

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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,

Another fiscal year is behind us – and this one was a whirlwind! From new and exciting collaborations to our team expanding, MECASA has experienced changes big and small. We’ve made great progress toward our mission this year – to improve support for survivors and to prevent sexual violence; and yet there’s so much more to be done. We’ve learned a lot this year that will help us on our continued path, and we hope that you find ways to continue this work along with us.

This report details some of the important projects our team worked on over the past year – from the reestablishment of the Victim Assistance Academy to work with campuses to strengthen higher education’s response to sexual assault. Alongside these projects, we continued our internal efforts to understand what racial equity means and how, as a coalition, we can and must become equitable organizations and service providers. As part of our commitment to hold ourselves accountable for the ways in which we uphold systems of injustice, all MECASA staff and management teams from every sexual assault support center in Maine came together monthly to learn, to unpack, and to find ways to make all of the work we do accessible and responsive to all the survivors who need support.

Lastly, our team has changed and expanded in significant ways. We began this fiscal year welcoming our new Communications Coordinator and ended it in the midst of interviewing for our new Training Coordinator position – while this summer marked the beginning of an entire team devoted to all things public policy! With the addition of these new staff members, the work we do will be more impactful than ever before – and I can’t wait to see what next year brings.

So many thanks as always to our funders at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, the federal Office of Violence Against Women, the Bingham Program, the Maine Women’s Fund, and the donors in our community who continue to make this work possible.

With gratitude,



Elizabeth Ward Saxl
Executive Director



STRENGTHENING HELPLINE SERVICES



The statewide helpline is one of the main ways survivors access services in our state, and a core part of achieving MECASA's mission. Staff and volunteers are available 24/7 to offer support by phone and in person in their communities – and MECASA continues to focus on making sure that staff have the resources they need to thrive in this part of their role. In 2021, after a pause of the text/chat program, we identified that structural changes were needed to ensure the sustainability of the helpline service and, most importantly, the people who staff it.

To be able to design changes that would effectively sustain the helpline going forward, we knew we needed more and detailed information. We contracted with Muskie's Catherine Cutler Institute to implement a center specific helpline needs assessment, focused on the needs of center staff and designed to identify strengths, gaps, and potential changes to the helpline program. After listening to centers' ideas and concerns and integrating the data from this assessment, our efforts next year will focus on helpline staffing structures and volunteer recruitment – two important pieces of building the capacity to provide ongoing services. We also hope to also deliver text/chat service again.

FOCUS ON DISABILITY PARTNERSHIPS



Lisa Råvar, MECASA Prevention and Community Change Coordinator, at this year's Disability Pride event in Augusta, Maine

MECASA's most recent Population Services Assessment showed that people with disabilities, particularly intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), were both more likely to experience sexual violence and less likely to access services than people without disabilities. In response, MECASA prioritized expanding services and information to this population. We created a multi-year plan which included relationship building with disability-focused service providers, providing training to advocates, looking for collaboration opportunities, and finding specialized resources that would enhance disability service providers' capacity to serve survivors already in their communities.

While this work began in 2021, this year saw many results. Disability Rights Maine (DRM), Maine's protection and advocacy organization for people with disabilities, and MECASA now meet monthly to develop cross-trainings. We hosted advocates from both DRM and Speaking Up For Us (SUFU), a statewide self-advocacy organization, for a workshop on ableism at MECASA's annual conference. In turn, center staff from Rape Response Services and AMHC co-presented with DRM advocates at SUFU's regional conference in northern Maine. We also increased our support to allies in the disability field by offering technical assistance to the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council's Community of Praxis project.

These partnerships will continue over at least the next three years; Disability Rights Maine recently received a grant from the Office of Violence Against Women to address sexual violence prevention and response for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities! MECASA is a proud partner on this grant and we're looking forward to getting to work.

WORKING FOR ELDER JUSTICE

“We are recognizing just how crucial it is that a cross-disciplinary approach will address the abuse and generational trauma that some older people experience.”

