

Hope United Survivor Network:
Continuation of Services Impacted By The Loss of VOCA Grant Dollars

1.Amount of funds Requested - \$616,366

2.Recovery Fund Eligible Category – In accordance with the Interim Final Rule, the eligibility for services provided by this department are as follows:

- a. To respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small business and nonprofits;
 - i. Services include mental health and other behavioral health services, which are critical component of holistic public safety to include community based mental health and substance use disorder that deliver evidence-based psychotherapy, crisis support services, medications for opioid use disorder, and/or recovery support. Additionally, trauma recovery services for crime victims.
 - ii. Assistance programs to households or population facing negative economic impacts of the public health emergency including assistance to support economic security, including for the victim of crime; housing assistance, including rent, utilities and relocation assistance; assistance with food and employment or job training to address the negative economic or public health impacts.
- b. To respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers;
- c. To prevent and respond to crime, and to support public safety in the community as the Interim Final Rule provides several ways for recipients to “respond to” this pandemic related gun violence, ranging from community violence intervention programs to mental health services to hiring of public safety personal.
 - i. In communities where an increase in violence or increased difficulty in accessing or providing services to respond to or mitigate the effects of violence, is a result of the pandemic may use funds to address that harm. This may include –
Community Violence Intervention programs

3. Brief Project Description – Hope United Survivor Network exists to provide real time response to those impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and elder abuse along with victims of childhood sexual abuse. The COVID 19 pandemic has proved to be an added challenge to the population we serve. Many survivors saw reduced financial resources and increased stressors as a result of the pandemic. The funds provided would allow for the continuation of supportive and collaborative service provision to those impacted by these crimes. Services provided as a result of this funding include: comprehensive safety planning, clothing, food, job training, transportation, improved mental health, increasing safety by pursuing and obtaining a domestic violence protection order, maintaining safe homes for children by securing a child custody order, support through the court process via legal representation and financial assistance with rent, utilities, and relocation. Additionally, this funding would allow for an increased number of those in the community to be educated about such crimes and informed as to where to obtain these free and confidential services. This work requires a coordinated community response by which the professionals are removing the burden from those impacted.

4. Provide a short summary of your proposed project – Using ARPA funding will allow for survivors to benefit from a coordinated, team response and improve outcomes. Without Hope United Survivor Network, survivors had to make 21 stops to get to the helping agencies, which required 8 bus trips and took a total of 19 hours. With ongoing community education and continued agency operations, those engaged in survivor led services benefit from a coordinated community response addressing the safety and wellbeing on those impacted. Additionally, with the engagement of services, future trauma is mitigated and children are protected leading to long term impacts. The exacerbation of factors contributing to the rise of abuse in relationships are off set with the survivor's ability to initiate services either remotely or in person and receive a response that is specific to their needs. The removal of these services would cause a return to the segmented and siloed response to victims of crime.

5. Project Plan – Hope United Survivor Network is the community's convener of those working to reduce domestic & sexual violence. This department has been operating since 2020. With the allocation of funding, the services will not be interrupted, survivors will be supported in reaching their goals and the community will be educated on where to get help. Partners will continue to collaborate regularly to ensure comprehensive services for victims. The model is proven to streamline services, increase arrest and prosecution of offenders, and reduce fear and anxiety for survivors, ultimately increasing survivor's safety & reducing violence. This model of service delivery provides these services free and is more accessible to survivors through our collaborative efforts. This department is proving to be invaluable to survivors experiencing the impact of COVID as services can be initiated remotely. In our first year, with a lock down in place, Hope United Survivor Network reached over 1000 survivors in Gaston County and the surrounding area. Additionally, our contracted attorneys assisted close to 500 survivors through the court process. Without the funding, the ability to obtain services will revert back to a barrier ridden landscape inclusive of 21 separate agencies and 21 separate intake processes leading to the likelihood that survivors stay with their abuser.

6. Statement of Need – COVID 19 has exacerbated the factors that contribute to violence in relationships. Locally, law enforcement and child welfare services reported an increase in crime and an increase in the complexity of needs. Without our programming and services, survivors would be left to navigate all the systems impacted by violence. Our model is working with survivors to bring the services to them, we take on that burden. With our support, advocacy, and services, we empower survivors to seek services to meet their goals. Our partners provide essential services ensuring the needs of our community are met when it comes to this public health & safety crisis. Without our Partners, it would be impossible for the County to provide these essential services, opening dangerous gaps in our community that would reinstate barriers for survivors. Many of our Partners, including us have experienced significant funding cuts due to a national shortfall in Victims of Crime Act funding. Our department is directly impacted by this cut. Our Partners have proven to be resilient, adaptable, & innovative. As a result, all of our services have stayed operational during the pandemic. These services are needed more than ever post COVID.

Additionally, many survivors are experiencing housing insecurity and may be forced to face evictions while there is a strain on emergency shelter making them more vulnerable. Adversely, many survivors who would otherwise be homeless remain in an abusive relationship as a result of a lack of safe and affordable housing. Funding is necessary to utilize hotels and provide financial assistance for rent and utilities.

