2024 Homicide Report:
Relationship Abuse in Minnesota

AN ECOSYSTEM OF IMPACT



VIOLENCE FREE
MINNESOTA
THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As you begin reading this report, we want to acknowledge that the following content is heavy. It may be upsetting, angering, and disturbing. Many of the details in this report are devastating. Often, this work carries a profound tiredness, frequently layered with the complexities of many of our own experiences of surviving domestic violence. However, we believe that explicitly naming both the difficulty and the opportunity of this work is important, and that those with the capacity to fully read this report, especially policymakers, legal systems professionals, healthcare professionals, and journalists, have a critical role to play in improving the safety of victim/survivors in our state and preventing domestic violence. Every victim in this report deserves our collective, continued commitments to end relationship abuse.

THANK YOU:

Thank you to Relationship Safety Alliance, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office, the Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls Office, and 360 Communities for contributing statements for this report; to the VFMN Homicide Committee for providing ongoing expertise and feedback during the report process; to Rana Alexander, Assistant County Attorney at the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, for her insight and feedback on firearms and ERPOs; and to The Justin Center for Transformation and Healing for their expertise and feedback on suicide.

Questions, comments, or concerns regarding this report may be directed to Violence Free Minnesota via our Contact Form: https://www.vfmn.org/contact

INDEX

1 Introduction and Foreword

2 A Note on Theme

3 We Remember: Memory Keeping

7 Intimate Partner Homicide Statistics: 1989–2024

10 2024 Key Intimate Partner Homicide Statistics

17 Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Homicide

26 2024 Analysis

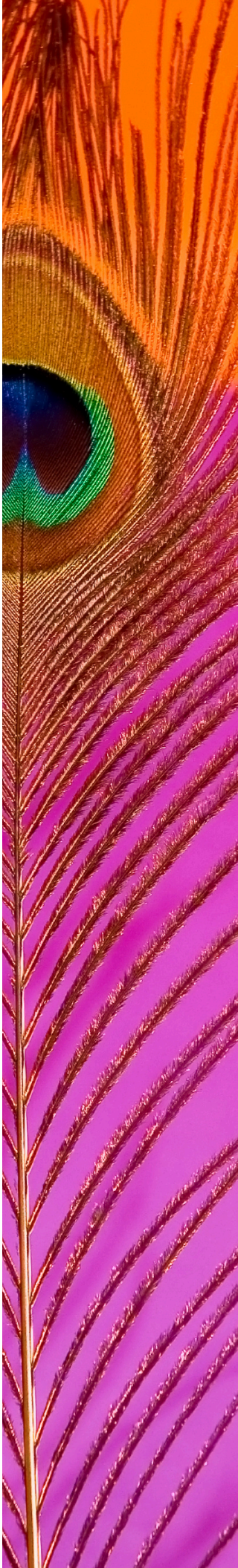
27 • The Far-Reaching Impact of Domestic Violence Homicide
29 • Echoes of Domestic Violence: Burnsville
31 • Duluth Murders-Suicide
34 • Gender, Abuse, and the Criminalization of Domestic Violence Victims
37 • MMIR and MMBWG Offices Statements
41 • Bystander and Intervenor Deaths: Firearms
42 • 2024 Suspicious Deaths

45 Recommendations

55 Victim Stories

64 Report Methods

70 About Violence Free Minnesota



INTRODUCTION & FOREWORD

In 2024, Minnesota lost at least 24 community members to relationship abuse, and at least three more whose deaths we consider suspicious. For every person whose death we document here, there are countless more Minnesotans actively experiencing abuse or attempting to rebuild from it. During a 24 hour period on September 4, 2024, Minnesota domestic violence agencies who were surveyed by the National Network to End Domestic Violence served 1,561 victims. This number does not include data from all the agencies who did not participate in the survey, nor the many victim/survivors who did not seek services during those 24 hours. **The numbers—those we know and do not know—are staggering.**

Beyond data, we ask that every person in this report be seen as more than the sum of their abuse or the moments of their deaths. Relationship abuse affects every part of Minnesota's ecosystem. And just as the sheer magnitude of domestic violence is nearly unfathomable, **so too is the immense and infinite joy that every person in this report brought to our societal ecosystem.** Amir Demarion Harden shared his 8-year-old "infectious smile and kind heart" with fellow students at Echo Park Elementary. Damara Alexis Kirkland never lost her love for coloring and doodling, even as an adult. Dejuan Hemphill was a new father. Andrea "Drea" Broyld wrote encouraging notes on coffee cups to brighten customers' days.

The people in this report shared an abundance of light with us during their time here on earth. **That abundance of light demands an equal abundance of respect** and our continued individual and collective refusal to accept domestic violence homicide as a fact of life. Sunsets and sunrises are a fact of life. Mountains, valleys, fish, and plants are facts of life. So are love and liberation and generosity. Countless lives cut short, whether Oliver Nephew's at 7 years old or Janet Louise Andersen's at 81 years old, are not something we are willing to accept—**not today, not at sunset, and not at any sunrise in any future.**

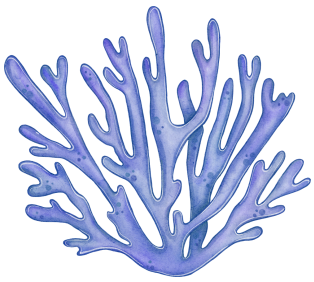
We cannot prevent relationship abuse without recognizing that our national ecosystem impacts the scope and circumstances of domestic violence in our state. As we write this, racial and gender justice initiatives across the nation are being dismantled. Community members are being ripped from their families and deported. Our 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are being subjected to increasing state violence. **The conditions that perpetuate harm within our ecosystem in Minnesota are rippling throughout our country and will echo for years to come.** Those echoes can and will shape both the deaths and the lives of Minnesotans impacted by relationship abuse. It is up to all of us to find the "bright spark of life" that Patricia Ann Spitzmueller brought into the world; the fearlessness Jaelyn Nichole Walker carried; and the "passion to learn and grow" that Apostle L held for decades.

Together, we can strive towards a future in which the ultimate fact of life is the value of every life.

A NOTE ON THEME



For our 2024 Homicide Report theme, we have chosen nature imagery such as flowers, animals, plants, landscapes, and oceans to illustrate the "ecosystem of impact." An ecosystem is a system of organisms and natural beings interacting with, and within, their environment. **Each part of an ecosystem depends on another part.** When the temperature rises and oceans recede, the coasts erode and aquatic life diminishes, which in turn affects humans. **When humans harm one another or disappear, the conditions for continued harm progress through another cycle.**



An ecosystem can be as small as the home **Samantha Koehne** was at when her boyfriend killed her. It can be as contained as the field **Payao Vang** was found in by her stepson. And it can be as large as **Liara Kaylee Tsai's** community, which stretched across Minnesota and Iowa and Wisconsin, or the roads a man traversed from Roseville to Maplewood after assaulting his girlfriend before crashing his car into **Apostle L**, ending his life. **Each death in an ecosystem affects that ecosystem in devastating ways.**



When changes are made to an ecosystem, the rest of the ecosystem must adapt in order to survive. Sugarbush plants begin to produce more fire-resistant seeds in response to flames. Seaweed develops a protective coating to avoid exposure to the sun. **We see this with domestic violence homicide:** surviving families create GoFundMes to raise money to afford funeral services for their loved ones. Schools hold an extra graduation cap and gown for students who will never have a chance to cross the stage. Friends and family create domestic violence prevention organizations named after their sisters, aunts, and cousins. **Some children lose both parents to murder-suicide and their surviving family members take on caregiving.**

No one should have to adapt to domestic violence homicide.



Ecosystems flourish when their environments support them. For plants and animals, this can look like nutrients, healthy soil, photosynthesis and enough rain. **For humans, this looks like economic justice, racial equity, and gender justice. It looks like transforming our ecosystems to pull them away from normalizing and perpetuating relationship abuse, and towards abundant life.**

WE REMEMBER: MEMORY KEEPING

Memory keeping is an essential practice for addressing and responding to intimate partner homicide and domestic violence, and humanizing the lives lost. Through grief that often feels insurmountable and overwhelming, we share memorials to the victims in our report to uplift their lives and stories rather than only the moments of their deaths. They were nurses, baristas, caregivers, students, teachers, and cousins, who brought joy, wisdom, and laughter to their loved ones. Their lives were cut far too short, but they touched so many others. As we share these victims' stories and the statements and memory keeping rituals of their loved ones, we must not forget our communities' capacities for healing and resilience. We bear witness to so many thoughtful, beautiful peacekeeping efforts made by those who have confronted grief and loss as we look forward to a violence free Minnesota. **We choose to start rather than end our report with Memory Keeping in order to begin with how each victim lived, not how they died. We hope you will remember them how they are remembered here.**



Sandra Wilson Goertz

Sandra was included in Lakes Crisis and Resource Center's annual Break the Silence Memorial Display in October 2024 in Detroit Lakes City Park. The memorial display is a visual representation of Minnesota's victims of domestic violence homicide and includes silhouette cutouts to honor each of that year's known victims.

