

# Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

2013

Annual Report  
&  
Fatal Incident Review Team Report



# **Domestic Violence Coordinating Council**

## **2013 Annual Report**

**And**

## **Fatal Incident Review Team Report**

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To:

Honorable Jack A. Markell  
Governor, State of Delaware

Honorable Myron T. Steele  
Chief Justice  
Supreme Court  
State of Delaware

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Delaware  
Fatal Incident  
Review Team  
Report

2013



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# Introduction

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The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council's Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT) was established by statute in 1996 and became the first statewide team in the country. There are eleven other statewide teams today.

Domestic violence continues to be a devastating problem and deaths resulting from this crime are the ultimate acts of abuse. This report contains information from 115 cases reviewed over 17 years. In some of these cases, the victims had taken steps to protect themselves and their families. Despite their efforts, some victims and/or the people they loved died at the hands of the abuser.

The Fatal Incident Review Team members are dedicated professionals who conduct system audits of State agencies and private organizations that had contact with the deceased victim and/or the perpetrator to assess the system's response. Although domestic violence fatality reviews are retrospective in nature, their purpose is prospective. Reviews focus on identifying trends, patterns and obstacles in services, assessing agency interventions, and most importantly, developing practical recommendations aimed at improving the system and preventing future injury and death.

Delaware's FIRT team has had the authority to conduct near fatality reviews since 2009 when HB 146 w/SA2 was passed on 6/29/09 amending Title 13 of the DE Code to allow, but not require, Near Death reviews by the Fatal Incident Review Team. These reviews can enhance the Team's ability to improve Delaware's response to domestic violence. There is a wealth of knowledge that can be gained from hearing from the domestic violence victim about the history of violence, system involvement, and awareness of resources as well as information about what happened on the day of the incident. Sometimes, victims want to participate in the process of preventing future domestic violence homicides.

In 2012, the FIRT Team reviewed its first Near Death case, which included information acquired from a victim interview conducted by a FIRT Team Member and DVCC Staff. The Team did not complete this review until 2013, and therefore data and recommendations from this case are not included in this report.

Legislation mandates confidentiality requirements in the review process and any records created therein are exempt from the provision of the Freedom of Information Act. Therefore, all records of the reviews are confidential and are maintained in the DVCC office and may only be used by the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council in the exercise of its proper function. More information can be found at: *13 Del. C. § 2105*.

# Team Members, Confidentiality & Participation

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## Co-Chairs

Honorable Vincent J. Poppiti, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council  
Dana Harrington Conner, Domestic Violence Coordinating Council  
Honorable James T. Vaughn, Jr., Domestic Violence Coordinating Council

## Members

According to 13 Del. C. § 2105, in addition to the co-chairs, the Review Team shall consist of 7 other core members:

- The Attorney General or the Attorney General's designee,
- The Director of the Division of Family Services or the Director's designee,
- A victim advocate appointed by the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council,
- The Chief Judge of the Family Court or the Chief Judge's designee,
- The Chief Magistrate of the Justice of the Peace Courts or the Chief Magistrate's designee,
- The Director of the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, or the Director's designee,
- A law-enforcement officer to be appointed by the Delaware Chiefs of Police Council.

## Participation & Confidentiality

All members of the Review Team, plus other individuals invited to participate, shall be considered part of the review panel for a particular case or incident. The Review Team shall invite other law-enforcement personnel to serve and participate as full members of a review panel in any case in which a law-enforcement agency has investigated the death or near death under review or any prior domestic violence incident involving the decedent or near death victim. The Review Team may also invite other relevant persons to serve on an ad-hoc basis and participate as full members of the review panel for a particular review. Such persons may include, but are not limited to, individuals with particular expertise that would be helpful to the review panel, representatives from those organizations or agencies that had contact with or provided services to the individual prior to that individual's own death or near death, that individual's abusive partner or family member and/or the alleged perpetrator of the death or near death.

Each Review begins with the signing of a Confidentiality Agreement by each participant. This Agreement informs and reinforces that the confidentiality of case specific information is required by statute. All aspects of the review, including discussion of the case and information from the records must remain confidential.

