



LEGAL SERVICES & OUTCOMES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS Fiscal Year 2023

Prepared by

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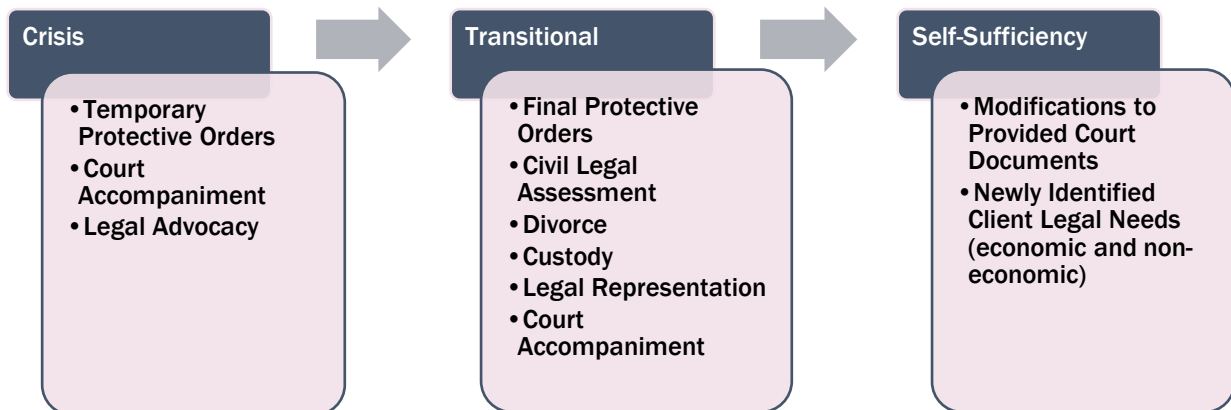
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Legal protections such as protective orders, emergency family maintenance and divorce can be crucial for a domestic violence victim ending an abusive relationship. The complexities of the law, however, can be intimidating. Moreover, rural survivors face additional challenges such as limited number of attorneys and geographic isolation that limit their access to legal protections.

*Everything was helpful. They moved very fast to provide all the services when I needed them most. If it wasn't for MSCFV I don't know where I would be maybe homeless, or my abuser would have killed me.
-MSCFV Client*

