

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

The Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault is organized to end sexual violence and to support high quality sexual violence prevention and response within Maine communities.

Dear friends,

As 2023 comes to a close, I am filled with a mix of emotions about the state of sexual violence services in Maine. It is clear that we are facing great challenges in the next year, particularly around the funding that we count on to provide the resources and supports that survivors need.

Our funding bill to raise advocate salaries, LD 566, did not get past the finish line and more advocates have left the work because of low wages and uncertainty about their future careers. And while that bill can still be considered in the upcoming legislative session, more pressing concerns have arisen - a huge gap in Victims of Crime Act funding that will cut \$6 million or more from victims' services in Maine next year unless the Governor and Legislature take action. That VOCA gap must be filled – but I worry about what that means for improving advocate wages this session.

Yet despite these real and present frustrations, there are also many reasons to celebrate. I have so much hope and pride in the work we continue to do together. More people than ever before reached out to the Helpline for support. Those calls were answered by advocates who have the most up-to-date training and grounding in our work thanks to the resources that MECASA provides. Over 1,200 children and their families were supported by Children's Advocacy Centers across our state in 2023. And MECASA's Human Trafficking and Survivor Funds had their biggest year yet: providing almost \$90,000 in funds so that survivors could meet their emergency needs.

We also have built an incredible team here at the Coalition. Our thoughtful and passionate staff provide high quality trainings, change systems, and design robust community-level prevention initiatives that are having a lasting impact.

Our new public policy team completed its first legislative session. And, while we are deeply disappointed with the status of our funding bill, that session still ranks as one of the most impactful in MECASA's last twenty years. Today there is a legal definition of "consent" in Maine statute. The brand-new law allowing children's interviews at advocacy centers to be admissible as evidence just allowed a survivor of child sexual abuse to avoid taking the stand to recount the abuse she suffered at the hands of her grandfather. The result was guilty on all counts. And the right for every survivor to have an advocate throughout the legal process is now enshrined in Maine law.

As always, we could not do this work without our partners: the funders at both the state and federal levels, our allies doing work that supports a more just and connected Maine, and of course, every single sexual assault advocate, forensic interviewer, and educator – you are the real changemakers, and we are so grateful to support what you do.

With gratitude,



Elizabeth Ward Saxl
Executive Director



THE WORK BY THE NUMBERS

At the very heart of MECASA's mission are Maine's sexual assault support centers – everything we do is focused on supporting and increasing their capacity to serve survivors, educate communities, and build relationships that will respond to and reduce sexual violence.

This past year, Maine's sexual assault support centers:



Answered **3,581 helpline calls** - the most calls ever.



Facilitated **250 support groups for survivors** with disabilities, new Americans, in prison and jails, coming out of trafficking situations and more.



Provided **1,319 forensic interviews** for more than 1,200 children suspected of being sexually abused.



Taught over 20,000 children about topics like personal boundaries and healthy relationships.

To support this incredible work, MECASA staff:



Provided over **6,000 hours of technical assistance**, responding to the needs and questions of member centers.



Facilitated **92 peer sharing calls**, bringing center staff together to discuss the shared aspects of their work.



Organized **59 separate trainings** (136 hours of training!) for center staff and partners in our work.



Reached our followers **100,000+ times** on social media & brought **70,000 people** to our websites.



Created or updated **122 resources** ranging from one-pagers to amicus briefs to support center work.

COMMITTING TO OUR SHARED VISION



Results of our 2023 visioning work with centers

Coalition work is unique. At MECASA, our work is driven by our member centers and the needs of the survivors they serve. While providing day-to-day support to members and partners, we also are charged with holding the “10,000 foot view” and making sure our communities and the people who are most impacted are centered and that our work is making a difference.

This past year, MECASA worked with sexual assault support centers and statewide partners to listen to community needs, strengths, and hopes for our future. We used what we learned to create a vision for future work and to recommit to the shared values that underpin our services and workplaces. Using this vision as a guide, we are making changes to our Quality Assurance Standards (QAS) - a set of agreements made by sexual assault support centers about how we support survivors and make change in our communities. The leadership of the sexual assault support centers and MECASA have drafted a complete update to these standards to reflect our vision that services be:

- survivor-driven
- accessible and equity-driven
- confidential
- focused on culture change
- evidence and evaluation-based
- expert
- sustainable

In the coming year we will finalize, roll out, and support implementation of these standards. We’ll also continue realizing our shared visions for our work.

