



COVID-19 & GENDER VIOLENCE

2020 REPORT: URGENT NEEDS & SANCTUARY'S RESPONSE

The unprecedented public health and economic crisis, and the resulting quarantine, disproportionately impacted our clients—low-income survivors of gender-based violence, more than 90% women of color and immigrants, and their vulnerable children.

As New York State's largest provider of trauma-informed, holistic services for gender violence survivors and their children, Sanctuary has been an essential service provider since day one of the pandemic. This report details the range of challenges abuse survivors have experienced and Sanctuary's multi-pronged service, outreach, and advocacy response — made possible, in part, by your generous support.

URGENT NEEDS

When COVID-19 hit New York City in March 2020, survivors working with Sanctuary reported an array of urgent concerns triggered or exacerbated by the crisis:

- Job loss, food and housing insecurity
- Court closures preventing or delaying life-saving legal remedies like orders of protection
- Dangerous visitation situations
- Stressors and technology challenges around remote schooling, and other childcare issues
- Increased economic abuse such as stolen stimulus checks
- Heightened racism and xenophobia
- Abusive partners restricting reproductive and other healthcare access
- Immigrant clients' fears of reporting virus symptoms or seeking emergency police or medical assistance
- Voter suppression by abusive partners in the lead up to the 2020 election

Sanctuary saw a sharp increase in calls to our legal and clinical hotlines and demand for supportive services. **Between May and August, hotline calls increased by 60-125% compared to 2019.** While calls tapered off as lockdown measures went into effect again in the fall, the need for supportive services remained high. Monthly crisis service provision (including safety planning, case management, and trauma counseling) increased an average of nearly 50% in 2020 compared to 2019.



50%

**Increase in monthly
crisis service provision
(including safety planning,
case management, and
trauma counseling)**

AN ONGOING CRISIS

During the pandemic, the message abuse survivors have all too frequently heard and internalized—from police, the court system, the media, and/or their abusive partners—is that their abuse does not constitute a serious “life or death” emergency compared to the medical crisis of the pandemic, leading them to believe that help is not available or accessible.

Now, as New York re-opens and vaccination rates rise, a perceived return-to-normalcy threatens to overshadow the long-term crises that marginalized communities devastated by COVID-19 will continue to face. We anticipate:

- Increased homelessness when the eviction moratorium is lifted
- Inequitable vaccine distribution
- A deepening digital divide as services that were once available in-person shift permanently online

Sanctuary’s staff and survivor leaders have worked tirelessly to counteract these harmful messages and to ensure survivors’ safety and access to our essential services. We will continue to support survivors and community recovery in the year ahead.

60-125%

**Increase in hotline
calls between May
and August 2020
(compared to the
same period in 2019)**



OUR RESPONSE

Sanctuary for Families pivoted rapidly to continue providing nearly all our holistic, life-saving services after stay-at-home orders went into effect last March, converting all but our shelter services to remote platforms within a matter of days. From March to December 2020, we provided services to 7,100 adults and children, including:

- **Crisis intervention, safety planning, and case management** via phone and video calls: Over 5,900 sessions to over 1,100 clients.
- **Licensed mental health counseling via secure, interactive telehealth services:** 39 clinicians have provided more than 8,100 counseling sessions to over 650 adults and children.
- **Conversion of our intensive, full-day career training to remote learning,** hand-delivering laptops, software, and Wi-Fi hotspots to over 130 trainees in 2020 (and 60 more in 2021), after relaunching trainings within just a few weeks of quarantine order.
- **Continued operation of our five shelters:** 365 adults and children resided in our shelters in 2020, at capacity, with enhanced cleaning/safety protocols keeping them COVID-free.
- **Expanding our clinical and legal helplines,** staffing the legal line full-time with attorneys ensuring that callers always received a live response (when they may have few free moments to call) and increasing helpline hours—responding to over 1,150 calls.
- **Significantly expanding direct cash assistance,** distributing over \$780,000 to over 800 individuals and families for emergency food, supplies, rent, medicine, clothing, and more.

