



# PROJECT SAFE

## A SURVIVOR'S JOURNEY



2019 ANNUAL REPORT



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## To Our Friends:

It's an honor to serve as Chair of the Board of Directors of Project Safe, and to share the 2019 Annual Report. Our theme this year is A Survivor's Journey. The inspiration for the theme—as well as the artwork and journal entries in this report—came from a former client who gifted staff with a travel journal documenting her experiences while working with Project Safe. From the first hotline call for help to her plane tickets home to reunite with loving family, she worked with Project Safe for nine months through shelter, legal representation, individual and group support, transportation assistance and more. And as she worked with our staff, she jotted her notes down on paper along the way; these notes are what you will read as you read the report.

Project Safe exists to help survivors of domestic violence chart the course of their own journey to hope and healing, and through the years we have grown and changed to offer more supports and services. The journey to become free from domestic violence is different for everyone—often filled with starts and stops, and significant challenges and the occasional detour. Our staff work diligently, and compassionately, to travel with our clients as they navigate their journeys.

In the more than 20 years that my wife, Dawn, and I have supported Project Safe as volunteers, donors and board members, our family has taken its own journey. We have seen the transformative work of this organization in action and we have tried to instill in our children why being involved is important. We have done this by talking about the work of Project Safe. We have used those conversations to help them understand how people navigate difficult situations – and to help them practice problem solving in their own lives. We have included them in our support of Project Safe. We bring them with us to events, volunteer activities, and they have been with us as we have invested time and energy in support of this agency. And most of all, we have talked about the issue of domestic violence. Not as an abstract concept, but as one that affects all segments of the community. Domestic violence is not limited to one demographic slice of the community nor is it confined to one socioeconomic segment. It is our hope that we have empowered our children, who are now young adults, to help themselves and others as they begin their own journeys toward independence.

I hope that you will spend a few minutes to review all of the information in this report. The information speaks to the dedication and hard work that the staff of Project Safe devote to supporting our community, especially those whose journeys find them in need of a safe, welcoming and forgiving place to heal and find strength. We look forward to your continued support this year as we continue our journey as an agency dedicated to helping survivors of domestic violence. -David Meyers

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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.



# A JOURNEY BEGINS

Every person who reaches out to Project Safe embarks on a journey. In this journey, survivors of domestic violence must gather every ounce of hope, courage, and trust in the unknown. To those on the outside, it may seem like the simplest task to pick up the phone and call Project Safe's 24/7 hotline. For those who have, they understand the incredible uncertainty; fear of staying, fear of leaving, loss of home, loss of family, loss of future, loss of dreams. With incredible bravery, a survivor begins their journey to break free from abuse; perhaps by calling our emergency hotline, or by coming to the Family Protection Center for Walk-in hours. Though every journey is different, reaching out to Project Safe leads a survivor to talking with an advocate who will listen, free of judgment, to give options, education, and tools so that clients may embark on their own journey to healing.