PREVENTION SUMMIT

This past June, prevention educators from across the state came together for MECASA's first annual Prevention Summit. This event broadened participants' understanding of community-level prevention and supported expanded efforts to change the underlying conditions that allow sexual violence to occur.

Prevention educators learned more about how to include community members in planning, designing and evaluating prevention programs; spent time brainstorming potential projects within and across their teams; and received support from MECASA staff as they leaned into new and exciting avenues for broadening their reach and impact.

This upcoming year will be a formative one for centers' prevention work, and our first Summit laid a foundation for their next steps.

CREATING A STATEWIDE PREVENTION EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Historically, sexual violence prevention educators in Maine created curricula for use in K-12 schools in response to their individual community's needs. Over time, each center developed effective materials to meet the demands from schools in their area. At the same time, best practices in prevention across the country began to point toward the need for a common and consistent statewide curriculum. A common curriculum would ensure that all children in Maine receive consistent information and that the materials used would be grounded in evidence-based practices. It would also mean that over time, center educators could support schools to deliver the curricula themselves. Increasing capacity of schools to lead prevention efforts in their own communities would expand the reach of these efforts far beyond center educators' current capacity.

Educators at sexual assault support centers began collaborating in 2022 to create a comprehensive prevention education resource and toolkit to streamline efforts, promote consistency, and support the capacity of prevention education in Maine. Over the past eighteen months, a group of educators and MECASA staff met monthly to discuss priorities in prevention education, best and promising practices, and what educators need to build the skills of young people of all ages to end sexual violence. Partners like Maine TransNet and Disability Rights Maine offered feedback and resources so the final product was accessible and sensitive to everyone impacted by sexual violence.

The result is Maine's Sexual Assault Prevention Toolkit: a collection of curriculum materials, lesson plans, activities, book recommendations, evaluations, tools for schools, caregivers, and community members, and many other resources. Provided to schools and communities for their own use, this toolkit offers a comprehensive, year-by-year set of lessons can be used to teach about bodies and boundaries, consent, and healthy relationships to children from preschool through high school. We are grateful for the shared wisdom of each and every educator and partner who helped make this resource a reality!



Bodies and Boundaries
(Grades Pre-K through 5)



Healthy Communities
(Grades Pre-K through 5)



Creating Safer Online Spaces
(Grades 3-8)



Consent and Communication
(Grades 6-12)



Gender and Sexuality
(Grades 6-12)



Creating Respectful and Safe
Communities
(Grades 6-12)



Working with
Families/Caregivers



Working with
Schools/Communities

Front page of the new Prevention Curriculum website

"MECASA STAFF ARE ALWAYS CARING AND SUPPORTIVE AND REALLY LISTEN TO OUR NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVE."

- Center Staff Member

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

Volunteer Helpline advocates are a cornerstone of Maine's intervention programs – they are often the first contact that survivors make with a sexual assault support center, and they provide vital coverage on the Helpline so that center staff can spend more of their time working to change systems and cultures and improve outcomes when survivors connect with systems of care.

In recent MECASA annual assessments, centers have expressed their need for more robust recruitment and retention of volunteer advocates. From that ask, in late 2022, MECASA staff created a multi-step plan to build center capacity around their volunteer programs. We began by hosting a peer call for center staff responsible for managing their volunteer programs, facilitating a discussion around the current climate of volunteerism in Maine, their immediate needs, and what approaches have worked in the past.

Following that call, MECASA staff have supported centers' volunteer efforts in a number of ways, beginning with collecting and sharing the most up-to-date resources and research available on this topic. In May, we launched a statewide social media campaign focused on the recruitment of new volunteers and designed graphics and language for centers to adapt for their own use as well.



Post graphic from 2023 Volunteer Recruitment Series

Finally, we have committed to longer-term efforts to build centers' capacities for maintaining volunteer programs, by identifying a highly-regarded training series from Energize, providing financial support so that staff from every member center can participate, and pairing that ongoing learning with a regular peer call to discuss questions and ideas that have come from those trainings.

Most recently, MECASA staff have created a fact sheet that summarizes best practices and considerations for the recruitment and retention of volunteers, which will inform future conversations at our ongoing Volunteer Management peer call. This work will continue as we strive to build capacity through volunteer efforts in years to come.