# Domestic Violence Fatal Incident Cases

The information contained in this report represents data collected from 115 fatality case reviews conducted by the Delaware Fatal Incident Review Team (FIRT). The fatalities reviewed occurred over a period of 17 years. The 115 cases contained in this report occurred between 1996 and 2012. However, because cases cannot be reviewed until prosecution has been completed and the review is authorized by the Department of Justice, not every domestic violence-related fatality that occurred between those years appears in this report (13 Del. C. § 2105).

**This report contains data on  
115 Domestic Violence Fatal Incident cases  
which resulted in 148 deaths.  
  
Some cases resulted in multiple deaths.**

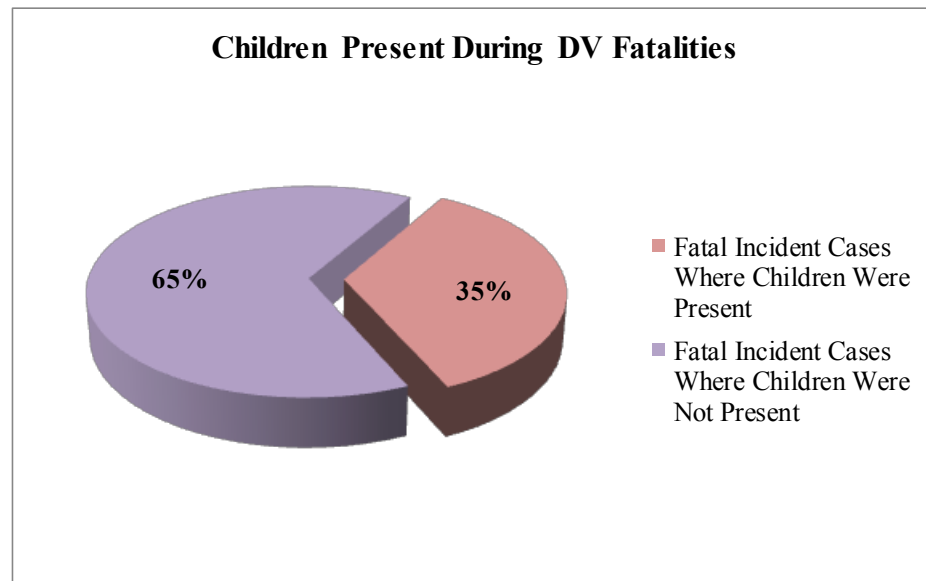
Homicide Victims	Perpetrator Suicides Following Homicides	Suicide Only	Undetermined Victim Deaths
98	27	22	1



## Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Domestic violence affects every member of the family, including children. Family violence creates a home environment where children live in constant fear. The ultimate form of domestic violence – homicide – has devastating life-long effects on those children left behind.

According to Delaware law, a child can be a witness to an act of domestic violence by sound as well as sight, acknowledging that a child may have only heard the violent act from another room, but nonetheless be a witness who is emotionally impacted by it.