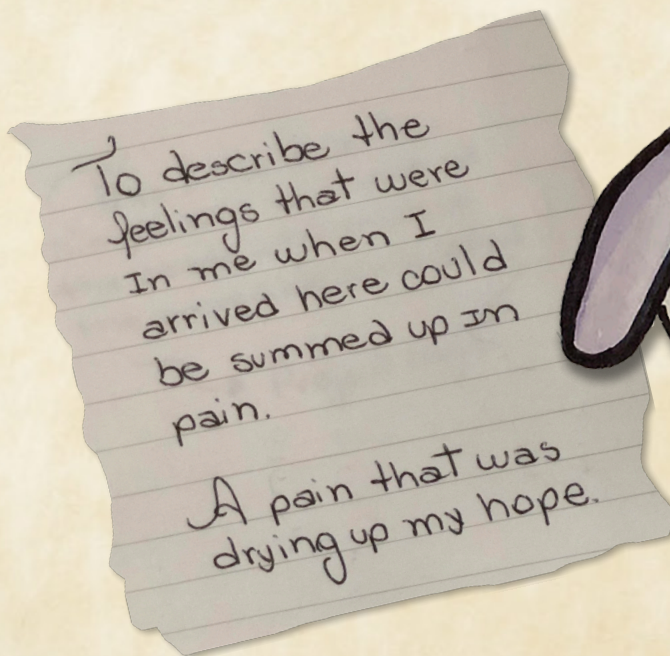


3182 Hotline Calls Answered in 2019

286 Text Conversations in 2019

130 Clients Sheltered in 2019

600 Clients Served in Outreach in 2019

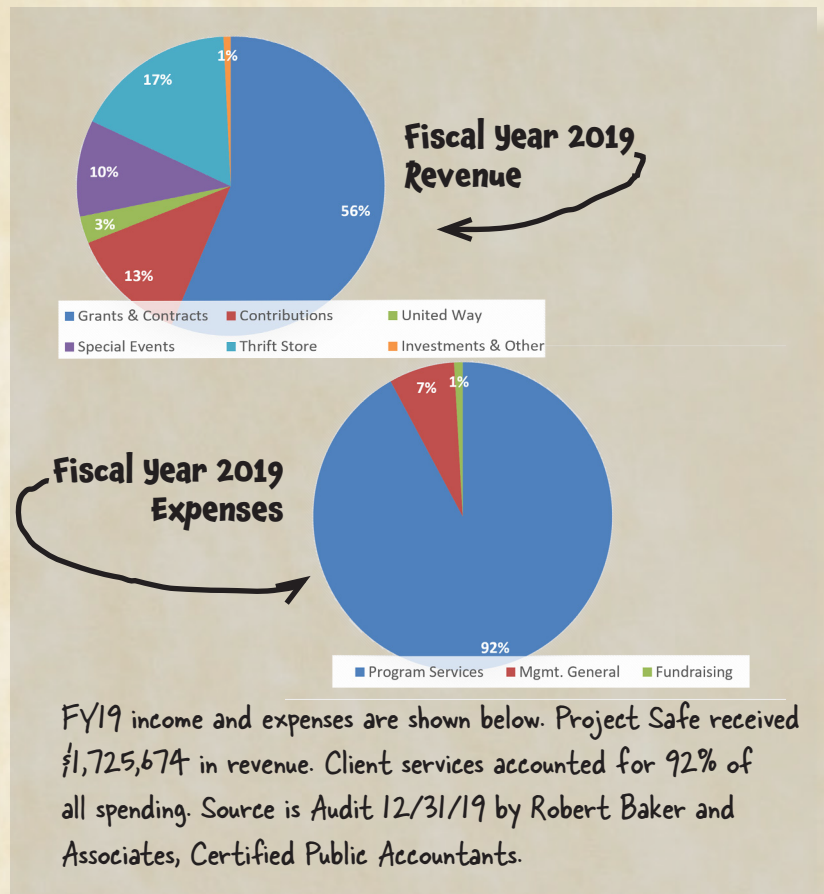




# A JOURNEY CONTINUES



Project Safe believes that each survivor of domestic violence is the expert on their own experience. We find that abusive partners often use tactics to lower a survivor's self-esteem and ability to trust themselves. Our advocates work to empower survivors and encourage them to be in charge of choosing the services that they feel are right, and setting their own goals. Some journeys continue as survivors work one on one with an advocate at our Outreach Office. Some journeys lead to living at the emergency shelter where advocates are available day and night to provide support.



92% of clients achieved their housing goal or safe housing  
58% of clients achieved their employment goals  
92% of clients achieved their other goals