Paul Elmstrand

Paul's name was etched into the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 2025. A contingent of family members, officers, and supporters traveled to D.C. in May 2025 to attend a candlelight honor vigil on May 13 and a law enforcement memorial service on May 15.

Matthew Ruge

Matthew's name was etched into the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 2025. A contingent of family members, officers, and supporters traveled to D.C. in May 2025 to attend a candlelight honor vigil on May 13 and a law enforcement memorial service on May 15.

Adam Finseth

Adam was honored as part of the National Fallen Firefighters Memorial in Emmitsburg, Maryland in May 2025. Burnsville firefighters and their families traveled to Emmitsburg to attend the memorial weekend events, which included a candlelight vigil and service.

David Joseph Nanovic

Susquehanna Township High School Alumni Association of Pennsylvania honored David in an online post in April 2024. David was a member of the class of 1997.

WE REMEMBER: MEMORY KEEPING



Allisa Marie Vollan

A memorial walk was held for the community in honor of Allisa on October 12, 2024 at Gichi-ode' Akiing Park and along the lakewalk in Duluth during Domestic Violence Awareness Month.



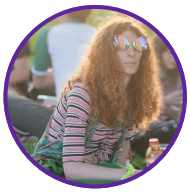
Toumai Gaynor

“Forever 21.” Toumai was included in Lakes Crisis and Resource Center’s annual Break the Silence Memorial Display in October 2024 in Detroit Lakes City Park. The memorial display is a visual representation of Minnesota’s victims of domestic violence homicide and includes silhouette cutouts to honor each of that year’s known victims.



Amir Demarion Harden

On August 17, 2024, Amir’s family, loved ones, and friends held a celebration of his life at Lac Lavon Park in Burnsville, where his elementary school principal led a balloon release in his memory.



Liara Kaylee Tsai

Community members organized a memorial for Liara on June 23, 2024 at Loring Park in Minneapolis, during which Liara’s music was played. A gathering at Gabe’s, a music venue in Iowa City, Iowa, was also held in honor of Liara, along with a tribute to Liara at Neon Noir on July 5, 2024 at the Uptown VFW in Minneapolis.



Patricia Ann Spitzmueller

“She was known for her undying compassion, boundless curiosity, and penchant for long, searching conversations.”



Jaelyn Nichole Walker

Community members created a memorial for Jaelyn in August 2024 in Gooseberry Park near the Red River in Moorhead, where she was found. The memorial included a photo of Jaelyn, a cross, flowers, a Hello Kitty blanket, a pair of shoes, and more.



Payao Vang

Transforming Generations, a Minnesota-based advocacy organization supporting Hmong and Southeast Asian survivors of gender-based violence, and Paper Lantern Project, a grassroots AAPI gender and reproductive justice mutual aid fund and arts movement, held a virtual memorial healing circle to honor Payao on October 10, 2024.

WE REMEMBER: MEMORY KEEPING



Janet Louise Andersen
We remember Janet Louise Andersen.



Damara Alexis Kirkland
"Damara was an all or nothing kind of girl. If she was with you, she would give you her all. Always sweet, kind and compassionate, she was also very protective of her family."



Anonymous
This person was honored as an artist, a father, a musician, a lover of nature and animals, and so much more.



Lyle Maske
"He was a kind person helping anyone he could. He was a hero, a father, and a friend to all, willing to give the shirt off his back."



Samantha Koehne
"Sami was an amazing friend. She was known to many as "Panda". She could always be counted on to show up for a friend in need and was always there when she was needed the most. Her smile and personality brought joy and happiness to those around her."



Erin Abramson and Jacob Nephew
The She/Moms Run This Town group hosted the Erin and Jacob Memorial Run/Walk/Bike on November 29, 2024, near Spirit Mountain in Duluth, on what would have been Erin's 48th birthday. She was an avid runner. The group is also hoping to raise funds to create scholarships for programs Erin and Jacob were passionate about, including the Duluth Superior Symphony and Youth Orchestra, and Marshall School's Nordic Ski Team.



Kathryn "Kat" Ramsland and Oliver Nephew
Shortly after Kathryn and her son Oliver were killed, community members placed flowers, stuffed animals, and toys around the Little Free Library Oliver had built for children in their neighborhood. Duluth Public Schools also held a candlelight walk shortly after their deaths in honor of Oliver. The walk took place in Kathryn and Oliver's neighborhood between their home and Erin Abramson and Jacob Nephew's home.

WE REMEMBER: MEMORY KEEPING



Dejuan Hemphill
Dejuan was a new father to a 4-month-old son. We remember Dejuan Hemphill.



Andrea “Drea” Broyld
An online memorial wall was set up to honor Andrea “Drea” Broyld on Ever Loved, and included memories and photos of Andrea shared by her loved ones.



Apostle L
Apostle L’s life was celebrated with a memorial service on January 18, 2025 at Jackson Memorial Church of God in Christ in Dickinson, Texas, the state in which Apostle L was born.

WE REMEMBER: SUSPICIOUS DEATHS



Allison Lussier
On March 2, 2024, Allison’s loved ones and supporters held a march from Allison’s apartment in Minneapolis to the 1st Police Precinct to demand accountability for Allison’s death. Allison was also honored at the 10th Annual Memorial March for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives in Minneapolis on February 14, 2025.



Marcus Antwan Martin, Jr.
“Marcus enjoyed life to the fullest with his carefree, happy-go-lucky spirit. He loved listening to music and watching movies. He was very giving and always put others first.”



Victoria Jo Gamble
Community members raised funds in Victoria’s memory for her sons at a meat raffle at Danny’s Dugout in Sauk Rapids on November 27, 2024. Several local businesses also reached out to Victoria’s sons and former spouse in December 2024, offering to pay for their Christmas gifts.

WE REMEMBER

INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDES IN MINNESOTA: 1989–2024

1989
At least 17 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 child died due to relationship abuse

1990
At least 15 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 child died due to relationship abuse

1991
At least 9 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 6 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 2 bystanders/intervenors died

1992
At least 20 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 5 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

1993
At least 24 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 5 bystanders/intervenors died

1994
At least 14 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 children died due to relationship abuse

1995
At least 23 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 4 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 2 bystanders/intervenors died

1996
At least 17 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 4 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

1997
At least 13 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 child died due to relationship abuse

1998
At least 18 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 1 bystander/intervenor died

1999
At least 19 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 11 bystanders/intervenors died

2000
At least 29 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 child died due to relationship abuse
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

2001
At least 22 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 5 bystanders/intervenors died

2002
At least 18 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 child died due to relationship abuse

2003
At least 13 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 bystanders/intervenors died

2004
At least 12 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 5 bystanders/intervenors died

2005
At least 16 women died from intimate partner violence

2006
At least 17 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 4 men died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 bystander/intervenor died

2007
At least 18 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 bystanders/intervenors died

2008
At least 20 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 4 bystanders/intervenors died

WE REMEMBER

Intimate Partner Homicides in Minnesota: 1989–2024

2009
At least 12 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

2010
At least 14 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 men died from intimate partner violence
At least 4 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

2011
At least 22 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 child died due to relationship abuse
At least 6 bystanders/intervenors died

2012
At least 15 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

2013
At least 22 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 6 men died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 7 bystanders/intervenors died

2014
At least 16 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

2015
At least 22 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 men died from intimate partner violence
At least 4 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 5 bystanders/intervenors died

2016
At least 18 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 1 bystander/intervenor died

2017
At least 21 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 6 bystanders/intervenors died

2018
At least 10 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 4 bystanders/intervenors died

2019
At least 16 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 3 bystanders/intervenors died

2020
At least 20 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 6 bystanders/intervenors died

2021
At least 20 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 children died due to relationship abuse
At least 4 bystanders/intervenors died

2022
At least 21 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 1 man died from intimate partner violence
At least 2 bystanders/intervenors died

