



Protecting Pinellas:
Working Together to Save Lives

2015 Pinellas County Fatality Review Team Report

A Look at the Last 15 Years and
a Vision for the Future

A committee of the Pinellas County

Domestic Violence Task Force

Published May 2016

<http://pinellasdvtaskforce.wix.com/pinellasdvtaskforce>

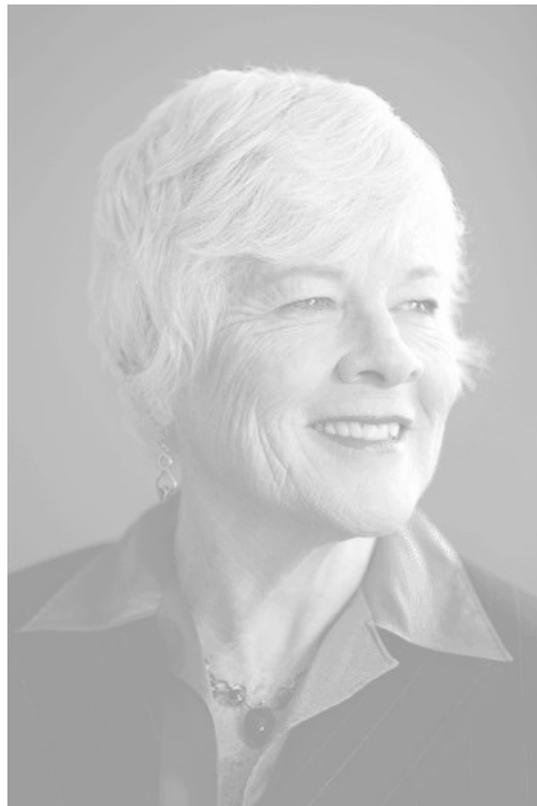
Dedicated to a Visionary



This report is dedicated to Linda Osmundson who was one of the most powerful and driven advocates who devoted most of her life to ending domestic violence.

Linda has an extensive list of accomplishments, but she will be remembered most for her fierce commitment to helping victims of intimate partner violence as well as creating a new 100 bed shelter for *CASA* (Community Action Stops Abuse) in 2015. As the Executive Director of *CASA* from 1989 through 2015, Linda worked to save lives, keep victims and their children safe, and educate not only the community but many countries around the world about the impact of intimate partner violence. Linda was a long time member of the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force and she inspired the development of the Fatality Review Team. Without Linda, this annual report may never have been possible.

