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# **Building a Safer Community:**

**A Coordinated Community Response  
to Prevent Intimate Partner Homicide**



2014 Fatality Review Team Annual Report,  
A committee of the Pinellas County  
Domestic Violence Task Force  
Published May 2015  
[www.pinellasdvtf.wikispaces.com](http://www.pinellasdvtf.wikispaces.com)

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# A Foundation of Safety

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This report is a “blueprint” on how to build safer communities. We are all faced with the difficult task of building a safe community where adults, teens and children can feel secure and free from intimate partner violence (IPV). This task is accomplished by a coordinated community response.

Some may ask why and how should I take part in this task? A safer, healthier community benefits us all. Each individual is a piece of the community framework and together we build safe foundations. When one person is affected by IPV, it rocks the foundation of the community.

During 2014, five people were murdered in Pinellas County as a result of IPV. Several trends, which remain unchanged during the past 14 years, continue to diminish the safety of those in the community. These trends include:

- ◆ In 90% of cases reviewed, ***no injunction for protection*** was filed.
- ◆ In 88% of the cases reviewed, there was a ***male perpetrator and female victim***  
(Our team recognizes that IPV can impact both genders - as well as same sex couples; however, due to statistics indicating that 85% of victims of IPV are women and since 88% of our cases involved a male perpetrator and female victim, for ease in reading we use she for victim and he for perpetrator in this document)
- ◆ In 87% of the cases reviewed, the victim had ***no contact with a domestic violence center.***
- ◆ In 80% of the cases reviewed, there was ***no Batterer Intervention Program ordered by a judge in cases where it could have been.***
- ◆ In 72% of cases reviewed, ***substance use by one or both parties was reported.***
- ◆ In 70% of cases reviewed, ***friends/family/coworkers report knowing about previous abuse.***
- ◆ In 68% of cases reviewed, ***the perpetrator had a criminal history.***

Building a safer community requires establishing a safe foundation. The framework built upon this foundation is a coordinated community response. Then, like the common rooms of a house, a network of services and resources are available to all. Finally, laws focused on protection and safety related to intimate partner violence form a protective roof. Each piece comes together to create a house, all built to withstand the challenging outside influences that include a lack of accountability, inequality, myths/stereotypes, and mainstream and social media distortions.



**SAFETY**

# The Framework for Action

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The framework of a safe community is a coordinated community response consisting of people working together for the same purpose.

A coordinated community response requires all members of the community to participate. When one deviates or is not engaged, the framework is at risk of being unsteady or misaligned. Each person working together allows for strong bonds between groups that may otherwise be separate. These bonds create community steadiness and alignment.

Judges, lawyers, police, firefighters, teachers, therapists, neighbors, clerks, store owners, daycare workers, coaches, city and county employees, legislators, retirees, parents, nurses, doctors, factory workers, business owners, leasing agents, hairdressers, wait staff, cooks, dentists, optometrists, child protection workers, guardian ad litem, transportation and delivery professionals, military personnel, bankers, the unemployed, the disabled, the homeless, emergency medical personnel, massage therapists, spa service professionals, foster parents, guardians, non-custodial parents, grandparents, spiritual leaders, members of spiritual communities, school bus drivers, and building tradespeople. These are the people of our community.

Everyone must work together with common understandings, beliefs and objectives, such as:

- 1). Focusing on the Offender: The batterer is solely responsible for the criminal behavior. The focus of change needs to be totally on the batterer. Statements such as “Why does she stay?” are not the focus. The focus of change needs to be “Why does he hit?”.
- 2). Recognizing Patterns: Intimate partner violence is not a one time incident or event. It is a coercive pattern based on a power differential that is not easily described or even initially recognized.
- 3). Believing and Listening: As the person who has experienced the abuse, the victim is the most important source of information needed to identify the patterns of violence and secure her safety. She must be listened to and there MUST be a strong effort to understand and support her throughout the entire community.
- 4). Making Services Available: Services must be easy to access and specialized for victims of intimate partner violence to empower them to continue to be strong community members.
- 5). Taking Action: Actions are the foundation of change. Each community member, from neighbors to judges, must be educated and act responsibly to end the coercive patterns of abuse. Everyone must be prepared to



***DO SOMETHING!***

# Rooms for Everyone

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Just as a house is made of several common rooms, a community needs several services to build safety. It is important to create spaces where common goals can become action. Our community has organized in common areas, such as the legal and law enforcement community, social services (DCF, drug, mental health, and disability), education and employment systems, domestic violence services, community services (spiritual, neighborhoods), and within the medical community.