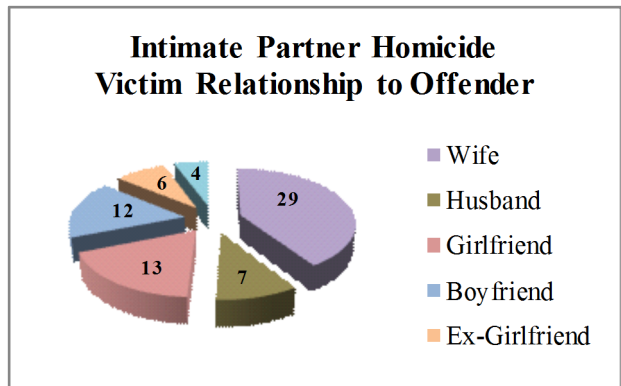
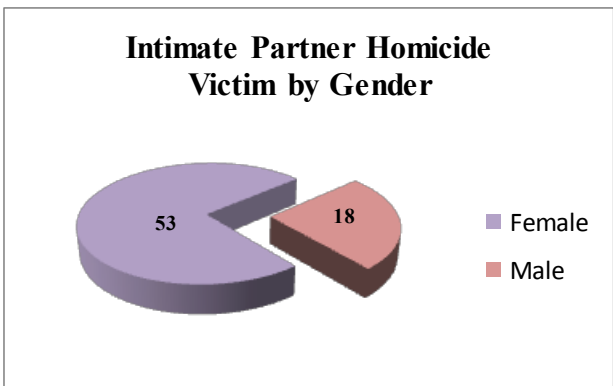
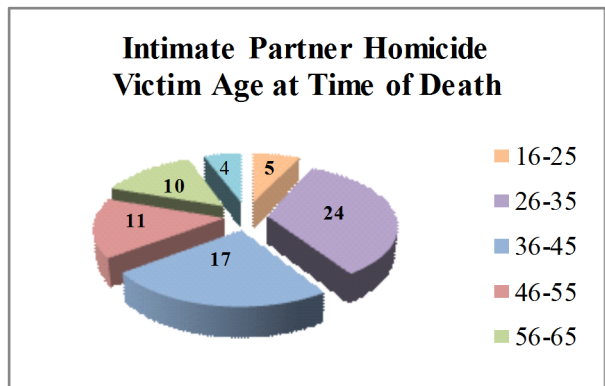
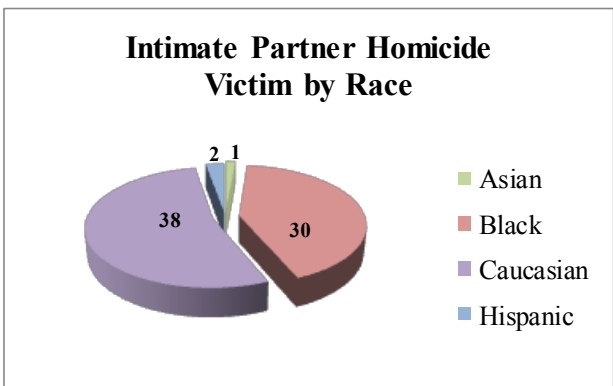
### Children Who Lost a Parent

- **In 35% of the 115 cases in this report, children experienced the loss of a parent.**
- **In FIRT cases reviewed to date, 106 children have lost a parent due to domestic violence.**
- **Many children also lost a parent to imprisonment following the homicide.**

# Intimate Partner Data

The term “Intimate Partner” includes current and former spouses, current and former dating couples with or without a child in common and teen dating couples. Intimate partners may be the same gender.

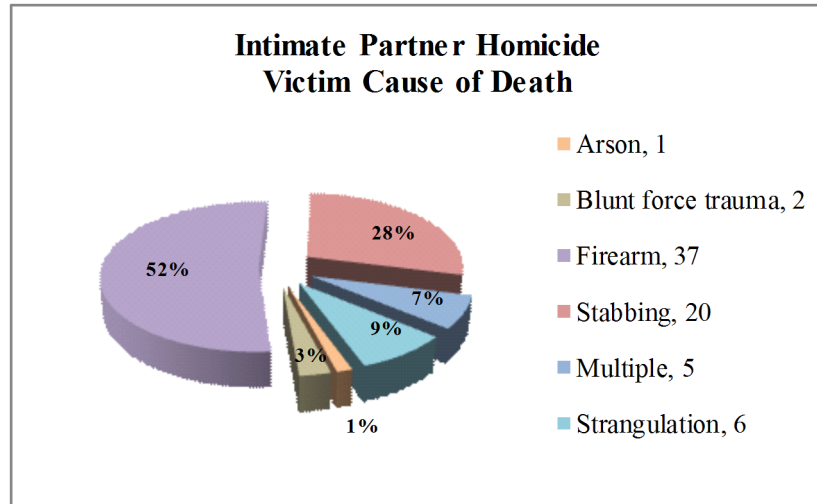
Of the 98 homicide deaths included in this report, 71 were the result of intimate partner homicide.



