

2020 Annual Report

Mission: To end violence, inspire hope, and provide unwavering support for all people affected by domestic and sexual violence by engaging our community in safety, equality, and partnership.

Vision: Embrace envisions a courageous social change taking place ending all forms of oppression and violence and creating healthy communities where every person has the support to thrive.

In 2020, we served

601 people with in-depth domestic and sexual violence advocacy services. **25** percent of all people served were children and youth, and **4** percent were age 60 or older. **1,029** people accessed Embrace's advocacy support for the first time through the 24/7 crisis line.

45 survivors at high-risk of homicide received **503** nights of safe shelter services including comprehensive advocacy-based counseling and case management support. **34** percent of shelter residents left shelter for stable housing, and **10** percent rented a new, safe home.



Transformation & Resilience

We never closed our doors.

At the start of the year, we were excited and looking forward to the enhanced services, collaborative relationships, and new grant programs we would create during the year. We planned to kick start the much-awaited On-Call Victim Advocate program that had been in development over the past six months to bring 24/7 transportation and advocacy accompaniment services to rural survivors. We were thrilled to be selected along with our new partners as one of three grant recipients in the country to create an advocacy-driven medical care program in the spring. We even hired additional staff to expand youth and sexual assault advocacy services for the new service area of Barron County. And, then, 2020 happened.

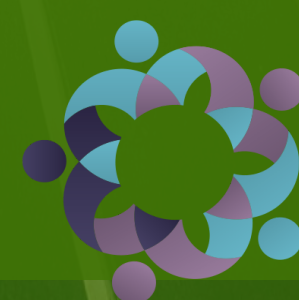
In March, the world shifted. We began months of unparalleled challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic caused new and unique needs for survivors, and it required a sharp pivot in how we delivered advocacy services to them. Under the isolation and Safer at Home Orders, survivors cited increases in the severity of violence they were experiencing with less opportunities for safely and discreetly seeking help. Homelessness, the loss of jobs, communication barriers from rural phone and internet, and unrelenting domestic and sexual violence were threaded throughout survivors' lives. Survivors' basic needs skyrocketed and safety became infinitely more complex over a few short weeks. Plus, the stories shared with Embrace staff made the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the Survivors of Color we served immediately apparent.

We quickly shifted planned in-person programming to virtual implementation. We never closed our doors. The structure of our organization and staff spread across the rural four-county area allowed us to meet the challenges of adapting to virtual programming with more ease than we anticipated. Our existing creativity that is needed to serve our rural communities helped us be resilient in responding to the pandemic. We created new ways of reaching teen survivors in schools and adapted to remote delivery. We developed new ties with our local hotels that allowed for more physically distant safe housing keeping staff and survivors healthy while supporting small businesses in our communities. We expanded emergency assistance to help survivors with basic needs. We prioritized letting survivors know we were open and help was available through new innovative, contactless

outreach strategies. We kept our staff, shelter residents, and survivors safe and healthy.

In May, after the murder of George Floyd, our work shifted again. We knew the root causes of the racism and police violence we were witnessing were the same, deep roots that cause sexual violence and domestic violence. We knew these forms of violence interact and compound on each other both in society and within the survivors we serve. However, the year's uprisings for racial justice made us realize we were leaving People of Color behind and unsafe by staying silent. We started meeting with our neighboring sister agencies and taking small actions, including putting "Black Lives Matter" signs up at each of our offices across rural Northwest Wisconsin, to show all survivors in our community we are safe, welcoming, and doing the work white people need to do to be allies. Then, in fall 2020, shortly after Jacob Blake was shot in Kenosha, Embrace experienced police coercion and control of community leadership by our close law enforcement colleagues who were out of sync with our world affirming Black Lives Matter. The subsequent parade of Board resignations and loss of our local, county government funding for displaying "Black Lives Matter" signs brought a national spotlight and support to Embrace. But, it also forced us to reckon with the longtime, core approaches to our advocacy. We began dismantling our years of training in what we now know as a carceral feminist lens that relies on policing, prosecution, and incarceration as the primary solution to curb violence.

Everyday, I have thought of the survivor who said to us after the Board transitions and loss of funding, "This is the first time I feel safe coming to Embrace." She helped teach me that the belief the criminal legal system works for all survivors is one steeped in the privilege of whiteness. The events of 2020 have shifted our philosophy on how we provide services to survivors and make our communities safer. 2020 has transformed our concept of justice. As we move forward into 2021, Embrace will continue to learn and incorporate transformative justice approaches into our programs and services that will, as transformative justice activist Mariame Kaba explains, allow our work to "eradicate violence rather than just simply managing it."