**"THIS WORK MOVES AND CHANGES QUICKLY, AND I THINK
MECASA DOES A GREAT JOB KEEPING UP WITH THAT."**

-Center Staff Member

RESPONDING TO YOUTH WITH PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

Over the years, Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers have worked not only with children and youth who have experienced sexual abuse, but also with those exhibiting sexual behaviors that are harmful to themselves and others. Particularly in cases involving sibling-on-sibling sexual abuse, CACs and multidisciplinary team (MDT) partners have often felt they lacked the training and resources needed to adequately support these youth, the victims, and their families. The 2023 MECASA Annual Needs Assessment captured that 75% of Children's Advocacy Center staff wanted more resources and training around youth with problematic sexual behavior (YPSB).

In response to this need, MECASA committed funding from the National Children's Alliance to bring trainers from the National Center on the Sexual Behavior of Youth to Maine. CAC staff and their MDT partners received an in-person training designed to build skills around working with youth with problematic sexual behavior, ensuring safety of victims of this type of abuse, and utilizing the CAC model when responding to these delicate and complicated incidents. We are so pleased that over seventy people doing this work in Maine had a chance to receive this training.

In May, MECASA hosted a discussion on services for people who commit sexual harm. Four community experts joined us for a panel discussion hosted by MECASA's Intervention Coordinator. They shared information, resources, and answered questions about the services and treatment options available to people who have committed sexual harm.

SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO COMMIT SEXUAL HARM

SUPPORTING COLLEGE SYSTEMS



Central Maine Community College

A sweeping new law enacted last year expanded the duties of colleges and universities to respond to and prevent instances of sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and stalking on campus. Among the new requirements are the creation and publication of policies on sexual violence, the development of resources and training for new students and staff about sexual assault services, and the designation of confidential resource advisors for victims of assault and stalking.

To help the Maine Community College System (MCCS) meet these new requirements, MCCS has contracted with MECASA to provide statewide coordination for confidential resource advisor services through local sexual assault support centers for five of their seven colleges. MECASA also created several video trainings to support schools in building their staff's understanding of specific issues around sexual violence, and will continue to provide training, prevention and awareness programming, and other resources as needed to all seven of MCCS's member colleges.

By strengthening community colleges' relationships with their local sexual assault support centers and facilitating the creation of policies and practices that support their students, MECASA is helping to ensure safer and more respectful campus climates in years to come.

ADVOCATE TRAINING BEYOND FOUNDATIONS

Beyond Foundations



An Onboarding Resource for
New Sexual Assault Advocates

Beyond Foundations cover

Once new center advocates go through advocacy training, centers provide extensive onboarding and continuing education as advocates begin working with survivors. After 2021's full update to the core 40-hour statewide advocate training, MECASA and center staff began collecting information to build on the base of Foundations of Advocacy. The intent was to dig more deeply into specific issues that can arise while serving survivors and their loved ones and provide consistency in sexual assault services across Maine.

The result of this work is *Beyond Foundations* - a self-paced onboarding resource for advocates. This collection of recorded trainings, handouts, resources, skill building activities, and other information provides important context that advocates need to do their work. There are approximately 45 hours of recorded training, 100 pages of Beyond Foundations reading, and hours of website and document review. Focused on systems advocacy and coordinated community response, this course is intended to be completed over the first 9 months of employment following or alongside the 40-hour Foundations of Advocacy Training.

Centers have begun using Beyond Foundations as part of onboarding new staff and advocates, and MECASA will continue to provide support by evaluating and updating this resource to provide the most robust training for advocates across the state.

SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR TRAINING

"The facilitators took such care to ensure people's questions were answered and that people felt seen and heard. You can tell a lot of love and effort went into everything!"

- Training Participant

In March 2023, MECASA coordinated and facilitated our annual Support Group Facilitator Training. This training is provided to center staff before they facilitate virtual or in-person support groups. In-person for the first time since 2020, for three days we met in Bangor, with a large and diverse group of attendees, that included advocates who work at Maine's Tribal Advocacy Programs.

Additionally, over a dozen advocates and two Coalition staff members traveled from Connecticut to receive this training. A few months later, MECASA provided a multi-day "training of trainers" to the Connecticut Coalition staff with the goal of providing our neighbors with all the materials and information they'll need to deliver a similar training to their member centers. MECASA will be on hand to help co-facilitate that first training this coming January.

SUSTAINING THE ADVOCATES

Much of MECASA's work revolves around thinking about how services for victims and survivors of sexual violence can be more responsive, trauma-informed, and effective – and we cannot succeed without

advocates who are grounded and prepared with the tools they need to do this impactful work. This past year, we redoubled our efforts to provide opportunities for advocates to center themselves, recharge and find outlets for processing their experiences. In doing so, advocates have deepened their connections to one another, considered how the work impacts them, and addressed some of the vicarious trauma that is common in anti-violence work.

