



Project Safeguard

www.PSGhelps.org

THEORY OF CHANGE

SERVICES WE PROVIDE TO SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Legal advocacy

Non-attorney legal advocates provide safety planning, accurate information about the legal system, referrals to other resources (attorneys, housing, food, counseling, etc.); and they support clients at court hearings, help them prepare for court, and coordinate Divorce and Custody clinics where clients receive legal advice and assistance completing necessary paperwork.

Systems change

Leadership and staff engage in policy advocacy; coordinate with local courts to ensure survivors rights and needs are considered; and provide training and education for the legal community and allied service providers on topics including: the services PSG provides, civil legal solutions for survivors, and trauma-informed practices.

Attorney services

Staff and contract attorneys provide expert, trauma-informed legal advice and representation, case consultations, hearing preparation, ghostwriting, and paperwork assistance.

CORE VALUES

We believe that justice is only possible when:

- GBV is understood.
- The people helping understand the impact of trauma.
- We hold systems accountable.
- It is defined by the survivor.
- We take anti-racist action and pursue social justice.
- We show respect.

OUR MISSION

Project Safeguard empowers and partners with people who have experienced gender-based violence, helping them navigate a course of survivor-driven justice through expert, trauma-informed legal advocacy and representation.

OUR VISION

A community where survivor-driven justice is accessible to all people who have experienced gender-based violence.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES OF OUR WORK

Survivors increase their ability to plan for their safety, enabling them move out of "survival mode" so they can rebuild their lives and move toward self-sufficiency

Survivors receive free information and legal advice so they can make informed decisions about how to move forward

Survivors feel heard and supported by the people assisting them, which builds their confidence to engage with the legal system and advocate for their own safety

Survivors have more knowledge about community resources and legal processes

Survivors may receive more desirable outcomes in divorce and custody cases, which can help them become more financially stable

Survivors recognize their own strength, resilience, and resourcefulness

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES OF OUR WORK

Laws and policies that are survivor-centered and make legal systems more accessible and effective for survivors

Survivors who have benefited from or services want to give back and become changemakers in their community

Survivors move along a continuum of healing, working through trauma and toward a life free from abuse



Our Mission

Project Safeguard (PSG) empowers and partners with people who have experienced gender-based violence, helping them navigate a course of survivor-driven justice through expert, trauma-informed legal advocacy and representation.

Our Vision

A community where survivor-driven justice is accessible to all people who have experienced gender-based violence.

Our Core Values

We believe that justice is only possible when:

- Gender-based violence is understood.
- The people helping understand the impact of trauma.
- We hold systems accountable.
- It is defined by the survivor.
- We take anti-racist action and pursue social justice.
- We show respect.

Who we Serve

PSG serves people who have experienced or are experiencing gender-based violence (including but not limited to domestic/intimate partner abuse, sexual violence, stalking, and/or human trafficking) in Metro Denver. Our non-attorney legal advocacy and attorney services are designed to help this population increase safety through civil legal remedies, which may include civil protection orders, divorce and custody cases, and/or immigration relief related to their abuse. Many of the folks we serve are referred through partner agencies or law enforcement after it has been identified that they need support filing for a civil protection order or a divorce or custody case. We also have offices in Metro area courthouses, where court personnel refer people who come in requesting protection orders because of gender-based violence. Support filing for a civil protection order is most often what brings people to Project Safeguard, but once they have connected with an advocate, we help people understand all of the ways the civil legal system can support them on their journey to safety. While we serve folks from all gender, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds, the majority of our clients are women, more than 60% of those we serve are considered “low income” by federal standards, and 15-20% of our clients have limited English proficiency. We do not have income eligibility requirements for our services, but many of the folks we serve are experiencing financial hardship and do not have the means to hire an attorney for support navigating the complexities of the civil legal system. Free legal services reduce barriers to accessing civil legal protections that can increase survivors’ safety.



Why our work is needed

The legal system is complex and confusing for anyone to navigate, and it is even more difficult for folks who have been impacted by trauma and are living in survival mode. A needs assessment conducted by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) found the provision of civil legal services for victims of crime to be a major gap in services in the state. PSG helps fill this gap by providing non-attorney legal advocacy and attorney services that help our clients understand their rights and options within the civil legal system. We work to level the playing field and create more equitable access to the civil legal system for survivors by working alongside them to make the process less daunting.

Colorado Crime Statistics from 2022 show that there were more than 12,000 reports of crimes related to gender-based violence in Metro Denver. According to the [Department of Justice's 2013 Vision 21 report](#), "the majority of crime victims in the United States never contact law enforcement or step across the threshold of a courtroom", so we know that the need is greater than the data can demonstrate. This report also states, "It is clear that millions of crime victims in the United States never experience any form of justice, nor do they benefit from support services that could help them regain a sense of normalcy in their lives." Because PSG's services are provided within the civil legal system, we address this gap by serving many of those victims who do not engage with the criminal legal system, helping them access safety through the civil courts. Furthermore, many of the clients we serve are seeking support for civil legal issues *in addition* to engaging with the criminal legal system, and our services help them navigate these intersecting systems, reducing confusion and mitigating the trauma that accompanies these processes.

