

Project Safe



2015 ANNUAL REPORT

Project Safe Program Outcomes

88% of clients reported that the services they received from Project Safe met their needs.

84% of clients achieved their housing goal or safe housing.

95% of clients reported they now know ways to manage their safety.

61% of clients achieved their employment goal.

100% of clients achieved other goals they set for themselves.

Project Safe is committed to evaluating the efficacy of our services. The outcomes to the left are self-reported by clients on anonymous surveys turned in upon the conclusion of services.

92% of clients reported they have a better understanding of domestic violence and its effects on their lives.



We believe in empowering clients to set their own goals and supporting them through the process. The outcomes to the right reflect the success of these efforts.

Project Safe Mission and Governing Board

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Project Safe is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization working to end domestic violence through prevention and educational programs, crisis intervention, ongoing supportive services for survivors of domestic violence and their children, and systems change advocacy in our community.

Work described in this report was supported in part by subgrant X16-8-069 awarded by the state administering office for the Domestic Violence Grant Program. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the state or the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

Robert Fulghum said, "Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you." It is true that children learn much of what they know about the world from our actions, our relationships, and our reactions- both positive and negative. Every child deserves a place that is a haven of routine and stability so that when the outside world presents challenges, they are prepared with the internal strength and self-confidence to take risks to learn and grow. However, when a home is filled with fear and violence, children must navigate this complex world with unmet emotional needs. As an educator, I believe that emotional safety is as important to child development as rigorous curriculum, engaging teachers, and healthy school facilities.



David and I have supported Project Safe with our time and financial gifts for nearly 20 years. We know that Project Safe spends 90 cents of every dollar to directly impact the lives of survivors and their children so we feel good about our investment and believe that their services help more children live in homes free from intimate partner violence. Over the years we've watched Project Safe grow and prosper because of all of the employees, volunteers, board members and support of the Athens community.

But what I didn't realize until recently is how much our commitment to Project Safe means to our own children--it is true that they are always watching. One day in April, shortly after attending Dancing with the Athens Stars, our 12-year-old daughter came home from school and said, "Mommy, you will be proud of a short story I wrote today- it's about domestic violence." As I read Lily's story, I marveled at her details of a teen relationship filled with the subtle makings of dating violence. "It started with a word- 'stupid'.... Then he slapped me on my arm... I never thought our relationship would come to this... the hitting became more regular....My parents thought I got the bruises from P.E...and then eventually I said get out. I thought you loved me, but I was wrong. You don't hit someone you love. Good bye- we're over."

Reading Lily's story taught me that she's watching how we spend our volunteer time, when we attend fundraising events, and that we support Project Safe through our annual sponsorship. The messages she's gleaned about intimate partner violence may help her personally when she starts dating, or help her to be a good friend and support to someone she knows who finds themselves in an emotionally or physically dangerous relationship. *I'm proud of Lily and her insight, and I'm proud to support Project Safe.*

Dawn Meyers, Board Chair 2015-2016

Featured Program: Through an Open Window

In 2015 Project Safe and the Domestic Violence Task Force of Athens-Clarke and Oconee Counties held its **5th Annual Through an Open Window** event to raise awareness about domestic violence.



Anyone whose life has been touched by domestic violence was invited to create a painting at various workshops and open painting sessions throughout the year. Over 90 paintings were then displayed throughout October at ARTini's studio to commemorate Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The exhibit opened with a reception honoring the individuals, businesses and churches selected by our local task force as Advocates of the Year. At the conclusion of the exhibit, the paintings were brought to Project Safe's emergency shelter and outreach offices.

Hundreds of paintings are on display at Project Safe's facilities to inspire and challenge staff, volunteers and clients.



Featured Program: Through an Open Window



Project Safe Crisis Intervention

- Advocates answered 2858 hotline calls in 2015-
-a 25% increase over the previous year.
- Advocates at the Family Protection Center reviewed police arrest reports in Clarke and Madison Counties, and were able to reach out through calls or letters to offer support and services to 619 victims of domestic violence.
- 136 individuals were sheltered at Project Safe's emergency shelter.
- Through our relationship with the UGA Vet School, we provided 136 nights of pet shelter



"The staff was great about finding out what my needs were. They helped me to obtain items stolen by my abuser. They helped me fix the impossible!"
--former shelter resident