Center Staff with Lived Experience Book Discussion Group

As part of our ongoing efforts to support center staff and increase sustainability, MECASA applied for and was selected to host a Discussion Project through the Maine Humanities Council (MHC). MHC connected us with a facilitator and we convened a group of center advocates who identify as survivors of sexual violence. Honoring their lived experience and providing space to connect, we hope this project helped increase their sense of connection, feelings of resilience, and capacity to remain in this challenging and emotionally demanding work.

Over 64% of member center staff identify as being survivors of sexual violence, and many have expressed wanting more connections between advocates at work. Having lived experience while also working in the anti-sexual violence movement impacts how we do our work and how the work impacts us. This book group was an opportunity for shared support and reflection, using a work of fiction as a starting point for conversation.

**“IT’S APPARENT THAT MECASA
HAS LISTENED TO REQUESTS AND
NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY CENTER
STAFF TO SELECT TRAININGS.”**

- Center Staff Member

Deep Rest for Advocates



Deep Rest for Advocates (DRFA) is a guided meditation exercise, rooted in the practices of Yoga Nidra and Reiki - practices that have been shown to reduce burnout related to trauma exposure in soldiers, hospital workers, and college students, among others. MECASA has been offering DRFA quarterly since 2022, and we invite all center and MECASA staff to join. During sessions, facilitator Molly Donlan leads participants through a practice that centers their own needs, emotions, and experience. In these sessions, advocates don't have to help anyone make decisions or hold space for someone else's trauma. For those unable to attend, each event is recorded and available for a limited time after the live event.

Low-Impact Debriefing Training

In September, Kris Bein and LaShae Lopez from the Resource Sharing Project (RSP) presented a training on low-impact debriefing to advocates, attorneys, and community partners. This training was developed by RSP because of a request from one of MECASA's member centers. In the training, the facilitators touched on appropriate ways to review and evaluate challenging experiences working with survivors, building trust in supervisory relationships, and minimizing the vicarious trauma that often impacts those in this field.

Because of the positive feedback received after this training, MECASA is working to bring Kris and LaShae back next year for additional education on debriefing! Further, this training will now be offered to other state coalitions along with a 10-page handout that will be added to RSP's written resources offerings.

OUR WORK AT THE STATE HOUSE

The first session of the 131st Maine Legislature included so many bills that will impact survivors of sexual violence – here are some of the most important that became law this year.

LD 535: This law allows 16 and 17 year olds to access medical treatment for gender dysphoria without parental consent.

LD 765: This makes recordings of forensic interviews admissible in civil and criminal cases, minimizing the amount that child sexual assault survivors will need to testify in open court.

LD 1092: This law requires the creation of a working group to make recommendations to the legislature regarding commercial sexual exploitation of children.

LD 1312: This law eliminates the doctrine of charitable immunity in cases involving child sexual assault, lifting the final barrier in allowing survivors of child sexual assault full access to civil damages.

LD 1362: The law gives sexual assault survivors the right to have an advocate present for a sexual assault forensic examination and/or interview with law enforcement. It also prevents law enforcement from searching or arresting a survivor during a sexual assault forensic examination for certain crimes such as OUI and misdemeanor drug crimes.

LD 1436: This law provides those previously convicted of engaging in prostitution the ability to have the record of that conviction sealed.

LD 1592: This law provides those who make a report of sexual harassment or sexual assault to their school or employer access to an expedited dismissal process if they are sued for defamation as a result of their complaint.

LD 1632: This law increases the amount of time law enforcement is required to store sexual assault kits from 8 years to 20 years.

LD 1657: This law defines consent and consistently applies the term consent throughout the Maine criminal code for sexual assault crimes.



LD 765 Bill Signing with Governor Mills, legislative sponsors, and systems partners

LD 1683: This law creates a civil cause of action for stealthing, which is the nonconsensual removal of or tampering with a condom. Survivors of stealthing may seek civil damages and/or a protection order based on the conduct. If a child is conceived as a result of stealthing, the court in a parental rights action also must weigh certain factors before issuing an order.

LD 1783: This law increases access to data related to sexual harassment and sexual assault in the Maine National Guard to assist the Governor's Advisory Council on Military Sexual Trauma. This law also expands access to paid leave and victim's compensation to survivors of sexual assault in the Maine National Guard.