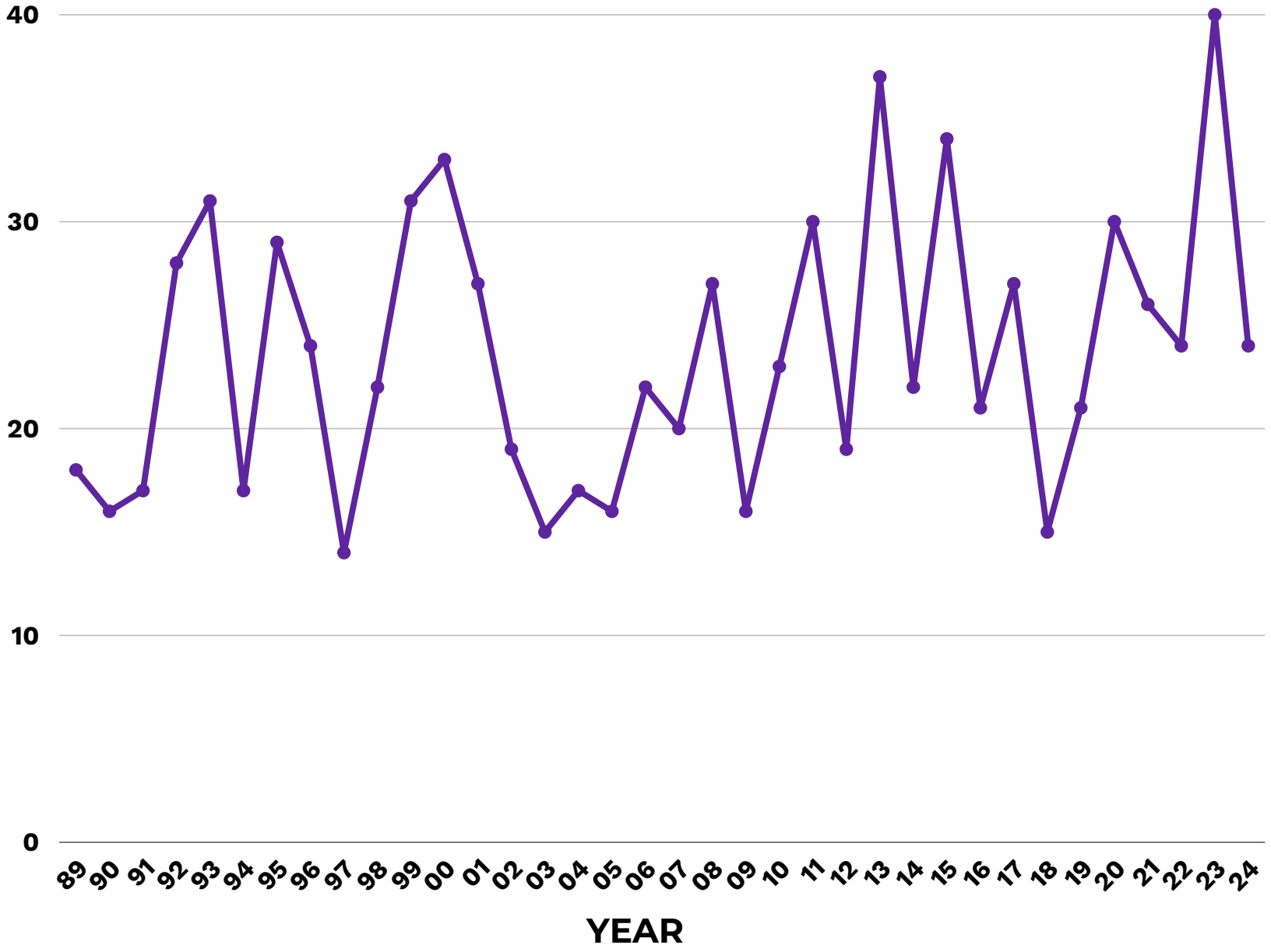
2023
At least 26 women died from intimate partner violence
At least 3 men died from intimate partner violence
At least 11 bystanders/intervenors died

2024

At least **12 women** died from intimate partner violence
At least **1 man** died from intimate partner violence
At least **11 bystanders/intervenors** died (all men or boys)
At least **3 deaths are considered suspicious** (these are not included in the total domestic violence homicide counts)

TOTAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDES IN MINNESOTA
1989–2024

INCLUDES: INTIMATE PARTNERS, FRIENDS, FAMILY MEMBERS, AND BYSTANDERS/INTERVENORS



VICTIM TOTAL: 852

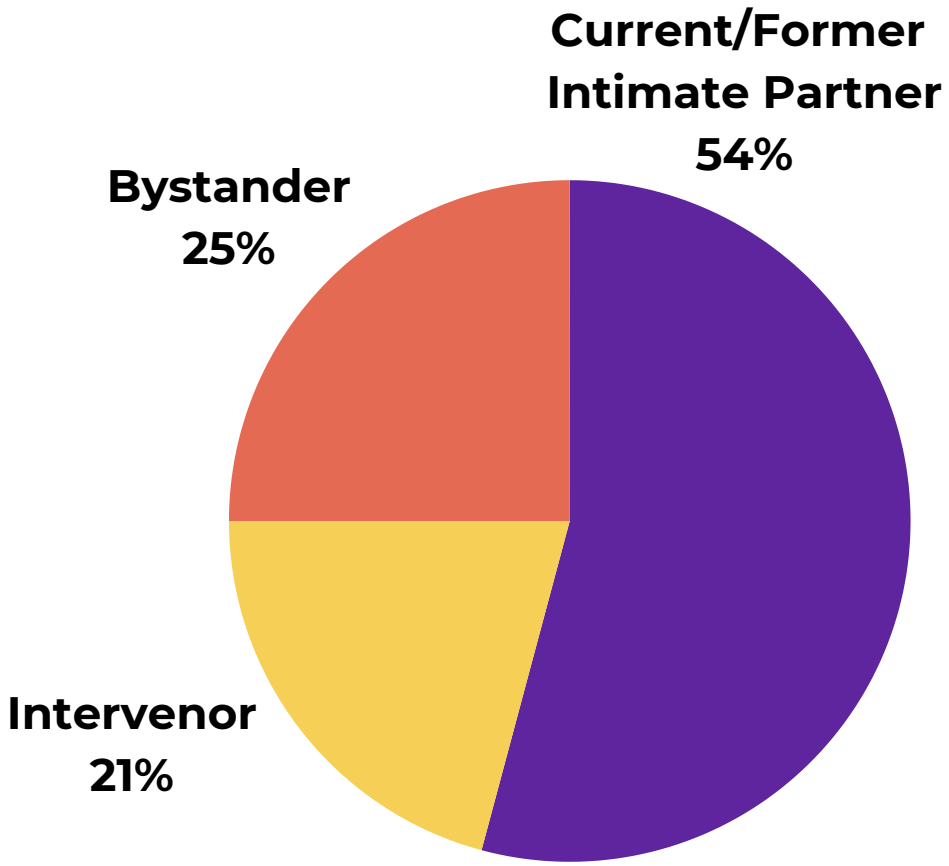
VICTIMS AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE ALLEGED PERPETRATORS

Key Intimate Partner Homicide Statistics: 2024

All 24 Domestic Violence-Related Homicide Victims

Current/Former Intimate Partner
13 victims

Sandra Wilson Goertz
David Joseph Nanovic
Allisa Marie Vollan
Liara Kaylee Tsai
Patricia Ann Spitzmueller
Jaelyn Nichole Walker
Payao Vang
Janet Louise Andersen
Damara Alexis Kirkland
Samantha Koehne
Erin Abramson
Kathryn “Kat” Ramsland
Andrea “Drea” Broyld



Bystander
6 victims

Toumai Gaynor
Anonymous
Jacob Nephew *(killed alongside his mother Erin Abramson)*
Oliver Nephew *(killed alongside his mother Kathryn “Kat” Ramsland)*
Dejuan Hemphill
Apostle L

Intervenor
5 victims

Paul Elmstrand
Matthew Ruge
Adam Finseth
Amir Demarion Harden
Lyle Maske

Note: While we cannot draw any definitive conclusions from this fact, we think it is important to note that **in 2024, the number of bystanders and intervenors killed due to domestic violence in Minnesota was almost equal to the number of individuals killed by current or former intimate partners (11 and 13, respectively).** Additionally, in 2023, we documented the highest number of bystander and intervenor deaths (11) related to relationship abuse in Minnesota since we began tracking in 1989. **In 2024, we again saw that same number: 11.**

CAUSE OF DEATH

Key Homicide Statistics (2022–2024) for
Adult Victims Murdered by Their Current or Former Intimate Partner

2024

2024 IPV VICTIMS : 13

STABBING: 3

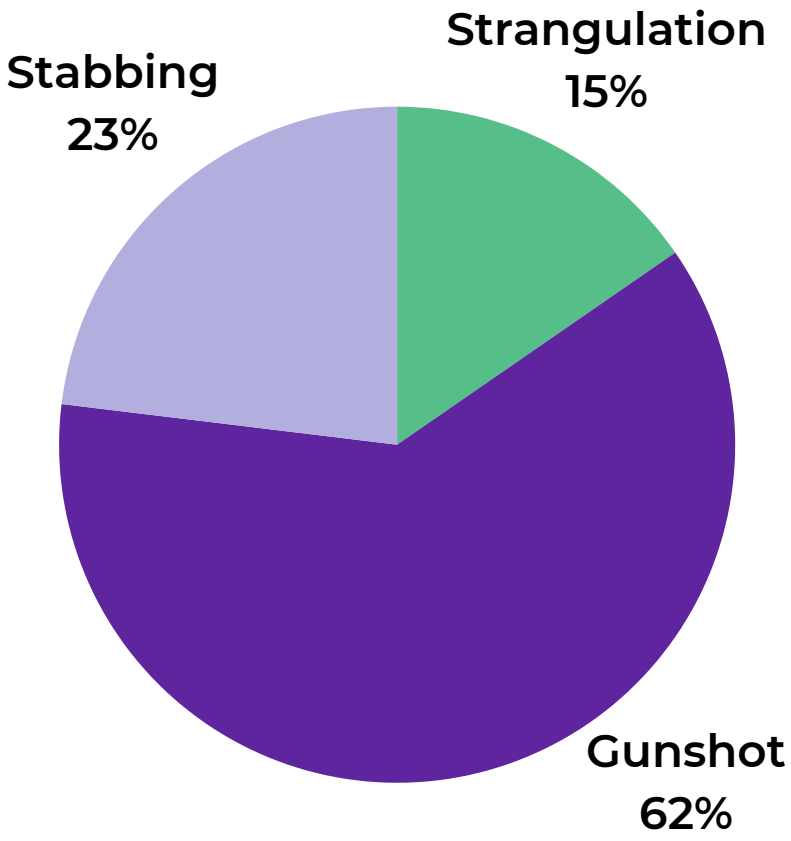
Liara Kaylee Tsai
Jaelyn Nichole Walker
Janet Louise Andersen