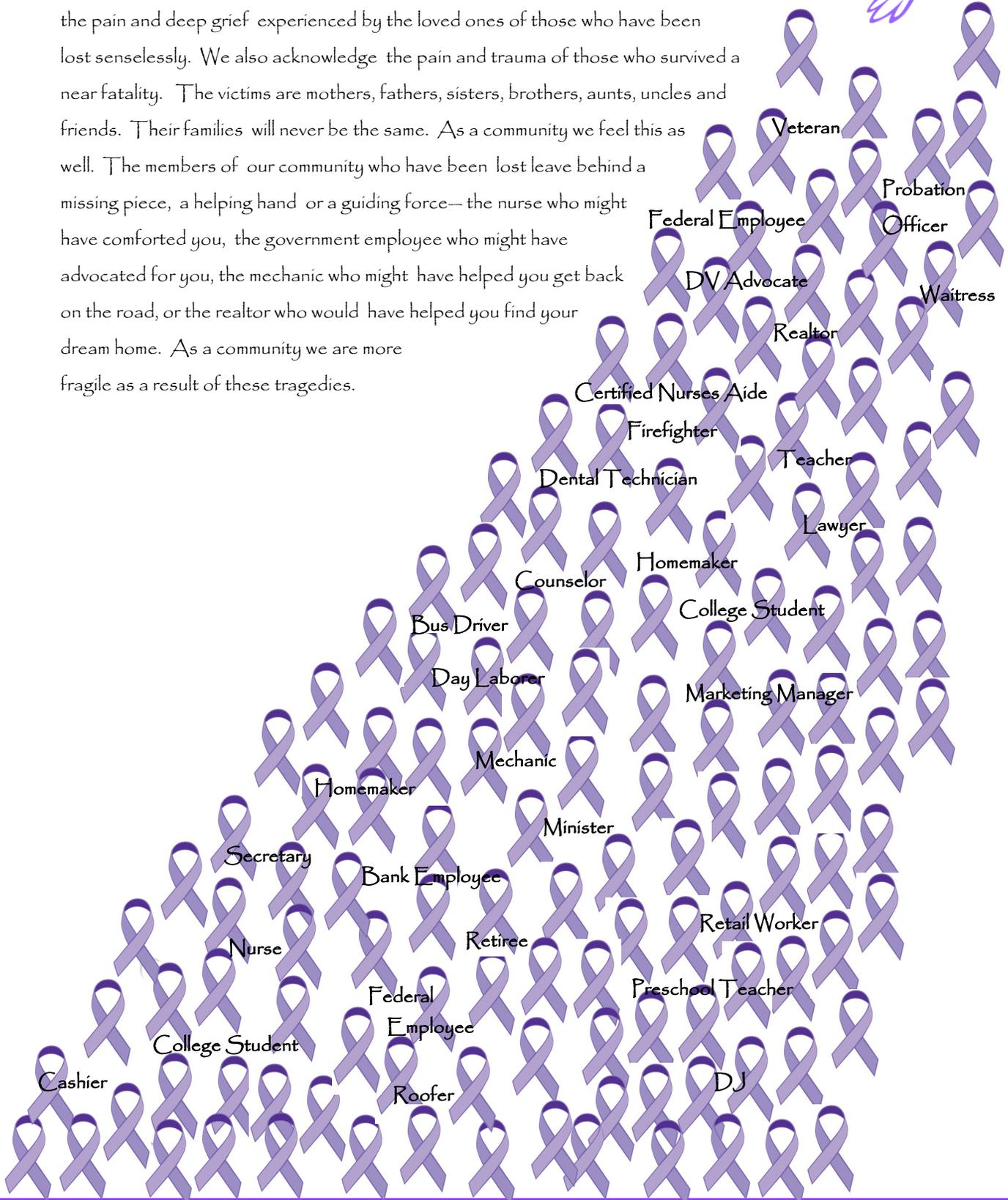
Linda's passing is a major loss to our community, family, friends, and survivors. However, her legacy and passion will live on through her accomplishments. She truly was a strong and tenacious leader. We honor her by keeping the passion alive in the movement to end intimate partner violence.



In memory and honor of...



One hundred and thirty eight community members lives lost or forever changed. Our community is saddened by the tragedy of intimate partner violence. We acknowledge the pain and deep grief experienced by the loved ones of those who have been lost senselessly. We also acknowledge the pain and trauma of those who survived a near fatality. The victims are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles and friends. Their families will never be the same. As a community we feel this as well. The members of our community who have been lost leave behind a missing piece, a helping hand or a guiding force—the nurse who might have comforted you, the government employee who might have advocated for you, the mechanic who might have helped you get back on the road, or the realtor who would have helped you find your dream home. As a community we are more fragile as a result of these tragedies.



A Look at Our History:

Creating Safety in Pinellas



1999

The first discussions about convening a Fatality Review Team took place. Fifteen community leaders were invited to discuss convening a Pinellas Fatality Review Team. At the time, there were only 6 teams in existence in FL. The first meeting was led by Linda Osmundson from CASA. The Haven of RCS and CASA were on board from the start, while others were reluctant. The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office was the first law enforcement agency to commit to join the team.

2000

The groundwork was done to establish the Pinellas County Team. Several individuals attended a Fatality Review conference to gather information. The Florida legislature passed a law protecting Fatality Review Teams resulting in the State Attorney's Office agreeing to join. The team held their first meeting and established agreements that have guided and shaped our team throughout the past 15 years.

2001

We completed our first yearly report.

2003

The Fatality Review Team began to include intimate partner near fatality cases for case reviews. Prior to this change, the Fatality Review Team only reviewed intimate partner homicide cases. It was decided that near fatality cases are beneficial to review because it is possible to speak with the survivor and gather more information.

2005

The Fatality Review Team developed the mission statement and objectives, creating a distinct focus for the team. CASA began a friends and family group based on findings that in a majority of the cases reviewed, friends and/or family frequently knew about the violence and threats but did not know how to help.

2006

The Team developed a list of information needed from detectives who would present cases. It was important for detectives to know what information to bring to the table. We began tracking the year that the death/case occurred and additional information about the perpetrator (example: mental health issues, unemployed, underemployed, etc).

2008

The Team developed a risk assessment tool for law enforcement to use in the field. Small pocket sized laminated cards were distributed to local law enforcement agencies.

2009

The Team made a shift in format for the annual report, putting more emphasis on engaging the community. Reports began to have "action needed" sections and focused on prevention, believing and acting, standing up, and building a safer community together.