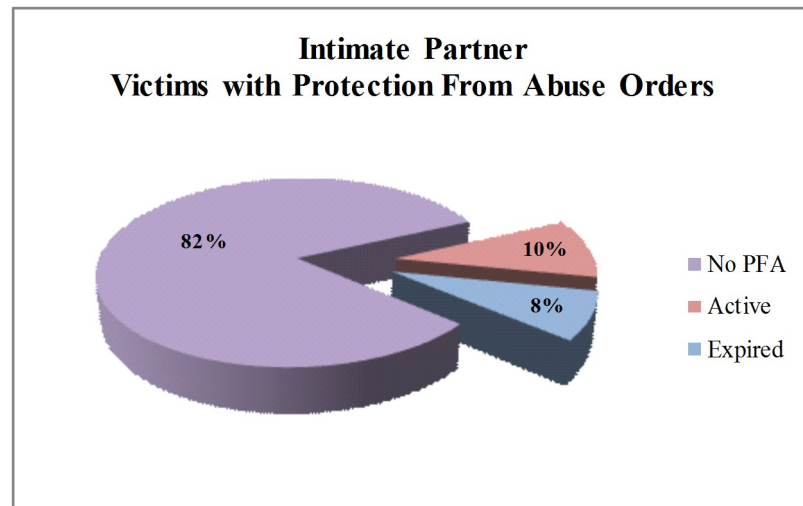
# Intimate Partner Data

## Location of these Intimate Partner Homicides:

- 37 (or 52%) of the deaths occurred at the shared home
- 17 (or 24%) of the deaths occurred at the victim's home.
- 10 (or 14%) of the deaths occurred in the car, on the street, or a parking lot
- 5 (or 7%) of the deaths occurred in the perpetrator's home
- 1 (or 1.4%) of the deaths occurred in the victim's place of employment
- 1 (or 1.4%) of the deaths occurred at a friend's home



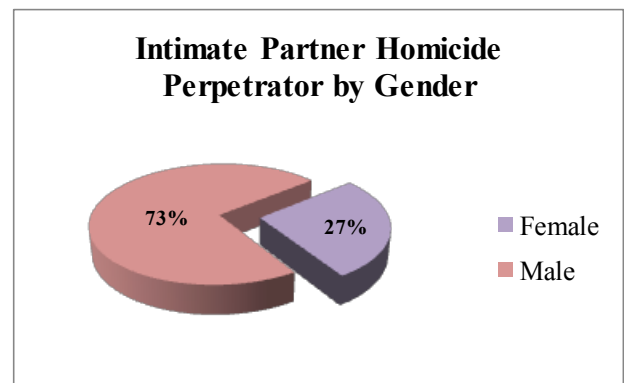
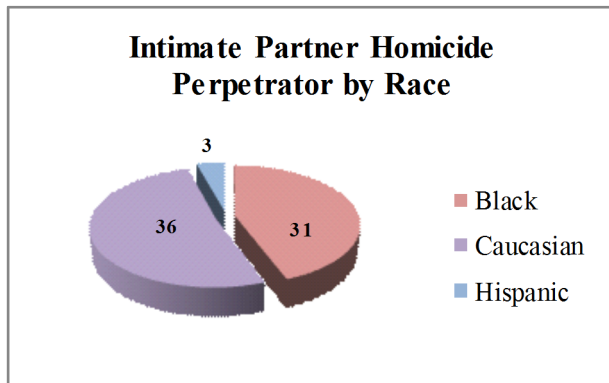
Of the 71 Intimate Partner homicides, 32 or 45% of the homicides occurred when the victim attempted to leave or had ended the relationship with the perpetrator.