STRANGULATION: 2

Allisa Marie Vollan
Samantha Koehne

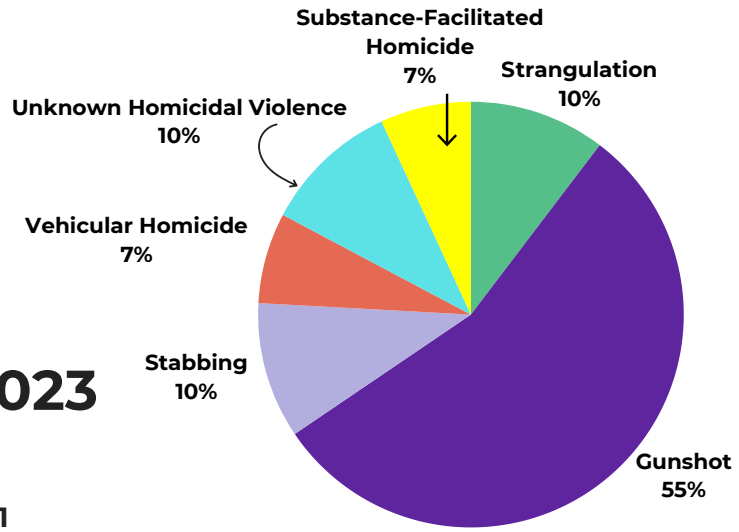
GUNSHOT: 8

Sandra Wilson Goertz
David Joseph Nanovic
Patricia Ann Spitzmueller
Payao Vang
Damara Alexis Kirkland
Erin Abramson
Kathryn “Kat” Nephew
Andrea “Drea” Broyld

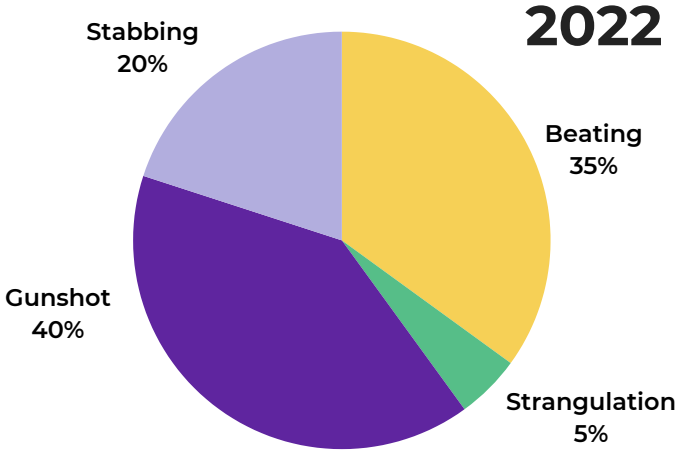


Note: While we don’t typically include bystander and intervenor causes of death in this statistics section, we think it is important to note that of the 11 bystanders and intervenors killed in 2024, **10 were killed by gunshot.** One was killed by car crash.

2023



2022



VICTIM WAS SEPARATED FROM ABUSER OR ATTEMPTING TO LEAVE, OR THEY WERE STILL TOGETHER/UNKNOWN

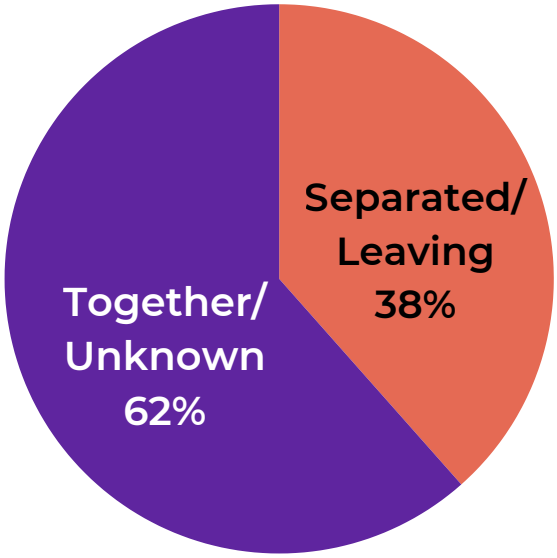
Key Homicide Statistics (2022–2024) for
Adult Victims Murdered by Their Current or Former Intimate Partner

2024

2024 IPV VICTIMS : 13

TOGETHER/UNKNOWN: 8

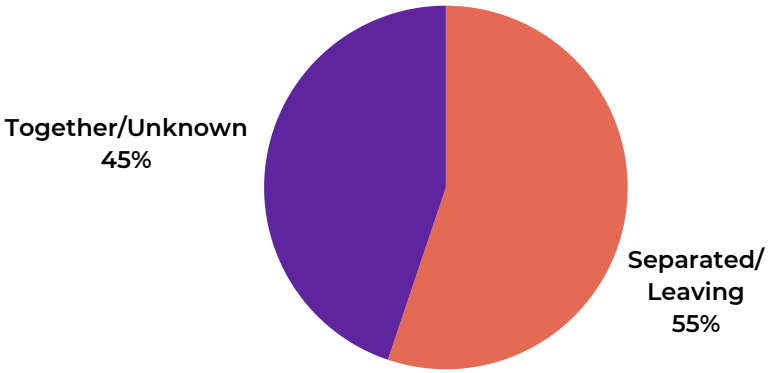
Sandra Wilson Goertz
David Joseph Nanovic
Patricia Ann Spitzmueller
Payao Vang
Janet Louise Andersen
Samantha Koehne
Kathryn “Kat” Ramsland
Andrea “Drea” Broyld



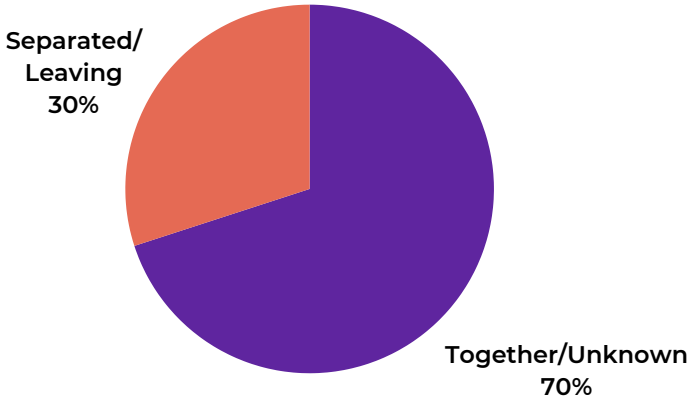
SEPARATED OR ATTEMPTING TO LEAVE: 5

Allisa Marie Vollan
Liara Kaylee Tsai
Jaelyn Nichole Walker
Damara Alexis Kirkland
Erin Abramson

2023



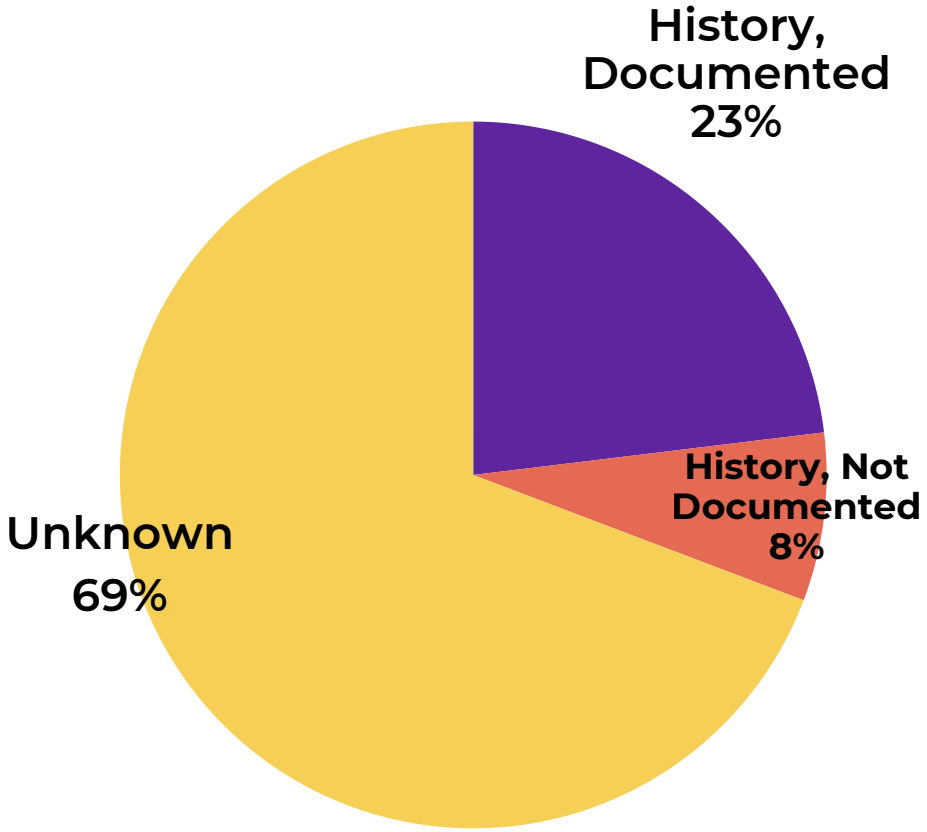
2022



HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Key Homicide Statistics (2022–2024) for
Adult Victims Murdered by Their Current or Former Intimate Partner