Research has shown that legal representation has a significant impact on the outcome of civil protection order hearings – particularly at Permanent Protection Order (PPO) hearings. [One study](#) found that 83% of victims represented by an attorney obtained a protection order, versus 32% without an attorney. PSG tracks domestic violence related Civil Protection Order (CPO) filing statistics in Metro Denver to better understand the need for our services. During Colorado's fiscal year ending on June 30, 2022, there were 2,666 CPOs related to domestic violence filed in county court in Metro Denver, which represents a 46% increase in filings from the previous year. PSG served nearly 800 clients in 2022, so we know that there are many more people that could benefit from our services than we are currently able to support.

While a variety of services are available to support victims, research has found that legal services alone have been shown to reduce incidences of domestic violence. Leading [researchers Farmer and Tiefenthaler report](#) that "...women who live in counties with legal assistance programs to help battered women are significantly less likely to report abuse. Because legal services help women with practical matters such as protective orders, custody, and child support they appear to actually present women with real, long-term alternatives to their relationships." For many of the clients we serve, non-attorney advocacy services sufficiently meet their needs, but those with more complex legal needs, higher risk of lethality, and those whose abusers are represented by an attorney, support from a licensed attorney can positively impact court outcomes.



PSG's legal advocacy and attorney services reduce the financial burden for victims of gender-based violence by providing free access to legal advice and representation, and we cover all associated court fees. A [2004 study](#) looking at custody proceedings involving domestic violence found that the average cost of cases filed by protective mothers is over \$90,000. More than a quarter of study participants were forced to file bankruptcy as a result of filing for custody. Fortunately, [research has also found](#) "...having an attorney's assistance with ancillary legal matters further helps women achieve greater economic self-sufficiency (and perceptions of self-sufficiency), which in turn makes leaving their relationships a more realistic option." A [2014 Report on Civil Legal Needs in Colorado](#) found that "...76 percent of parties in domestic relations cases are self-represented." This report goes on to say, "Legal assistance can help keep families together, preserve housing, ensure access to health care and other basic needs, and reduce domestic violence."

Widespread cultural change is needed for the issue of gender-based violence to be eradicated, but until that happens, Project Safeguard will be here to support survivors on their journey to safety. When survivors receive services from a typical legal aid organization, the representation is often limited to the standard procedural steps of a case. When a survivor hires a private attorney, the representation is limited by their financial means. Survivors who receive representation from a PSG staff attorney are assisted with every aspect of the case that arises. PSG's model of pairing wrap-around civil legal advocacy with long-term, multi-issue legal representation for survivors of gender-based violence is unique in Metro Denver. Without such a resource, people are more likely to give up and see abuse as their only option.

Outcomes for the survivors PSG serves

Short-term:

- Survivors increase their ability to plan for their safety, enabling them move out of "survival mode" so they can rebuild their lives and move toward self-sufficiency
- Survivors have more knowledge about community resources and legal processes
- Survivors receive free information and legal advice so they can make informed decisions about how to move forward
- Survivors may receive more desirable outcomes in divorce and custody cases, which can help them become more financially stable
- Survivors feel heard and supported by the people supporting them, which builds their

confidence to engage with the legal system and advocate for their own safety

- Survivors recognize their own strength, resilience, and resourcefulness

Long-term:

- Laws and policies that are survivor-centered and make legal systems more accessible and effective for survivors
- Survivors who have benefited from advocacy and legal support want to give back and go on to become changemakers in their community
- Survivors move along a continuum of healing, working through trauma and toward a life free from abuse



Activities

- *Legal advocacy*: Non-attorney legal advocates provide safety planning, accurate information about the legal system, referrals to other resources (attorneys, housing, food, counseling, etc.), and they support clients at court hearings, help them prepare for court, and coordinate Divorce and Custody clinics where clients receive legal advice and assistance completing necessary paperwork.
- *Attorney services*: Staff and contract attorneys provide expert, trauma-informed legal advice and representation, case consultations, hearing preparation, ghostwriting, and paperwork assistance.
- *Systems change*: Leadership and staff engage in policy advocacy; coordinate with local courts to ensure survivors rights and needs are considered; and provide training and education for the legal community and allied service providers on topics including: the services PSG provides, civil legal solutions for survivors, and trauma-informed practices.
- *Collaboration and coordination with other services providers*: Leadership and staff participate in multidisciplinary committees and task forces to ensure the needs and interests of the folks we serve are represented in the victim services community. They also learn from and share information with community partners through guest presentations and cross-trainings.

Inputs

- Resiliency and survival skills among the clients we serve
- Staff and board members with lived experience and a passion for supporting survivors
- Patient, compassionate, and knowledgeable advocates and attorneys on staff
- Staff, contract, and volunteer attorneys with expertise in the law AND understanding of trauma
- Financial support from foundation and government funders, and community members
- Technology that can support case management and robust reporting
- Community trust and name recognition among the victim services and legal community
- Strong partnerships with allied agencies who refer survivors to the agency
- A deep understanding throughout the agency of the impacts of trauma and intersections of various forms of oppression