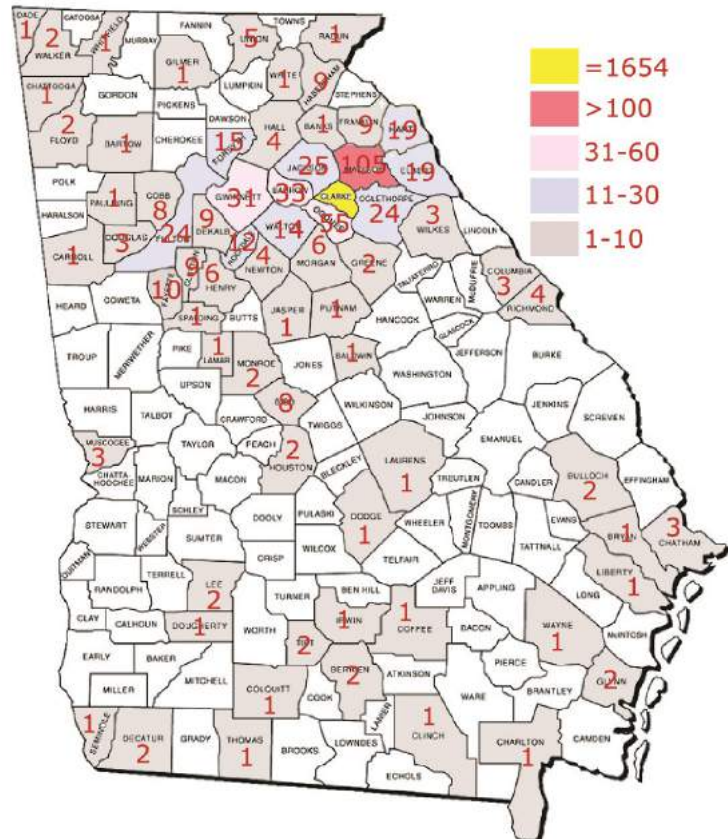


"Many people told me they couldn't help me...Without Project Safe I would still be stuck in my situation and fearing for my safety."--former shelter resident

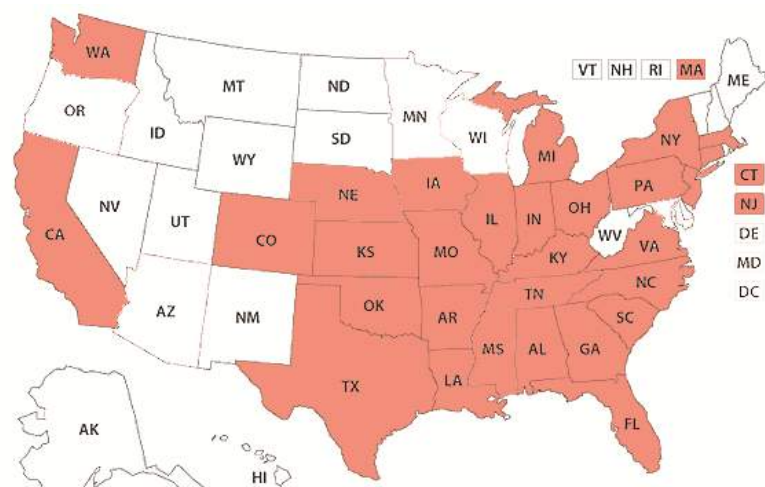
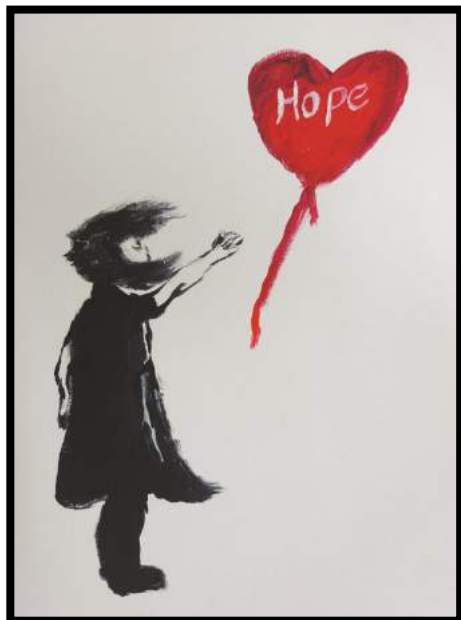
Local Program: Broader Impact

Areas Served Statewide and Nationally

While we focus on our primary service area of Athens-Clarke, Madison, Oconee and Oglethorpe Counties (and most of our clients come from those counties) we understand that sometimes people need to put more distance between themselves and their abusers. In the same manner that we help relocate people away from our area to other parts of the country, we also provide refuge here for those who need to start over from somewhere else.



Callers to Project Safe by Place of Origin



Callers to Project Safe by Place of Origin: US

Project Safe Ongoing Support

Ongoing supportive services are designed to help people move on from unhealthy relationships and heal from the pain of experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse. It can take months or even years to become finally free from the emotional, physical and financial ties of an abuser. Our services such as individual counseling, support groups, advocacy, case management, and transitional housing help people discover their own strength and put their lives back together.

Outreach services are provided to survivors of domestic violence who are in need of support but not necessarily shelter. After working with Project Safe **95%** of outreach clients report that they have strategies to enhance their safety, and **92%** report knowledge of community resources.

1465 women, children and men were served in our outreach offices at the Family Protection Center.

"I am truly grateful for Ms. Pam. She has taken the time to help me and let me know that the life I've been given doesn't have to always be that way, that I am worthy of a relationship that's not abusive. She has truly blessed my life!"
--outreach client

"I have been a client of Project Safe in Athens, GA for about a year now. I have at first seen an advocate, then went to the women's shelter for about a week, received psychological and legal help (with a TPO and a divorce) and recently went to many support groups. Project Safe has changed my life for the better. I probably would probably still be with my abuser (and probably deep into a depression) if I hadn't received their advice and help. Their help and services have really exceeded my expectations by far. I'll always be grateful for their support and would recommend this wonderful organization to anyone."
--review on greatnonprofits.org