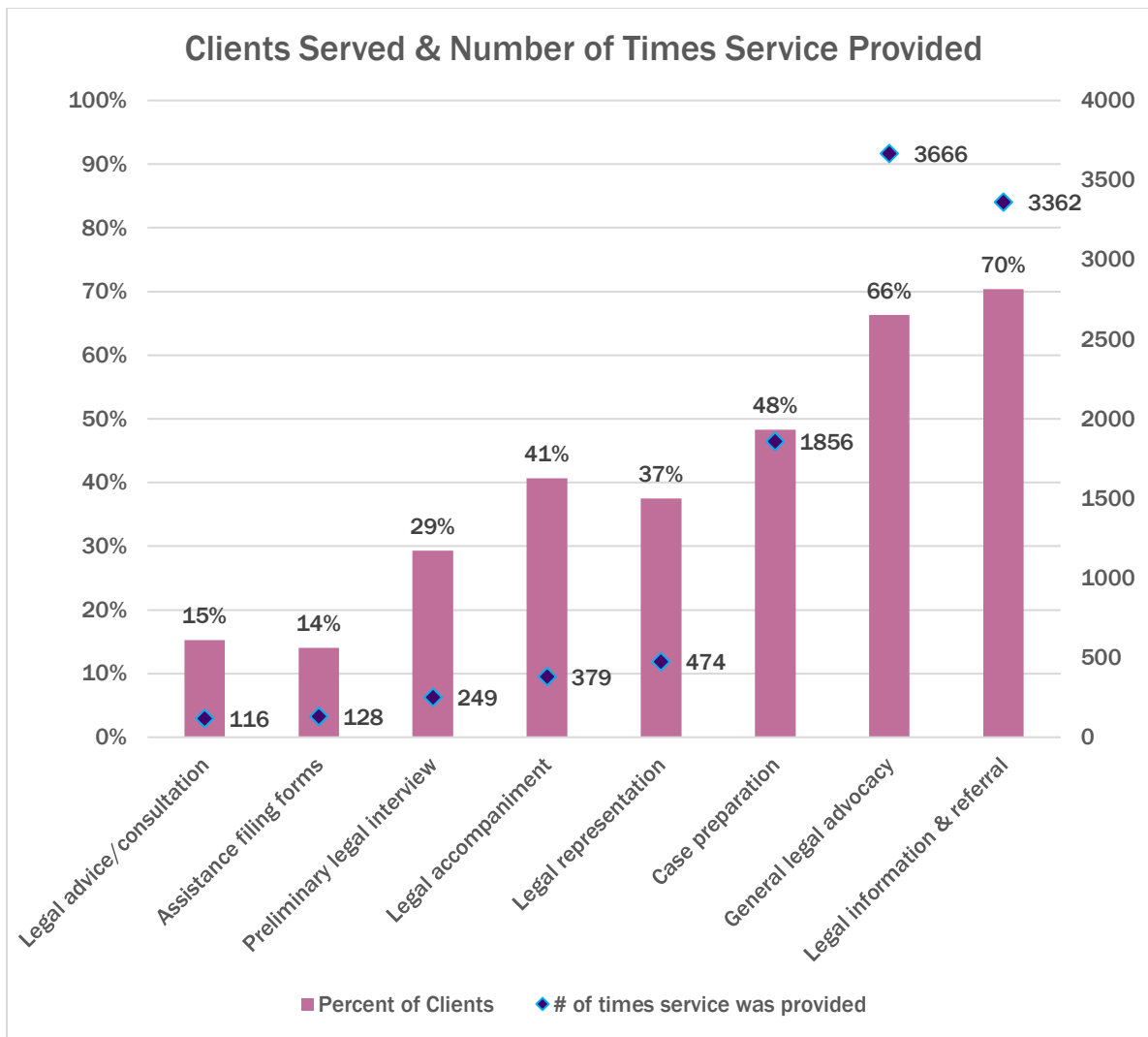
Mid-Shore Council on Family Violence's (MSCFV) Chesapeake Crisis to Self-Sufficiency Model provides critical legal services to bridge the gap between survivors and the legal protections available. They help victims know their rights and options, file for protection, present their cases before a judge and hold abusers accountable for their actions. Legal advocacy and assistance extend as well to other situations which may keep a victim in an abusive situation, such as immigration, housing and consumer finance problems. In the following pages, we present data on the legal services provided by MSCFV and the outcomes achieved during fiscal year 2023.