Legislators vote to approve LD 566 in work session

ADVOCATING FOR ADVOCATE PAY

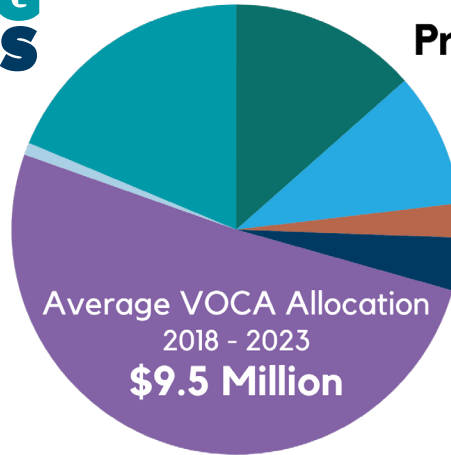
While sustainability remains a primary focus at MECASA, the last several years have brought a crisis to Maine's sexual assault support centers – one of increasing levels of staff turnover as a result of continued low wages for those that do this vital work. LD 566 was MECASA's response to this crisis – ongoing funding that raises advocate salaries to a floor of \$45,000 per year, from a current low of \$33,000 per year.

Unfortunately, LD 566 was not passed in the first session of the Legislature, and while we still have hope, there are complications. The federal act that funds a significant portion of victim's services across the country, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), has been underfunded for years. That shortfall has begun hitting states, and Maine is looking at a \$6 million or more cut next year unless the state and legislature act now. These funding cuts will impact all victims of crime and the services that they depend on, and will be devastating to sexual assault support centers, children's advocacy centers, and the survivors that count on advocates for support and resources as they work to find justice and healing.

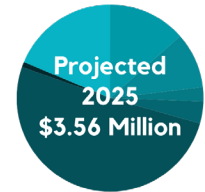


For donating food and wine
to our legislative outreach
events in support of LD 566!

VOCA FUNDING IN CRISIS



**Projected total gap in funding:
\$5,920,401**



While the 2024 VOCA shortfall was covered by one-time funding from DHHS, projected cuts for next year will leave a \$6 million gap

Since the 1980s, VOCA has provided funding for core services to victims of violent crimes. From civil and criminal legal services to advocacy and financial support, this funding has been critical in helping victims participate in the criminal justice process, get their lives back on track after disruption and trauma, and heal from the hurt and pain of their experiences.

Now, federal budget shortfalls are resulting in projected cuts of \$6 million in Maine's VOCA funds – more than 60% of our recent average funding – which would be devastating to the services that victims count on to support them through an already difficult time.

MECASA and other impacted agencies with the leadership of Senator Carney and Representative Stover are introducing a bill in the upcoming session to provide state funding to avoid these cuts – but we need you to help! Call your elected representatives today and tell them that victims' services must be prioritized and the VOCA gap filled.

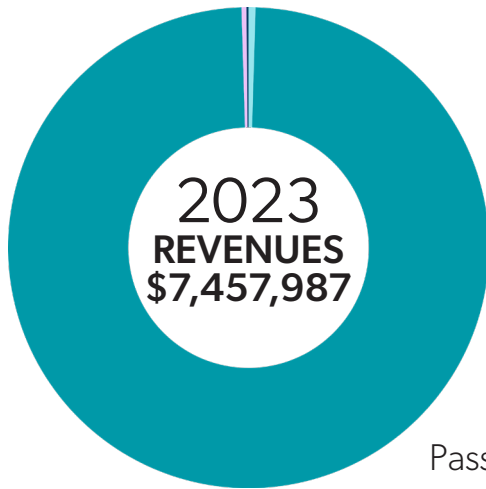
2022-2023 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

REVENUES:

	9/30/2023 (Unaudited)	9/30/2022 (Audited)
Dues & Donations	34,869	45,553
Foundations	0	17,500
State & Federal Grants	7,387,852	6,837,651
Other Grants	25,000	16,392
Investment Return	10,266	-6,797
Misc. Revenue	0	0
TOTAL	7,457,987	6,910,299

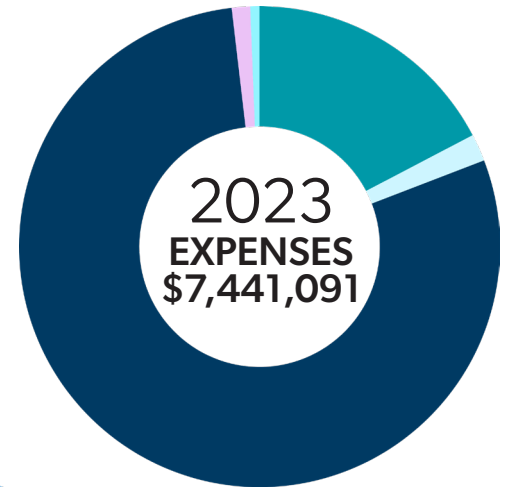
EXPENSES:

	9/30/2023 (Unaudited)	9/30/2022 (Audited)
Prevention & Victims Services	1,289,066	1,001,470
Tech. Assistance & Coalition Bldg	136,343	197,456
Pass-through to Service Providers	5,877,662	5,563,988
Other Sub-Contracted Programs	91,812	105,131
Management & General	46,208	29,940
TOTAL	7,441,091	6,897,985
Change in Net Assets	16,896	12,314
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	300,349	288,035
Net Assets at End of Year	317,245	300,349



- State & Federal Grants
- Other Grants
- State & Federal Grants
- Dues & Donations

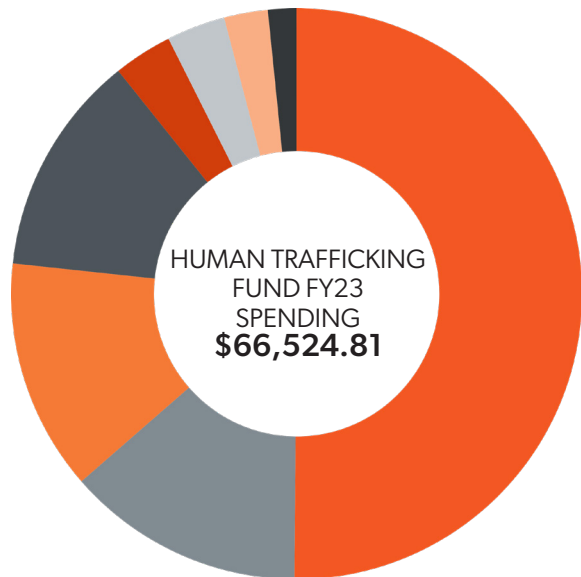
- Pass-through to Service Providers
- Prevention & Victims Services
- Technical Assistance & Coalition Building
- Other Sub-Contracted Programs
- Management & General



**"I APPRECIATE THE TIME THAT MECASA STAFF TAKE...
I ALWAYS FEEL SUPPORTED AND HEARD."**

- Center Staff Member

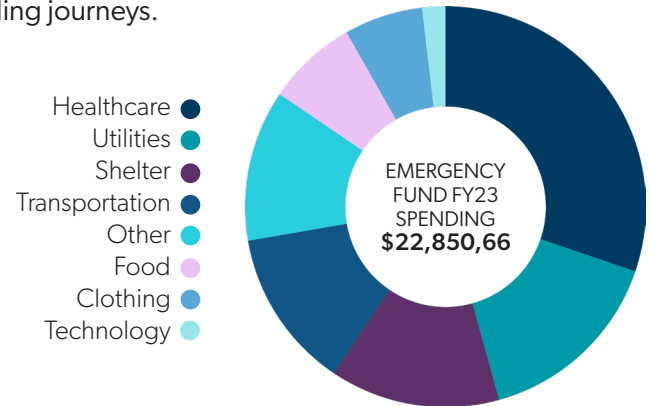
HUMAN TRAFFICKING & SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVOR EMERGENCY FUNDS



Survivors of human trafficking often struggle to leave exploitative situations because it means leaving behind their means of survival – their shelter, clothing, food, and support networks. Survivors of other kinds of sexual violence also face barriers to meeting their basic needs.

To address these issues, MECASA created two funds to support survivors – one specific to those who are leaving “the life” of trafficking and one for survivors of any sexual violence who need help with emergency needs like food, childcare, or rent to support their healing. We are committed to providing these kinds of supports because we know that experiences of violence often overlap with other vulnerabilities and because community care is an important part of both individual healing and cultural change.

This past year, 156 survivors of human trafficking and 81 survivors of sexual violence received \$89,375 in aid to meet their basic needs and support their healing journeys.



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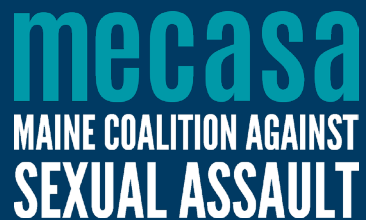
Prevention Director

Kristin Shumway

Finance Coordinator

Elizabeth Ward Saxl

Executive Director



45 Memorial Circle, Suite 302, Augusta, ME 04330
207-626-0034 | mecasa.org