2024



2024 IPV VICTIMS : 13

HISTORY WITH DOCUMENTATION: 3

Allisa Marie Vollan
Samantha Koehne
Kathryn “Kat” Ramsland

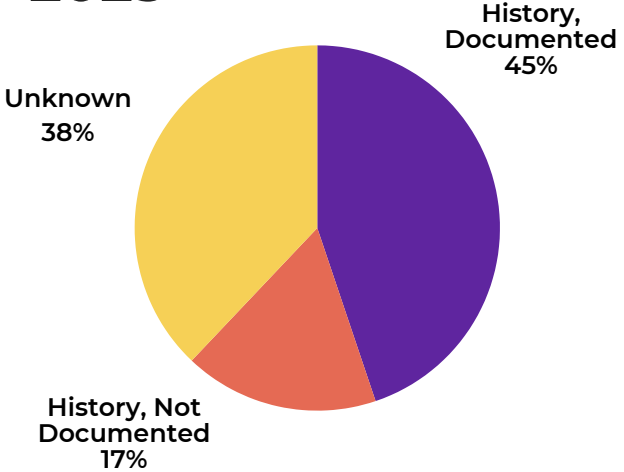
UNKNOWN: 9

Sandra Wilson Goertz
Liara Kaylee Tsai
Patricia Ann Spitzmueller
Jaelyn Nichole Walker
Payao Vang
Janet Louise Andersen
Damara Alexis Kirkland
Erin Abramson
Andrea “Drea” Broyld

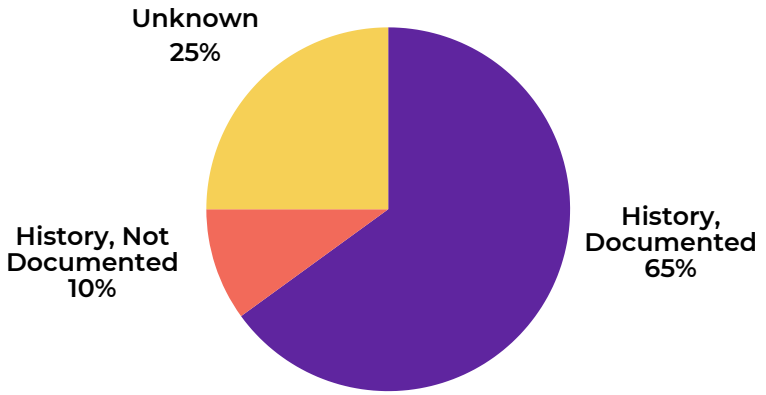
HISTORY, NO DOCUMENTATION: 1

David Joseph Nanovic

2023



2022



GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION OF VICTIM

Key Homicide Statistics (2022–2024) for
Adult Victims Murdered by Their Current or Former Intimate Partner

2024

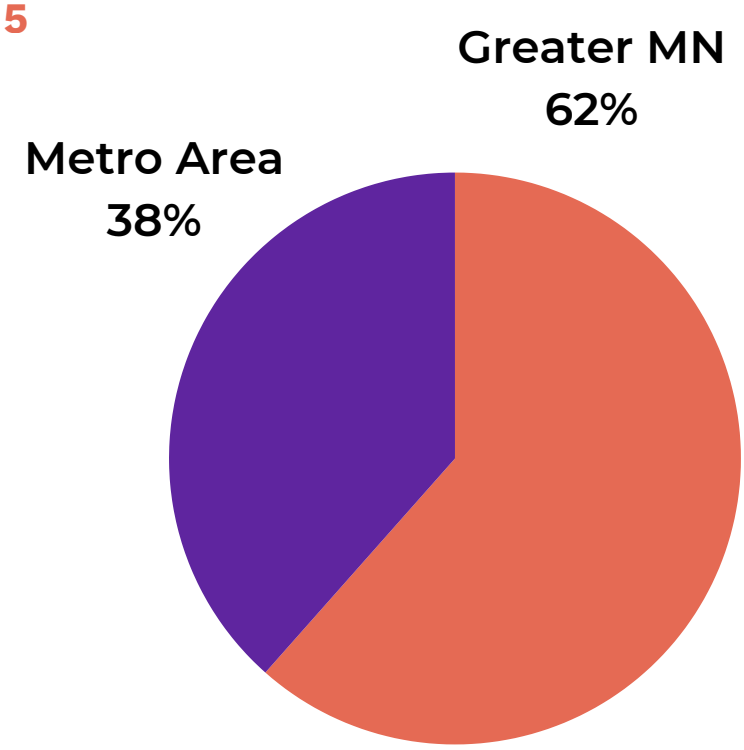
2024 IPV VICTIMS : 13

TWIN CITIES METRO AREA: 5

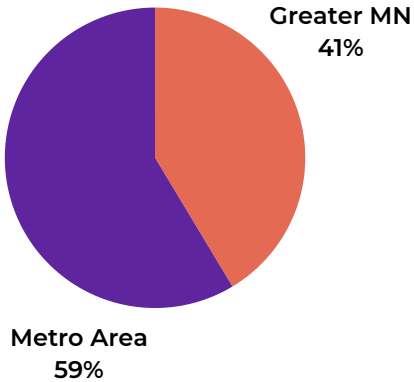
David Joseph Nanovic
Liara Kaylee Tsai
Patricia Ann Spitzmueller
Payao Vang
Damara Alexis Kirkland

GREATER MINNESOTA: 8

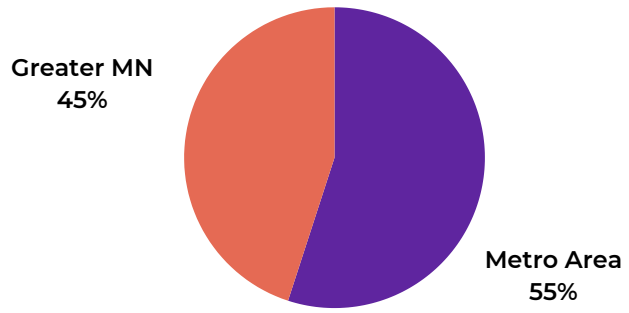
Sandra Wilson Goertz
Allisa Marie Vollan
Jaelyn Nichole Walker
Janet Louise Andersen
Samantha Koehne
Erin Abramson
Kathryn “Kat” Ramsland
Andrea “Drea” Broyld



2023



2022



RACE AND ETHNICITY DEMOGRAPHICS OF VICTIMS

Key Homicide Statistics (2024) for
Adult Victims Murdered by Their Current or Former Intimate Partner