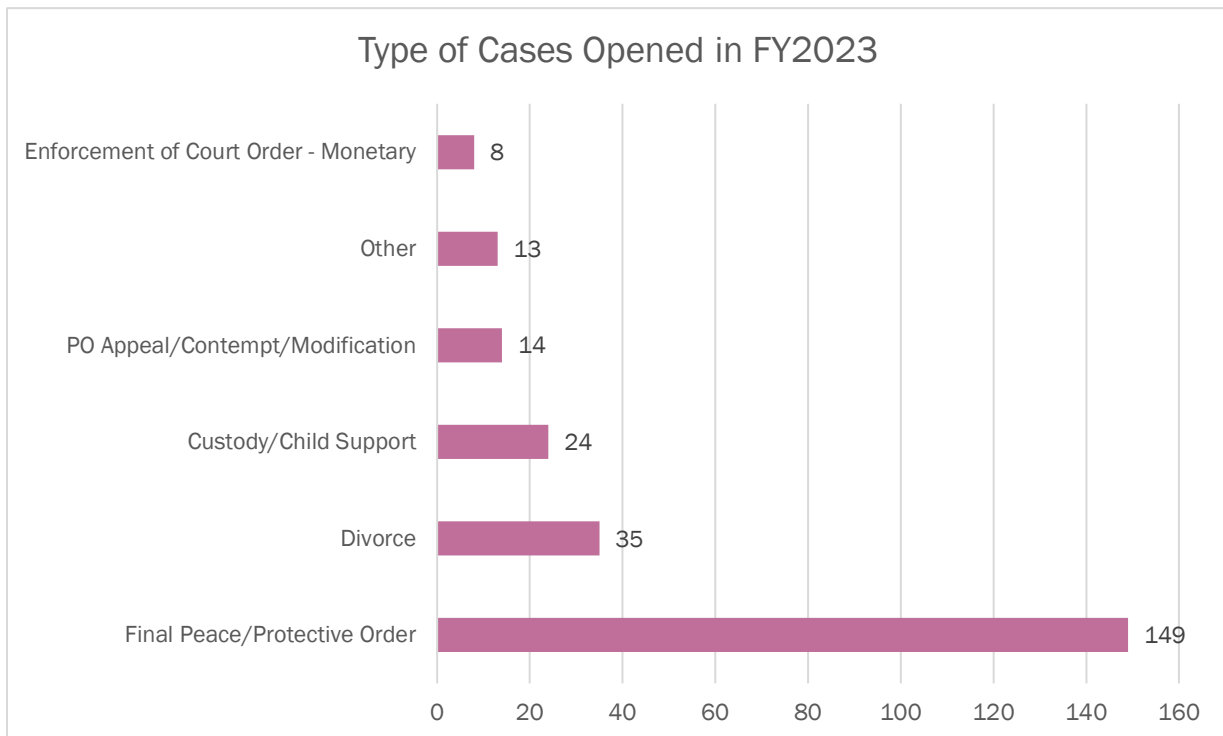
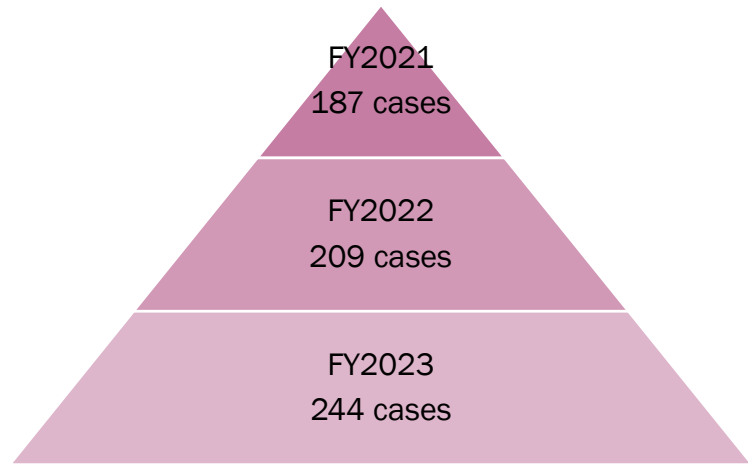
SERVICES PROVIDED

The majority of victims served by MSCFV receive some form of legal assistance. A total of 357 clients (72% of all MSCFV clients) received at least one legal service during fiscal year 2023. While the percentage of clients receiving legal services has remained the same, the total number of clients served has increased by 17%.