7.Link to COVID-19 – Those eligible for our services are from an underserved/ marginalized population as they have experienced an increase in violence and have difficulty accessing the services, hence our ability to navigate and coordinate a response tailored to their needs.

During COVID, domestic and sexual violence was described as a “shadow pandemic.” While these crimes were underreported during COVID, local anecdotal reporting indicated otherwise. What is significant about the domestic and sexual violence during COVID is that all of the compounding effects were amplified. Stay-at-home orders, while designed to keep people safe, unintentionally put others in danger especially those living with their abusers. Prolonged social isolation, job loss or reduction, disruption of social supports and services, caring for school-aged children, increased substance use, and general stress created specialized high-stress environments. In a research study, it was found that these stressors, in addition to intimate Partners being in close proximity, predicted a 20% increase of violence in the household (Buttelt et al., 2020). The intensity of the violence also increased and the mental health of survivors was also significantly impacted.

Dillon et al., 2013 cites studies that look at mental health impacts of intimate partner violence (IPV) and found that survivors of IPV are 2.3 times more likely to develop PTSD. Depression and anxiety are also prevalent in survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Not having access to care, isolation, and/or living with an abuser exacerbated or re-triggered past trauma to unmanageable levels.

This complexity is best addressed with a collocated model where survivors have a clear path to safety or access to coordinated services that address the impacts of COVID. At Hope United Survivor Network, protective factors such as safety planning, legal assistance, mental health services, and financial assistance are offered.

This funding would ensure the FJC is adequately resourced to meet the influx of survivors seeking services.

8.Population Served – Our service criteria are those who are currently experiencing or have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, elder abuse and childhood victims of sexual abuse. Our previous work has drilled down on the groups known to be underserved in areas of domestic and sexual violence by working in conjunction with the City of Gastonia Police Department to engage the Hispanic population. Other tactics to disperse information to that population proved impactful as we observed an increase in their seeking services. Ongoing focus will continue to hone in on the Hispanic, LGBTQ+ and male population.

9.Results – The continuation of these services will result in the following outcomes:

1. Serve 700 new survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, elder abuse and/or child sexual abuse through a trauma-informed, integrated intake process that supports survivors in understanding available services and resources including COVID-19 related services and resources.

Performance Measure: Number of new intakes of survivors completed by GCC funded Intake Specialists at contracted partner agencies.

2. Obtain or maintain survivor safety by utilizing funding that allows to secure safe housing inclusive of the use of hotels to assure protection.

Performance Measure: Survivors in need of housing and utility assistance will obtain safe housing. Information will be maintained by our data tracking system.

3. Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and/or stalking will have a plan to keep themselves safe, understand how to access resources, including emergency housing funded by this request, and experience decreased fear and anxiety after accessing intake services at the Hope United Survivor Network.

Performance Measure: 80% of survivors reporting they have a plan to keep themselves safe on post intake feedback form.

4. Ongoing targeted education and outreach to the marginalized population to provide education and identify barriers to obtaining services.

Performance Measure: Clear record keeping on outreach opportunities.

10. Evaluation – The following tools will continue to be utilized:

- New World Data Base specifically designed by the City of Gastonia for the sole use of this program
- Data reporting from community partners
- Munis
- Monthly Reporting to track trends and adjust services as needed
- Survivor Surveys

11. Equity Impact – Survivors of domestic and sexual violence, especially those in marginalized groups, are among the most impacted in our community thereby more likely to not seek services. The concept behind this work is providing equitable outcomes by using an equity lens in our strategic planning process and outreach efforts along with reducing barriers to those seeking services. An equity and inclusion goal is necessary to our strategic plan. Secondly, our services are free, therefore those without financial means can obtain the same level of care. Being intentional with our outreach efforts will also ensure that we are reaching those that are the most impacted.

12. Project Partners –Nesco will continue to provide staff responsible to administrative assistant related tasks and child care tasks. Non funded key partners are as follows: Law Enforcement, Legal Aide, Gaston County District Attorney Office, Gaston County Sherriff's Office Victim Advocates, Gaston Emergency Services, Pretrial Intervention, Kintegra Health, contracted legal representation (not funded by this request), DHHS, Phoenix Counseling, Cathy Mabry Cloninger Center, and The Lighthouse Children Advocacy Center along with 5 local business dedicated to providing employment to our survivors.

13. Capacity – Work to establish this department began in 2018 as the Gaston County Family Justice Center Steering Committee. In 2019, we received grant dollars to begin this initiative and important work. In June of 2020 the Cathy Mabry Cloninger Center and The Lighthouse Children's Advocacy Center was relocated into this department strengthening the response to survivors by creating one department leveraging knowledge, services and experience to provide individual care to children and families. Many of our community partners have been engaged since the inception of this initiative and some are newly invested in the collaboration, all are driving to provide survivor led services.

14. Budget – Services are free and confidential. Therefore, no revenue is generated. Expenses are as follows:

- Salary required: \$328,966
- Operational Budget required: \$137,400
- Housing assistance required: \$150,000

15. Special Considerations – Grant dollars will continue to be pursued. Should a portion or all of the needs be funded by other sources, the allocated ARPA dollars would revert back to the county.