

# Don't Look Away...

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## Believe, Speak, Act: Encouraging a Community to Come for Help

2012 Fatality Review Team Annual Report,  
A committee of the Pinellas County  
Domestic Violence Task Force



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For more information, please visit  
[www.dvtf.org](http://www.dvtf.org)

# In one year...

A probation officer, a former paramedic, a homemaker, a retired federal employee, two US Army veterans, a fast food employee, a retiree.

It could have been the paramedic who arrived to help you, could have been the homemaker next door, could have been the Army veteran you honored, could have been the fast food employee who served you breakfast. Every day in our community, someone you know or someone you meet might be a victim of domestic violence.

This year in Pinellas County we lost eighteen community members. Some victims, some perpetrators – all with family, friends, neighbors and coworkers who have been impacted.

In our everyday lives, on a monthly basis, we pay bills, read a community newsletter, attend club meetings, and refill prescriptions. This year in Pinellas County, every 28 days a community member was killed. As each month passes this year, consider the impact of the loss of another life in our community. What are you willing to do to make it stop?

*Believe* in who we are as a community

*Speak* the truth to end violence

*Act* to save lives

This report is dedicated to those victims we lost in 2012. We honor their contributions and we remember their lives.

# Executive Summary

## ***Mission:***

*The mission of the multi-disciplinary Pinellas County Fatality Review Team is to review domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities, and to identify public policy changes needed to prevent domestic violence.*

The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team is a subcommittee of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force, whose purpose is to promote the prevention of domestic and sexual violence, to enhance victim safety, and to hold batterers accountable.

The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team (FRT) reviewed 114 cases during the last thirteen years. In 2012, we reviewed eleven of those cases. All cases have been finalized in the criminal justice system prior to a review. Therefore, the eleven reviewed last year did not all occur in 2012. This report discusses our findings, the most prevalent trends/factors identified, and includes a tear off sheet as a quick reference. Year to year we continue to see similar trends.

The purpose of this report is threefold:

1. To honor victims and their loved ones as we learn from their tragedies and work to prevent future domestic partner homicides.
2. To raise awareness of the prevalence and devastation of domestic partner homicides and near fatalities.
3. To serve as a practical tool for those who are in a position to try to prevent domestic partner homicides and near fatalities in our community.

## **Reviewed cases met the following criteria:**

- Violence between intimate partners
- Homicides, homicide/suicides, and near fatalities
- Closed cases (investigated, prosecuted with a resolution if appropriate)
- Cases that occurred since 1996

Because we understand there are numerous facets to a case, it is important to note that we are limited by the information provided by FRT members and their access to that information.

## **Definitions and Terminology:**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is all too common in our community and takes many forms to include physical, emotional, verbal, financial, and sexual abuse. Homicide is the worst and ultimate form of IPV. Although Florida statutes define “domestic violence” as occurring among family or household members and includes siblings, parent/child, and other family in the home, our team focuses on intimate partners only (husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, ex partners, gay/lesbian couples). Therefore, throughout the majority of this document we will use the term “IPV” to describe our cases, and use the term “domestic violence” when referring to the legal term.

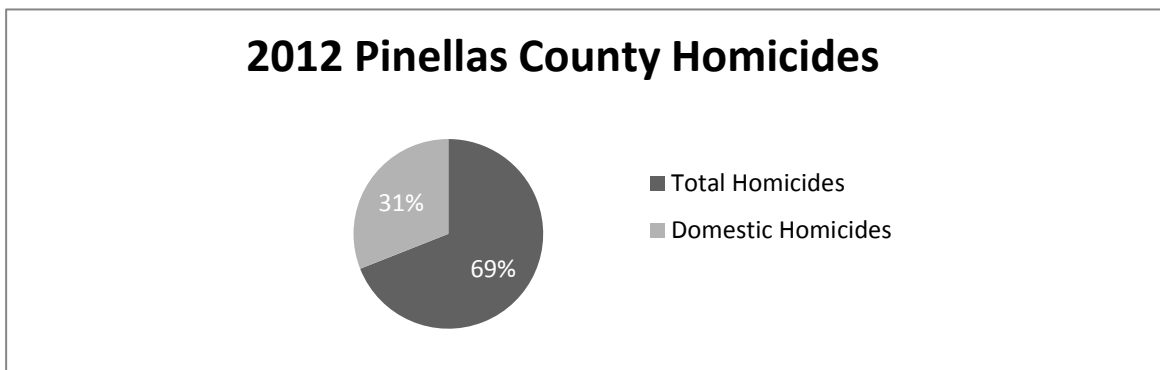
*Our hope is that EACH and EVERY member of our community recognizes that they have a role in preventing IPV homicides and near fatalities. It is not the responsibility of the criminal justice system alone. We all have a part.*

For more information on domestic partner homicide or this report, please contact:

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# This Year...