"I was granted an amazing, informative, memorable opportunity to work as a student intern/ volunteer at Project Safe. Project Safe is truly an amazing, caring organization that undeniably fulfills its mission statement to work to end domestic violence through various supportive programs and services. The work of this organization can be quite challenging at times but the success stories of survivors of domestic violence is remarkably rewarding. I both cherish and embrace every opportunity and experience working with Project Safe because this organization truly defines the meaning of giving back to the community and protects and serves every survivor that reaches out for assistance. I give this organization a 5 star rating because Project Safe and its dedicated staff truly impacted my life personally and professionally."--
review on greatnonprofits.org

"I'm so thankful for Project Safe! My counselor has helped me in so many ways. I've gained my self confidence back. I'm realizing my self worth. I'm becoming a better mom and person. [Outreach Services Coordinator] Sarah has been awesome as well. She has helped give my children a Christmas, gotten us clothes, counseling, and helped me know I don't have to stay in an unsafe place. Thank you so much!"
--outreach client

Turning Painful Experience Into Positive Change

"As a woman who had witnessed domestic violence throughout my childhood, I know first hand the devastating effects it can have on the entire family. Some people mistakenly assume that children are unaware of the violence taking place in their home. Others mistakenly assume that there is nothing they can do to help. By donating a few hours of my time each week, I was able to provide quality care to children while their mothers received the support that was vital in their healing journey. Every single mother and child I encountered, inspired me to help the next. Project Safe has helped so many survivors in the Athens community and I am proud to be part of the grand initiative to end domestic violence!"

--Damaris Febles, volunteer



"Project Safe has been the biggest help in assisting me and my family in overcoming the effects of domestic violence. I hope to get more involved with Project Safe and other organizations to help with awareness and resources for other victims."--outreach client

Volunteers Make a Difference

Our volunteers come from all walks of life. Some are former clients or survivors of domestic violence who want to help others. Others are students looking for real-world work experience, and others are people in the community drawn to our values-driven, client-centered approach to our work. In FY15, **356 people** donated **22,216 hours** of service to Project Safe in activities ranging from helping at the thrift store or donating meals for support group to caring for children at the shelter or helping to plan our popular fundraisers.

To volunteer, please contact Community Involvement & Volunteer Coordinator Linnea Ionno at lionno@project-safe.org or 706-549-0922.

Project Safe Systems Change Advocacy

In addition to our work with clients, Project Safe works to improve the legal and social service systems on local and state levels to better serve the individuals who need them.

Project Safe's mission includes efforts to change the culture that allows domestic violence to persist. The most grievous cases end in murder, while others are in abusive situations for years, resulting in broken lives of victims and children instead of death. This violence affects our community as well as the families who experience it directly. Since 2003, Project Safe has employed a Fatality Review Coordinator to lead a collaborative effort to review closed cases of domestic violence fatalities and near-fatalities and implement recommendations for improvements in community response. In 2013, that position expanded beyond fatality review to support a variety of initiatives.

In 2015 our Community Response Coordinator, Pat Peterson, led the Fatality Review Panel (a dozen various agency



representatives) in its examination of serious closed domestic violence cases including one which had ended in homicide. Input was sought from others close to the situation and the panel created several strategies to improve survivor safety and abuser accountability. These included Project Safe collaborating with the Athens Clarke County Police Department on lethality assessments, and task force members conducting domestic violence presentations in housing

communities with high incidences of domestic violence. Pat also presented at two major Athens-Clarke County employers, with other workplace education events being planned for 2016.



Some of the members of the Domestic Violence Task Force of Athens-Clarke and Oconee Counties. From left to right: Christine Scartz, Marcy Jolles, Pat Peterson, Janessa Alvarez, Kelly Inch

"I enjoy being part of the PSI team because of its strong, intelligent leadership and committed staff. I like that PSI has earned a respected reputation, is victim-centered, and is a forerunner in the state's direction and best practices."

*~Pat Peterson,
Community Response Coordinator*

Nourishing the Body & the Soul

For 14 years, Debbie Golden has collected an offering from members of the United Methodist Women at her church, and used the funds to purchase milk, juice and eggs which she delivers to our emergency shelter--saving staff time and trips to the store, and saving the organization money that can be used for other client needs. Shelter residents use these refrigerator staples for daily meals, and staff use them to cook for special occasions like family breakfasts or our monthly Cultural Nights. Not everyone at the shelter knows Debbie by name, but they all know about the angel who brings milk, juice and eggs every week!



"My first introduction to Project Safe was a presentation in 2000 by Joan Prittie at Athens First United Methodist Church. I learned about the extent of domestic violence and it touched my heart. Project Safe empowers victims to remove themselves from violent and potentially deadly situations. I like volunteering with Project Safe because I want to help support people to improve their situation and bring some happiness into their lives. **I enjoy providing food as it feeds the body and soul.** Project Safe helps build their clients' self-esteem and empowers them to advocate for themselves as well as counsel the children and help them to have an environment where they see violence is not always a part of their life and maybe learn to deal with some of the feelings regarding their exposure to a violent household.