2015

The Fatality Review Team revised the mission statement and is honored to have completed 15 years of reviews. The mission of the multi-disciplinary Pinellas County Fatality Review Team is to review intimate partner fatalities and near fatalities, to identify patterns and trends, and to generate a report for the community with

A Look at Our Accomplishments:

Actions to Protect Pinellas

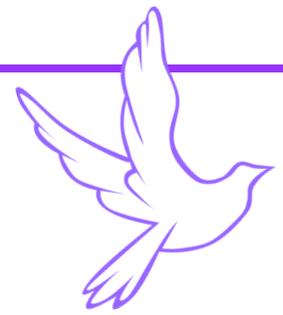


As a result of the Fatality Review Team, identified trends from the past 15 years have been addressed in the following ways:

- ◆ **Education about Batterer Intervention Programs (BIP):** Training was provided to judges giving information about batterers and their tactics. Also, author and researcher Dr. Edward Gondolf was brought in to educate the community on the success rate of BIP treatment in decreasing intimate partner violence. These efforts were in hopes of increasing the number of batterers ordered or referred to BIP treatment.
- ◆ **Education for Police Officers:** Mark Wynn, retired police lieutenant and nationally recognized speaker from TN, was brought in for a training to help the community work together with law enforcement to revise and implement policy and procedures focused on increasing arrest rates and saving lives.
- ◆ **Changing Language:** Jackson Katz, a nationally known speaker, presented at a conference to help the community and media use language that truly depicts violence. For example, “A woman was murdered” vs. “Victim killed in love spat”. The Team also created a booklet “Say This, Not That” to provide awareness and alternatives to violent language.
- ◆ **Education for Physicians:** Training was provided for physicians at Bayfront Medical Center to discuss how to recognize signs of intimate partner violence and what to do once they are recognized.
- ◆ **Specialized Training for Child Protective Investigators (CPI):** The Task Force assisted in the coordination of creating five training modules to present to newly hired CPI and Eckerd (case management) employees. The modules address ways to assist women and children with the help they need from domestic violence centers and tips for writing reports that help victims and enhance their safety.
- ◆ **Advocacy Training for Providers:** David Mandel, international trainer and consultant, was brought in to train CPI and BIP providers in the best ways to advocate for victims within the court system.
- ◆ **Improvements to Injunction for Protection Process:** The Task Force consulted with the civil court who received a grant to improve our civil injunction court system in the areas of increasing referrals to batterer treatment and creating a system for tracking and surrendering weapons once a person is the subject of an injunction. The Task Force also created a packet of information to help victims with the injunction process including court proceedings and what to do when violations of the injunction occur.
- ◆ **Training for the Community:** Be A Better Bystander training was created and implemented to give the community information about the many different options available for reporting intimate partner violence and supporting victims.
- ◆ **Early Intervention for those Struggling with Addiction:** Westcare and Pinellas County Ex-offender Re-entry Coalition (PERC) created an early intervention curriculum for men being treated in residential substance abuse facilities to address their power and control issues. A pilot program found that even though none of the men in the group had been arrested for domestic violence, all admitted to issues of power and control and worked on addressing these issues.
- ◆ **Information for Use in the Field by Police Officers:** Pocket sized cards were created and disseminated to law enforcement with questions to identify cases with higher lethality and the importance of encouraging victims to contact the local domestic violence center for safety planning.
- ◆ **Brochures Created to Address Special Populations:** Brochures were created for three specific groups: seniors, black women, and friends or family of victims of intimate partner violence. The brochures helped with safety planning and resources to contact for help.

Trends Tell the Story:

What We Know Now



After fifteen years of reviews, looking at 138 different cases, patterns have emerged and solidified in what we refer to as trends. These trends help us to know the reality of intimate partner homicide and near fatalities in Pinellas County.

