

Maintaining and Adapting the Continuum of Victims' Services in Buncombe County in Response to COVID-19

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

The Mediation Center

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

[Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP](#)

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

Name of Project.

Maintaining and Adapting the Continuum of Victims' Services in Buncombe County in Response to COVID-19

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$3,065,804.00

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*

Please select one:

Services for disproportionately impacted communities

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

This one-time 3-year project ensures that Buncombe County survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and human trafficking have continued access to the continuum of critical services needed for healing and protection. Buncombe County funding will prevent a devastating gap in civil legal aid,

advocacy, counseling, case management, and supervised visitation services for these survivors, who are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

This project is a collaboration between The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program (lead applicant), Pisgah Legal Services, Helpmate, and Our VOICE.

All four agencies were recently informed that long-term funding from the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission's allocation of federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funds will end of September 30, 2021. COVID-19 recovery in our community depends on maintaining these critical services for survivors.

Project Plan*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

The Mediation Center will be the fiscal agent and coordinate collaboration between project partners: The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program, Pisgah Legal Services, Our VOICE, and Helpmate. Partners are determined to work together and with our community to ensure that the most vulnerable do not continue to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

All four organizations' services are successfully operating with funding that will last through September 30, 2021; with Buncombe Recovery funding, each partner will seamlessly continue existing services on October 1, 2021 with no start-up time or gap for survivors. Federal VOCA or state funding is anticipated eventually, likely three years from now.

Project partners will communicate regularly to ensure that the continuum of services for victims in Buncombe County is accessible, effective, and comprehensive.

Each partner will continue its unique and unduplicated services for victims, adapted for COVID-19 recovery:

The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program will provide supervised visitation in cases of domestic violence and child sexual abuse. Services prevent ongoing violence, abuse, and trauma to child and adult victims during visits and exchanges, which are often court-ordered. These services are separate from DSS-provided visitation in child maltreatment cases.

Pisgah Legal Services (PLS) will sustain free civil legal assistance to underserved, low-income victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. PLS will help victims secure court protective orders; child custody and child support; divorce; division of property; and legal immigration status and employment authorization for immigrant victims. PLS will also help victims with issues related to housing, debt, consumer rights, and public benefits to promote safety and independence.

Helpmate will provide advocacy for victims of domestic violence. Advocates will support adult and child survivors with processes related to domestic violence protective orders, criminal matters, custody/family court, and will support families involved with DSS. Court Advocates and Children's Case Managers safety plan, assist survivors in accessing resources to meet self-identified goals, liaise with criminal and civil justice personnel, provide information on court processes and dates, connect survivors with legal aid, and accompany survivors to hearings and child and family team meetings.

Our VOICE will provide crisis response, counseling, and case management for victims of sexual assault and human trafficking, with special attention to care coordination for survivors who are experiencing homelessness and/or have sexual trauma mental health needs.

A one-time, three-year grant from Buncombe County will allow time for a “VOCA Fix” to resolve the underlying shortage of federal funding for victims’ services and to ensure that the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the populations we serve has been resolved.

Statement of Need*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

This project arises from two needs:(1) The needs of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and human trafficking were amplified and altered by COVID-19 , and (2) There has been a sudden loss of substantial funding for Buncombe victims’ services agencies at this critical time in COVID-19 recovery.

Domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking are significant problems in Buncombe County, and survivors often experience more than one form of abuse: The Jamie Kimball Foundation estimates that nearly 3,500 domestic violence victimizations occur in Buncombe County each year. In 2020, Buncombe DSS opened over 2,000 child maltreatment cases, including 762 cases with domestic violence affecting children. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center states that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men are victims of sexual violence in their lifetimes. According to the North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission, NC consistently ranks in the top-10 states for human trafficking.

These high rates of victimization are evident in the demand for local services:

The Mediation Center provided more than 450 safe supervised visits last year for Buncombe families who had experienced domestic violence or child sexual abuse.

In 2020, Pisgah Legal Services helped 3,551 people in Buncombe County with issues related to domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and other crimes.

Helpmate provided counseling, advocacy, case management, and/or shelter to 3431 survivors of domestic violence last year.

Our VOICE provided 56% more counseling services this year compared to last and received 326% more calls from survivors of human trafficking in the first half of 2021 compared to the first half of 2020.