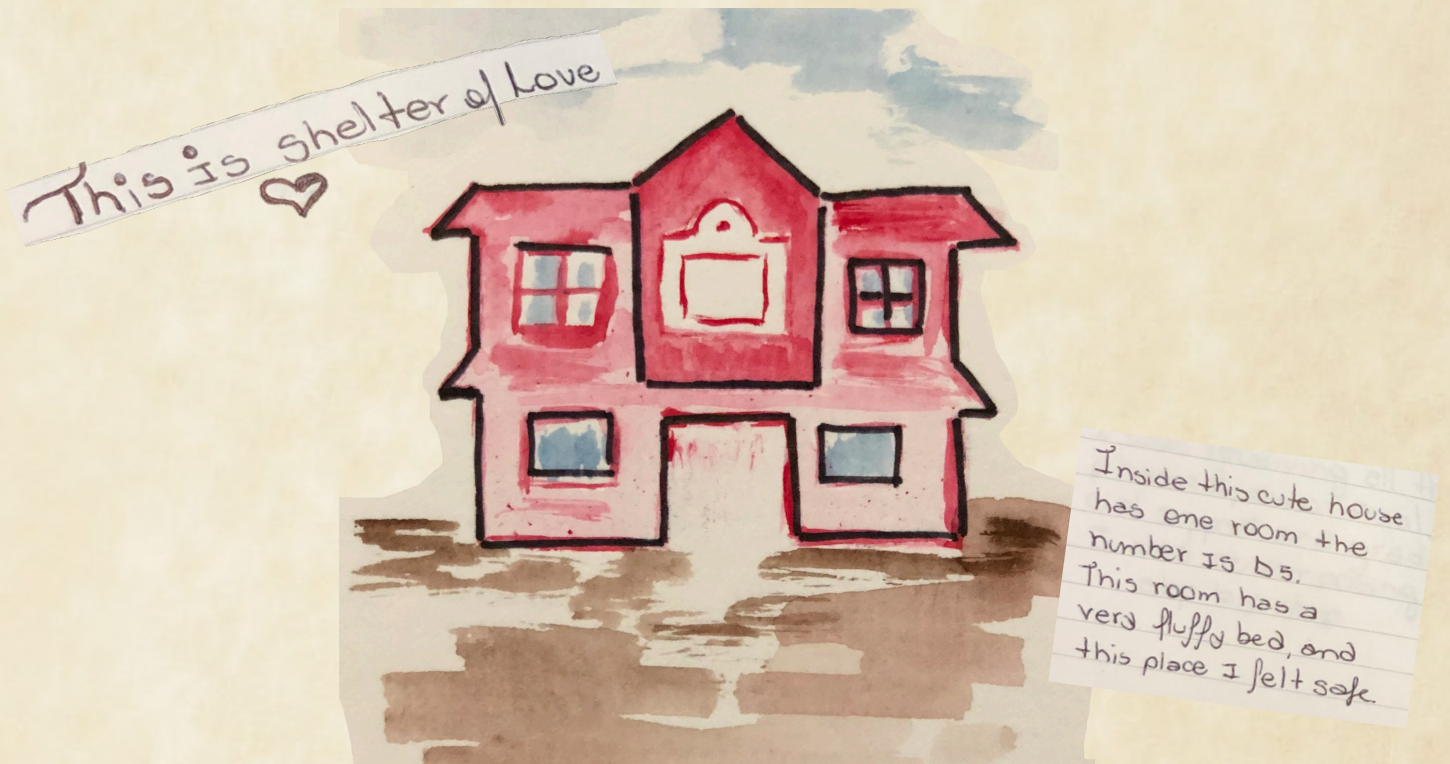
When I arrived at the shelter I entered my room I did not feel like going anywhere...



Because I felt embraced by my bed...



# A JOURNEY CHANGES



The journey that a survivor takes is never easy, and the path to healing is often full of twists, turns, roadblocks and even u-turns. Sometimes this difficult journey leads to a reconciliation with an abusive partner. On average, a survivor of domestic violence will leave an abusive relationship 7 times before leaving for good. Our advocates always respect our client's decision. It is not our place to judge. Instead, we work to foster trust and communication as we gently remind survivors that we remain available when future help is needed. Other clients, such as the one whose journal is featured here, work with us consistently for many months or even years through shelter, longer term housing, legal advocacy, support groups and more.

When I felt lost  
I could always count  
on you to show me  
that there was  
still a happy and  
beautiful future...

Each day I received  
a different tool to  
remember who I was,  
what I would like to do  
and how I want to  
live my life.