Project Safe gives me the opportunity to provide a service that is helpful and accommodates my schedule with work, home and activities. Thank you Project Safe for what you do and allowing me to make a contribution to the great service you provide." --Debbie Golden



Project Safe Thrift Store

~ By Mary Wilson, Thrift Store Manager

Managing Project Safe's Thrift Store on Hawthorne Avenue is the most difficult - and rewarding- job I have ever had. The pace, intensity and fervor some days bring is surely similar to what a trader on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange experiences. But instead of abstract commodities, numbers and futures, we trade face to face with customers and clients who live in society's margins. I see abuse, loneliness, addiction and mental health issues that both make me cry and make me go to work each day.

Although the Thrift Store exists to provide our clients with clothing and household items to start a new, safer life - a warm coat for the kids, a sofa for the new apartment or a suit for a job interview, need is not always material. Sometimes a smile, a hug or a few words of support are more valuable than anything else. We try to supply both.

The most difficult cases for me are those that involve children. Home is supposed to be a safe and nurturing place, but for many children it is the exact opposite- scary, frightening and violent. I think about how this negative atmosphere impacts their ability to trust, to learn, to grow, to believe in themselves, to do well in school, to have dreams, hopes, goals



and desires they might actually have the support to fulfill someday. One client's young daughter, a very precocious and outspoken girl, brought a day planner to the register and asked if she could have it. She wanted it, she said, "so she could make her own plans and agendas." I gave her the planner (though it wasn't on her mother's voucher) and encouraged her to write down any and every plan she dreamed up.

Project Safe Thrift Store



I love my job because at the Thrift Store, my coworkers, volunteers and I have worked to create an environment where everyone is equal. Support and positivity are our guiding principles. Our customers and clients recognize this and return the love, dedication, thankfulness and generosity in spades. I am thanked every day for what I do and no matter how tired or broken I feel at the end of a shift, I know I have done my best to help someone else.



Everyone, it seems, eventually falls under the store's unique spell. Volunteers add more shifts to their schedules; Community Service Workers complete their required hours and ask to become volunteers. UGA interns come back to help out long after graduation. The vibe we've created makes everyone feel useful, valued and honored to support such a worthy cause. The cross-section of clients, customers and donors we receive make the store a fascinating place to work. Helping others and seeing the direct effect is the most rewarding effort one can make.



Monday - Saturday 10-6
995 Hawthorne Avenue (Bell's Shopping Center)
For more information: 706-425-8863
Please stop by!

Staff Leadership and Recognition



In January 2015, **Executive Director Joan Prittie** received the University of Georgia President's Fulfilling the Dream Award. The award is given to individuals who exemplify Dr. Martin Luther King's values, and who have made significant contributions to the community in justice, human

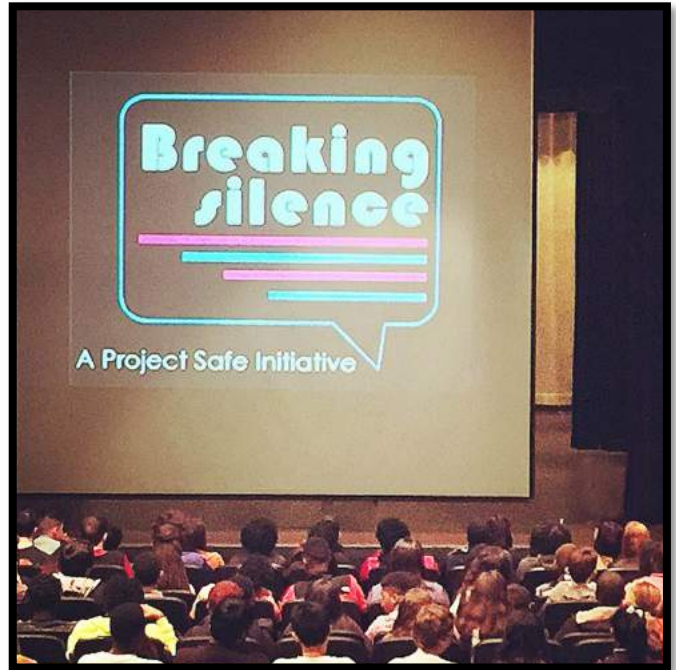
rights, social justice, and race relations. Increasing Project Safe's capacity--from emergency shelter expansion to text line growth--was a priority for Joan during 2015.

"Love Joan Prittie's energy, her strength, her ability to communicate 'personally' on a mass basis, her absolute belief in the greatness of what Project Safe does, and her amazing courage to keep pushing in every direction to further this cause. Keep it up! We (Athens!...and victims of abuse) love her!"--Wingate Downs, volunteer event photographer since 2010.



Associate Director Tangela Ferguson continued to lead the Domestic Violence Task Force of Athens-Clarke and Oconee Counties as Co-Chair along with probation officer Jason Kelley. Community education was a particular focus for Tangela in 2015, and she helped create and deliver numerous specialized trainings

for area faith community leaders. In addition to local collaborations, Tangela also serves on the board of a statewide organization, the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence.



In October 2015, Project Safe received the Moving the Work Forward Award from the Georgia Commission on Family Violence in recognition of our innovative services to reach teens experience dating violence. The award is a great honor for our organization and a tribute to the visionary board and staff who saw the need for this type of initiative years ago, as well as the staff and interns who do the work of Breaking Silence every day.



Project Safe Prevention and Education

Raising Awareness, Creating Change

Project Safe staff offer professional in-service training to businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, court personnel, law enforcement, and schools and universities. Additionally, we provide community education presentations to classrooms, churches and civic clubs and distribute thousands of brochures, posters and hotline cards annually.