During this critical time, project partners learned that the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission (GCC) would not continue \$2.2 million funding from Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funds after September 30, 2021.

Link to COVID-19*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

COVID-19 increased victimization and created new barriers for victims. During the pandemic lockdown, adults and children were trapped in homes with abusers, unable to access support networks including family, schools, and faith groups. An American Psychological Association study showed that risk factors for domestic violence and child abuse -- unemployment, financial strain, substance use, isolation, depression, anxiety, and

stress – increased due to COVID-19. An article in JAMA showed that the conditions of COVID-19 have increased risk factors for human trafficking and made it more difficult for victims to get help.

Our community is experiencing what the United Nations has called the “shadow pandemic,” where survivors are seeking help as conditions improve. Demand for victims’ services is rising and needs are changing: The National Domestic Violence Prevention Hotline reported legal advocacy was the most requested service from NC callers in 2020 with 28% seeking legal help. Helpmate saw a dramatic increase in demand for crisis services - they provided 30% more nights in shelter and answered 25% more hotline calls than in the prior year. Our VOICE has had more clients with severe psychiatric conditions and a 200% increase in clients experiencing homelessness. In the past three months, The Mediation Center’s Family Visitation Program has seen a rapid increase in demand for supervised visits with more than 20 new families seeking services. Pisgah Legal Services provided new and increased services including assistance with unemployment benefits and is now preparing to assist the many survivors facing eviction as soon as the moratorium expires in July.

The VOCA fund is filled by fines and penalties from federal prosecutions; a change in administrative process greatly depleted the fund over the past several years. This problem was exacerbated by the closure of federal courts due to COVID-19. Without pandemic-related closures the cuts would have been much less severe.

Population Served*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

This project will serve victims of domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault and human trafficking. All people can be victims of abuse; however, the frequency, impact, and lethality of victimization is disproportionate for members of our community with the fewest financial and social resources. Of the people who accessed community case management and court advocacy programs in Buncombe County last year, 80% identified as female, 35% as persons of color, and 49% were between the ages of 25-44.

Because each project partner’s services are distinct and non-duplicative, each has a unique focus:

The Mediation Center’s Family Visitation Program will annually provide supervised visitation services to 40 families in cases of domestic violence and child sexual abuse, serving at least 40 adult victims and 60 child victims. These families will participate in more than 600 supervised visits.

Pisgah Legal Services will provide civil legal aid to 2,000 underserved, low-income victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse per year in Buncombe County. An estimated 20% of the cases will be for immigrant households and 65% for households with children.

Helpmate will provide community case management, children’s services and/or court advocacy to 2,000 survivors of domestic violence and their children. Child and family case managers will provide support to 200 survivors and children involved with Child Protective Services.

Our VOICE will provide outreach and comprehensive support services to 400 victims of sexual assault and human trafficking. At least 80 of these service recipients will be experiencing homelessness.

Results*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

Project partners will sustain services to ensure that victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and child abuse have access to the resources they need to ensure their safety and to heal.

In each year of the grant:

The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program will serve at least 40 families including more than 60 children; 100% these families will be safe from abuse or neglect while using supervised visitation or safe exchange. This year, the program served 29 families, which was lower than prior years due to court closures COVID-19 restrictions.

Pisgah Legal Services will sustain their work to help 2,000 people in Buncombe County escape domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse and will help rebuild their lives through legal advice and representation in at least 750 cases.

Helpmate will provide community case management, children's services and/or court advocacy to 2,000 survivors of intimate partner domestic violence and their children, including at least 200 survivors and children involved in Child Protective Services, family court, or juvenile court. Over the last year, Helpmate served 2,122 survivors through community case management and court advocacy programs. 52% of these survivors also received specialized Children's Services to mitigate the impact of intergenerational trauma.

Our VOICE will provide trauma-informed, survivor-centered crisis support to 400 individuals who connect with the crisis line; at least 20% of these survivors will be experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. In the past year, the staff in positions funded by this project served 164 survivors of sexual violence and/or human trafficking. These figures are lower than normal due to COVID-19 pandemic. Now that restrictions have loosened, more survivors are requesting services.