# A JOURNEY INTENSIFIES

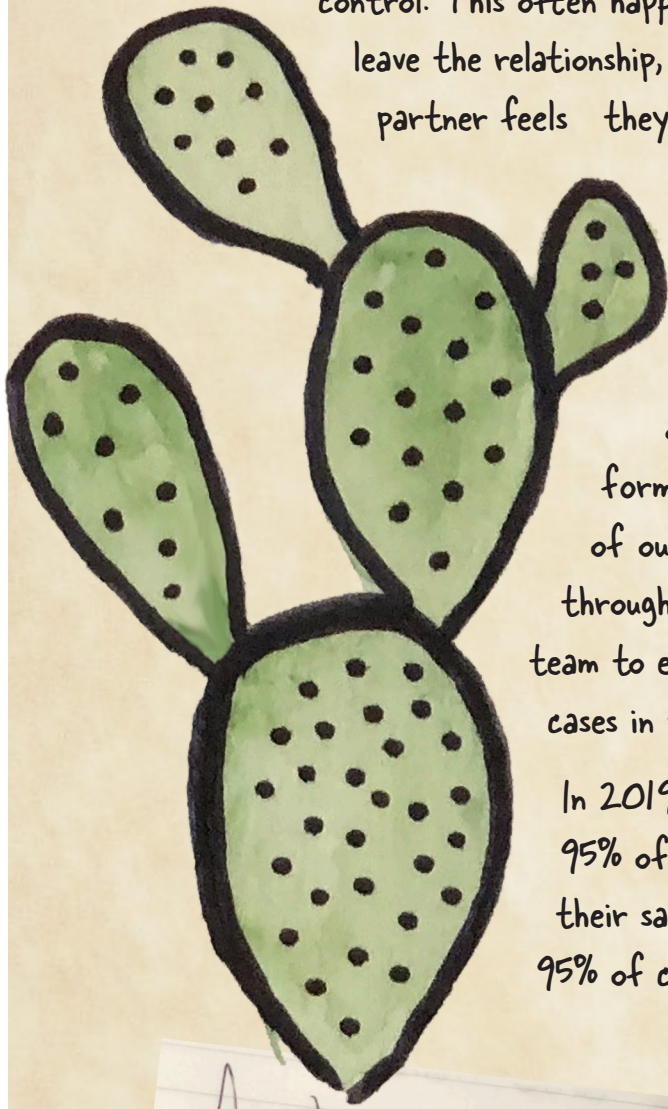
The most dangerous time in a survivor's journey is when the abuser believes they are losing control. This often happens when the survivor is planning or attempting to leave the relationship, or at some point after leaving. When an abusive partner feels they are losing power or control over their victim, they may lash out and violence may escalate. At Project Safe we prioritize helping survivors create a safety plan for every stage of their journey.

As a survivor's journey intensifies, firearms pose a significant risk. In 2019, Project Safe helped form the Firearm Surrender Protocol Subcommittee of our local domestic violence task force, and worked throughout the year with an engaged, multi-disciplinary team to examine and improve processes in civil and criminal cases in which domestic abusers own firearms.

In 2019:

95% of clients reported they learned strategies to enhance their safety

95% of clients increased their knowledge of available resources



And even when everything seemed too heavy is that I could not I got all the support to start dreaming...

Thank you for being patient with me and for holding me in the sea of anxiety that I was steeped in.



# A JOURNEY CHALLENGES

Survivors of domestic violence face a variety of barriers throughout their journey. One challenge that we see often is overcoming financial abuse. Abusive partners can intentionally use financial abuse to make it difficult for a survivor to leave the relationship. Some survivors share how they were forbidden from going to school or working, some survivors share how their abusive partner intentionally ruined their credit by not paying bills on time or taking out a loan in a survivor's name without their knowledge. Some survivors report abusive partners spending money excessively so that survivors are not able to save. An abusive partner may try to drag out a court process to drain a survivor's financial and emotional resources. Our advocates help clients improve their credit scores, link clients to resources to meet education and employment related goals, and advocate to creditors and local agencies so that they understand the dynamics of financial abuse. To help our clients navigate the court system Project Safe has legal advocates to assist with temporary protective orders, stalking orders, and accompaniment to court. Project Safe also has an attorney on retainer to provide legal counsel at no cost to some of our clients in proceedings such as divorce and child custody.

In 2019 our attorney either represented, or provided consultation to, 17 survivors of domestic violence.

And as crazy as  
it may seem  
I could stand the  
storms not because  
I'm strong  
but because I've  
never been alone...

You were always  
with me.

At this stage of  
my journey, I learned  
every day about care  
but a care with myself,  
about allowing myself  
to feel, allowing myself  
to cry and forgive  
myself.

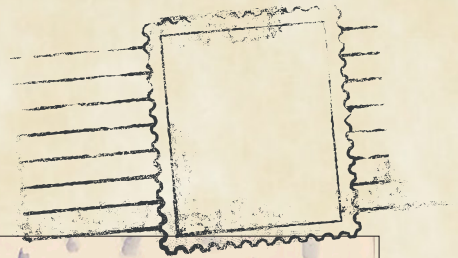
It seemed easy to  
move forward but  
every step of the  
process involved  
takes a while that  
is out of our  
control and so  
enters the magic  
word "patience"



# A JOURNEY OVERCOMES

Once immediate threats to safety are mitigated, a survivor can begin to focus on long term goals and begin to make dreams into reality. To help survivors meet their longer term goals, Project Safe offers both a Transitional Housing Program and a Rapid Re-housing Program. Using the housing first model, these programs allow clients to focus on other goals without the stressors of housing insecurities. In 2019, our clients who worked in these programs were able to re-enroll in post secondary institutions, gain employment, pay off debt, and save for their future.