Katie Bement
Executive Director

Service Numbers

1,029 crisis calls.

95 Lethality Assessment Program calls took place with survivors at high-risk of homicide. 21 percent of all callers made an appointment with an advocate.

308 sexual assault survivors

received in-depth services. 100 were child sexual assault survivors, and 42 of the adult survivors reported experiencing sexual abuse as a child.

5,497 advocacy services

provided. Each survivor coming to Embrace received an average of 9.2 different services such as legal assistance, safety planning, transportation, crisis counseling, etc.

81 survivors attended support groups more than 300 times

throughout the year; groups were adapted to a virtual format to meet survivors needs during the pandemic. **36** of the support group sessions were offered online through the secure HelpRoom platform provided to Embrace through a unique partnership with RAINN.

Average reach of 1,541 people and 15 likes

per Facebook post. Embrace's Facebook page has 1,651 followers and Embrace's Instagram has 547 followers. Embrace staff curate outreach and awareness posts every weekday.

Embrace connected with **25 teens** who needed support and advocacy related to teen dating violence.

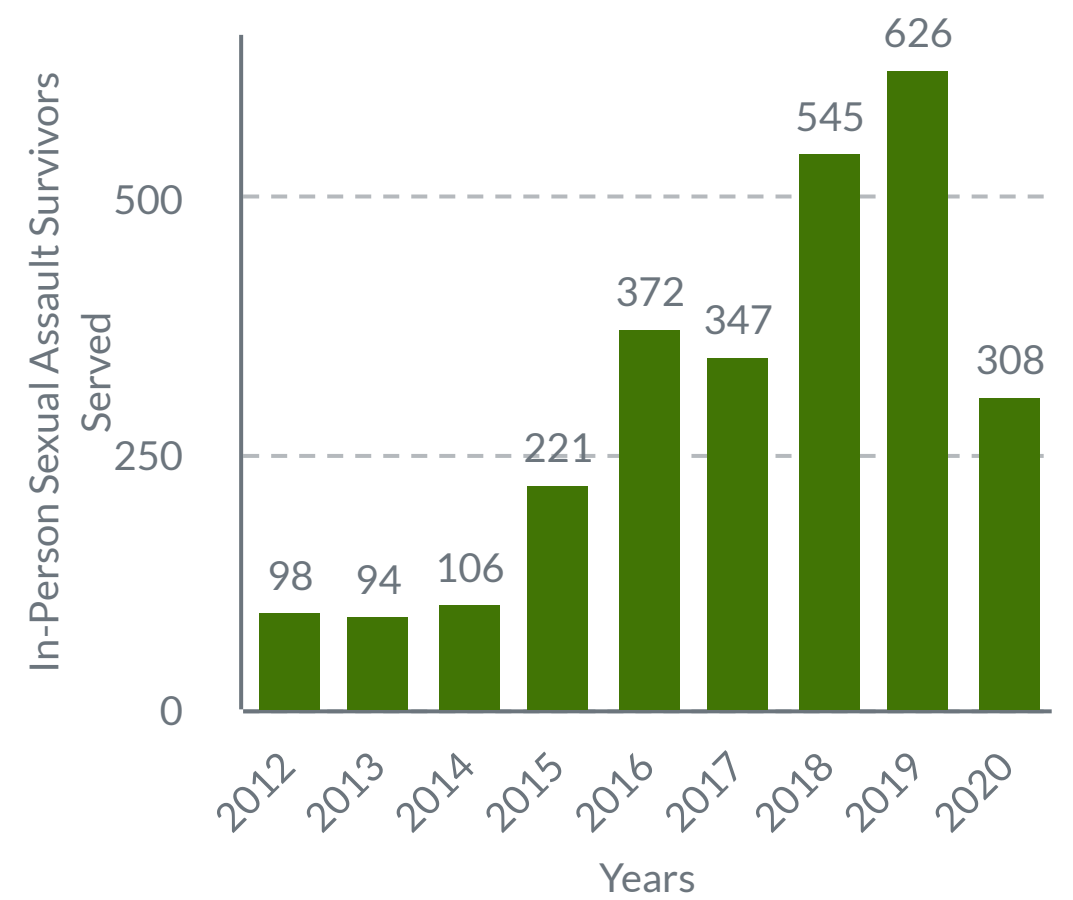
Emergency financial support.

73 survivors accessed Embrace's emergency financial assistance 127 times helping them to achieve emotional and physical safety as defined by them. 35 people accessed safe shelter through an updated hotel voucher system coordinated between Embrace staff and local hotels.