Our domestic violence prevention efforts start with children in 4th and 5th grade through our two-part Crossroads program, and continue with middle and high school youth. To request a training or presentation, email Community Involvement and Volunteer Coordinator Linnea Ionno at lionno@project-safe.org.

In December 2012, with support from Verizon, Project Safe launched Breaking Silence, a texting line and awareness campaign designed to meet the needs of a younger generation. Breaking Silence increases Project Safe's connections to teens and young adults through specialized educational material, classroom presentations, and use of social media. In 2014, we launched the Youth Ambassador Program at Clarke Middle School--moving beyond education to empower young people to become leaders and advocates about this issue in their school and community. Through regular monthly meetings, activities and challenges, the students deepen their understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships, create awareness events, and practice leadership skills.

To volunteer, please contact the **Community Involvement & Volunteer Coordinator, Linnea Ionno**, at **706-549-0922** or lionno@project-safe.org

IN 2015
Project Safe
DELIVERED 228
PRESENTATIONS AND TRAININGS

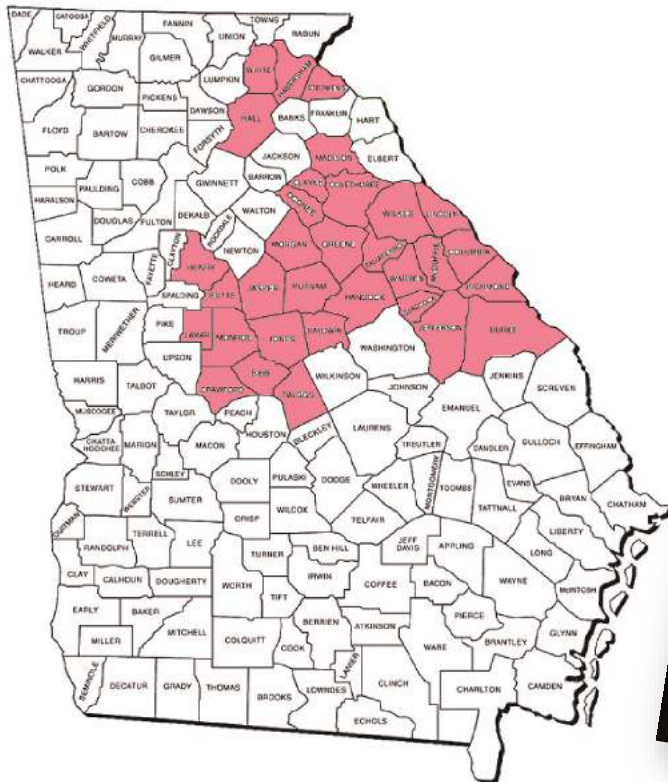


"I just finished my last Cross Roads lesson of the school year. It's hard to beat a day full of children reciting their right to stay safe from harm and their responsibility not to harm others, making connections between the two lessons, applying the lessons to things they see happening in real life, drawing pictures and requesting that they go in your office, and handing out compliments left and right to boost your self esteem just as you've boosted theirs." --Ashley Dykes, former BSW intern and current Text Line Manager

Increasing Access to Meet More Needs

In 2015 Project Safe worked to increase access to our services in three important ways: 1) expanding our teen text line to cover 32 counties (and eventually the whole state); 2) renovating and enlarging our emergency shelter; and 3) staffing our weekly walk-in clinic at the Family Protection Center year round.

Our Monday afternoon walk-in clinic affords people an opportunity to meet face to face with advocates at our outreach office without an appointment. When the walk-in clinic began in 2013, we were only able to operate it during the school year when we have the extra support of student interns to help with workload. In 2015 Project Safe made the commitment to staff the clinic during summer and holiday breaks as well, providing more access to outreach services for individuals in our community.



Project Safe's Teen Text Line 2015 Expansion

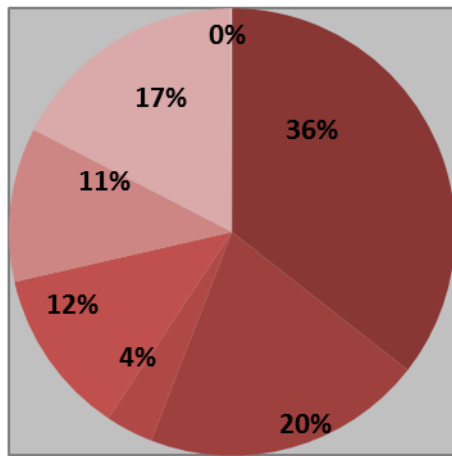
Thanks to a FVPSA grant from the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Project Safe was able to expand our teen text line to 32 counties in 2015 and share promotional materials with six other domestic violence programs to help market the text line in those communities.



Project Safe Financial Information

FY 15 income and expenses are shown below. Project Safe received \$1,276,324 in cash and \$266,592 through donations of time with the value of a volunteer hour estimated at \$12. Client services accounted for 90% of all spending. ~Source is Audit 12/31/15 by Robert Baker and Associates, Certified Public Accountants..