- EJCP member

MECASA is a longtime partner in Maine’s network of providers working to prevent and respond to older adults who have experienced abuse and exploitation. We have seen persistent low rates of services provided to older Mainers at sexual assault support centers over the years, and in response, we have committed to increasing collaborative efforts and resources. This year, in support of improved support for elder survivors, our Equity & Access Program Coordinator led a day of learning at the statewide Elder Abuse Prevention Summit. The day included a presentation on Sexual Violence and Older Adults and a Multidisciplinary Panel on Sexual Violence, Older Adults, & Systems Response where participants got to leave with tangible steps to improve the systemic response to sexual abuse of older adults.

We also continued our work with the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership, created by Governor Mills’ Executive Order, which was tasked with developing specific recommendations for improving the prevention, detection, and response to elder abuse. This year the EJCP published the Maine Elder Justice Roadmap, with top priorities that include: increased staffing capacity at Adult Protective Services & Legal Services for the Elderly; wrap-around support services when multiple agencies are involved with an elder abuse case; dedicated statewide forensic auditing resources; and increased support and staffing for prosecutors.

COLLABORATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION



To better serve survivors and bolster campus sexual violence prevention efforts, MECASA began convening a Campus Learning Collaborative at the beginning of 2022, bringing together sexual violence prevention and response staff from community colleges, public universities, and private colleges from across the state. At these meetings, campus staff have had opportunities to connect, learn together, and access the resources offered by MECASA and its member centers.

This program also allowed staff who support students and work in campus culture change efforts to provide feedback on the design of resources supporting the implementation of Maine Public Law 2021, chapter 733, “Sexual Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking at Institutions of Higher Education,” which became law in August of 2022. Over the next year, MECASA will provide technical assistance to campuses to implement this new law with policies that are rooted in best practices, are survivor-centered, and support collaboration with local sexual assault support centers.

Through the legislative process that created this new legislation, MECASA and its partners at the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and Pine Tree Legal Assistance were able to build stronger relationships with Maine’s higher education institutions. MECASA is currently working with representatives from Maine colleges and universities to develop a template Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and position descriptions for confidential resource advisors that will support schools in developing these resources for their students.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAININGS AT CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS

"I know it can be difficult to identify personal biases or even consider you have them but I felt like the presenter created a safe environment to do so."

- training participant

When working with and advocating for people from different cultural backgrounds, having an understanding of and sensitivity to their unique needs and perspectives is vital in building trust and effective communication. To better serve all survivors seeking support from Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and to provide CACs with the tools they need both for their work and to fulfill the National Children's Alliance's accreditation standards, MECASA and the Network of Children's Advocacy Centers hosted cultural competency trainings for CAC staff and their Multi-Disciplinary Teams.

Mandy Levine, a Portland-based diversity, equity, and inclusion consultant, offered training on the framework of cultural competency: what it is, how it presents in our work, and how CACs can adapt their practices to better meet the cultural needs of their communities. Mandy also met with CACs individually to identify gaps in policy and practice as well as develop plans to address those gaps. One participant shared how much they enjoyed the training, and that "It was a comfortable pace and relaxed. I know it can be difficult to identify personal biases or even consider you have them but I felt like the presenter created a safe environment to do so."

IN 2022, MECASA TRAINED OVER 2,000 PROFESSIONALS, INCLUDING OVER 900 PEOPLE WHO ARE PART OF A MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESPONSE TO SURVIVORS.

ENHANCE EARLY ENGAGEMENT TRAINING FOR FAMILY ADVOCATES

The 3E model seeks to enhance evidence-based practices...to ensure the continuity of services and track mental health outcomes.

This year, a group of Family Advocates (FAs) from Children's Advocacy Centers throughout Maine participated in a pilot of the Enhance Early Engagement (E3) training. E3 is designed to improve outcomes for children who have experienced abuse by increasing access to and improving the quality of mental health treatments. This work is especially important at a time when options for mental health treatments are limited for many who need them.

The E3 model seeks to enhance existing evidence-based practices; as part of the model, FAs keep in close contact with families and mental health clinicians during the referral and treatment process to ensure the continuity of services and track mental health outcomes. The FAs who attended the training report positive experiences with the new program and are working with MECASA to update data collection tools to meet the needs of this initiative. Moving forward, there is a critical need to expand the number of trained clinicians available to provide support to all people affected by sexual violence. It is a challenge MECASA hopes to address with continued collaborations and resources in the coming year.