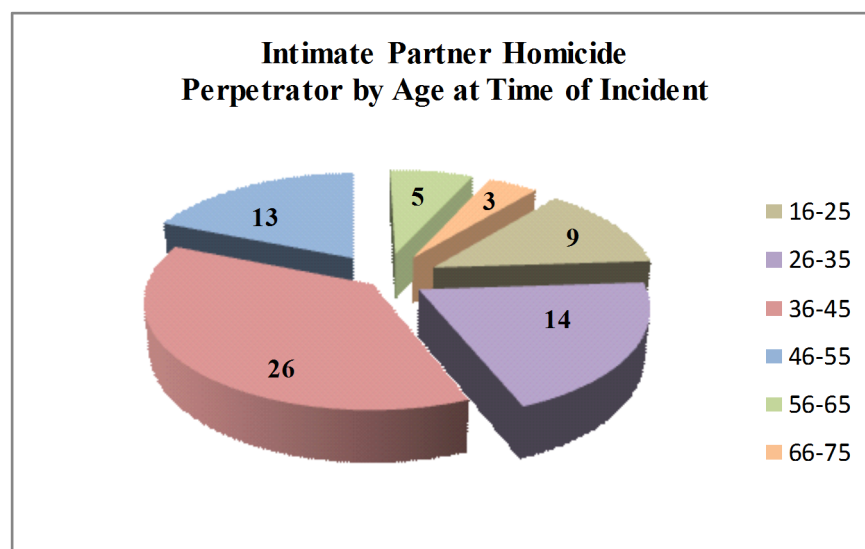
A Protection from Abuse Order (PFA) is issued by Family Court ordering someone to stop abusing another person. Of the 115 cases reviewed in this report, 82% of the victims never had a Protection From Abuse Order.

# Intimate Partner Data

There are 70 Intimate Partner homicide perpetrators in this report. Of those, 51 or 73% of the perpetrators were male and 19 or 27% of the perpetrators were female.



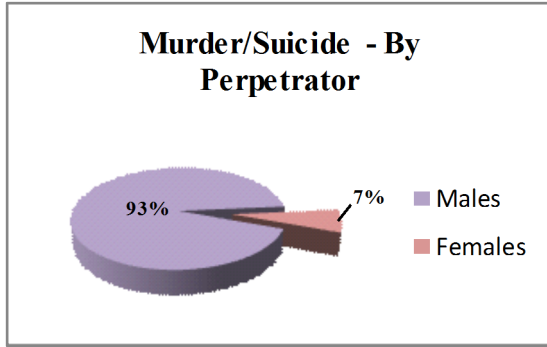
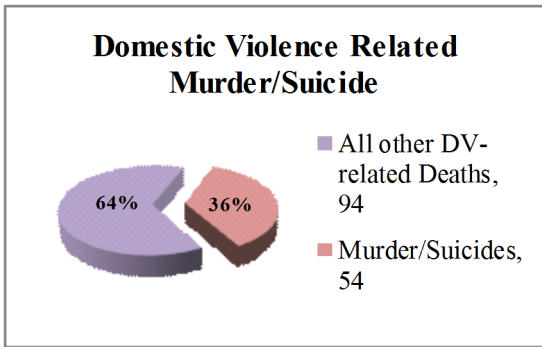
26 or 37% of the perpetrators were between the ages of 36-45 at time of incident.



# Suicide Data

The term “Murder/Suicide” refers to those cases where the perpetrator murdered the victim and then committed suicide.

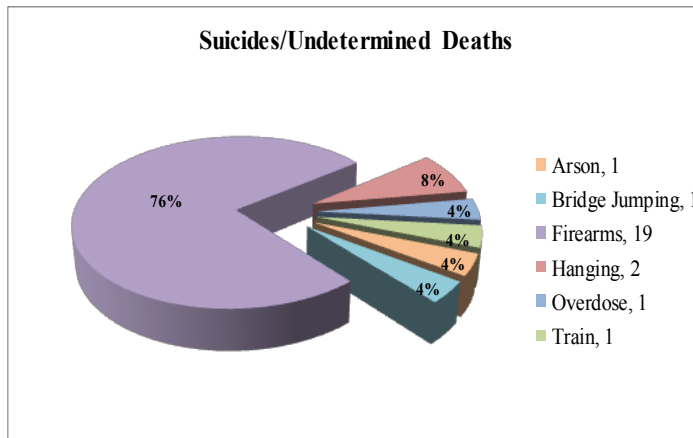
Of the 148 Domestic Violence deaths included in this report, 54 deaths (36%) resulted from murder/suicide. There were 27 murder/suicide cases. Of those, 25 (93%) of the perpetrators of these murder/suicides were male and 2 (7%) of the perpetrators were female.