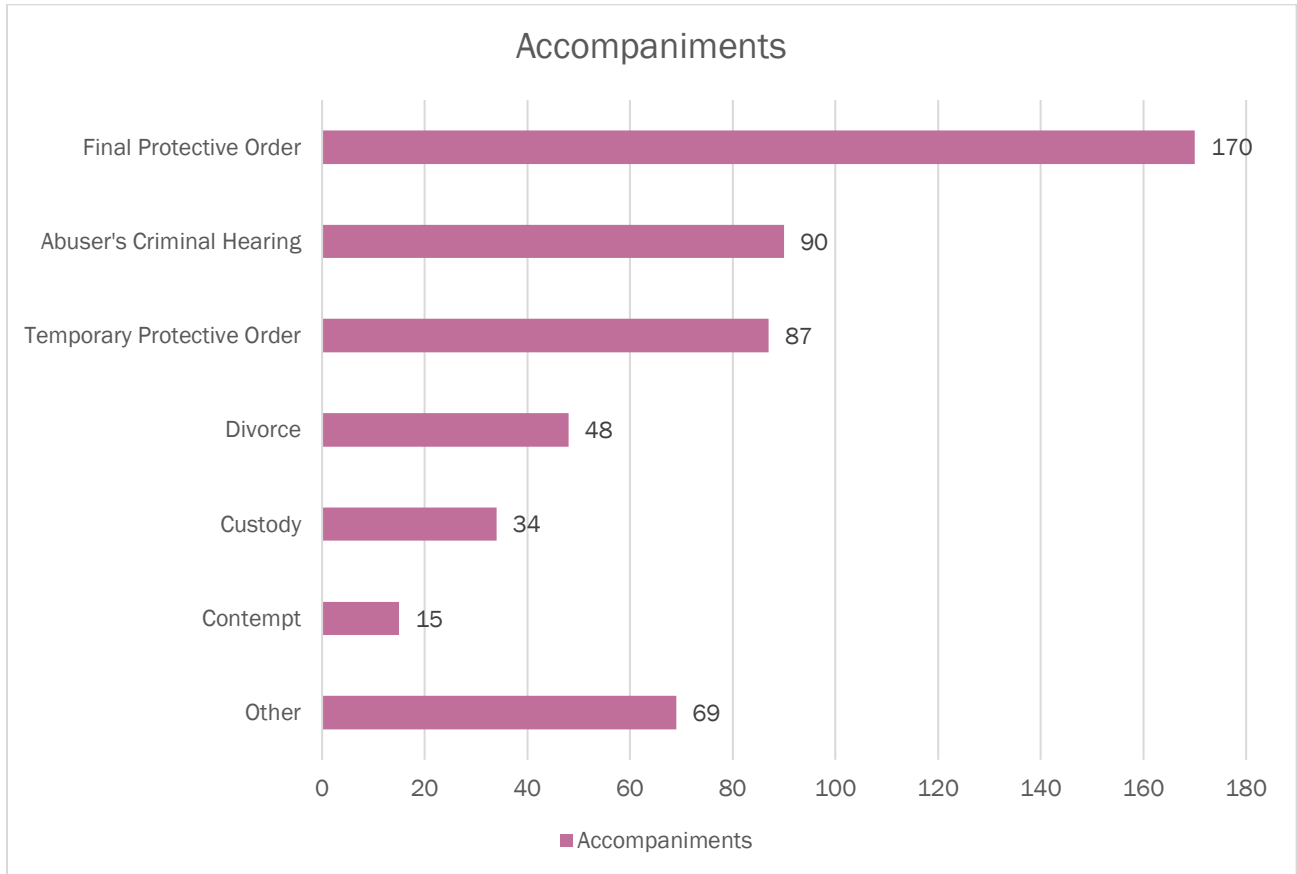
Legal information & referral (70%) and general legal advocacy (66%) were the most common type of legal service. Case preparation (48%), legal representation (37%), and legal accompaniment (41%) are also utilized by a significant minority of clients. In total, for example, MSCFV staff assisted with case preparation 1,856 times and provided legal advocacy 3,666 times in the fiscal year.



MSCFV opened 244 legal cases in Fiscal Year 2023. This reflects an increase over the past two years. Final protective orders are the most common case type, with MSCFV opening 151 such cases in this period. The agency was able to provide attorney representation for other types of cases as well. Custody/child support (n = 25), divorce/divorce & custody (n =27), and protective order appeals/contempt/modification (n = 17) are also common case types.



MSCFV legal advocates accompanied victims to 488 court hearings in fiscal year 2023. As the following figure illustrates, final protective orders are most common, accounting for 35% of all accompaniments.