- ◆ We know that **an injunction had not been obtained** in 89% of the cases.
- ◆ We know that **87% of victims had no contact with a domestic violence center.**
- ◆ We know that in Pinellas County a **preponderance of intimate partner homicides and near fatalities are perpetrated by men** (86% of cases).
- ◆ We know that a **Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) was not ordered** in 79% of the cases where there was a potential to (17 cases had injunctions and 56 cases had domestic violence arrests making 73 cases where BIP might have been ordered). In 15 of 73 cases there was a BIP referral or order.
- ◆ We know that in Pinellas County **substance use by one or both parties contributed to the incident** in 72% of the cases. The use of substances by a perpetrator exacerbates the violence whereas use by a victim impedes their ability to see red flags and potentially escape.
- ◆ We know that in a majority of Pinellas County cases (71%) **family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers knew about the violence occurring but did not know how to intervene.** If these individuals had helpful tools to aid victims and the ability to intervene, these deaths (or near fatalities) may have been prevented.
- ◆ We know that **economic issues are involved in a majority of cases in Pinellas County.** Individuals with incomes less than \$20,000 are overrepresented with 69% of cases.
- ◆ We know that **there was system involvement** in 62% of the cases in Pinellas County. The violence in these cases was not occurring in isolation. Agencies had contact with the couple.
- ◆ **Firearms were the weapons used** in 46% of the cases. While the use of other methods such as stabbing are attributed to homicide and near fatality, firearm involvement always resulted in death. Of the cases involving intimate partner homicide followed by suicide of the perpetrator, 94% (31 of 33) involved a firearm.
- ◆ We also know that...
 - ⇒ The **perpetrator was unemployed** in 56% of the cases.
 - ⇒ The **perpetrator had mental health issues** in 40% of the cases.
 - ⇒ The **perpetrator had been arrested for prior domestic violence** in 41% of the cases and 70% had a criminal history.
 - ⇒ There were **recent separation issues** in 40% of the cases.

After fifteen years of identifying trends, we know that there are four trends that we believe fundamentally contribute to the likelihood of an intimate partner fatality. These trends are: victims had not obtained an injunction for protection (89%), victims had no contact with a domestic violence center (87%), no batterer intervention program (BIP) order/referral was made (79%), and others knew about the violence but did not know what to do to help (71%). As a Task Force and a community, these are the four areas where we can make direct and impactful change. By collectively addressing these trends, we believe we can prevent future fatalities.

Details Paint the Picture

More of What We Know



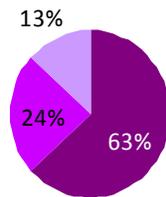
It is important to note that because there are so many facets to a case, our reviews are limited by the information provided by FRT members and their access to that information. Reviewed cases met the following criteria:

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

138 Total Cases

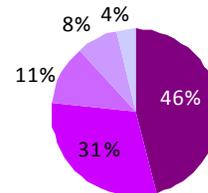
Type of Case

■ Homicide ■ Homicide/Suicide ■ Near Fatality



Weapon/Method

■ Firearm ■ Knife/Stabbing ■ Strangulation
■ Blunt Trauma ■ Other



- ◆ The parties had **children** in 37% of the cases. Of those cases, **children witnessed** the event in 45% of the cases.
- ◆ The **length of relationships** ranged from several weeks to over 30 years, with the majority (49%) being 1-5 years.
- ◆ The **age** of victims ranged from 16 to over 80 years old and the age of the perpetrators ranged from 22 to over 80 years old. The majority of victims (63%) were in the age group 18-45 years old and perpetrators (62%) were in the age group 22-45 years old.
- ◆ There was an **age difference** of 6 years or more in 44% of the cases.

National Lethality Indicators

Local and national studies consistently demonstrate that the danger level for the victim is heightened when any of these indicators is present.

Prior threats to kill

Prior use of a weapon or threats with a weapon

Prior strangulation

Forced sex

Jealous, possessive behavior and/or controlling behavior

Firearm in the home

Separation issues

An Expression of Gratitude

Our Community Working Together



Fifteen years of intimate partner fatality and near fatality reviews. One hundred thirty-eight cases filled with painful details. Trends identified and shared. Lessons learned. Recommendations given. Our review team has met time and time again over the last 15 years to glean what we can from these senseless tragedies and to find a way to make our reviews meaningful. We create annual reports to honor victims and their loved ones, learn from deaths, raise awareness, work toward prevention of further deaths, and serve as a practical tool for the community. We have discovered that while a small number of the cases we report on had limited contact with the system and few lethality indicators, most cases did have contact with the system, friends or family who knew about the violence, and at least one of the leading lethality indicators present. These were all opportunities to help and to prevent. We challenge the community to not let these deaths go unnoticed but rather to see them as a reason to take action. We, as a community, can do better. **Together we can make a difference.**

A **special thank you** to each and every person who has donated their time and effort to make these reviews possible. We recognize the personal impact that this important work has on each of you and we offer our sincere gratitude. Your dedication is commendable and invaluable to our community. You make a difference.