Direct Services Highlights

Sexual Assault Survivors

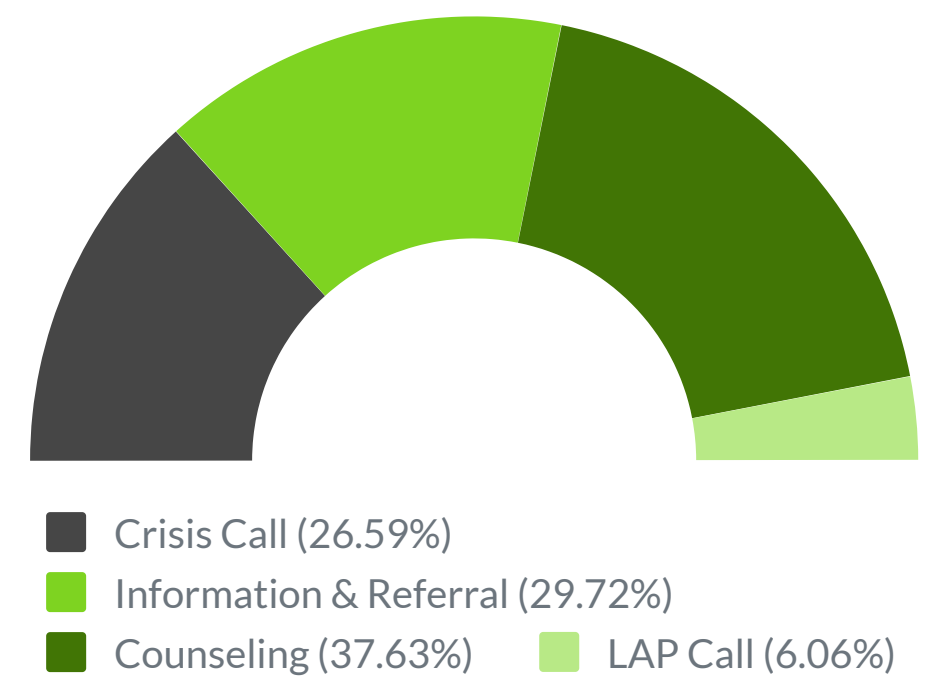
A vast majority of people Embrace serves in any given year disclose both domestic and sexual violence and receive comprehensive support for both crimes they experienced. Survivors reaching out after experiencing standalone sexual violence crimes most commonly access personal advocacy and information/referral advocacy services to determine what their options are after an assault. The decline in 2020 can be attributed to the pandemic and Safer at Home Orders making it challenging for survivors to safely reach out. Since 2012, Embrace has equitably prioritized rural sexual assault survivors' needs alongside domestic violence which contributes to the trend of more sexual assault survivors coming forward for advocacy.



Crisis Calls

Crisis callers are people who are new to receiving Embrace's services. Callers can be a primary or secondary victim who are connecting with an advocate for the first time via phone, text, fax, email, community partner referral, or via social media. In 2020, 78 percent of crisis calls that came in were by phone. 182 callers remained anonymous, and 54 percent of all crisis line callers indicated their needs were met and services completed after talking with an advocate.

Primary Crisis Call Services



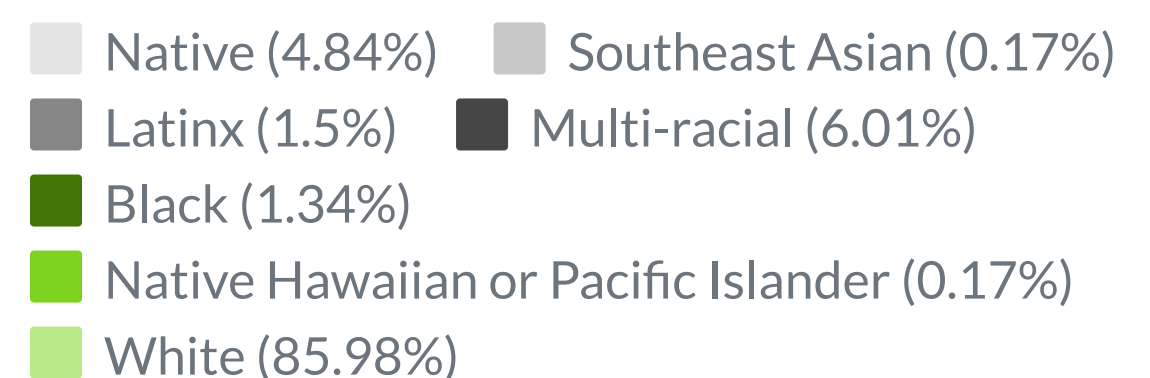
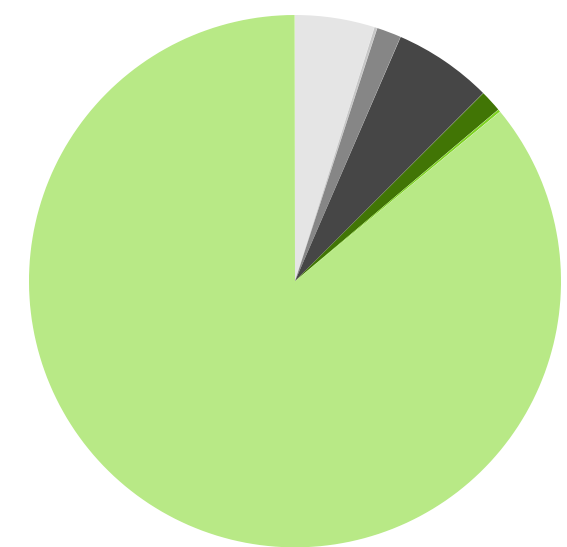
In-Person Advocacy Hours