“Domestic Violence related Suicides” are victims or perpetrators who have taken their own lives and have had a significant history of abuse by or toward their partner.

Manner of death is the classification of categories used to define whether a death is from intentional causes, unintentional causes, natural causes, or undetermined. If a case lacks a clear indicator as to whether or not the death was intentionally caused by another or accidental, this case will remain suspicious in nature and the exact manner of death will be undetermined.

There were a total of 25 domestic violence related suicides, including one undetermined death. Of those 25 domestic violence related suicides/undetermined deaths the victim’s death was a result of a firearm in 19 (76%) of the cases. Two of the deaths resulted from hanging. And one death each resulted from jumping from a bridge, suicide by train, overdose and arson.



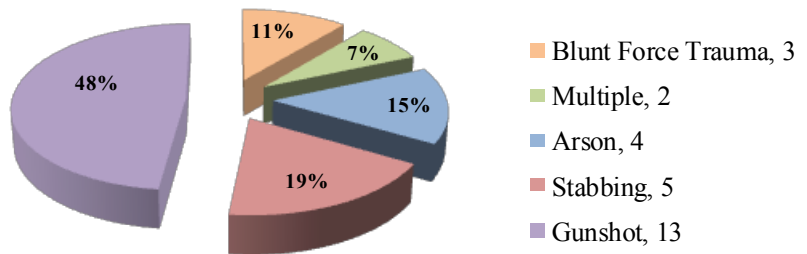
# Non-Intimate Partner Data

## Location of these Non-Intimate Homicides:

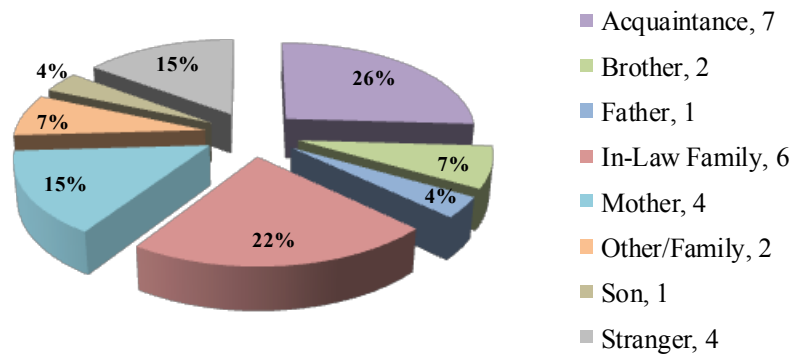
- 8 of the deaths occurred at the shared home of the victim and the perpetrator.
- 8 of the deaths occurred at the victim's home.
- 4 of the deaths occurred at the perpetrator's home
- 2 of the deaths occurred in a car, on the street or in a parking lot
- 2 at an acquaintance/friend's home
- 1 at the perpetrator's girlfriend's home
- 1 at the victim's place of employment
- 1 at the victim's boyfriend's home.

“Non-Intimate Partners” are individuals who are not intimate partners, but have a familial relationship, such as, mother/adult son, or brother/sister. Of the 98 homicides included in this report, 27 (28%) were “Non-Intimate Partner” homicides. Also included in these homicide numbers are victims who were bystander victims (friends, acquaintances or strangers).

**Non-Intimate Partner Homicide - Cause of Death**



**Non-Intimate Partner Homicide Relationship to Offender**



# 2012 Year in Review

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## **Children and Domestic Violence Fatality**

- Of the 115 cases in this report, in 35% of them, there were children present during the crime. Of the 115 cases in this report, there were 106 children who lost a parent due to domestic violence.