**2012** was a particularly terrible year for Pinellas County. We had 13 domestic intimate partner homicides, the highest number in over a decade. Equally alarming is that five of the cases were homicide/suicides, again, unusually high for our community. In all, 18 families were impacted by the death of a loved one, some at the hands of a partner, and others at their own hand after killing their partner. The average rate of domestic intimate partner homicides in Pinellas since 2000 has been 18% of all homicides, in 2012 that rate increased to 31%. This increase in lives lost shows us that we must take notice, we must **believe**, we must **speak**, we must **act** to prevent future deaths.



(using Florida Department of Law Enforcement 2012 semi-annual report and projecting for the full year)

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**NOTE:** This page can be torn off and used as a quick reference to help you recognize potentially lethal cases of intimate partner violence and provide a list of community resources to share with others.

*The Pinellas County Fatality Review Team would like to thank the following individuals for making this report possible: Suncoast Center, Inc. and the Juvenile Welfare Board for providing a meeting space; the report subcommittee- Frieda Widera-Largo Police Department, Chad Herman-Motivating for Positive Change, Courtney Hendrickson-The Haven of RCS, Cathy Stallings-Area Agency on Aging, and Jennifer Young, LMHC-Counseling for Your SELF; and the detectives from area law enforcement agencies who presented cases to the team.*

# Believe

## *Believe* it's a problem...still

Even after 40 years of domestic violence/intimate partner violence prevention and advocacy efforts, women are still being killed at an alarming rate. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 3 women are battered, raped, or stalked in their lifetime. Eighty-five percent (85%) of

victims of domestic violence are women (Bureau of Justice Statistics). Domestic violence is gender based with women being more likely to experience it than men. Thirty-three percent (33%) of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner (versus 4% of male homicide victims). In Pinellas County, 88% of our domestic/intimate partner homicides involve male perpetrators killing female victims.

*A domestic violence advocate who has been working in the field for over 25 years states that "the work is not yet done...we have to encourage the community to ask for help and to use the services that we have to offer."*

## *Believe* when women speak

Victims of intimate partner violence often fear that no one will believe them when they speak. One study reveals that 25% of those surveyed believe that women want to be abused. Furthermore, many believe that women can "just leave" versus recognizing that the abuser is responsible for stopping their violent behavior. In order for victims of intimate partner violence to feel safe to share their experiences, the community must

A probation officer encourages probationers to share their violence experiences "because domestic violence is so prevalent in our society I ask everyone about it".

be open and willing to hear their stories and to believe that she is not the problem. When she speaks about threats of physical harm or use of a weapon, strangulation or sexual assault (even in marriage), his prior criminal history, his substance abuse and his untreated mental health; know and believe that these are specific red flags that indicate a risk for domestic homicide. **Believe** her, without judgment or blame, it can save her life.

## *Believe* there is a solution

In the last 40 years of advocacy and empowerment, we have created a network of domestic violence centers to provide safety for women, we have implemented new laws to criminalize violence against women and we have created prevention programs to educate children and their families about healthy relationships. Through this work there has been an increase in safety and knowledge but it is not enough. In Pinellas county homicide cases, 70% involved family, friends, or coworkers knowing about the violence but not knowing what to do to help. **Believe** the solution is YOU.

A judge states "There are options. You do not deserve to be hurt by anyone. We can help".

If you are a boss/coworker, you can: ♦ Show you care about the safety of your coworkers/employees ♦ Hang informational posters in bathrooms ♦ Help coworkers with safety planning ♦ Have pamphlets and cards for the local DV center ♦ Give staff time off to get an injunction or go to court ♦ Help document incidents of abuse

# Speak

## Encourage women to *speak* up

Intimate partner violence breeds fear. Fear causes people to stop talking. Fear causes people to stop believing in themselves. The abuser tells their victim that nobody will listen, nobody cares, and nobody is going to help. We, as a community, cannot let this happen. When we see that someone is having a problem, we must be

there for them. We must encourage them to speak – to tell their story. When she speaks, she faces the fear and gains strength from those who support her. As a community we must embrace these conversations. Only then will women feel safe speaking, and hopefully **speak** before it's too late.