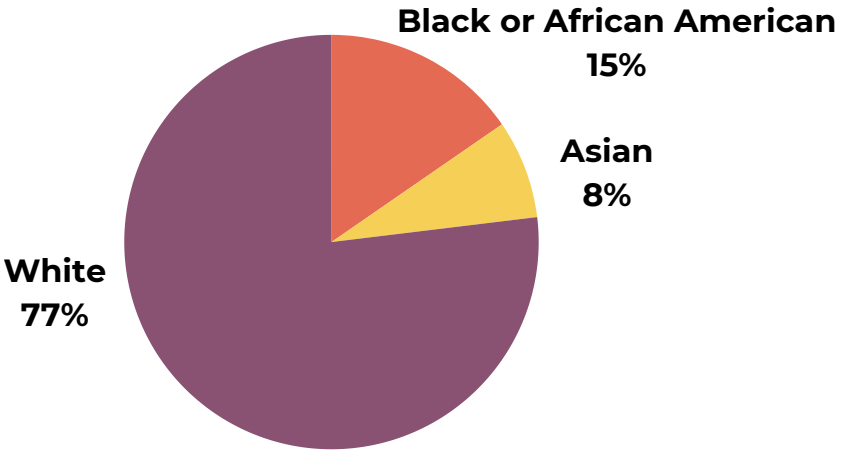
2024

2024 IPV VICTIMS : 13

BLACK OR AFRICAN-AMERICAN: 2

ASIAN: 1

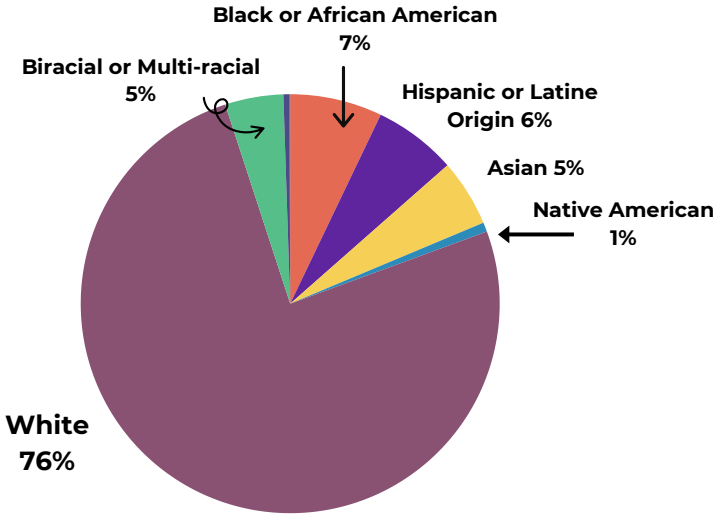
WHITE: 10



2023 MINNESOTA CENSUS DEMOGRAPHICS

Reference: Cynthia Tu, Sahan Journal. **Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey (1-year estimates).

The 2023 data has a "Pacific Islander" category (0.06%). This is the tiny purple slice between the green and orange.



Note: We have made every effort to document victims' racial and ethnic identities by prioritizing victims' self-identification and, when not available, identifications made by family, friends, and peers. In the event that neither of these options were available, we relied on Medical Examiners' reports and media reporting, which should be considered with the understanding that medical and media documentation of racial and ethnic identity is often inaccurate due to bias. In order to most succinctly demonstrate disproportionality in our data, we chose to use the same categories used by the U.S. Census.

We collect this data to draw attention to racial disparities within intimate partner homicides in Minnesota. According to the U.S. Census (which itself is not immune to bias and inaccuracy), in 2023, 76% of Minnesota's population reported identifying as white alone, while 7% reported as Black or African-American, and 5% reported as Asian. **Yet both Black or African-American victims and Asian victims are over-represented within Minnesota's 2024 intimate partner homicide numbers. White victims are represented at very close to their proportion of Minnesota's population, meaning they are NOT over-represented.**

CHILDREN

At least 24 children lost a parent due to intimate partner violence in 2024*

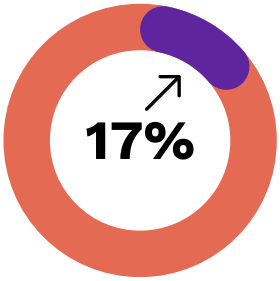


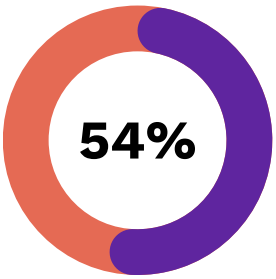
17 adult children



7 minor children

At least **4 of those 24 children (17%)** witnessed their parent murdered, or found the body*





At least **13 victims (54%) of the total 24 confirmed victims** in 2024 had children*

*Numbers based on information available to us, and what we have confirmed. It is likely that some may actually be higher than indicated here.

2024 VICTIMS WHO WERE KNOWN PARENTS (13 VICTIMS)

Sandra Wilson Goertz
Paul Elmstrand
Adam Finseth
David Joseph Nanovic
Patricia Ann Spitzmueller
Payao Vang
Damara Alexis Kirkland
Anonymous
Lyle Maske
Samantha Koehne
Erin Abramson
Kathryn "Kat" Ramsland
Dejuan Hemphill



RISK FACTORS FOR INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE

Each year, Violence Free Minnesota analyzes confirmed intimate partner homicides in the state with a particular focus on five key risk factors for homicide that, when present, especially in combination, are associated with significantly increased risk for a victim to be killed by their current or former partner.

These five risk factors are:

- victim's attempts to leave the abuser;
- abuser's threats to kill the victim;
- abuser's access to firearms;
- abuser's history of violence;
- strangulation of the victim.

We are confident that if we had access to confidential court records, medical records, and interviews with loved ones, we would find additional information pertaining to these risk factors and others. While homicide risk factors are often considered in a criminal legal context, we believe that by placing them in a public health framework, these factors can illuminate important patterns in cases of homicide. These indicators can and should be identified and addressed through multiple victim/survivor "touchpoints" with systems and services, including: public health, social services, community-based services, and housing systems. Within these different systems, services and approaches should always be culturally responsive and relevant to the survivor.

We cannot emphasize enough that the presence of these risk factors, even one alone, indicates a very real possibility of significant danger and death. Victim/survivors must ALWAYS be taken seriously by every system they interact with. These homicides are preventable.

Violence Free Minnesota DOES NOT intend for our analysis of these risk factors to be used for the creation of new crimes or the enhancement of criminal penalties.



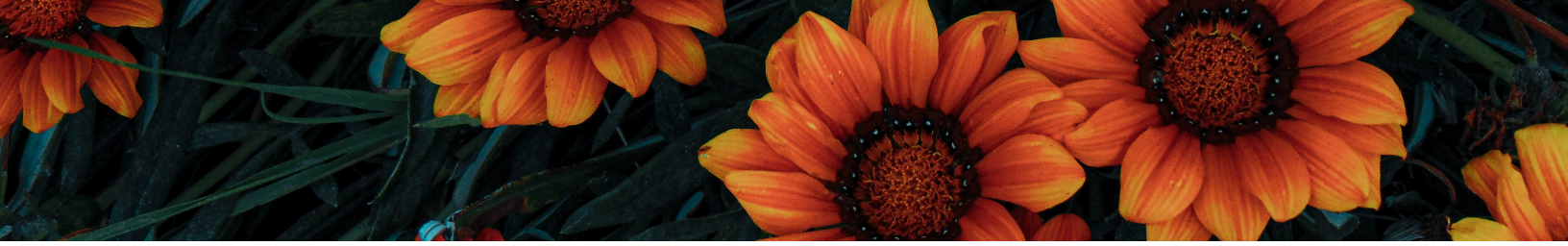
VICTIM'S ATTEMPTS TO LEAVE THE ABUSER

Complex factors prevent victim/survivors from leaving, and leaving is not every victim/survivor's goal. Some of the many barriers include fear of losing custody, lack of economic resources, pregnancy, isolation, and fear of criminalization. **Leaving an abusive relationship or preparing to leave often carries a heightened risk of homicide,** as abusive partners may feel they are losing control over the survivor and may escalate or start violence to try to regain control. **We found that at least 38% (5 victims) of the 13 victims killed in 2024 by a partner were attempting to leave or had recently left the relationship. The jealousy and escalation in violence that sometimes accompanies victims' attempts to leave can also pose a danger to victims' loved ones, acquaintances, and strangers, as illustrated in the following case highlight.** This danger is solely the responsibility of the abusive partner, and reminds us of the public, far-reaching impact of relationship abuse.

CASE HIGHLIGHT



Amir Demarion Harden, 8, was shot on June 5, 2024, in Burnsville by his father Danair Harden, and died in the hospital on June 9. Amir was trying to wrestle a gun away from his father, who was attempting to shoot Amir's mother. His father was in court the morning before on charges that he had strangled Amir's mother on May 30, 2024 **after she had tried to end the relationship after a history of abuse.** When police gave Amir's mother the lethality assessment screening after that assault, **she indicated Amir's father had access to a gun, was violently and constantly jealous and controlling, and he followed/spied on her and left her threatening messages. A Domestic Abuse No Contact Order was issued in June 2024, prohibiting Amir's father from contacting his mother. Just because a relationship ends does not mean the abuse ends.**



ABUSER'S THREATS TO KILL THE VICTIM

Threats by the abuser to kill the victim, as well as the victim's belief that the abuser will kill them, are among the most reliable indicators of lethality, yet the criminal and civil legal systems often overlook these threats. As illustrated by the following case highlight, threats to kill not only place victims at risk, but their friends, new partners, acquaintances, and even total strangers due to violent and excessive jealousy, underscoring the public health impact of abuse. Without access to and review of police case files, medical records, and all court records, it is difficult to determine whether threats to kill were made against each victim. We often hear about them because the victim told a friend or family member. Because these threats are not always communicated, we believe our numbers for this risk factor are much lower than in actuality. **Threats to kill preceded at least 9 of the total 24 homicide cases (38%) in 2024.**