Evaluation*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

Project partners use computerized data tracking systems to record and analyze data. Each organization will continue to track the data points mentioned in this application. All partners have significant experience with recording data and generating reports. Partners will submit quarterly reports on progress towards contract requirements and outcomes, and will collaborate to overcome barriers and to adjust plans as victim needs and COVID-19 recovery evolve. Project partners will meet on a quarterly basis and additionally as needed to evaluate the effectiveness, comprehensiveness, and collaborative nature of services.

Equity Impact*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

Survivors of domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and will need additional resources to ensure recovery.

We know that survivors in marginalized communities including people of color, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and rural residents are less likely to seek services because of distrust in law enforcement, distrust in the court process, lack of access to financial resources and transportation, and other barriers. It is critical that we approach our services with an equity lens in order to provide full access to holistic services for all members of our community.

The CDC reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health conditions were disproportionately affecting specific populations including Latinx and Black persons, and those receiving treatment for preexisting psychiatric conditions. Immigrant survivors are already often more isolated than others in the community, making it more difficult to access services. Immigrants have also suffered higher rates of COVID-19. According to Immigration Court data obtained by TRAC Immigration, NC ranks last for the likelihood of having legal representation in an immigration case, with only 23.5% of immigrants with NC cases being represented. All project partners are dedicated to ensuring immigrant survivors have equal access to services, despite the additional barriers they face. All four partners meet the needs of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) survivors by using Language Line and other interpretation resources. In addition, all partners can provide most services in Spanish directly from bilingual staff to clients without the use of interpreters.

All four partners are invested in continued work to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within each organization, and also committed to approaching our collaborative services and outreach with an equity lens to make real progress on identifying and reducing these barriers.

Project Partners*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:

- 1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;
- 2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

Pisgah Legal, Helpmate, and Our VOICE are project partners and subcontractors:

Pisgah Legal Services will provide civil legal advice and representation to underserved, low-income victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and elder abuse. Grant funds will pay for 2.9 FTE attorneys, 1 FTE victim advocate, 0.4 FTE immigration specialist, and 1.5 FTE legal assistants.

Helpmate will provide advocacy for victims of domestic violence. Advocates will support adult and child survivors through processes related to domestic violence protective orders, criminal matters, custody/family court, and DSS involvement. Grants funds will pay for 4.7 FTE staff for direct service provision (case management, children's services, and court advocacy). In addition, project funds will be used for direct financial assistance for survivors' immediate needs.

Our VOICE will provide crisis response, counseling, and case management services for victims of sexual assault and human trafficking. Grant funds will pay for 2.6 FTE staff in counseling, outreach, community engagement, and leadership positions to ensure services are sustained.

In addition, The Mediation Center will contract with a local law enforcement entity to provide occasional security services to the program on an as-needed basis as well as an IT service that will ensure that security cameras and staff computers function properly.

Based on total FTEs contributed to the project each partner will contribute the following percentage of the overall scope of work: The Mediation Center - 17.7%, Pisgah Legal Services - 36.7%, Helpmate - 29.2%, and Our VOICE - 16.4%.

All partners have long-standing referral relationships with community and government organizations including DSS, The United Way's 211, the Buncombe District Attorney's office, The Family Justice Center, local law enforcement, and Mountain Child Advocacy Center, as well as homelessness service providers and mental health providers.

Capacity*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

The Mediation Center is in its fifth year as lead application/fiscal agent for a Justice for Families grant from the federal Office of Violence Against Women. The project is a collaboration between The Mediation Center, Pisgah Legal Services, Safelight (Henderson) and SAFE (Transylvania). During this time, The Mediation Center had a site visit that did not result in any concerns with either programmatic or financial management of the federal grant.

The Mediation Center opened in 1984 and has provided more than 10,000 safe supervised visits since 2008. The program has federal funding for visitation services in Henderson and Transylvania Counties. The Mediation Center's Executive Director Laura Jeffords has been with the agency for more than 15 years.

Founded in 1978, Pisgah Legal Services has capable Board, staff, and volunteer leadership and expertise. Jim Barrett is one of the longest-serving executive directors in WNC, with almost 28 years in his role. Jim has helped PLS grow from a staff of 15 to a staff of 92.

Since 1974, Our VOICE has provided crisis intervention and therapeutic services to survivors of sexual violence and human trafficking as well as primary prevention education in the community. Executive Director Angelica Wind has over 15 years' experience in the anti-gender based violence movement.