Fiscal Year 2015 Revenue



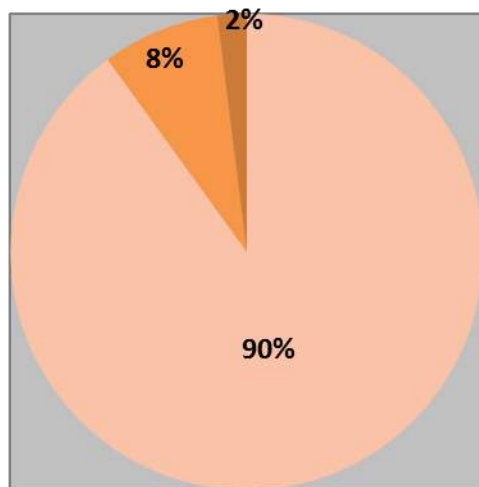
- Grants & Contracts
- Contributions
- United Way
- Special Events
- Thrift Store Sales
- Volunteers
- Investment Income

"At Verizon we believe that technology has a unique role to play in addressing society's most serious problems.

Through innovation, we can improve our communities, making them safer for current and future generations. Since 2012 we've helped fund Project Safe's

Breaking Silence program, a dating violence awareness initiative and teen text line that empowers young people experiencing relationship violence by providing them access to a trained advocate. Breaking Silence is a crucial resource for young people who may have nowhere else to turn." Kate Jay, PR Manager-South East Market,

Fiscal Year 2015 Expenses



- Program Services
- Mgmt. General
- Fundraising



"Why do I support Project Safe?...I ache when I hear that some folks are suffering or marginalized or the target of violence.....I am so impressed with the efforts you and your staff put forth that at times I'm moved to hopefulness...and tears. It's my sense that we all are walking each other back home...and maybe none of us really arrive until we all get to come home.....together." --Dr. Randy Dishaw, annual sponsor

Project Safe Special Events



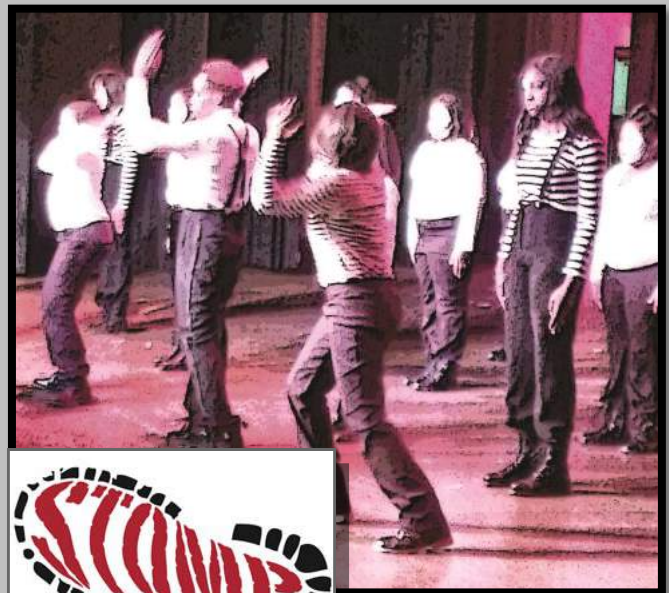
Dancing with the Athens Stars is the community's premier fundraiser, with a net total of more than \$780,000 raised in its first 8 years.



Eve Ensler's award winning play challenges, entertains and inspires audience members to take action to stop violence against women.



Groovy Nights disco and silent auction is Project Safe's longest running event.



A spin-off of *Dancing with the Athens Stars*, Stomp Out Domestic Violence features teams of students paired with adult volunteers in a step competition.



Project Safe How Your Money Counts

- New ID card for someone whose abuser stole it: \$32
- A week in a motel under an assumed name when the shelter is full: \$317
- Three months of weekly counseling sessions for trauma and PTSD: \$900

More than ever, Project Safe relies on the generosity of the community to support our work. 90 cents of every dollar goes towards client services.

How To Donate

Online:

www.project-safe.org

Check by Mail:

P.O. Box 7532

Athens, GA 30604

Become an Annual Sponsor:

E-mail jpriette@project-safe.org

"My wife and I had never had anything like this happen to us before. We were lost and Project Safe found us. Sarah, as well as Shannon, were absolutely imperative to our navigation through the confusing court system. They were smart, kind, informed, hard workers. Mostly though, they listened. They listened and then they helped us in just the right way. I could go on and on, but I have already written thank you letters which explain how we feel about Project Safe to Ms. Prittie as well as Sarah and Shannon. We tell everybody about how you all helped us. We are true believers in Project Safe. My wife and I, without the other one knowing, decided to sign up and donate a small amount of money to Project Safe every month. It's the least we could do. I don't know what we would have done without their help. THANK YOU!"--Lee and Diana Hartle

"Almost 5 years ago, when I was placed at PSI as an MSW intern I could not have gotten a better placement. I cannot ask for a better organization to be a part of and work for. I chose to apply for a staff position near the end of my internship because I fully believe in the work we do. I believe in our work more today than I ever have. I work with some of the most compassionate, creative and all-around amazing people I've ever met. These past 5 years have taught me so much about the human spirit, strength, hope and the power of community. I want Athens and the places around us to know we are here and that we always will be. I want those around us who are experiencing abuse to know that they are not alone. That their stories are important and their lives matter. I want them to know there is hope from pain and that beauty can come from the ashes. That even after the darkest night, the sun will rise. It is such a privilege for me to get to do this work. To hear so many stories and to be able to encourage people that healing and freedom from abuse are possible. I choose to stay in this work because I will not ever give up the hope that a world without domestic violence can exist and that we all deserve to feel safe and free. I have the honor of walking with people as they experience that hope and freedom, sometimes for the first time and there is nothing quite like being able to see that."