**"I JUST CAN'T SAY ENOUGH
ABOUT YOUR AMAZING TEAM AT
MECASA. I HAVE LEARNED SO MUCH
FOR SO MANY IN JUST A SHORT TIME."**

- CENTER STAFF MEMBER

REVAMPED VICTIM ASSISTANCE ACADEMY



*Katie Kondrat presents at this year's Victim Assistance Academy.
Photo courtesy of MCEDV/Amanda Taisey*

MECASA staff are proud to be a part of the development, coordination, and implementation of the relaunch of the Maine Victim Assistance Academy (MVAA) – a series which provides foundational victim-centered interdisciplinary training opportunities for victim assistance providers, advocates, criminal justice professionals and others who interact with victims of crime. As part of the first MVAA learning module (with 5 more modules to come!) we spent two days with over 40 Victim Witness Advocates, domestic violence & sexual assault advocates, Pine Tree Legal Assistance attorneys, and Department of Corrections advocates. As one staff member reflected, “It was a really awesome couple of days with great conversation, connection, and amazing feedback.” This hybrid model academy will run through March 2023.

MECASACON 2022

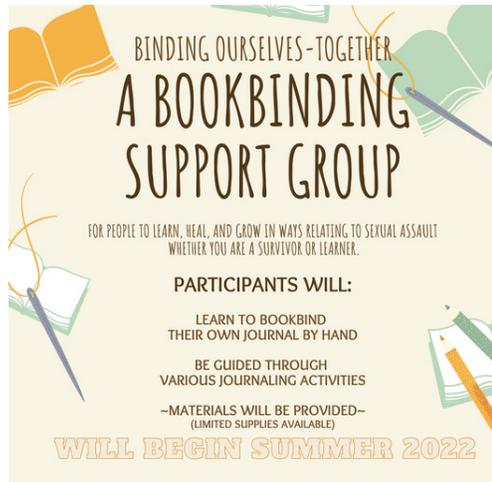


Doodle by Katie Church

We held our 6th annual conference in September - two days of virtual workshops attended by over 100 center staff and allied providers. This year, based on the theme of "Surviving and Thriving," we celebrated and supported the resiliency of survivors and communities and offered advocates new tools to help them thrive. Participants attended workshops on ways to improve access to mental health services for survivors, the importance of a sense of "mattering" in outcomes for young people, how to recognize when "self-care" is a privilege accessible only to some, and heard from self-advocates about how to move towards an anti-ableist future. There were also opportunities for advocates to share learning about their work over the past year as well as a chance to unwind with trauma-informed yoga at the end of each day's workshops.

Our keynote speaker was Tashmica Torok, founder and co-director of the Firecracker Foundation in Michigan, an organization dedicated to providing holistic healing services for survivors of sexual trauma under the age of 18 and to their families. Grounded in hope, Tashmica's keynote spoke to building coalitions in our local communities, the ups and downs of healing, and the "possibilities of the in-between spaces." She left the group with a vision of integration, looking toward "the communities who leave us foot paths on how to create a different world."

EXPERIENTIAL SUPPORT GROUP MINI GRANTS



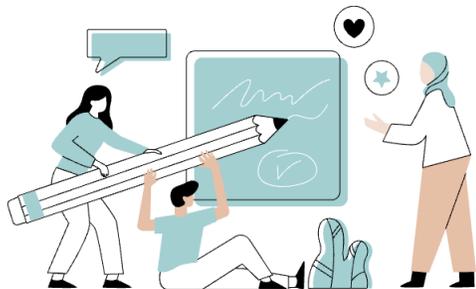
Poster from AMHC's bookbinding experiential support group

Every survivor's path to justice and healing looks different and there is so much work to do to ensure that the options available to survivors are plentiful, meaningful, and accessible. In 2021, the MECASA Alternative Justice and Healing Workgroup created a set of recommendations about programming centers could engage in to expand paths toward justice and healing. Experiential support groups were among those recommendations.

Experiential support groups seek to increase healing options through innovative, non-traditional programming – often through body or breath movement, but also through methods like journaling and storytelling. Through these groups survivors and concerned others have the opportunity to engage in practices that build on healing work they have already done, and to engage in practices that help move through trauma in ways traditional groups may not be able to offer them.

Five sexual assault programs in Maine were awarded mini grants in 2022 to host six different experiential support groups. Results were shared at MECASA's annual conference, with centers describing the groups they had held, lessons learned, and feedback from participants. One center staff member shared, "It was really awesome to offer a kinesthetic activity that can help center the mind and body and help increase awareness of different benefits of moving your body using yoga and helping to relax the nervous system."