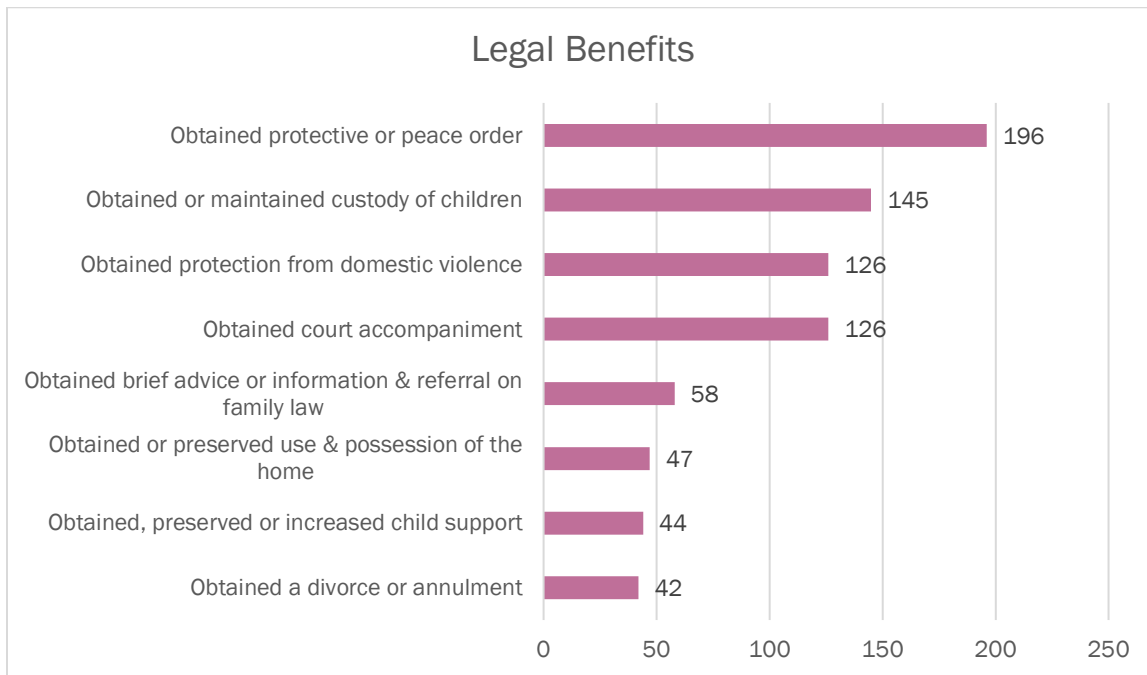


... I just wanted to start to move forward with this divorce, so then I got sent [to legal department]...now I have a lawyer... it's finally getting done and I cannot be happier to be done with this, you have no idea. Like, it's, I'm so close to getting to be able to just fully just let go and be free and be away from him. – MSCFV Client

Legal Outcomes

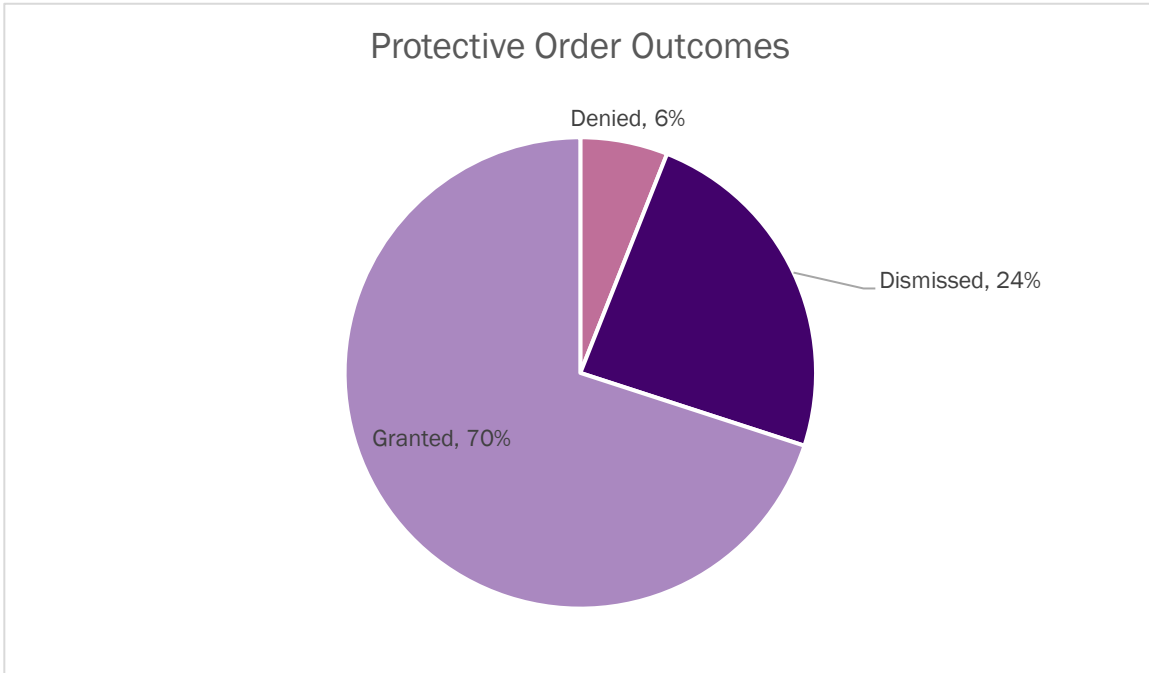
The legal services provided by MSCFV achieve several important outcomes for domestic violence victims. Between July 2022 and June 2023, a total of 243 legal cases were closed or resolved. The figure below highlights the major ways in which survivors benefited in these cases; each case may have multiple benefits. The most common outcomes for legal clients were obtaining protection from domestic violence, obtained/maintained custody, obtaining protection via a protective order, and obtained brief advice on a family matter.