7,100

Adults & child survivors served
between March-Dec 2020

24/7

Continued operation of our
5 shelters at full capacity

8,100

Mental health counseling
sessions via telehealth

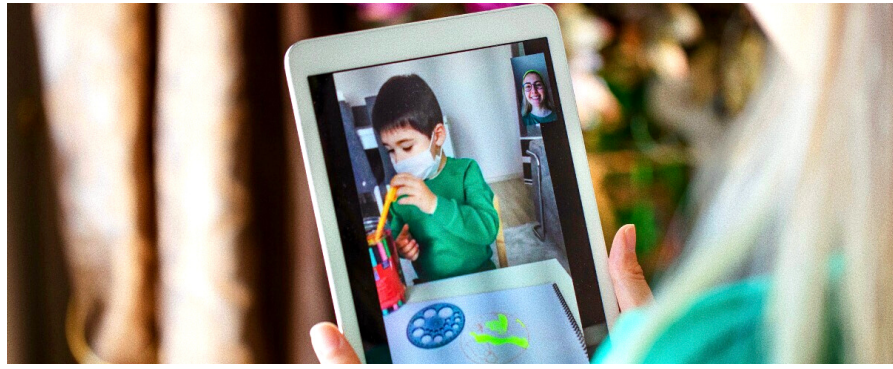
\$780K

Distributed in direct cash
assistance to 800
individuals and families

1,150

Callers assisted via clinical
and legal helplines

INNOVATIVE OUTREACH

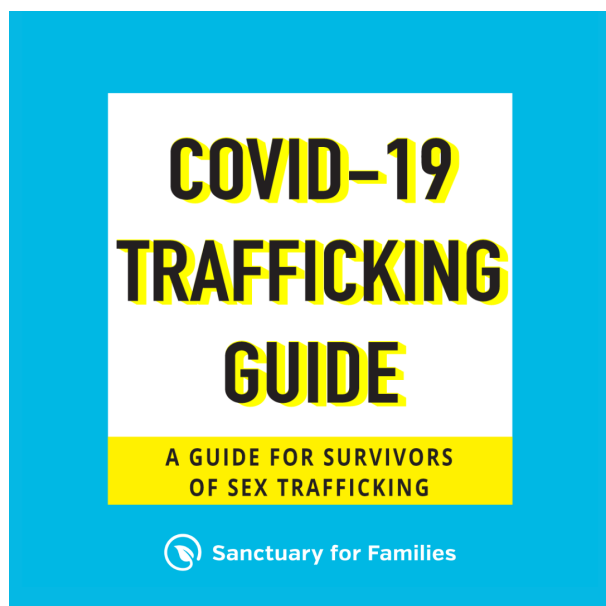


Sanctuary rapidly developed new initiatives designed to connect with and provide resources to often-isolated abuse survivors and children, who may be cut off from regular avenues of access to assistance:

- **A website chat feature on our helplines enhanced accessibility**—particularly vital for survivors quarantining in dangerous situations and unable to safely call for help.
- The **Virtual Courtroom Advocates Project** trained over 80 pro bono attorneys to help survivors seeking orders of protection from remote courts—receiving **over 250 referrals and obtaining over 200 protection orders to date**.
- **Targeted outreach to raise awareness** of services, as well as the rights of survivors during COVID-19, including ads on social media, community-based news sites, taxis, and public areas at hospitals and other sites, including a powerful **We're Still Here** video featuring staff and survivor leaders.
- A week-long, trauma-informed **virtual summer camp for 25 teens** affected by domestic violence, which saw high attendance and active participation.
- Children's clinicians organized an array of creative **virtual groups reaching over 150 children and teens** including art, reading, dance, yoga, and other engaging activities.
- Volunteers have continued to support our clients with virtual tutoring, remote interview prep and career days for career training participants, and our annual **backpack and school supplies drive for almost 600 children** last Fall.
- Through a privately funded initiative overseen by the NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, **Sanctuary administered \$500,000 in micro-grants** to abuse survivors.
- At the holidays, Sanctuary distributed **nearly \$100,000 in gift cards to over 1,100** individuals and families, and fulfilled Amazon wish lists for 107 of the highest-need families through Adopt-a-Family.

SAFETY PLANNING GUIDES

Early in the pandemic, Sanctuary clinicians and survivor leaders collaborated to develop two guides: a quarantine safety planning guide for domestic violence survivors and a guide for survivors of human trafficking to cope during COVID-19. **These guides have been translated into multiple languages and shared with over 200,000 people online.**



SAFETY PLANNING - COVID19

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO REDUCE RISK OF HARM FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1. HAVING A BUDDY SYSTEM CODE WORD

Identify at least two people that you can contact with a "code word" to let them know if you are in trouble

2. IDENTIFYING THE "SAFEST ROOM"

Find a space you can move to where there are no weapons and there are ways for you to leave the house or apartment

3. PLANNING WITH CHILDREN

Decide how to communicate urgency (i.e. code words) and teach your children how to make emergency calls...

LEARN ALL ELEVEN STEPS IN OUR SAFETY PLANNING GUIDE AT sanctuaryforfamilies.org/safety-plan

The logo for Sanctuary for Families, featuring a stylized bird icon inside a circle, followed by the text 'Sanctuary for Families' in a bold, sans-serif font.

THANK YOU

Your generous support has helped us meet the urgent needs of abuse survivors and their children over the past year. Yet even with the successful, safe delivery of remote and in-person services, the need remains intense. The majority of survivors and families we serve come from marginalized communities, many of which have borne the brunt of the pandemic's devastation. These communities will also be the last to recover.

As we look toward the future, we are anticipating long-term demands for legal services, housing, food, and financial assistance among other needs. Many more survivors are also likely to emerge in the months to come, particularly those who have been trapped in quarantine with abusive partners. We must be ready to respond.

Thank you for your support. We hope that you will continue to partner with us in the year ahead.



www.sanctuaryforfamilies.org
PO Box 1406, Wall Street Station
New York, NY 10268

  /SanctuaryforFamilies
  @SFFNY