

Northern Lights

Family Justice Center

2025 Impact Report



28 BPD DVI Program / FJC collaborations

The DVI Program (1 full-time officer) moved into the YWCA Northern Lights Family Justice Center in May 2024. The DVI Program started tracking FJC collaborations that same year. Due to limited resources, though, the DVI was not able to work collaboratively on more than a few cases that year.

The 2nd full-time DVI started at the FJC in March 2025, increasing the number of cases involving teamwork between the DVI Program and the FJC. Guests at the FJC are ***never*** required to file a police report or to meet with the DVIs to receive services from other FJC partner providers.

Since 2024, the DVI Program has collaborated with the FJC on **28 cases** and **26 unique victims**. “Collaborations” include cases during which a DVI works with a victim and then, through a *warm handoff*, refers that person as a Guest to additional FJC services. “Collaborations” also include any FJC partners referring a Guest to the DVIs to file a report or to follow-up on an offense. DVI/FJC Collaborations often include multi-disciplinary meetings, allowing several FJC providers to staff a case and develop a safety plan and service plan for the Guest.

Both DVIs work full-time at the FJC, so office hours are Mon-Fri. DVI’s work their own case load when not specifically collaborating on FJC cases.



68 City Attorney DV Unit / FJC collaborations

The City Attorney’s Office DV Unit also moved into the FJC in early 2024. The City’s 3 DV prosecutors alternate office days at the FJC, ensuring that a prosecutor is available 5 days a week. The City’s 3 DV Victim-Witness Specialists (VWs) have office hours at the FJC 3 days a week (Mon, Weds, Fri). The City Attorney’s DV Unit is available to meet with FJC Guests regardless of whether the Guest is involved in a pending criminal case. For example, the VWs frequently help Guests who are interested in obtaining civil orders of protection.

Since 2024, the City Attorney’s Office DVU has collaborated with the FJC on **68 cases**, helping **54 unique victims**. Similar to the DVIs, “collaboration” includes Guests

referred to the DVU from FJC partners, as well as Guests referred from the DVU to additional FJC services. Guests are **never** required to meet with the DVU to receive services from other FJC partner providers. Like the DVI's, the City's DVU work independently on their own caseload when they are not assisting Guests.

Centrally located and with ample parking, the FJC also provides a convenient location for the DVU to meet with victims in criminal cases. This location can also offer a layer of protection for victims who are afraid to be seen in or near the courthouses downtown. The City Attorney's Office DVU strives to offer support during victim meetings, encouraging victims to provide input on pending cases and to identify barriers to their participation in criminal justice proceedings. When victim meetings take place at the FJC, the DVU can offer victims a warm handoff to the Service Navigators. The Navigators then provide pathways to additional support and resources. From 2023 through 2025, the DVU has more than doubled the number of victim meetings.



55 YCAO VW / FJC collaborations

Eight of the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office Victim Witness Specialists (VWs) rotate through the VW office at the FJC. The County VWs maintain office hours on Tues and Thurs, alternating with the City's 3 VWs. The County's VWs also began working at the FJC in 2024. They are available to assist FJC Guests with orders of protection, as well as meeting with Guests who have questions about felony cases or cases that occur in Yellowstone County outside of the City of Billings. Additionally, because the Yellowstone County Attorney's Office (YCAO) uses a separate case management system, the DVIs often rely on the County VWs with whom the DVIs staff felony cases.

In 2025 (Jan-Nov), the YCAO VWs have been involved in collaborations with other FJC partner providers **55 times**. "Collaborations," as tracked by the YCAO, include meeting with victims/ Guests referred from the FJC, as well as assisting other on-site FJC service providers. With both County and City VWs maintaining office hours, FJC service providers are able to refer Guests to the appropriate prosecutor's office, depending on the type and location of a case, so a Guest can receive accurate information and relevant assistance. As with the City VWs, FJC Guests are **never** required to report a crime before meeting with the County VWs, and County VWs also maintain their own caseload while working at the FJC.