Since 2012, Embrace's staff has expanded outreach and strengthened "out-patient" type services allowing more survivors in our communities to access advocacy-based counseling services. The pandemic and Safer at Home Orders created additional barriers for survivors to access Embrace's services resulting in an overall drop in the number of individuals connecting with staff for in-depth and on-going support. However, many new survivors reached out by phone increasing crisis calls by 31 percent in comparison to 2019. Compared to 2019, survivors who did connect with Embrace received on average an hour more of services and an additional contact with an advocate to support them in navigating the complex barriers and violence worsened by the pandemic.

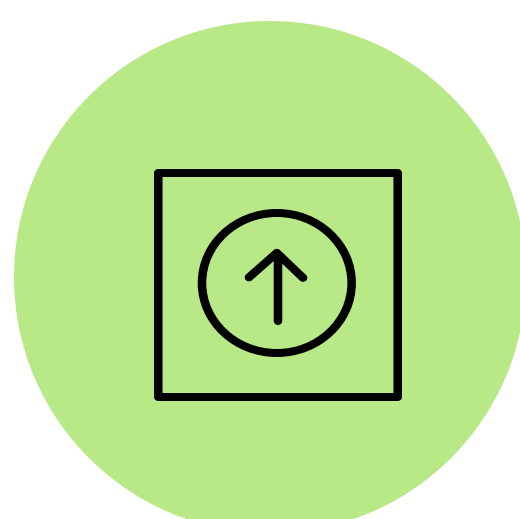
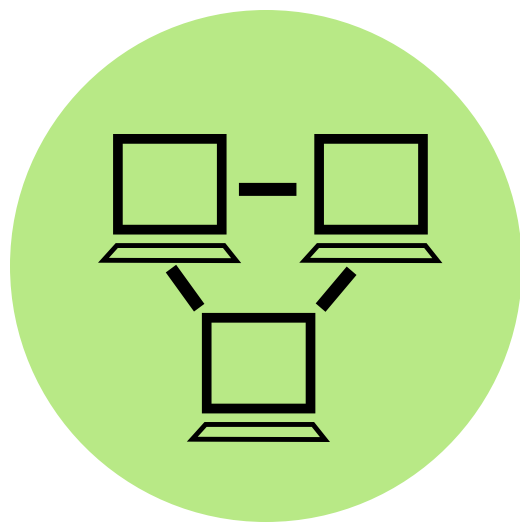


Services to Historically Marginalized Survivors

15 percent of all survivors served as clients with in-depth services were Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). 40 percent of all safe shelter residents in 2020 were BIPOC. Population wide, Embrace's service area ranges from 5 to 6 percent BIPOC. People of Color are disproportionately impacted by domestic and sexual violence in Embrace's service area because of historical trauma and systemic racism. Embrace is committed to centering the most marginalized and oppressed survivors and developing tailored services to properly address the higher rates of violence and isolation they experience. In 2020, 15 survivors identified as Limited English Proficiency and Embrace advocates utilized translators to provide advocacy services to these individuals. 86 percent of survivors identified as female, 13 percent as male, and 1 percent as Trans. 19 people identified as LGBTQ+.



New Funding and Enhanced Programs



Embrace pivoted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and adapted critical services and programs to safe, virtual platforms for survivors and community partners. "Safer at Work" policies and procedures following public health guidance were developed to keep staff, residents, and survivors safe and healthy.

Embrace and its partners were one of three recipients nationally to be awarded a subgrant of the federal Office on Violence Against Women program in July 2020 doubling the capacity of sexual assault services in Barron County and developing an advocacy-driven forensic medical program centering Native survivors.