Though a survivor may have rebuilt their life, survivors often share with us that their emotional wounds take longer to heal than the physical ones. Project Safe offers community based support groups and also pays for counseling sessions at local counseling practices so that our clients have the opportunity to heal from the inside out.



I returned to watering the feelings of self-esteem with all the support and learning I received, each face cream, every makeup party also the picture we take.



And based on the goals that I established I was receiving all the physical, emotional, financial support and gradually I was recomposing step by step



# A JOURNEY'S CHAMPIONS

Every client at Project safe works with advocates—staff and interns who work closely with survivors as they navigate their journey. Our advocates are supported by volunteers and donors in the community who make our work possible. These are our major donors and sponsors for 2019:

1st United Methodist Church of Athens  
Abdulwahab & Naomi Alharoun  
Allergy Partners  
Alpha Chi Omega Beta Sigma Chapter  
Alpha Kappa Alpha Inc. Eta Chapter  
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Bertis & Katherine Downs  
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Jeff & Becky Engel  
William Fay  
Felker Family Foundation  
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Five Bar  
Buford Frye  
Lisa Gale  
Georgia Power Company  
Give Back Real Estate  
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Angela Jackson  
Janssen Pharmaceuticals  
Kim Jensen  
Johnson & Johnson  
Estate of June F. Johnston  
Kelly Family Cuidiu Foundation  
Tammy & Bill Kemper  
Kirby Smart Foundation  
George & Linda Kuhlman  
Carol & Paul Kurtz  
Law Offices of John Lydon



And after the  
storm I could  
breathe in relief.



# A JOURNEY'S CHAMPIONS

Erika Lewis Family Fund  
 Luncheon Optimist Club of Athens  
 Louis Manglass  
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 Joan Yantko  
 Kevin York  
 Young Professionals Network



\*Donors listed here contributed \$500 or more during either FY 2019 or calendar 2019.

## Government Grants

Athens-Clarke County (5% fund)  
 Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (Victims of Crime Act, Violence  
 Against Women Act, Family Violence Prevention & Services Act,  
 State of Georgia Domestic Violence grants)  
 Emergency Food & Shelter Program  
 U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development



For the EIGHTH year in a row, Project Safe was named a top rated nonprofit by Great Nonprofits!



# A JOURNEY TRANSFORMS

With the passage of time I was feeling lighter and with security came also hope.

Project Safe works to transform the community through education and awareness so that we can begin to envision a world free of domestic violence. For some survivors, their journey to healing from domestic violence begins in childhood after witnessing domestic violence of a parent or caretaker. We hope to transform the lives of children who have been impacted by domestic violence. Our children's advocate helps families build safe, predictable spaces in our shelter, and engages children through fun activities during weekly Kid's Group. Project Safe also offers a 2 week summer camp called Superheroes to give children a fun, safe space to heal from the

trauma they have witnessed. Project Safe seeks to prevent domestic violence through the Breaking Silence initiative, which works to educate teens about the dynamics of abusive relationships as well as what healthy, safe relationships look like. Breaking Silence houses the statewide Teen Text Line, a resource for teens to reach out for advice and support surrounding unhealthy and abusive relationships.

A journey to healing never truly ends; it is a process that one chooses to embark on every day with strength, courage and grace. However, it is never a journey that anyone must take alone. We stand ready to help anyone, at any stage of their journey so they may envision a future free of abuse, and filled with unconditional love. We are inspired by the survivors we work with, and are honored to be with them on part of their journey.

We salute their determination and bravery.



Long before our incorporation in 1990, Project Safe existed as a network of safe houses. Our founders opened their homes to strangers so that people with nowhere else to go could escape the horror of abuse. Today, we ask ourselves as an organization, "What is the equivalent act of courage that we must do to end domestic violence?"

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 I 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

I felt that  
I received  
The greatest  
Love in the  
world...

The love of freedom,  
of care and  
learning.





Artwork and journal notes throughout this document courtesy of a survivor of domestic violence who continues to inspire all of us at Project Safe.  
Annual report design by WendyMeehan designs