

Bridges to Safety serves nearly 1,000 domestic abuse victims in first year

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Bridges to Safety, the domestic abuse service center housed in City Hall/Ramsey County Courthouse, recently celebrated its first year of operation. A long time in the planning, the center finally came to life in 2008, representing the work and leadership of a coalition of 19 different agencies, including Mayor Chris Coleman's office.

"This project sat on the shelf for far too long. When we were approached by folks who were working to get this done, I knew we had to act," Coleman said. "At a time of crisis, the life-changing support that Bridges to Safety provides is invaluable. I am proud of the fact that nearly 1,000 victims have walked through its doors and been shown a path out of a life of violence."

Bridges to Safety brings together civic, non-profit, legal, and corporate leaders to create a center where victims can find help, from legal orders to court filings to free computer kiosks to use for job applications or setting up banking services. A priority for Coleman, he led the charge for the city to donate the space in Saint Paul City Hall for Bridges to Safety while other partners found almost 30 other groups from architects to contractors to furniture stores to donate materials, labor, and furnishings.

The 5,000-square-foot center allows victims of domestic abuse to access all the services they need to escape abusive relationships in one location, including physical health services, victim's advocates, and social and legal services as well as meetings with a prosecutor, court services, and law enforcement. The center also features a play area for children and computers, including a Saint Paul Public Library computer kiosk for victims and their children to check out materials.

In the past year, 74 percent of victims who have visited Bridges to Safety have children, making the play area and Children's Safety Center invaluable resources. Of the people who have used the center, 90 percent have been women. Visitors to Bridges to Safety have taken advantage of an average of 2.4 services per participant.

Most important, the center brings all of the services victims need together in a safe, secure location, something nearly all victims who responded to a survey said was the top priority for creating the center.

"Bridges to Safety reflects our commitment to ending domestic violence in our community. It removes barriers and provides life-changing support to end the cycle of violence. We're proud of what we've been able to do in such a short time," Coleman said.

For more information on Bridges to Safety, visit www.bridgestosafety.org.