*A police officer states "Thank you for sharing what happened here tonight. I know it took a lot of courage".*

## Listen when women *speak*

Words are often a mask for the struggles that lie beneath the surface. If she speaks, you will begin to hear the conflict. Society questions why she doesn't just leave but inside she is conflicted with society's message to stay and fix it. She fears the violence, but questions her life alone. She knows that she must go, but struggles to solve the problems of leaving. If you really listen, you will hear her.

Listening when she **speaks** means being open without judgment to her struggle, honoring her trust and validating her choices.

*A teacher reminds us, "Be sensitive to the story being told."*

## *Speak* Up on Behalf of Women

You have a voice. When she speaks, you can speak too. Whether you stand by her while she tells her story or you speak to others about intimate partner violence, your voice must be heard. Speaking up can also mean calling the police when you suspect violence, talking to community groups, creating a safe work environment or offering to be a part of her safety plan (offer a ride or small amount of money, store items, make copies of important documents, send or receive emails). As a community we have to break the veil of silence on intimate partner violence. It is not a private family matter, it is not culturally acceptable, it is your business, she does want out and she needs YOU to **speak**.

*A father, "My daughter, your daughter, any daughter isn't going to be treated with respect by boys until we all say STOP! Every man and woman has to say it."*

If you are a friend or family member: ♦Listen non judgmentally♦Tell her what you can help with (money, a ride, storing documents, watching children) ♦ Hold the abuser accountable for the violence♦Model healthy relationships♦Learn to recognize the signs of abuse♦Report injunction violations♦Be involved in community efforts to end violence.

# Act

## *Act to Empower Victims*

Empowerment means to supply with a specific ability, like power. One of the first things an abuser does is to take away the power of the victim. Taking action to help restore her own power is a big step towards saving her life. When women have contact with Domestic Violence (DV) centers, the risk of domestic/intimate partner homicide is lowered. Domestic Violence centers offer safety, support, education, validation and resources that provide empowerment to victims. If you see a situation, be a better bystander by taking action and speaking up. Tell the abuser to stop, call the police, let her know she is not alone and give her the information for the local DV center. **Act** to empower her by knowing the local DV center and how to reach them.

*An employer states that she offers help by saying “I’m so sorry, how can I help?”*

## *Act to Help Women Leave*

One of the most important questions we can ask when someone shares they are in a dangerous relationship is not “why don’t you leave”, but rather “how can I help you leave”. As a friend, co-worker, or neighbor you can offer a little extra money, a ride to the local domestic violence center or provide a place for her to keep her important papers. Remember, leaving is a process and only she knows when and if she can leave. You need to support her decisions and know that she is the expert in her situation. Offer safe options like contacting the DV center for safety planning. Follow through with what you tell her you will do; she needs to know others can be trusted. Take action to learn about injunctions for protection as a tool to assist her in leaving. Although leaving is a risky time, injunctions make his behavior punishable by law. **Act** to help her leave; with safety in mind, any step you take can make a difference.

*A business owner says, “I keep cards for the domestic violence center behind the counter, just in case.”*

## *Act to Build Communities*

Learning about intimate partner violence is the first step in taking action to build a better, violence free community. But, you must not stop there. Take action to learn about local resources to disseminate information, not only about DV centers, but injunctions for protection, batterer intervention programs (BIP), substance treatment and mental health providers. Work to eliminate stigma against domestic violence/intimate partner violence and domestic violence centers. As a community, we need to build an equality-focused environment for both adults and children in which we continue to teach non-violence. Children learn from the adults around them, therefore equality and non-violence must be taught and modeled for them. **Act** to build a community that is safe and violence free to protect your neighbors, your family and your co-workers from domestic/intimate partner homicide.

*A teacher says, “I rallied several people to form a unit of support for the victim and to find ways to help.”*

If you are a neighbor or bystander: ♦ Call the police if you hear a disturbance ♦ Ask her how you can help ♦ Be her eyes and ears for law enforcement ♦ Develop a code word with her that she can use if she needs you to call the police ♦ Be involved in neighborhood efforts to end violence

Tear Off Here

# Trends

The following trends were found in the 114 cases that have been reviewed:

## No Injunction

Only 14% of the victims had filed for an injunction for protection.