The YWCA Northern Lights FJC facilitates Guests' access to the Criminal Justice System while respecting Guests' autonomy in deciding which FJC services to utilize. With the knowledge that the FJC collaborations cannot change the nature of the Criminal Justice System, the goal is to wrap victims/Guests in supportive services, helping them to navigate the system and helping eliminate the barriers that often prevent victims participating in criminal cases.

As a guiding principle and recommendation from the International FJC Alliance, participation in the Criminal Justice System is *never* mandatory for a Guest to receive other FJC services.

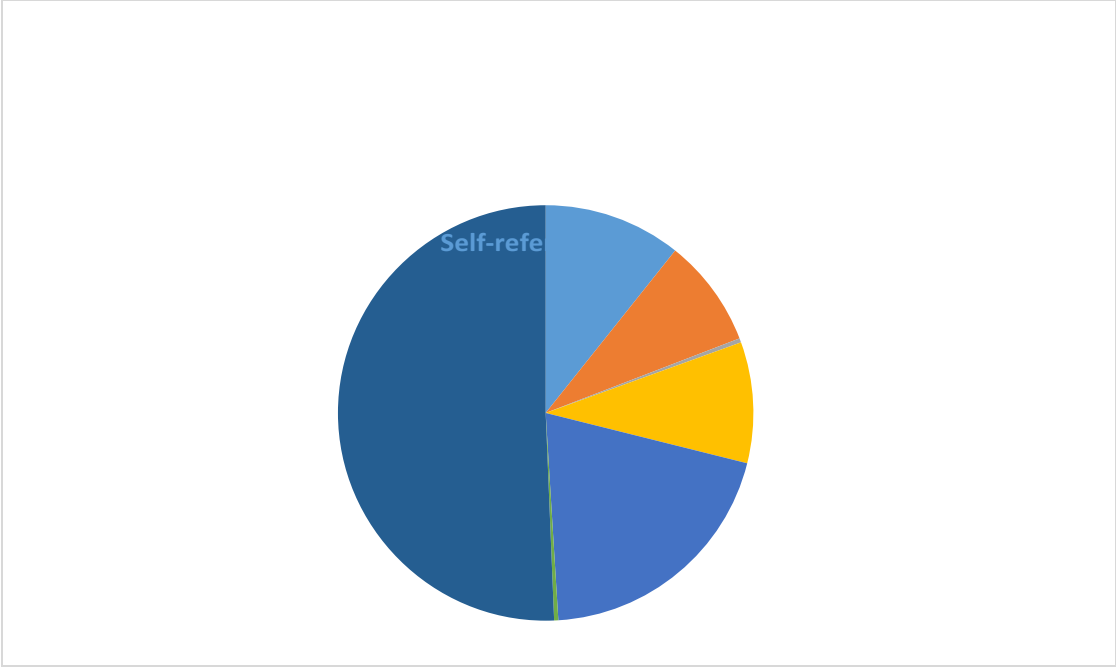


308 Northern Lights FJC Intakes

In July 2024, Northern Lights FJC officially became an International FJC Alliance **Affiliated center**. It is the **FIRST** affiliated FJC in Montana. To date, the Service Navigators have done **308** FJC Guest intakes. **91%** (280) of those intakes were Guests who did not access YWCA shelter services.

The intake process involves meeting with a Guest, either in person or by phone, and reviewing that Guest's individual circumstances. The Guest receives a Services Menu (attached as pages 13-14), and the Service Navigator helps him or her decide which of the available services might be helpful as the Guest works toward self-determined short - and long-term goals.