## **Intimate Partner Domestic Violence Homicide**

- 71 of the homicides recorded in this report were intimate partner homicides.
  - 75% of those victims were female victims.
  - Of those females, 41% were current or former wives of the perpetrator.
  - 34% of the female victims of Intimate Partner homicide were between the ages of 26 and 35.
- 45% of the intimate partner homicides included in this report occurred when the victim ended the relationship or attempted to leave.
- 76% of the intimate partner homicides included in this report occurred in the victim's own home or the shared home of the victim and the perpetrator.
- 73% of the intimate partner homicide perpetrators in this report were male.
  - Of those males, 61% were between the ages of 26 and 45.
- 36% of the deaths in this report resulted from murder/suicide.
- 93% of the perpetrators of murder/suicides included in this report were male.

## **Firearms and Domestic Violence Fatalities**

- 52% of the intimate partner homicides in this report were the result of a shooting.
- 48% of the non-intimate partner homicides in this report were the result of a shooting.
- 76% of the domestic violence related suicides in this report were the result of a shooting.
- Total 51% of 115 cases from homicides.

## **Domestic Violence Related Suicide**

- 80% of the domestic violence related suicides in this report were male DV perpetrators.
- 40% of the domestic violence related suicides in this report occurred in the victim's home.

## **Protection From Abuse Orders**

- **90% of the homicide victims in this report did not have an active PFA at the time of the fatality.**

# FIRT Recommendations & Responses for Improving System Response

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The ultimate purpose for reviewing domestic violence fatalities is to reduce the incidence of such deaths. At the end of each case review, following the presentation of information, team members are asked if they have any recommendations for improving the system response to domestic violence.

The 2012 FIRT Recommendations were sent to relevant agencies and organizations throughout the State. The Responses to those Recommendations are listed below in **BOLD**.

The Domestic Violence Coordinating Council is extremely grateful to the participating agencies for their commitment towards the mission to improve the system's response to domestic violence. We are fortunate to have the high level of cooperation demonstrated by the agencies' response to the Fatal Incident Review Team's recommendations.

## CHILD, Inc.

### Recommendation:

Family Court and the Domestic Violence Advocacy Program staff should continue to ensure compliance 16 *Del. C.* §§ 903 and 904, which require mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect to the Division of Family Services.

### CHILD, Inc. Response:

**CHILD, Inc. agrees with the recommendation of the Fatal Incident Review Team and will ensure that staff comply with mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect. Staff are provided information on reporting child abuse and neglect to the Division of Family Services when they become employed by the agency. Additionally, staff receive regular training on mandatory reporting from both internal and external trainers.**

## Family Court


### Recommendation:

Family Court and the Domestic Violence Advocacy Program staff should continue to ensure compliance 16 *Del. C.* §§ 903 and 904, which require mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect to the Division of Family Services.


### Family Court Response:

**Family Court's Internal Policy Memorandum 06-006 entitled "Mandatory Reporting Requirement under the Child Abuse Prevention Act of 1997" ensures that all employees are aware of their responsibilities as mandatory reporters of child abuse. In addition to the policy, the Court has an internal operating procedure entitled "Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting" that sets forth the requirements that staff must follow if they witness abuse or neglect, or a child discloses such abuse or neglect to the employee. This procedure also addresses referrals made by Judges and Commissioners. The Court's policy and procedure, and adherence to them, continue to ensure compliance with Delaware's mandatory reporting laws.**





Notes:



Notes:

If you are in danger, please call 911.

## Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis 24 –Hour Hotline Numbers

### New Castle County

Domestic Violence	302-762-6110
Bi-Lingual	302-762-6110
Rape Crisis	302-761-9100
TTY	800-232-5460

### Northern Kent

Domestic Violence	302-678-3886
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### Kent & Sussex

Domestic Violence	302-422-8058
Rape Crisis	800-262-9800
Bi-lingual	302-745-9874

## DVCC Main Office

New Castle County Courthouse  
Suite 9425  
500 N. King Street  
Wilmington, DE 19801

Phone: 302-255-0405

Fax: 302-255-2236

[www.dvcc.delaware.gov](http://www.dvcc.delaware.gov)

## DVCC Kent & Sussex County Office

Milford State Service Center  
Suite 105  
13 S. W. Front Street  
Milford, DE 19963

Phone: 302-424-7238

Fax: 302-424-5311

[www.dvcc.delaware.gov](http://www.dvcc.delaware.gov)

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