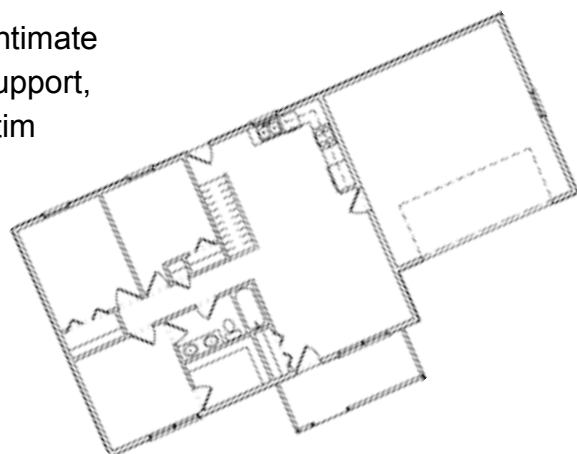
Like the kitchen provides what is necessary for a healthy life, the law enforcement/legal community works to address safety by making arrests, providing access to legal services, helping victims navigate the criminal justice system, accessing victim compensation funds, implementing safety plans and providing referrals. The agencies in our community working together in this room are Gulfcoast Legal Services, Clearwater Bar Foundation, Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice and Victim Advocates.

The family room provides the opportunity to meet just as social service agencies provide opportunities to address behaviors, needs, and various issues thus helping people to successfully create a safe, violence free life. The agencies in our community working together in this room are substance abuse and mental health providers, batterer intervention providers, child protection agencies and sexual assault service providers.

The living room provides opportunities for discussion similar to organizations focused on addressing violence who educate the community and increase awareness while building toward a safe, non-violent community. The agencies in our community working together in this room are the domestic violence centers (providing the Peacemaker Program), the school board, mental health agencies (Suncoast Center providing dating/sexual violence awareness), and The Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force (providing Be A Better Bystander workshops).

The dining room is a place to gather and reflect. Community groups work together to make Pinellas County a safer place to live while encouraging people to get involved and effectively report crimes like intimate partner violence. The groups working together in this room are Jewish Alliance to End Domestic Abuse (JAEDA), neighborhood watch groups and homeowners associations.

The bedroom is a place of rest, safety, and rejuvenation. Intimate partner violence services provide safe shelter, emotional support, information, coordination, and collaboration to increase victim safety and hold batterers accountable. The organizations working together in this room are domestic violence centers and the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force. Everyone works together to



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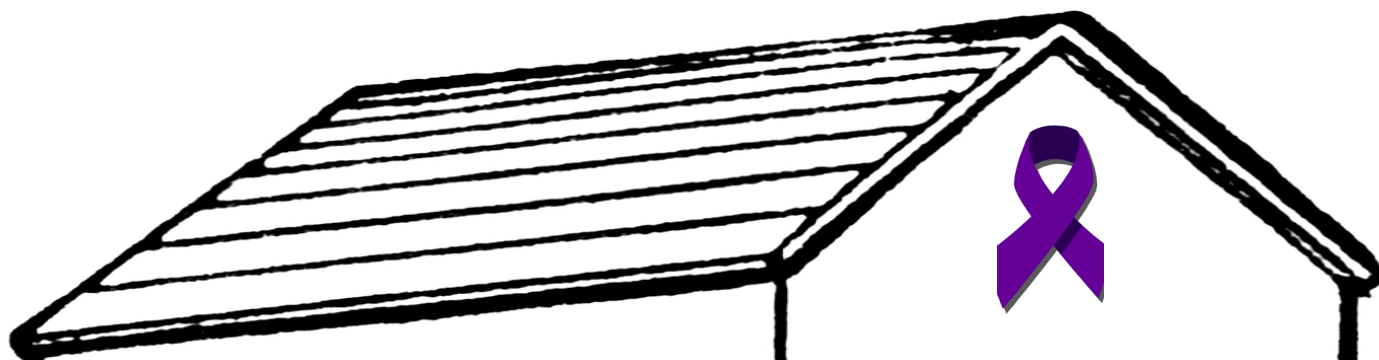
# A Roof for Protection

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Just as a house cannot be safe without a solid roof, a community cannot be safe without legal protections and the means to enforce them. These legal protections are what enable the people and the programs of our coordinated community response to carry out the work they do to respond to and prevent intimate partner violence.

Laws and statutes have evolved over the years in Florida to help secure the immediate safety of victims of intimate partner violence and their children as well as to increase their financial resources and emotional well-being. So just how do Florida laws and statutes protect the home?