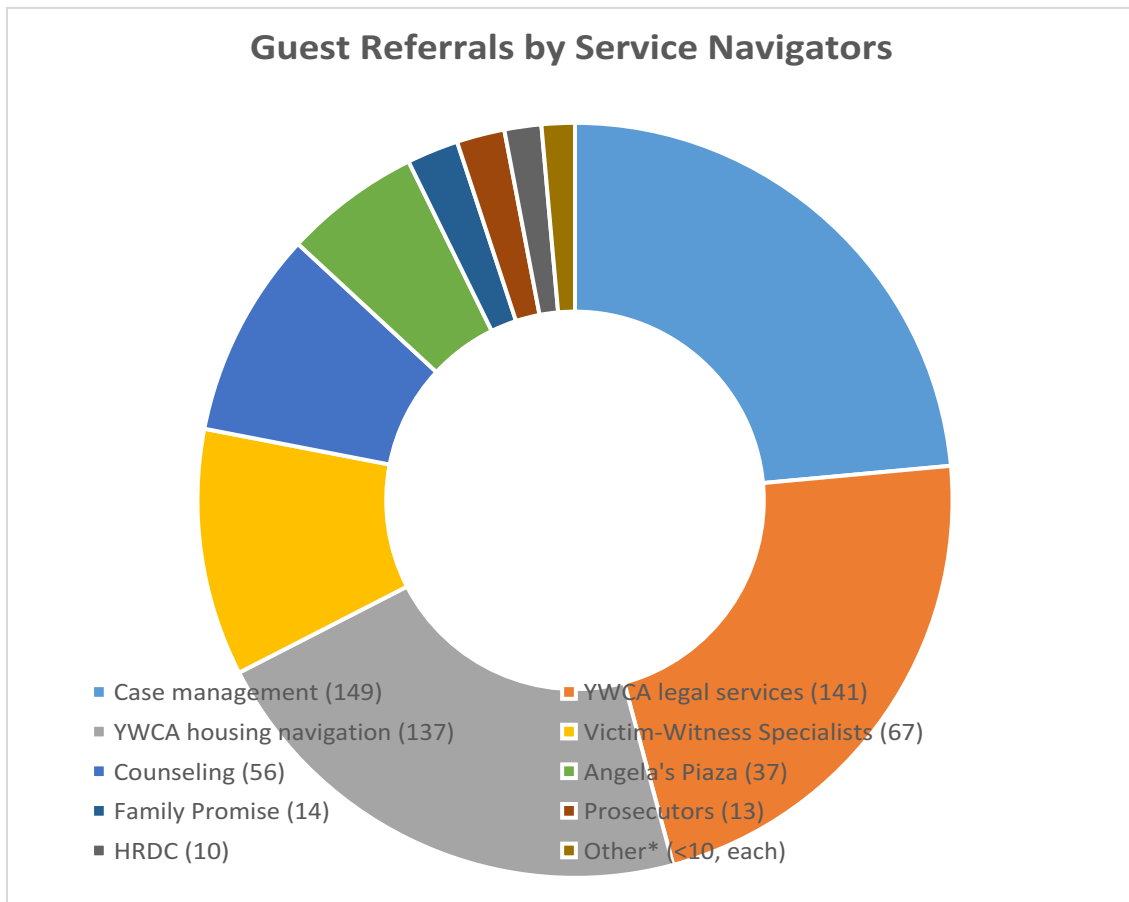
- Guests can be referred to the FJC from all on-site partner agencies, as well as from other organizations throughout the region.
- YWCA shelter residents receive an automatic referral to meet with a Service Navigator if they choose. Statistics related to service provision for shelter residents are tracked separately from non-resident FJC Guests.
- Victims referred to the YWCA help line via the Billings PD risk assessment process also receive an automatic referral to FJC service navigation.
- Word of mouth referrals and **walk-ins are welcome!**



What can Guests expect?

When an individual walks through the doors seeking resources, that person becomes a Guest in the FJC. They can expect to be treated with judgment-free care, dignity, and respect. Service Navigators work with that FJC Guest and make specific referrals based on Service Menu selections (see attached Service Menu). The Navigators are experienced professionals, skilled in helping Guests identify and prioritize their needs. While the goal is to help Guests increase their safety and independence, the journey to achieve that goal is different for everyone. FJC Guests are never required to participate in any service as a prerequisite to receiving other services.

FJC partner agencies maintain their own criteria for client/participant eligibility. However, FJC Guests can include victims of domestic and dating abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking, and family-involved elder abuse. The FJC can serve Guests living in Yellowstone County, as well as some surrounding counties, situation-dependent.