The supportive services and legal accompaniment made me feel safe.
- MSCFV Client



So when [case manager] told me that they can help me with a lawyer, it was kind of another door got opened. Like What's the chance? That was my biggest burden, me against him. But now I can go on an even playing field. I can't afford a lawyer, but I will have a lawyer there. that not only is there, you know, for my protection, but I don't have to worry about how I am going to pay for it. -MSCFV Client

Attorney representation in protective order hearings can often be critical for victims to receive the protection they need. During the most recent calendar year, 70% of victims with MSCFV representation at their FPO hearings had their protective orders granted. This percentage is remarkably higher than the average of 44% of final protective orders granted statewide.



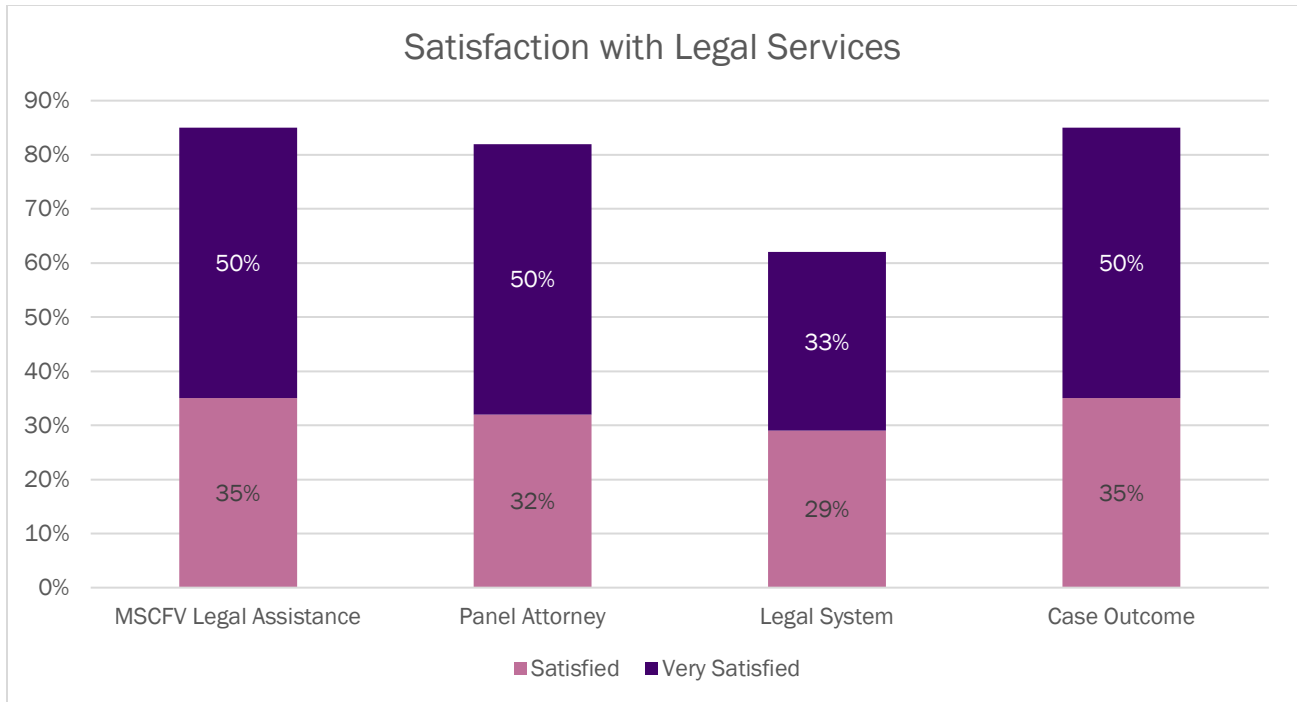
From July 2022 to June 2023, a total of 55 legal cases for which MSCFV provided attorney representation resulted in a financial benefit for a survivor. These include:

- Spousal Support - \$17,000 lump sum & \$1200 monthly
- Child Support - \$14,800 lump sum & 15,577 monthly
- Emergency Family Maintenance - \$7,550 lump sum & \$26,110 monthly
- Marital Property - \$737,614

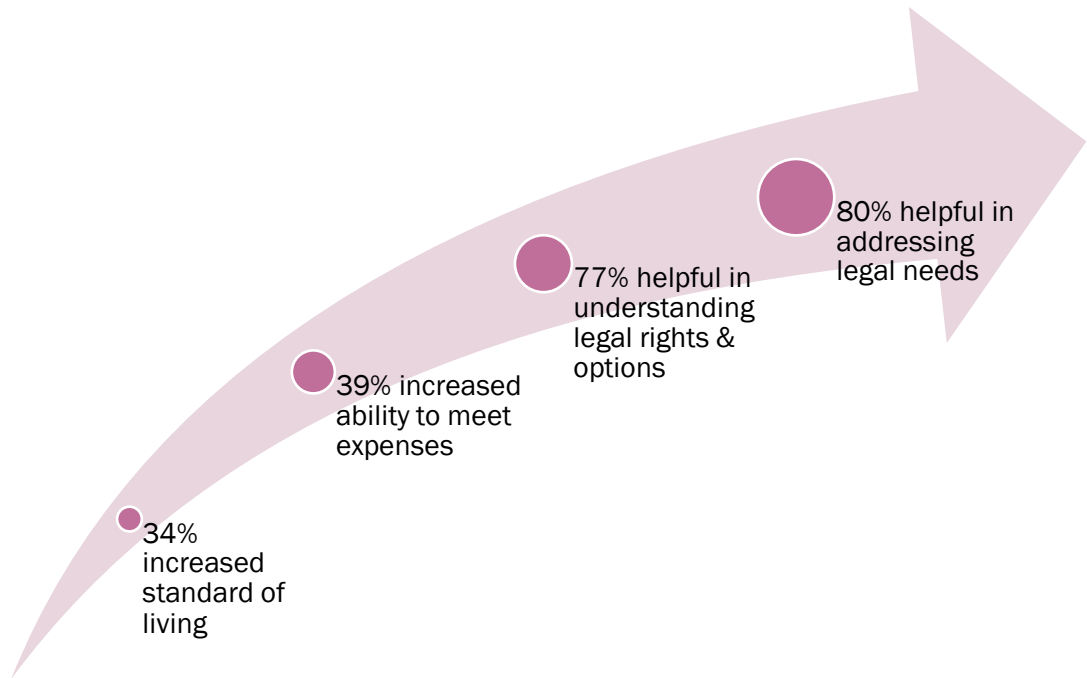
When their legal cases close, survivors are invited by email or text (when their contact information is safe) or by their case manager to complete our Legal Exit Survey. A total of 41 survivors completed surveys in fiscal year 2023.