- ◆ Statutes govern domestic violence (DV) centers and provide safety by keeping services free, confidential and locations private. (FL Stat. § 90.5036 & 39.901-908)
- ◆ Statutes govern Law Enforcement and create safety by providing resources to victims that include DV services, follow preferred arrest policy and arrest over victim objection, provide medical assistance, provide injunction information, determine primary aggressor (discouraging arrest of both parties), document injuries, and make arrests for violation of criminal no contact order. (FL Stat. § 741.29)
- ◆ Statutes govern Prosecutors and provide safety by requiring specialized DV units which are trained in DV, prosecuting DV as a criminal act - even over victim objection, and investigating the criminal background of all defendants for consideration by the court when setting bond or sentencing. (FL Stat. § 741.2901)
- ◆ Statutes govern Judges and provide safety by considering all relevant information and safety of victims when setting bonds and when releasing defendants. They also address injunctions for protection by recognizing that the safety of the victim may require immediate removal of the respondent from the joint residence, ensure the parties have a clear understanding of the terms of the injunction, inform parties on the penalties for failure to comply, and can consider ordering BIP. (FL Stat. § 741.2902)
- ◆ Statutes create Injunctions for Protection and provide safety by outlining specific guidelines of eligibility, what constitutes criminal and civil violations, outlining responsibilities of the clerk of court in the application process, requiring that sheriffs provide notification to abuser, and law enforcement provides assistance to victim to obtain rights to home. These statutes also outline guidelines for prohibiting contact, removal of firearm from perpetrator and establishing temporary parenting. (FL. Stat. § 741.30, 741.31, 784.046-0485, & 790.233)
- ◆ Additional statutes that support victim safety include relocation assistance, victim crime compensation, victim address confidentiality program, and employer requirement for leave of absence for victim to address court, medical or safety issues. (FL Stat. § 741.313, 741.403-405, & 960.05-14)



# To Weather a Storm

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To build a safer community we must pay attention to the positive and negative influences that impact a community. These influences can damage or strengthen the foundation of every structure within that community. Much like the weather impacts our daily lives, there are hurricanes, rainstorms, cloudy days, snow, sunny days and even rainbows that dictate how we function. Sometimes it takes hurricanes to teach us to appreciate the rainbows. And when we rebuild, we find new resources and strength to create a stronger community.

Adverse weather, like negative community influences, can negatively impact a community's ability to keep people safe. Problems within the court and child welfare systems, a lack of accountability, inequality and gender bias in the sports and entertainment industry, society's misunderstanding of intimate partner violence and social/mainstream media's influence can all disrupt the safety of a community.

Favorable weather, like positive community influences, can enhance victim safety. Positive influences in our community include increased batterer accountability, increased victim and survivor support, increased awareness and responsibility, positive role models, and more accurate reporting in the media including opportunities for victims' voices to be heard through social media.

Programs in our community have worked to increase victim safety and batterer accountability. The Civil Injunction Improvement Grant provides a vehicle to improve the civil injunction process. The Substance Abuse Early Intervention Program provides power and control education to substance abusers. The Be A Better Bystander Training provides community education on effective reporting and intervention of intimate partner violence. Primary Prevention activities educate youth about healthy relationships. Dating Violence Awareness programs educate teens in the school system.

The impact of outside influences, positive or negative, can be an opportunity to strengthen the community. If every person, every program, every system works together, then we

**BUILD A SAFER COMMUNITY!**





# Building A Report

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As the multi-disciplinary Fatality Review Team (FRT), our Mission in building a safer community is to review domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities for public policy changes needed to prevent domestic violence.

The FRT 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 **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 such deaths.
2. To **raise** awareness of the prevalence and devastation of intimate partner violence (IPV) homicides and near fatalities.
3. To **serve** as a practical tool for those who are in a position to prevent IPV homicides and near fatalities in our community.

It is important to note that because there are so many facets to a case, our reviews are limited by the information provided by FRT members and their access to that information.

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

***Our hope is that EACH and EVERY member of our community recognizes that they have a role in preventing IPV homicides and near fatalities. We all have a part in creating safety.***

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

Frieda Widera, Chairperson, Fatality Review Team  
Largo Police Department, 201 Highland Avenue, Largo, FL 33770  
727-586-7481 [fwidera@largo.com](mailto:fwidera@largo.com)

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#### **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 State Statute defines "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 use the term "IPV" to describe our cases, and use the term "domestic violence" when referring to the legal term.