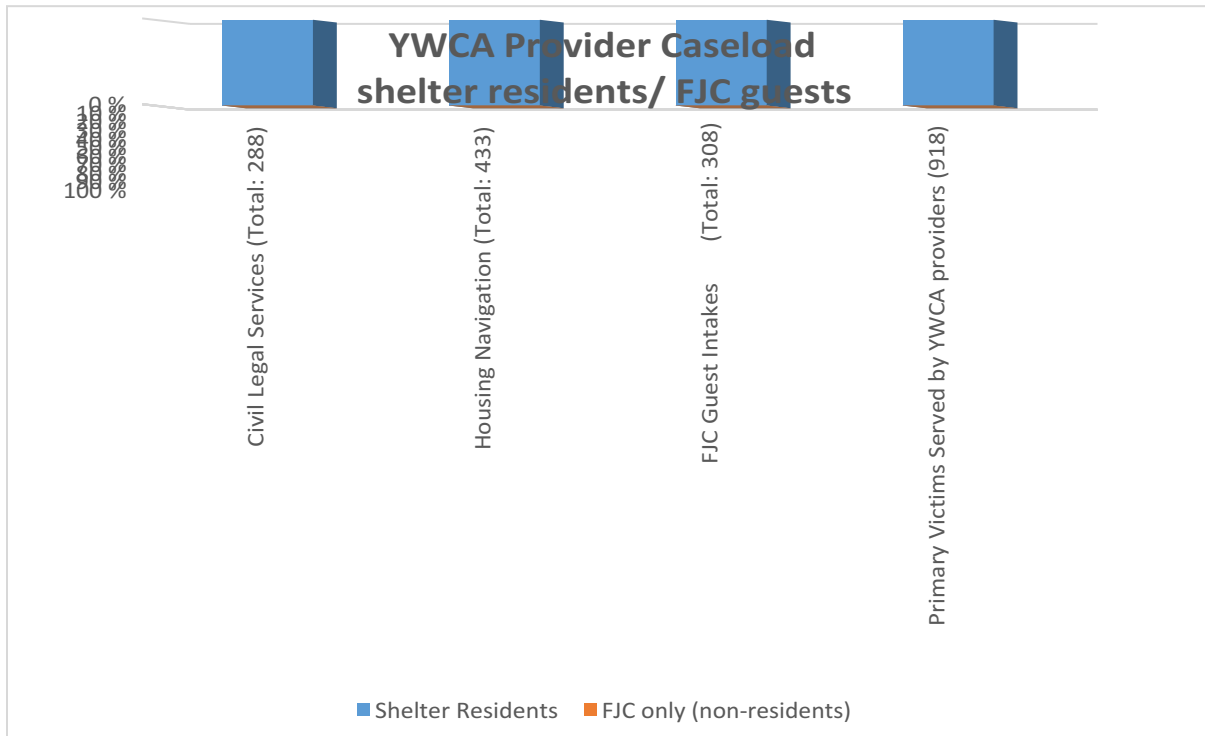
* Other referrals = fewer than 10 referrals, each, to Montana Rescue Mission, Salvation Army, Montana Legal Services, Family Service, Job Service, St. Vincent de Paul, Housing Authority of Billings, YWCA Gateway Horizons shelter, Riverstone Health, Off the Streets, Family Support Network, Family Tree, Law enforcement, Adult Education, & Community Crisis Center.

Have YWCA services changed?

YWCA still offers its core services, but capacity has expanded in some areas to meet the needs of FJC Guests! Traditional YWCA services include shelter, civil legal assistance, housing navigation, advocacy, and service navigation/case management. As with other human service organizations, providers already had full caseloads. Prior to the FJC collaboration, YWCA services were available to shelter residents only. With the FJC fully operational (July 2024), YWCA providers have extended their services, increasing their caseloads to include FJC Guests.