CASE HIGHLIGHT



Dejuan Hemphill, 24, was shot in St. Paul on November 5, 2024 and died in the hospital on November 15, 2024. Kenneth Terry, 18, and Jehovah Nelson, 19, were arrested for the murder. Dejuan and his two cousins were walking in St. Paul when Nelson shot Dejuan and then fled with Terry. A woman told investigators that she had previously been in a relationship with Terry and had a child with Terry, but no longer had contact with him. **The woman stated that Nelson shot Dejuan because Terry was jealous that she had been spending time with one of Dejuan's male family members. Investigators believe Terry and Nelson attempted to kill Dejuan's cousins as well.** A month later in December 2024, Terry was charged with violation of a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order that had been issued in August prohibiting him from contacting a previous girlfriend **whom he had a history of strangling and threatening. During that August incident, he threatened to kill her.** Though Dejuan is not a direct victim of intimate partner violence, his death is clearly the result of it, and **threats to kill played a significant role.**



ABUSER'S ACCESS TO FIREARMS

Nearly every year in Minnesota, firearms are overwhelmingly the most common means of intimate partner homicide. **In 2024, a staggering 75% (18 victims) of the total 24 victims were killed with a firearm, and at least 5 of those 18 victims (28%) were killed by someone who was legally prohibited from possessing firearms.** Since we began collecting homicide data in 1989, firearms are used to kill in nearly half of all cases. The next most common means is typically stabbing (averaging 20%), less than half the rate of firearm murders. Nationally, statistics are even more stark. **The Violence Policy Center (2020) has emphasized that female intimate partners are more likely to be killed with a firearm than all other means combined.**

Studies show that the mere presence of a firearm in the home increases a victim/survivor's risk of homicide. Everytown for Gun Safety (2025) states that abusive partners with access to guns are five times more likely to kill their partners, and firearms are often used to threaten violence or death as a means of control. Two-thirds of intimate partner homicides in the United States use a gun and 75% of these victims are women. **This number has accelerated in recent years.**

Firearms restrictions need to be enforced at all levels for individuals who abuse their partners and who are not legally allowed to possess firearms. When these restrictions are not enforced—and there is ample evidence of this across Minnesota—it empowers abusers to continue to harm their partners because they know they will not be held accountable. Firearms are not only a common means of homicide, but a tool used by abusive partners to threaten, coerce, and intimidate victims and their communities. According to an in-depth 2024 domestic violence and firearms survey conducted by the National Domestic Violence Hotline and the Battered Women's Justice Center, 48% of women reported they had been threatened, coerced, stalked, or harmed by firearms in an intimate partner context. **Many female survey respondents also reported firearms threats made by their partners against their children, colleagues, friends, pets, and family members. The following case highlight illustrates the risk that abusers' firearm access poses to victims and those around them—in this case, a neighbor. In the survey, 8% of women indicated their partner had used a firearm to threaten a neighbor.**



ABUSER'S ACCESS TO FIREARMS

CASE HIGHLIGHT



Lyle Maske, 62, was fatally shot in Brainerd on November 1, 2024 after intervening in a domestic violence incident. Chad Aanerud, 35, is charged with multiple crimes, including murder, criminal sexual conduct, kidnapping, assault, arson, and theft. Aanerud allegedly sexually assaulted his pregnant ex-girlfriend in Brainerd on or around the night of October 31st **after threatening to shoot her children if she did not engage in sexual activity.** He then began dumping gasoline on her family members' home, which later burned to the ground, **and began taking firearms from the home**. His ex-girlfriend asked her children to go down the road to Lyle's home to ask for help. **Aanerud fatally shot Lyle when he arrived to intervene.**

Aanerud then kidnapped his ex-girlfriend and her children at gunpoint and fled by vehicle as a statewide Amber Alert was sent out. He was eventually arrested and his ex-girlfriend and children were recovered. **Aanerud was legally prohibited from possessing firearms at the time** and had a lengthy criminal history involving sexual assault and domestic violence against multiple women dating back to at least the early 2010s; **many of those women expressed fear he would kill them**. This case demonstrates the dangerous intersections of firearms access, jealousy, pregnancy, and threats of violence, and is a tangible example of the National Domestic Violence Hotline and Battered Women's Justice Center survey results. **When abusers prohibited from possessing firearms still have access to them, this presents a significant public safety hazard that can endanger multiple individuals, communities, and systems.**

ABUSER'S HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

A previous history of intimate partner violence may seem like the most obvious risk factor for homicide. **Abusive partners never simply "snap" and kill their partners; instead, they choose to engage in the ultimate act of power and control.** A hallmark of abusive relationships is that the violence and control often escalate over time, increasing in frequency and severity, and thus, the risk of homicide also increases. **We found that at least 58% (14 victims) of the total 24 victims in 2024 were killed by someone with a history of domestic violence against a current or former partner, whether documented or not.**

We strive to capture as much information as possible regarding a perpetrator's history of violence. Since our main sources of information are public court records and media stories, we are limited in this analysis. We consider a perpetrator to have a documented history of domestic violence if there are police or court records with evidence of such, or if a history of violence is referenced in the media regarding records. Occasionally, media stories will quote a perpetrator's undocumented history of abuse in interviews with loved ones of the victim or previous victims. At times, we will be contacted by family members who share this information with us. We categorize this information as "undocumented but known" domestic violence history of the perpetrator.

Along with a perpetrator's history of violence against the victim they killed, we also look into histories of violence against previous partners. It is important to view a history of abuse against past partners as a possible indicator of future violence, especially when past incidents involved extreme brutality. **We also draw attention to the importance of programming that aims to support behavior change in people using abuse in their relationships. This programming is a vital component of domestic violence prevention, which includes addressing attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and social norms that endorse and perpetuate relationship abuse.**

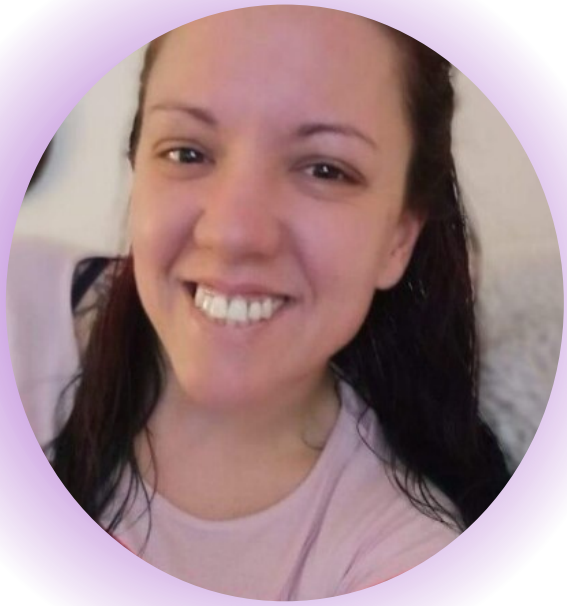
ABUSER'S HISTORY OF VIOLENCE: CASE HIGHLIGHT

Allisa Marie Vollan, 27, was killed in her boyfriend Dale Howard's home in Duluth on March 22, 2024, as a result of potential smothering. Howard was later sentenced to 20 years in prison. **Howard had previously been arrested and charged with domestic assault on March 9th after a neighbor reported him kicking Allisa in the head and slamming her head in the door**. Allisa told officers on scene that day that Howard demonstrated frequent jealousy over her past relationships, **would assault her "every couple of months,"** and had called her gendered slurs. When officers asked how often Howard would threaten Allisa, she said, "It depends on the day," and indicated it had happened about 12 times. He had also broken her phone.

On March 12th, 2024, a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order had been issued, prohibiting Howard from having contact with Allisa. He had a history of both physically and sexually assaulting her. **This case illustrates the too often deadly combination of misogyny and domestic violence, and the escalating nature of abuse.** Abusive partners who exhibit violent, frequent jealousy over women's past relationships and a fixation on perceived (and often unsubstantiated) infidelity may pose a risk not only to these women, but to people they have dated, or are beginning to date.



STRANGULATION OF THE VICTIM



CASE HIGHLIGHT

Samantha Koehne, 38, died as a result of probable strangulation on November 2, 2024 in Edgerton. Her boyfriend Joseph Benson, 35, is charged with second-degree murder. Samantha was found inside a home **with an extension cord lying across her body with blood in her hair and ears, and marks on her throat. Police found Benson with scratches on his face and arms,** emphasizing the need for comprehensive training for law enforcement on identifying strangulation and defensive wounds. This training is critical to obtaining necessary medical care for survivors and reducing the likelihood of survivor criminalization.

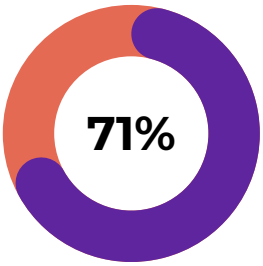
Nationally, strangulation is seen as a leading risk factor for intimate partner homicide. **At least 21% (5 victims) of all 24 victims killed in Minnesota in 2024 were killed by a person who used strangulation as the means of death; or had previously strangled them prior to killing them by other means; or had a history of strangling a past partner(s).** This number is undoubtedly lower than the true percentage. **Strangulation is both a risk factor for future homicide through other means, and a lethal form of violence on its own.** The presence of strangulation in an abusive relationship increases the likelihood of homicide by 70%. Although strangulation can leave visible marks, these signs are not always detectable and may be harder to see on darker skin. This is why it is necessary to have medical professionals make determinations of strangulation rather than being left *only* to the police. **In some cases, survivors may not have visible strangulation injuries, but may leave defensive wounds on their abusive partner's neck or body when trying to get away, which, in combination with racial and gender bias, may lead to criminalization.**

MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS

The five homicide risk factors we have covered are not mutually exclusive. Oftentimes, they co-occur, which increases the likelihood of homicide. **In 2024, at least 71% (17 victims) of the total 24 victims' cases involved multiple risk factors.** Each of these cases provide us with insight into victims' experiences, and reveal points of intervention that may prevent homicides.