--Sarah Penfold, Outreach Services Coordinator

Project Safe Major Donors

Major Donors & Sponsors

Affiniti Golf Partners
Anonymous and Friends of
Clarke County School District
Ben & Joi Akridge
Allergy Partners
Alpha Chi Omega
American Pest Control
Tish Anderson & Tom Santosky
Dr. & Mrs. Ardoin
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Ashford Methodist Church
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Athens Clarke Emergency Specialists
Athens First Bank & Trust
Athens Hospitality Group Inc.
Athens Ministries Inc.
Athens Oconee Junior Women's Club
Athens Regional Medical Center
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Canopy Studio
Catholic Center at UGA
Certapro Painters
Chase Street Self Storage
Classic City Orthodontics
Classic City Tournament of Wishes
Coastwise Consulting
Jenny Coleman & David Shipley
Commercial Bank
Covenant Presbyterian Church
Creature Comforts
Crossroads Church
Margaret & Eric Dahl
Delta Sigma Pi
Dermatology of Athens
Dishaw Chiropractic

William & Lisa Douglas
Virginia Duensing
Patricia Dunleavy
ETL Construction
Rebecca & Leon Farmer
First American Bank & Trust
First Presbyterian Church of Athens
First United Methodist Church of Athens
Lane & Norma Fitzpatrick
Five Bar
Five Points Optometrists
Cindy & Mark Fox
Georgia Club Foundation
Georgia EMS
Georgia Power Company
Georgia Power Foundation
Douglas Giles
Glickman Family Foundation
Beth & Dave Greeson
Brian Hall
Harris Foundation
Luther & Susie Harrison Foundation
Laurie Heinz
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Hilltop Grille
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Jonathan Hutton
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Law Offices of John Lyndon
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Loco's Franchise Co.
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Kristy Mayfield
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Project Safe Major Donors

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David & Dawn Meyers
Mitchell Bridge Dental
James Morganthaler
National Bank of Georgia
Newland Family Foundation
Jack Newman
Niolon Lumber Sales
Oconee County Chamber of Commerce
Ortho Infusion
Camila Pardo
Gordhan & Virginia Patel
Adele Patrick
Peachtree Medical Billing
Georgiann Pharis
Phil Hughes Honda
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Patricia Richards
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Thomas Schatzman
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Sunshine Lady Foundation
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Timothy Baptist Church
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Truxton Trust
Turner Family Foundation
UGA Athletic Association
Ulm Foundation
United Way of Northeast Georgia
UPS Foundation
Verizon
Robert & Tammy Wall
Walmart
Wells Fargo Foundation
Frederick Wiegert
William Elliott PC
William Overend PC
Woodruff Memorial Charitable Trust
David & Michelle Woodward
Joan Yantko
York Family

***Donors listed here contributed \$500 or more during either FY 2015 or calendar 2015.**

Government Grants

Athens-Clarke County (5% fund)
Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
Emergency Food & Shelter Program
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

For the fourth year in a row, Project Safe was named a top rated nonprofit by Great Non Profits!



Connection Through Sharing

"As an advocate, facilitating groups is perhaps the most challenging and rewarding responsibility of my work. Facilitating groups is a delicate push and pull because ultimately, the value of groups comes not from the group leader, but from the group members themselves. There are times in group when I feel my job is simply to be present as participants bare their vulnerabilities, successes, struggles, pain, and joy. A certain magic happens when a group of women of all colors, ages, incomes, backgrounds, faiths, and experiences come together and connect through a shared experience that so often leaves survivors feeling isolated and shameful.

There are too many groups to count that have left me in awe of the power of connection through sharing. One group in particular stands out, in which I witnessed a really powerful exchange unfold. A newer group attendee had been sharing about her new relationship, one in which she was very much invested, but also grappling with some concerns about abuse and manipulation. As she was sharing, another group member, a veteran of sorts who had attended numerous groups and had come so very far in her own life, spontaneously exclaimed, "RED FLAG! RED FLAG!"

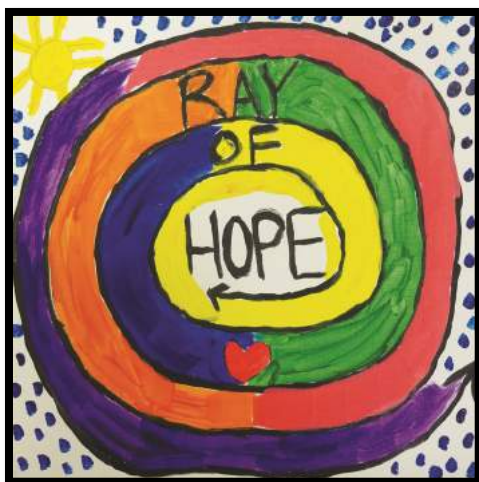
We often talk about new relationships in terms of red and green flags. Red flags being those behaviors such as jealousy or quick involvement, that are often precursors to an increasingly abusive relationship. Green flags being those signs that a relationship is one of mutual respect and safety.