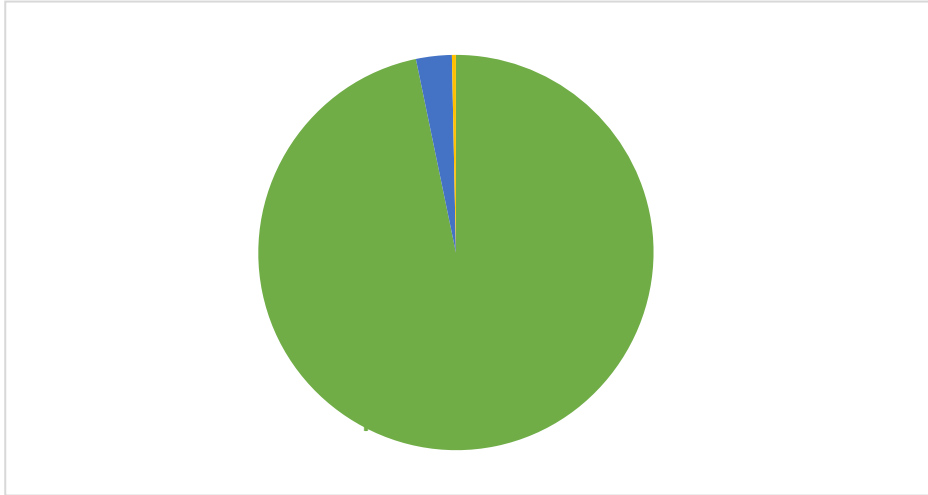
- 43% of the YWCA’s civil legal caseload is from FJC referrals of non-shelter residents
- 30% of the YWCA’s housing navigation caseload is from FJC referrals of non-shelter residents
- 91% of the YWCA’s case management/service navigation** caseload is non-shelter FJC Guests
- 30% of primary victims served at the YWCA/FJC begin as non-shelter residents

**Funding from the City of Billings allowed the YWCA to add a 2nd case manager/service navigator.



FJC Guest Demographics

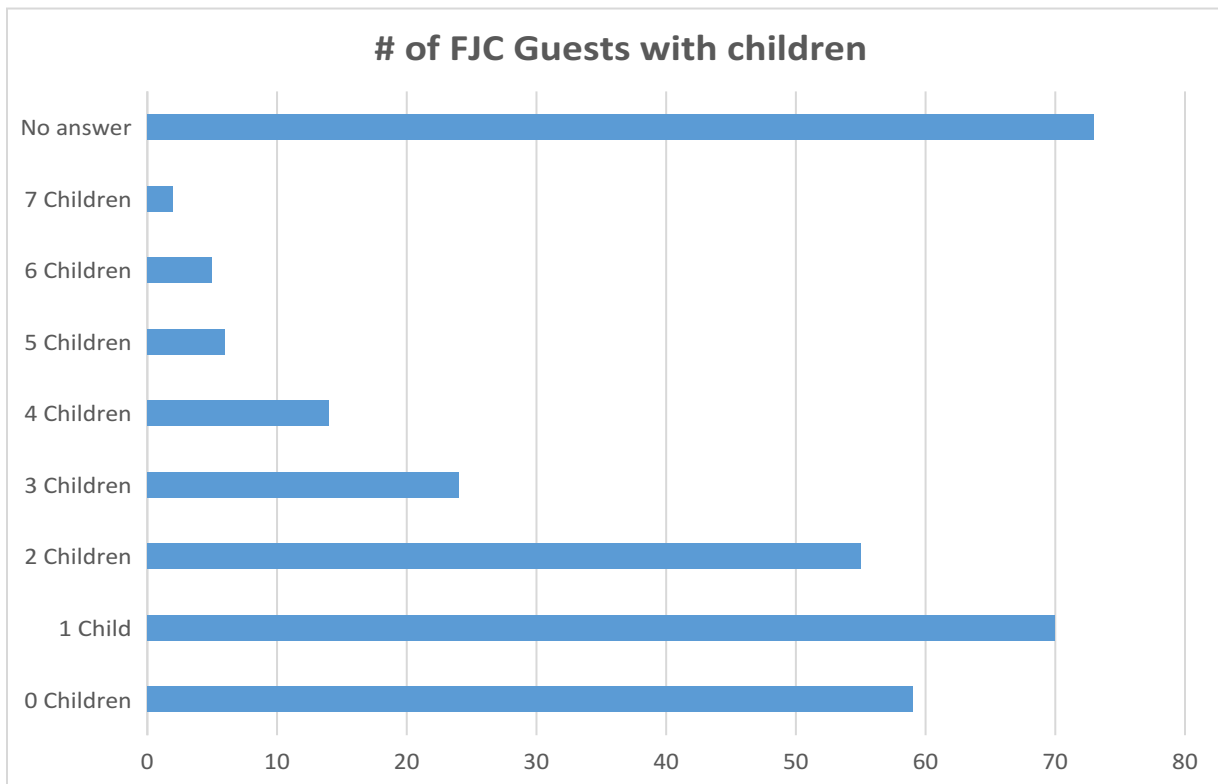
The FJC serves adult Guests regardless of their race, gender, age, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or other social group identity. Demographic information is tracked for statistical purposes only.