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# Renovations for Change

The Fatality Review Team's (FRT) role in building a safer community is to review cases and educate the community via an annual report. The FRT has reviewed 130 cases during the last fourteen years. In 2014, we reviewed six of those cases. This report discusses the most prevalent trends/factors identified, a blueprint for building a safer community, and this tear off sheet that can be used as a quick reference. Year to year we continue to see similar trends and recognize that community involvement is imperative to preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) and intimate partner homicide. Prevention of intimate partner homicide requires recognizing trends that are red flags. The danger level for a victim is heightened when any of these indicators are present:

- ◆ No injunction for protection filed by victim
- ◆ No contact with a domestic violence center
- ◆ Male perpetrator and female victim
- ◆ Substance use by one or both parties
- ◆ Friends/family/co workers/others knowing about abuse but not knowing how to help
- ◆ Perpetrator had a criminal history
- ◆ Previous threats to harm or kill
- ◆ Previous strangulation
- ◆ Previous forced sex
- ◆ Jealous or controlling behavior
- ◆ Separation or ending relationship issues

**What part can you play in the renovations for change?** If you recognize any of the red flags above among your friends or family, in your neighborhood, at work or church or the grocery store **ACT**.

Focus on the offender – In IPV the perpetrator is usually male. If you see some type of violence, question in your mind, “why is he doing that?” Do not blame her for being the victim.

Recognize Patterns – Friends and family often report knowing of the abuse. If you recognize a pattern of the victim seeming to be afraid or not herself or if he seems to be demeaning or controlling, call a domestic violence center, a batterer intervention provider or a mental health center to ask for advice.

Believe and Listen – Let her know you are there for her. Believe her. If she asks you NOT to intervene at this time DO NOT. However, let her know you are there for her when she is ready. Be supportive.

Make services available- Be aware of all the services available in your community that help with IPV. Find out what domestic violence centers, mental health agencies, law enforcement and The Domestic Violence Task Force do in your area. Know what role the Clerks Office and victim advocates play in obtaining injunctions for protection. Know who to contact for dating violence or elder abuse information.

Take Action – Let victims know you are there if they need you. Ask questions. Be informed. Call the police if you hear or see someone being abused.

There are many resources on the back of this page that will enable you to make needed renovations for change. Use them to help us all

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# Our Resources for a Safer Community

TEAR OFF HERE

For assistance regarding **shelter services, support groups, safety planning and general information** about intimate partner violence or **school based programs and education** about intimate partner violence, sexual violence, healthy relationships, preventing abuse, and reporting dating violence in schools there are two domestic violence centers who can assist you:

North of Ulmerton Road  
**The Haven of RCS**  
727-442-4128 (24 hours)  
727-441-2029 (Outreach)  
[www.rcspinellas.org/haven](http://www.rcspinellas.org/haven)

South of Ulmerton Road  
**CASA**  
(727)895-4912  
[www.casa-stpete.org/peacemakers.htm](http://www.casa-stpete.org/peacemakers.htm)

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

Directions for Living  
727-524-4464  
[www.directionsforliving.com](http://www.directionsforliving.com)

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

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

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

Operation PAR <a href="http://www.operationpar.org">www.operationpar.org</a> 1-888-727-6398	Westcare Gulfcoast <a href="http://www.westcare.com">www.westcare.com</a> 727-502-0188
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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 on legal services**:

Clearwater Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service  
(727)461-4880  
Gulfcoast Legal Services Clearwater (727)443-0657  
Gulfcoast Legal Services St. Petersburg  
(727) 821-0726 [www.gulfcoastlegal.org](http://www.gulfcoastlegal.org)

For assistance with **sexual assault services, school based information on dating violence or general mental health services**, contact:

Suncoast Center, Inc  
Counseling Services (727)388-1200  
Rape Crisis Line (727) 530-RAPE  
[www.suncoastcenter.org/Trauma.php](http://www.suncoastcenter.org/Trauma.php)

Pinellas County School Board Dating Violence/Bullying reporting [www.anonymoualerts.com/pinellascs/](http://www.anonymoualerts.com/pinellascs/)

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

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 Intervention Programs** contact The Haven of RCS, CASA or your local Victim Advocate associated with your law enforcement agency.

For **reporting and addressing child abuse**:

Abuse hotline 1-800-96-ABUSE  
Eckerd Community Alternatives  
main # (727)456-0600, concerns # (727)456-6110 option 5  
[www.eckerd.org](http://www.eckerd.org)

Child Protection Investigation Division, Pinellas  
County Sheriff's Office (727)582-3800 [www.pcsoweb.com](http://www.pcsoweb.com)