The veteran attendee's passionate observation was one that the group had been dancing around for a few minutes. It was clear that other group members were concerned, but the depth of that concern had not yet been named. In the moments that followed, there was a brief silence where it seemed the group was digesting what had been said. And then laughter. We laughed not because red flags in a relationship are necessarily funny, but because it was unexpected and came from the only person that could have said it in the way that she did, with the rest of the group immediately knowing that it was an act of compassion and respect. It disrupted the mythical narrative

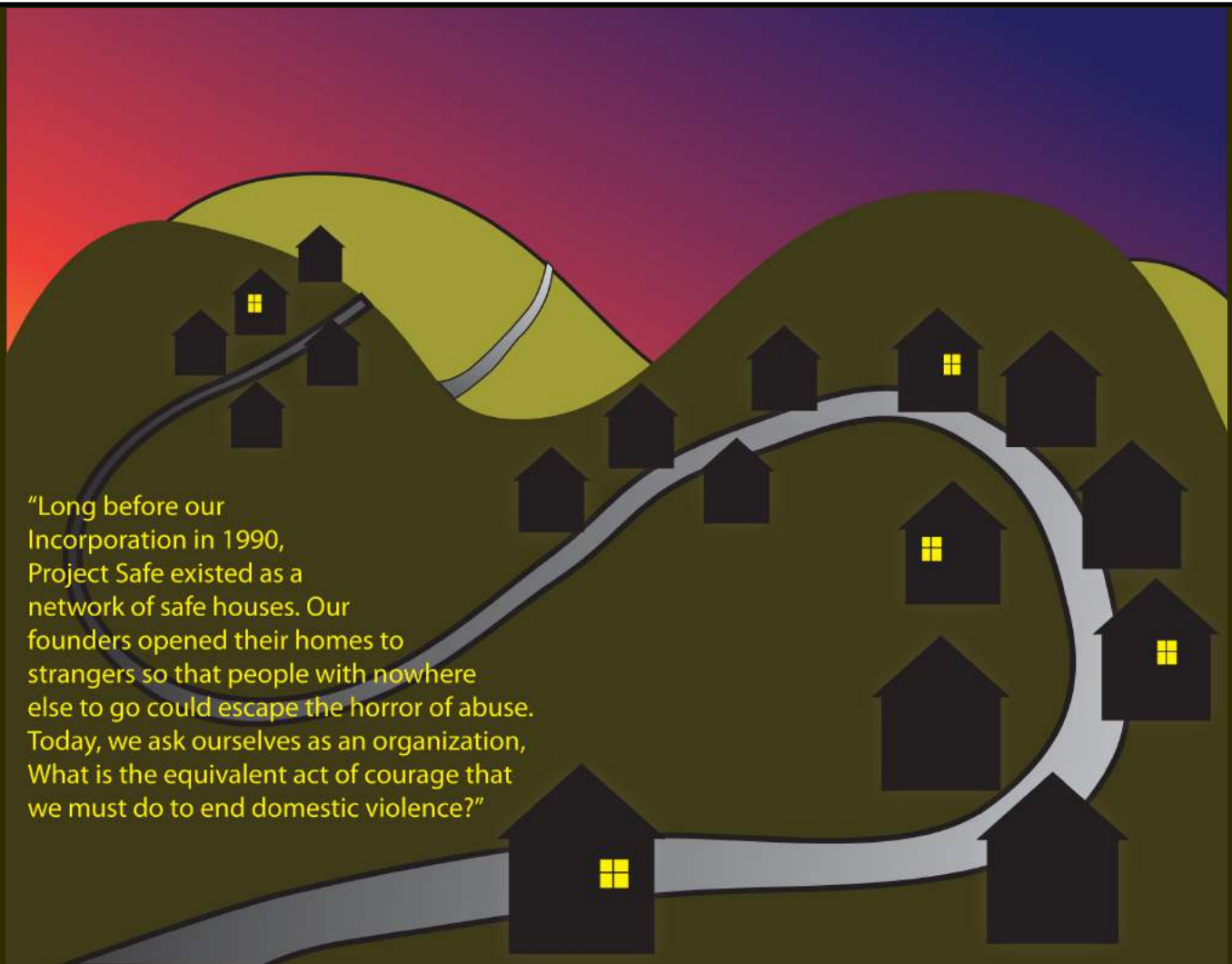
that those relationships that leave us feeling depleted, worthless, or fearful will certainly get better or are somehow worthwhile. **It was as if she said, "No way, you don't have time for this, you deserve better than this."**

The kind of magic that unfolded that evening is not uncommon. It happens in ways both loud and soft, large and small, spoken or unspoken, in every support group we facilitate."

–Casey Heermans, Legal & Community Advocate



Thank You!



These words paraphrase a conversation the board and I had many years ago. I've written them on our annual report every year since, and think about them every day. Only time will tell if we're as courageous as our founders, but every day we honor their effort and sacrifice, and every day we work to be worthy of the generosity, support and trust given to us by our community. *-Joan Prittie, Executive Director*

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