Reiki, a traditional and holistic Japanese form of energy healing that benefits physical, mental, and spiritual health, began being offered, at no cost, to survivors who work with Embrace through a partnership with Wellness n' Soul.

After a national spotlight on Embrace, its parade of board resignations, and loss of Barron County funding, a spur-of-the-moment online fundraiser raised over \$100,000.

Embrace structured cost of living wage increases bringing all direct services staff to meet the 2019 Wisconsin Fair Minimum wage levels. Hazard pay and pandemic leave policies were put in place to support employees' health and wellbeing.

Takeaways

Embrace's innovative and nationally-recognized programs, the increase in partnerships with community agencies working to close the gaps in systems, and the organization's strengthened infrastructure are direct results of retaining its professional staff. Embrace staff have the respected expertise to work collaboratively with community partners and successfully manage the increased grant funding and programs.

Outreach, Awareness, and Prevention Education Highlights

Embrace prioritizes ending violence by not only providing high-quality direct services to every person affected by violence but by focusing on outreach and collaboration with community partners who are also encountering survivors. Embrace knows the cycle of violence will not end without taking a proactive approach and tapping into collective roles with community allies to develop joint solutions heading toward social change.

In 2020, Embrace reached more than 4,525 people with a total of 728 virtually adapted student and community education presentations, media events, and facilitated meetings with community partners.



A Lifeline During Stay at Home Orders

As businesses and services began shutting down in March during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Embrace staff were gravely concerned that survivors would not realize Embrace's advocacy and emergency services remained open and available for domestic and sexual violence support and safety. Embrace staff quickly developed social media and community outreach campaign titled "Embrace is Here!" in both Spanish and English. The materials were distributed widely as paper leaflets at local businesses and grocery stores as well as online by community partners who were also coming into contact with survivors during the Stay at Home Orders. Embrace's quick response and multi-lingual, supportive messaging received statewide recognition.

Billboards Promoting Services

In partnership with the WI Department of Justice, two billboards were posted in the rural service area advertising Embrace's 24/7 advocacy services available for sexual assault survivors. The billboards were displayed at high-traffic intersections in Washburn County and Rusk County for the month of August. Embrace tailored the billboard to specifically show support for LGBTQ and American Indian survivors.

Addressing the Criminalization of Survival

In response to the many domestic violence survivors in Embrace's service area who are often labeled as "criminals" after calling the police for help or as a result of a lifetime of coping with abuse, Embrace developed and held the first annual "Survived and Incarcerated" event for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This virtual letter writing event allowed participants to express solidarity with incarcerated survivors and learn about the prevalence of self-defense in domestic violence cases, dual arrests, and why there is "no perfect victim." In winter 2020, Embrace was invited to participate in the Safe and Together Institute's Partnered with a Survivor podcast with author and professor, Leigh Goodmark, titled "Domestic Violence Advocacy in a Time of Police Reform" discussing the criminalization of survivors and the history of advocacy within the context of the carceral system.

Dismantling Oppression and Privilege

In response to George Floyd's murder and protests around the country, Embrace formalized its staff education series examining our complicity in white supremacist systems into a twice monthly education and discussion series called, "White Folx Work Group." As a result of that work, the organization took the small step of displaying "Black Lives Matter" signs at all its offices to show Survivors of Color we are safe and acknowledge the violence and complex barriers of systemic racism. Embrace wrote and posted a statement titled "Embrace Supports Communities of Color" as a way to help educate our community and partners about how domestic and sexual violence are inextricably linked to other social justice issues.

2020 Supporters

We are grateful beyond words for every one of the 3,000+ donors from around the country who gave their support after the Barron County Board of Supervisors voted to remove Embrace's annual funding. There's simply not enough space to list everyone by name. The donors listed below gave \$50 or more, or they are recurring donors providing financial or in-kind support. The * symbol indicates the generous, first-time donors who gave in response to Embrace losing funds for displaying "Black Lives Matter" signs. The ^ symbol denotes an individual donor who is a recurring donor.

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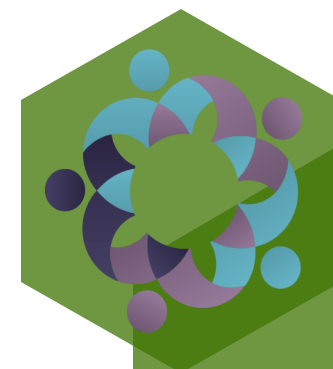
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**9 volunteers and interns
donated 528 hours to the
organization.**