GRANT SEEKING TOOLS



Supporting the sustainability of Maine’s sexual assault support centers and children’s advocacy centers is one of MECASA’s most important goals. Having diverse funding is key to building a sustainable organization – we want to support staff at local programs to develop the skills to expand their funding streams based on their community’s unique needs. In service of this goal, we co-hosted a webinar in June with our friends from the Bingham Program and Maine Women’s Fund who shared insights on philanthropy in Maine. We also launched a new toolkit page of resources on grant seeking. Plans for the coming year include expansion of the toolkit resources and a second webinar that focuses on federal discretionary grants.

MECASA SPENT OVER 5,300 HOURS PROVIDING SUPPORT TO SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SYSTEMS PARTNERS THROUGH INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT, TRAINING, AND RESOURCE CREATION

RPE ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Council will play a pivotal role in creating opportunities to engage in prevention work at all levels.

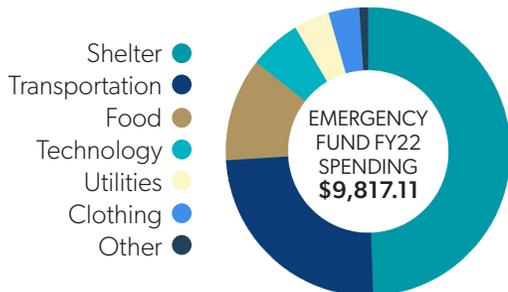
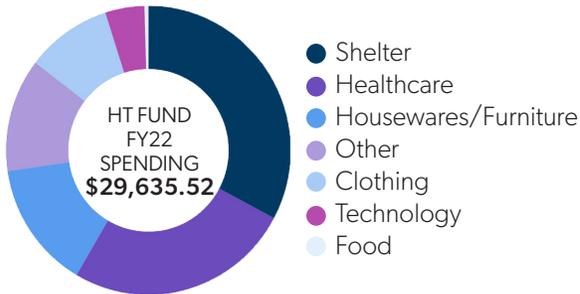
For the last couple of years, MECASA has been talking with our friends at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services about how to bring together stakeholders across Maine in support of sexual violence prevention efforts in the state. This year, the RPE (Rape Prevention Education) Advisory Council met for the first time. The Council is tasked with providing guidance on the selection of focus populations for prevention efforts, based on data and observed needs in the state, as well as informing strategies and determining an evaluation plan to quantify the impact of the work. The Council will play a pivotal role in creating opportunities to engage in prevention work at all levels, and we look forward to deeper engagement and collaboration in the years to come.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING & SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVOR EMERGENCY FUNDS

When survivors of human trafficking take steps to escape exploitation, they often leave everything behind: their shelter, clothing, support networks and means of transportation. MECASA's Human Trafficking Fund provides funding to support the immediate emotional, psychological, and physical health and safety needs of trafficking victims in Maine.

This year over \$29,600 from the fund was spent directly on survivor needs. That financial support allowed thirty-four individuals to access food, clothing, rent, medical and dental services, security equipment, housewares, and other basic necessities. We were excited to add new items to the pre-approved list this year, which allows centers more flexibility to meet urgent needs immediately without waiting for MECASA approval, such as hygiene products, baby items, and train tickets, making these items even easier for survivors to access through providers around the state.

Survivors of sexual violence other than trafficking can also face barriers to meeting their basic needs. Poverty can hinder a survivor's ability to find safety, healing, and justice and be an obstacle to accessing services. To help address this issue, this year MECASA formally launched the Sexual Assault Survivor Emergency Fund - a resource available to support immediate, emergency needs of survivors being served by sexual assault support centers and children's advocacy centers. Since its launch this past summer, the fund has supported survivors with almost \$10,000 to address needs that include transportation, shelter, clothing, medical assistance, and other basic needs that help support a survivor's healing.



MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING SERIES



“You had a normal reaction to an abnormal event.” This is a phrase sexual assault advocates use often when talking to survivors in helping them to understand that while the impacts of sexual violence can be profound, disruptive, and deeply painful, what’s abnormal is the sexual violence, not the survivor’s reaction to it. And, while mental health crises are common after experiences of sexual violence, advocates often struggle both with the lack of mental health care resources available to survivors and also the gulf between our understanding that such reactions are normal and the common framework of identifying dysregulation as pathology.