What about children?

Northern Lights FJC currently does not have any on-site services specific to children as primary victims. The majority of FJC Guests, though, do have children who may be experiencing the trauma of living in an unsafe home. According to research by Kaiser Permanente in the mid-1990s, these child witnesses (referred to as secondary victims) tend to have more Adverse Childhood Experiences¹. People with higher ACE scores are at increased risk of social, mental, behavioral, and health problems into adulthood, up to and including premature death.

Since July 2024, the FJC has served 308 Guests (primary victims), and those guests were accompanied by a total of **382 children** (secondary victims).



¹ Center for Disease Control. (n.d.). *About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html>



On-site service providers share intangible successes every day through streamlined communication and multi-disciplinary collaboration. While the providers can *feel* the difference, we believe FJC Guests simply experience the level of coordinated, wrap-around care that they deserve and should expect.

Guest Success Stories

“Suzanne”:

Suzanne reported a DV-related assault to a Billings PD patrol officer. The officer believed that Suzanne needed emergency shelter, but she was hesitant. The officer called one of the DV Investigators who spoke to Suzanne over the phone and helped her understand the benefits of temporary emergency shelter for herself and her child. Before the end of the call, the DVI had also confirmed with the YWCA Emergency Services Coordinator that a safe space could be available for Suzanne and her child if she wanted to take advantage of that resource. The patrol officer then helped Suzanne call the YWCA Gateway Horizons shelter advocate to complete the intake process.

After Suzanne moved into shelter and reviewed the FJC Services Menu, a Service Navigator helped her connect with the YCAO Victim-Witness Specialist who answered questions about her criminal case and assisted Suzanne with an order of protection application, a meeting that took several hours. Following that meeting, the YCAO VW provided a warm handoff to a DVI who took follow-up photos of Suzanne’s significant injuries.

Suzanne was able to receive shelter, safety planning, and criminal justice support, accomplishing all of that in a single afternoon, in one location, and with assistance for childcare.

“Christine”:

Christine learned about Northern Lights Family Justice Center when she went to Billings Clinic for a strangulation and SANE exam. She had been sexually assaulted and strangled by her partner several times, and he had hurt her children on different occasions, too. Christine arrived at the FJC and met with a Services Navigator who helped Christine complete a Danger Assessment. The Assessment showed that she

was in extreme danger from her partner. The Services Navigator completed a safety plan with Christine and provided her with a counseling referral list.

Christine had been too fearful to contact law enforcement for help because her prior experiences with police had not felt positive. The Service Navigator gave Christine the option to meet with one of the on-site DV Investigators, explaining that the meeting would be in the FJC's soft interview room. The Services Navigator's support put Christine at ease about speaking to law enforcement, and she was able to file a report against her abuser. Christine then met with a Gateway Horizons Shelter Advocate, completed an intake and was able to move into shelter with her children. Later, a City Attorney VW helped Christine complete an order of protection application, and Christine was supported at the court hearing by her Services Navigator and the YWCA Legal Services Provider. The Court granted a one-year order of protection, prohibiting Christine's abuser from contacting her in any way.