## Firearm Used

50% of the cases involved a firearm as the weapon of choice.

## Others Knew

In 70% of cases, friends, family, coworkers, and/or neighbors knew about intimate partner violence.

## No Contact

Only 10% of the cases involved a victim having contact with a domestic violence center.

## Substance Use

Abuse of substances was a contributing factor in 74% of the cases. Substance use includes alcohol, marijuana, prescribed medication and synthetic drugs.

## Criminal History

In 69% of the cases reviewed, the perpetrator had a criminal history.

## Male

## Perpetrator

89% of the cases involved a male perpetrator and female victim.

## System

## Involvement

In 65% of the cases, the couple had been involved in the system in some way.

## No Batterer Intervention

In 89% of the cases, the abuser had not been referred to or attended a batterer intervention program. In 49 (42%) of the cases, the perpetrators had been previously arrested for domestic violence crimes yet only 12 (25%) had been ordered to batterer intervention.

These trends are in line with national trends and are signs of high risk for domestic homicide. Along with the trends listed above, other warning signs include:

Previous Threats to Harm or Kill – Previous Strangulation – Previous Incident of Forced Sex – Jealous or Controlling Behavior – Separation Issues

These warning signs must be taken seriously and require you to **BELIEVE, SPEAK, ACT**



# Pinellas County Resources:

We encourage you to come for help and to support others in their efforts to get help.

For more information regarding **shelter services, support groups, safety planning and general information** about intimate partner violence, Pinellas County has two domestic violence centers:

North of Ulmerton Road  
The Haven of RCS  
727-442-4128  
[www.rcspinellas.org/haven](http://www.rcspinellas.org/haven)

South of Ulmerton Road  
CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse)  
727-895-4912  
[www.casa-stpete.org](http://www.casa-stpete.org)

For **information and support for seniors** who are being impacted by crime and intimate partner violence, please contact:

Senior Victim Advocate Program  
Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, Inc.  
727-570-9696 ext. 259  
[www.agingcarefl.org](http://www.agingcarefl.org)

For **information and assistance with substance abuse treatment**, please contact:

Operation PAR  
[www.operationpar.org](http://www.operationpar.org)  
1-888-727-6398

For assistance regarding **mental health issues and support**, please contact:

Suncoast Center for Mental Health  
(727) 388-1220  
[www.suncoastcenter.org](http://www.suncoastcenter.org)

Directions for Mental Health  
[www.healthehurt.com](http://www.healthehurt.com)

Gulfcoast Jewish Family and Community Services  
727-479-1800  
[www.gulfcoastjewishfamilyandcommunityservices.org](http://www.gulfcoastjewishfamilyandcommunityservices.org)

Personal Enrichment Through Mental Health Services  
(PEHMS)  
24 hour mental health assistance line: 727-541-4628  
24 hour suicide hotline: 727-791-3131

To request a **speaker at your child's school**, Pinellas County has two programs with staff who can come and speak about intimate partner violence, its effect on children and to provide education to students on how to prevent abuse.

North of Ulmerton Road  
Peacemakers Program  
727-441-2029 ext. 220

South of Ulmerton Road  
Peacemakers Program  
<http://www.casa-stpete.org/peacemakers.htm>  
727-895-4912

**Injunctions for protection** can be filed at one of three court buildings in Pinellas County, based on the address of the victim. You may also call them at 727-464-7000 or visit their website at [www.pinellasclerk.org](http://www.pinellasclerk.org)

Civil Court Records  
315 Court Street, Room 170  
Clearwater, FL 33756

Criminal Justice Center  
14250 49th Street North  
Clearwater, FL 33762

St. Petersburg Branch Office  
545 First Avenue North, Room 101  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

To **search criminal history records free of charge**, Pinellas County has two ways to access information:

Pinellas County Sherriff's Department-Jail Intake  
<http://pcsoweb.com/InmateBooking/>

Pinellas County Clerk of Court  
[www.pinellasclerk.org](http://www.pinellasclerk.org)

For **information about Batterer's Intervention Programs** contact The Haven of RCS, CASA or your local Victim Advocate associated with your law enforcement agency.

If you are a member of clergy or community leader: ♦Talk about intimate partner violence  
♦Be available to speak and advocate on the issue ♦Partner with DV centers to keep women safe ♦Hold abusers accountable