Survivors express high levels of satisfaction with the legal services received from MSCFV. As the following figure illustrates, this satisfaction includes the agency’s legal assistance, their panel attorney, the legal system, and their case outcome.

Places like this need to exist. For people like me. I don't know where I'd be...It took forever to get help and once I did, it's been great. It's been a huge weight off my shoulders. It felt like you can't won't always be stuck. – MSCFV Client



Similarly, four out of five survivors found the services helpful in meeting their legal needs; 77% say MSCFV helped them understand their rights and options. One-third felt their ability to meet their expenses and their standard of living increased as well.



Safety is another critical outcome for our clients. MSCFV utilizes two measures to gauge victim safety. Advocates complete a Safety Planning Score for clients at various contact points, indicating if the victim is engaged in short- or long-term planning. Clients complete the Survivor Check In at specific points in their transition including intake, first goal setting meeting, and monthly check in. This measure contains questions about their knowledge of and confidence in their safety plans.

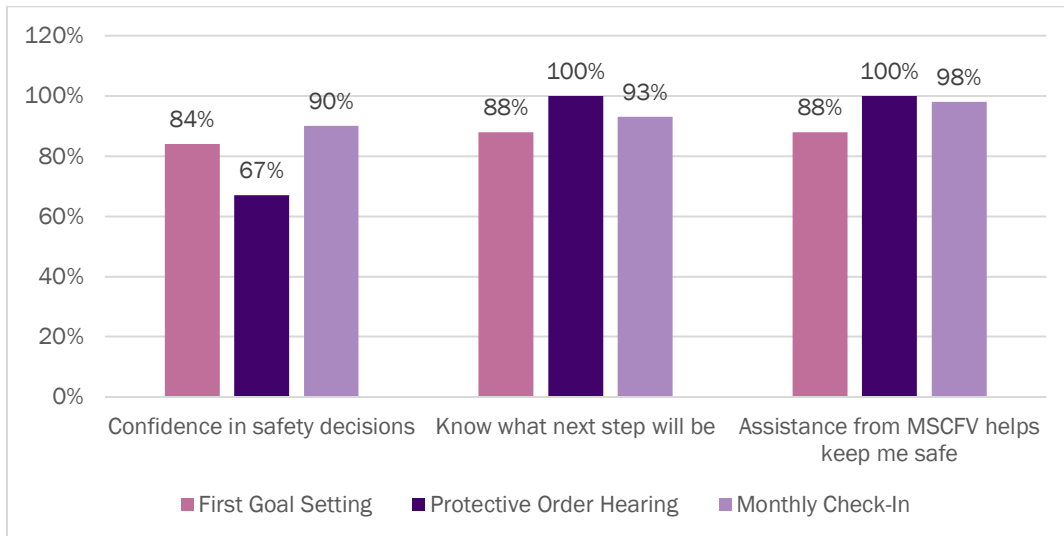
During their time with MSCFV, the percent of clients engaged in long-term safety planning increases. At intake, only 9% of victims are thinking long-term. That increases dramatically to 39%, where those who have been with the agency for at least a month are engaged in long-term safety planning.

My case manager made me understand that I am not guilty of his bad behavior and that I am valuable as a woman and as a mother. I shouldn't allow my husband to treat me badly. I know now that I have rights and options.

Change in Safety Planning Over Time.



Client survey data also show that the majority of MSCFV clients feel confident in their safety decisions, know what to do in response to threats, and know what their next step will be.



Conclusions

During Fiscal Year 2023, MSCFV experienced growth in the number of clients seeking services and legal services in particular. We helped 357 domestic violence victims understand their legal rights and access legal protections, 17% more than the previous fiscal year. Whether they receive legal information & referral, legal advocacy and accompaniment, or representation by an attorney, clients are able to obtain orders of protection, a divorce, child support and/or custody arrangements, and resolve financial issues.

Most commonly survivors benefit by gaining protection from domestic violence, custody of children, a divorce, access to the family home, and financial resources in the form of child support and emergency family maintenance. The majority of clients tell us that they are satisfied with our services and that they have grown in their understanding of their legal rights and options. Moreover, one-third indicate their standard of living and ability to meet expenses has increased.