Serving over 3300 survivors annually, Helpmate is the largest domestic violence service provider in WNC and serves 29% more victims than the statewide average. Executive Director April Burgess-Johnson has worked to end domestic violence for 26 years.

Pisgah Legal Services, Our VOICE, and Helpmate are founding on-site partners of the Buncombe County Family Justice Center, and are experts at working with the full scope of domestic violence services for Buncombe County victims.

All project partners have experience with managing, reporting on, and tracking federal funds and are prepared to meet federal standards with Buncombe Recovery funds.

Budget*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

210707 ADV Budget Form.xlsx

Special Considerations*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

The disparities in the impact of COVID on survivors of violence and abuse compound existing vulnerabilities. Domestic violence has been recognized by the World Health Organization as an important social determinant of health and exposure to domestic violence can significantly increase lifetime risk for numerous serious health conditions, such as diabetes and stroke. Abuse of pregnant women leads to a 2.5-fold increase in infant mortality. The Adverse Childhood Experiences study recognizes the life-long negative effects on children of experiencing violence in their homes. Making this one-time investment now to sustain the continuum of services for victims is a long-term investment in the health of our community as a whole.

VOCA grant dollars have decreased nationally and the impact on our community is severe. There is a bipartisan solution moving through Congress to fix the issue but, unfortunately, even after this 'VOCA Fix' is enacted, it will likely take three or more years for full funding to return to programs in our community. The Mediation Center's Family Visitation Program believes its loss of VAWA funds was due to redistribution of decreased VOCA funds; the two sources fund similar programs.

The positions to be funded by this grant are different from those to be funded in the Family Justice Center request as well as other positions in other applications submitted by project partners.

Project partners are actively advocating for the North Carolina government to replace funding for the long-term, established victims' services providers that did not receive GCC funding in the latest cycle, either via the state budget surplus or with state ARPA funds. Partners will request reverted funds from GCC in late 2021, although it is unknown if any will be available and unlikely that these funds will fill the full gap. Additionally, all project partners are in conversation with local and regional foundations and are asking individual donors for increased support.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- 210707 ADV Budget Form.xlsx

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Proposed Project Budget

Organization Name:	The Mediation Center
Project Name:	Protection and Healing for Buncombe Survivors
Amount Requested:	\$3,065,804.27

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	\$ 3,065,804.27	pending	
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Total	\$ 3,065,804.27		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Recovery Funds	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating Expense?	Notes
Mediation Center - Salaries (2.8 FTE/year/3 years)	\$ 360,646.00		\$ 360,646.00	operating	
Mediation Center - Fringe (3 years)	\$ 70,334.00		\$ 70,334.00	operating	
Mediation Center - Travel (3 years)	\$ 8,146.00		\$ 8,146.00	operating	
Mediation Center - Supplies (3 years)	\$ 15,276.00		\$ 15,276.00	operating	
Mediation Center - Contractual (3 years)	\$ 17,339.00		\$ 17,339.00	operating	
Mediation Center - Indirect Cost (3 years)	\$ 47,147.00		\$ 47,147.00	operating	
Pisgah Legal Salaries (5.8 FTE/year/3 years)	\$ 1,027,062.43		\$ 1,027,062.43	operating	
Pisgah Legal Fringe (3 years)	\$ 295,086.61		\$ 295,086.61	operating	
Pisgah Legal Indirect Cost (3 years)	\$ 130,797.23		\$ 130,797.23	operating	
Helpmate - Salaries (4.6 FTE/year/3 years)	\$ 462,388.00		\$ 462,388.00	operating	
Helpmate - Fringe (3 years)	\$ 128,196.00		\$ 128,196.00	operating	
Helpmate - Direct Service to Victims (3 years)	\$ 53,771.00		\$ 53,771.00	operating	
Helpmate - Client Transportation (3 years)	\$ 3,750.00		\$ 3,750.00	operating	
Our VOICE - Salaries (2.6 FTE/year/3 years)	\$ 376,649.00		\$ 376,649.00	operating	
Our VOICE - Fringe (3) years	\$ 69,216.00		\$ 69,216.00	operating	
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Total			\$ 3,065,804.27		