Over the last several years, we heard from advocates about their need for more support in navigating these complicated issues. In collaboration with Tiombe Wallace, a licensed therapist and interpersonal violence trainer, and Dory Hacker, Clinical Manager of the Department of Clinical Innovation at Maine Behavioral Healthcare, MECASA created a 4-part training series focused on: defining an advocate’s role and boundaries in a mental health crisis, building the skills of using trauma-informed language when setting boundaries, developing skills for crisis intervention, specific stabilizing tools and practices, and empowering advocates to appropriately and effectively respond to survivors experiencing suicidality and self-harm. Over 90 participants joined at least one session and all sessions are available for advocates to watch on our online toolkit. By laying a foundation grounded in our shared values, this training has prepared advocates both to better meet survivors’ needs and to move forward into the next phases of this work.

2021-2022 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

REVENUES:

| | 9/30/2022 (Unaudited) | 9/30/2021 (Audited) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Dues & Donations | 46,553 | 35,672 |
| Foundations | 17,500 | 10,775 |
| State & Federal Grants | 6,855,775 | 7,157,815 |
| Investment Return | -1,715 | 15,496 |
| Misc. Revenue | 0 | 40 |
| TOTAL | 6,918,113 | 7,219,798 |

EXPENSES:

| | 9/30/2022 (Unaudited) | 9/30/2021 (Audited) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Prevention & Victims Services | 1,009,925 | 868,850 |
| Tech. Assistance & Coalition Bldg | 197,455 | 151,380 |
| Pass-through to Service Providers | 5,563,960 | 5,982,744 |
| Other Sub-Contracted Programs | 85,229 | 166,182 |
| Management & General | 34,398 | 33,742 |
| TOTAL | 6,890,967 | 7,202,898 |
| Change in Net Assets | 18,453 | 16,900 |
| Net Assets at Beginning of Year | 288,035 | 271,135 |
| Net Assets at End of Year | 306,488 | 288,035 |



- Dues & Donations
- Foundations
- State & Federal Grants

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



**“AS A SOURCE OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT,
MECASA EXCELS. AS A CATALYST AND ALLY FOR POSITIVE
CHANGE...MECASA IS EXCEPTIONAL.”**

- CENTER STAFF MEMBER

OUR WORK AT THE STATE HOUSE

The second regular session of the 130th Maine Legislature was both exciting and hugely impactful. So much was accomplished with the help of allies and partners both inside and outside of the State House. From a complete re-write of the Protection From Abuse statute to wide-ranging initiatives to address sexual violence on college campuses, the laws passed will impact survivors across our state and give them more paths to healing and justice. To learn more about the policy work we were focused on this year, read MECASA's 2022 Legislative Report.

Here are some of the new laws coming out of this past session:

PUBLIC LAW CH. 760 This law comes from a growing awareness that employees were being asked to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) as part of employment, which prohibited them from disclosing if they were sexually harassed or assaulted in their workplace. This law prohibits NDAs in most situations involving sexual harassment or sexual assault.

PUBLIC LAW. CH. 647 This law clarifies and recodifies Maine's protection from abuse statutes to make the process more accessible to people seeking protection orders.

PUBLIC LAW, CH. 733 This law makes broad changes to the responsibilities of colleges and universities to address sexual violence, including adopting specific policies and procedures, designating confidential resource advisors to support survivors, requiring partnerships with local sexual assault support centers, and providing training on prevention and awareness to all employees and incoming students.

PUBLIC LAW, CH. 500 Adults who are subject to guardianship are now entitled to be able to seek the advice of a lawyer or talk to an advocate.

PUBLIC LAW, CH 649 This law expands the Address Confidentiality Program to victims of human trafficking and minor victims of kidnapping.

PUBLIC LAW, CH 634 The Legislature required that the Attorney General investigate criminal investigations and prosecutions related to sexual assault or harassment in the Maine National Guard and report his findings. The law also broadens the crime of harassment (17-A M.R.S.A. §506-A) to include harassing behavior for which a National Guard member received a written warning and adds the crime of harassment as a military offense punishable under the Maine Code of Military Justice.

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