Christine is now working with the YWCA Housing Navigator and is hoping to move into a new, safe place soon.

“Amy”:

Amy arrived at the FJC with an appointment to meet with one of the DV Investigators for a follow-up interview regarding a criminal case. During the interview, Amy described ongoing abuse, threats, and manipulation by her abuser. His manipulation included attempts to leverage their shared child, creating a barrier to Amy leaving the relationship. Amy mentioned to the DVI that she had started the process of filing a parenting plan in District Court, but she found the process very confusing. Amy was fearful about the family law process, as she did not have money to hire an attorney. After Amy's follow-up interview, the DVI arranged for Amy to meet with a Services Navigator for an FJC intake. That was followed by a meeting with YWCA Legal Services so Amy could receive advice from an attorney on her upcoming court proceedings.

The resources Amy received at the FJC made her feel validated and helped remove one of the barriers that had kept Amy trapped in an abusive relationship.

Thank You! to all of the agencies, organizations, and individuals who have worked so hard to make Montana's first Family Justice Center possible. We have made great progress, and we are excited to see what the future brings for the FJC and the community.

The Northern Lights FJC Network

On-Site Partners:



Yellowstone County Attorney

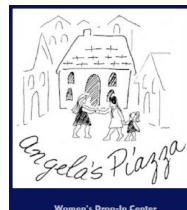


Montana State University TRIO

Supporting Partners:



Yellowstone County
Self-Help Law Center



YWCA IS ON A MISSION



Name: _____ Date: _____ Gateway Horizons Resident?

How do you want us to contact you? Phone Text Message Email

What is the best day and time to contact you? _____

Phone Number: _____ Safe to call Safe to text Safe to leave a voicemail

Email Address: _____ Safe to email

Services Navigation

- I want help getting my (circle all that apply): ID Birth Certificate Social Security Card
- I want help applying for (circle all that apply): SNAP TANF LIEAP Best Beginnings Medicaid
- I want help fixing or building my resume
- I want help applying for jobs
- I want to get my HiSET (GED)
- I want to learn about vocational training options
- I want to learn higher education options
- I want [help](#) goal planning
- I want help finding childcare for my children
- I want help finding resources to help my children
- I want help finding an appropriate counselor for myself
- I want help finding an appropriate counselor for my children
- I want help finding support groups that will meet my needs
- I want help finding other community resources that will benefit me
- I want [help creating](#) a safety plan
- I want help finding substance use/abuse or recovery resources
- I have concerns about my health or injuries I have
- I want help getting a primary care doctor for myself or my children
- I want help finding religious or spiritual care resources
- I am affiliated with the military and would like to learn about resources

Civil Legal Services

- I want help with legal questions I have
- I want help getting an order of protection (restraining order)
- I want help getting a parenting plan
- I want help with a dissolution (divorce)
- I want help with an immigration matter
- I want help [preparing](#) for a civil court hearing and/or someone to provide support at an upcoming hearing

Criminal Justice System

- I want help understanding the legal process before I make a report to law enforcement
- I want [help understanding](#) the legal process after I have reported to law enforcement
- I want help reporting my victimization to law enforcement
- I want help preparing for a criminal court hearing and/or someone to provide support at an upcoming hearing
- I would like to check on the status of a criminal case I am a victim in
- I would like to speak with the investigator assigned to my case

Housing

- I want help understanding what my rental barriers might be and how to overcome them
- I want [help creating](#) a housing action plan
- I want help with [renter](#) education
- I want [help](#) printing, filling out, and/or turning in rental applications
- I want help with finding appropriate rentals
- I want help with rental advocacy or an appeal
- I want someone to go with me for a rental [walk-through](#)
- I need help understanding a lease agreement
- I want help applying for Section 8 and/or Public Housing

Is there anything else you were hoping Northern Lights could help you with?

What else would you like us to know [about how](#) to best help you?

You can ask any questions you have here.