We also want to say **thank you** to TARGIT US Inc. for your generosity in printing this report and for your commitment to our community. TARGIT is a Business Intelligence and Analytics software vendor local to the Tampa Bay community with offices in Boston, MA and Tampa, FL. Tommy Hilfiger, Giant Bicycles and local clients such as Monin and Lazy Days are examples of companies relying on TARGIT's Analytics software to help them make the right business decisions.

Be a part of the solution! **Join** the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force! We meet odd months of the year, the 3rd Tuesday of the month, 2-4 pm, in The Gathering Place at Suncoast Hospice, 5771 Roosevelt Blvd., Clearwater, FL 33760.

If your community group is interested in hosting a "**Be a Better Bystander**" training, please email Melissa Andress at andressm@pcsb.org (Upon request, CEU's can be provided)

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

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.

A Vision for the Future: What We Need to Do



- ◆ The Pinellas County School Board, domestic violence (DV) centers and parents must educate young men and women about what a healthy relationship is and how to achieve it.
- ◆ Substance abuse providers must address power and control dynamics as they pertain to both batterers and victims in their curriculum.
- ◆ Food pantries, health department, housing authorities, Department of Children and Families and other economic service providers must become educated regarding signs of intimate partner violence, lethality indicators, and how to intervene.
- ◆ Agencies within the system must continue to educate staff regarding intimate partner violence and lethality indicators, make referrals for survivor services, and hold batterers accountable.
- ◆ As a community, we must encourage and support legislation and policies that keep firearms out of the hands of individuals convicted of intimate partner violence (misdemeanor and felony) and those who have a domestic, stalking, dating or sexual violence injunction for protection against them.
- ◆ Employers must be aware that financial stressors are a risk factor for intimate partner violence and domestic homicide and implement policies that support survivors.
- ◆ Mental health providers must be well educated to address issues related to intimate partner violence and lethality risk. Also, they must refer batterers to batterer intervention programs (BIP), be aware of services for survivors, and acknowledge the dangers of couples counseling.
- ◆ The community, especially the judicial and criminal justice system, must be aware that **any** criminal history is a lethality indicator and must be utilized to set higher and stricter bonds as well as enact stronger sentencing and plea agreements.
- ◆ Therapists, mental health providers, family law system, police officers, prosecutors, and DV centers must be aware of the lethality risk during separation and provide appropriate safety planning for the survivor.

We believe that in order to stop intimate partner fatalities we **MUST** take action as a community. Everyone (friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, professionals, criminal justice system, and clergy) **MUST** be involved ◆ increase their personal awareness of how to recognize, report, and effectively discuss intimate partner violence ◆ become educated about the services of domestic violence centers and refer victims ◆ know what BIP treatment is and make referrals ◆ increase their knowledge about injunctions for protection and tell victims about them ◆ become involved in working toward solutions.

Be a part of the vision by joining the Pinellas County Domestic Violence Task Force in its efforts to promote prevention of domestic and sexual violence, enhance victim safety, and hold batterers accountable. (see previous page for details on how to join)



Resources to Protect Pinellas

Tear Off Here

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

North of Ulmerton Road:
The Haven of RCS: www.rcspinellas.org/haven
PH: 727-442-4128 (24 hours)
PH: 727-441-2029 (outreach)

South of Ulmerton Road
CASA (Community Action Stops Abuse)
www.casa-stpete.org
PH: 727-895-4912 (24 hours)

FL DV Hotline: 800-500-1119

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.
www.agingcarefl.org
PH: 727-570-9696 ext. 259

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

Operation PAR: www.operationpar.org
PH: 888-727-6398

Westcare of Florida:
PH: 727-442-7800

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

Suncoast Center Inc.: www.suncoastcenter.org
PH: 727 388-1220

Directions for Living: www.directionsforliving.com
PH: 727-524-4464

Gulfcoast Jewish Family and Community Services
www.gcjfcfs.org
PH: 727-479-1800

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

For **reporting abuse of animals**, contact the 24 hour SPCA Animal Cruelty Investigation Hotline at 727-586-3592

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
Youth Advocate
Peacemakers Program
PH: 727-441-2029 ext. 208

South of Ulmerton Road
Peacemakers Program
PH: 727-895-4912

Injunctions for protection can be filed at one of three court buildings in Pinellas County. You may also call them at 727-464-7000 or visit their website at www.pinellasclerk.org:

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

County Justice Center
14250 49th Street North, 2nd FL
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 Sheriff's Department-Jail Intake <http://pcsoweb.com/InmateBooking/> Pinellas County Clerk of Court 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

Child Protection Investigation Division, Pinellas County Sheriff's Office 727-582-3800
www.pcsoweb.com