VICTIMS WHO MET MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS

The following list includes victims killed by a current or former partner, as well as bystanders or intervenors. For bystanders or intervenors, we looked at whether the perpetrator's current or former partner met multiple risk factors for homicide.

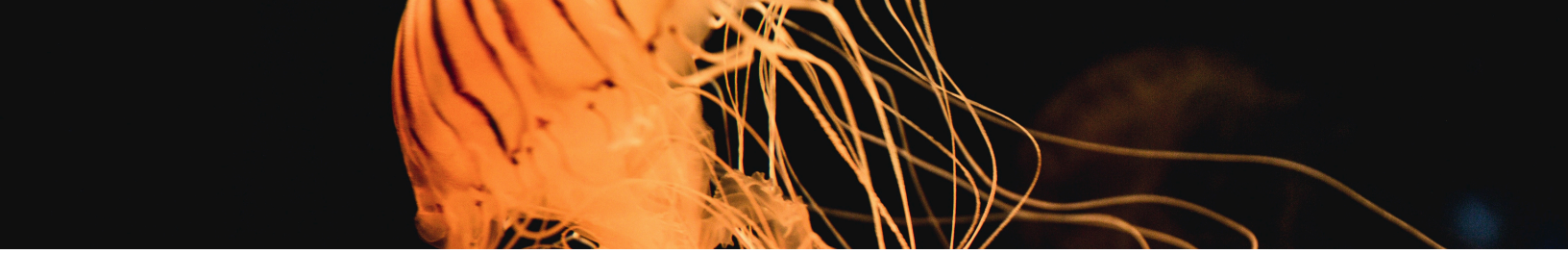


- **Paul Elmstrand, Matthew Ruge, Adam Finseth (4)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's access to firearms; history of violence
- **David Joseph Nanovic (2)**
  - Abuser's access to firearms; history of violence
- **Toumai Gaynor (3)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's access to firearms
- **Amir Demarion Harden (4)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's access to firearms; history of violence; strangulation
- **Allisa Marie Vollan (3)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; history of violence; strangulation
- **Damara Alexis Kirkland (2)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's access to firearms
- **Anonymous (2)**
  - Abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's access to firearms
- **Lyle Maske (4)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's access to firearms; abuser's history of violence
- **Dejuan Hemphill (5)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's access to firearms; history of violence; strangulation
- **Samantha Koehne (3)**
  - Abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's history of violence; strangulation
- **Erin Abramson, Jacob Nephew, Kathryn "Kat" Ramsland, Oliver Nephew (3)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's access to firearms; abuser's history of violence
- **Apostle L (4)**
  - Attempts to leave the abuser; abuser's threats to kill the victim; abuser's history of violence; strangulation

The ex-girlfriend of one of the men who killed Dejuan Hemphill due to jealousy involving her met all 5 risk factors.



2024 ANALYSIS



THE FAR-REACHING IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE

Statement from Relationship Safety Alliance – Crow Wing County

Domestic violence homicide leaves a lasting imprint not just on families but entire communities. At Relationship Safety Alliance in Crow Wing County, we witness how the trauma reverberates—affecting classrooms, workplaces, courtrooms, and shelters. The impact is never contained to just one household. Every life lost alters many more.

In 2024, our community was shaken by the murder of 62-year-old Lyle Maske, who was killed while trying to intervene in a domestic violence incident involving his neighbor and her children. Lyle's decision to step in during a moment of danger should not have cost him his life. **His death underscores how domestic violence doesn't only affect those in intimate relationships**—it pulls in neighbors, bystanders, and those who care enough to act. This loss deeply impacted our rural Brainerd-area community, where connections run deep and neighbors often rely on one another.

We see the ripple effects of these tragedies in our daily work. Children carry the trauma of what they've witnessed or lost. Friends and family struggle to understand how warning signs were missed or dismissed. Advocates and professionals in health care, law enforcement, education, and child protection absorb the emotional toll of preventable tragedies. **In small communities, these events are not distant headlines—they are felt personally, intensely, and over time.**

Domestic violence is not caused by mental illness or substance use—it is rooted in power and control. And while not every tragedy can be predicted, many can be prevented when systems are equipped to act early and decisively. That means enforcing firearm prohibitions, strengthening cross-system communication, investing in culturally responsive services, and ensuring that survivors are believed and supported the first time they reach out.

We cannot wait for crisis to mobilize action. Preventing domestic violence homicide requires more than awareness—it requires commitment. It requires recognizing that delays in funding, service gaps, and policy inaction can have fatal consequences. **If the only thing standing between a survivor and safety is a grant deadline or a budget vote, then we have completely failed as a society.** At RSA, we remain steadfast in our efforts to build a safer, more responsive community—one where survivors are supported, prevention is prioritized, **and no one else has to pay with their life for trying to help.**



ABOUT RELATIONSHIP SAFETY ALLIANCE

Serving Crow Wing County and Region 5+

Formerly known as Mid-Minnesota Women's Center, Relationship Safety Alliance (RSA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ending relationship abuse through safety, shelter, advocacy, and education. We serve Central Minnesota's Region 5+ with two core programs: the Louise Seliski Shelter, offering 24/7 emergency shelter and crisis support for those experiencing domestic violence, and the Alex & Brandon Child Safety Center, providing safe, neutral spaces for supervised parenting time and child exchanges.

RSA offers trauma-informed support groups, advocacy and support navigating legal and medical systems, community outreach, youth prevention programming, professional training, and a 24-hour crisis line. We welcome survivors of all backgrounds, identities, and family structures—and provide pet-friendly accommodations because we know safety includes the whole family.

We believe everyone deserves to live free from violence. Our mission is to save lives by supporting the journey to wellbeing and empowerment of all people exposed to relationship abuse.

www.relationshipsafety.org
24/7 Crisis Line: 218-828-1216
info@relationshipsafety.org

Relationship Safety Alliance

Statement from 360 Communities



In February 2024, **Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge**, both Burnsville Police Officers, were shot and killed in Burnsville while responding to a domestic and sexual violence call. **Adam Finseth**, a firefighter-paramedic, responded to the same call and was killed while providing life saving measures to an officer. Burnsville Police Sergeant, Adam Medlicott, was also shot and injured in the incident, and later recovered. **In a matter of several hours, countless lives were forever changed by the impact of intimate partner violence.**

Intimate partner homicides represent the most extreme and final form of abuse, often preceded by years of psychological, physical, sexual, and/or financial control. Yet not all of these deaths are treated with the same urgency, respect, or visibility. Some become national headlines, while others are barely mentioned. **As we honor everyone in this report, it's important to us that those who did not receive the same attention are remembered.** In Dakota County, the other victims of intimate partner homicide in 2024 include:



- **In June 2024, Amir Demarion Harden was 8 years old when he was shot and killed in Burnsville protecting his mother from his abusive father.**



- **In August 2024, Payao Vang was 27 years old when she was shot and killed by her husband in Empire in a murder-suicide.**

The lasting trauma of domestic violence is a public health issue with devastation that affects an entire community and beyond. In these three incidents in Dakota County, not only did we see a significant loss of life, but we also saw a woman and seven children experience so much trauma in the very place they should feel the safest, home. We saw a mother and children who watched as their child and sibling tragically lost his life at the hands of his father. We saw a woman left in an empty field, lying next to the person who killed her. **We saw the deeply troubling reality that survivors of domestic violence are blamed and/or criminalized for actions stemming directly from their abuse.**



Continued: Echoes of Domestic Violence

Many of the impacts are harder to see and continue for days, weeks, months, and years: Officers who constantly wonder if they'll live through the next call for help. Students who go to school wondering where their friends and classmates are. Co-workers who miss the person who used to sit next to them and help them get through the work day. Advocates who wonder if they could've done something different to help. Victims/survivors who are even more afraid to leave abusive relationships and ask for help.

Communities play an essential role before and after an intimate partner homicide—not only in supporting survivors and families, but also in understanding the complexities of domestic violence, holding systems and individuals accountable, preventing further violence, and building healthier, safer environments. In the aftermath of this difficult year in Dakota County, we have seen our communities become more motivated for change. There is an increased sense of responsibility and urgency from community members and leaders, business leaders, educators, systems professionals, and more to come together to make a difference.

It will take all of us to create long-lasting sustainable change in our communities. Take a moment to review the recommendations and action ideas in this report. And, please know we are here with you. Together, we can ensure that parents are not forced to outlive their children, and children will be able to experience the joy of being a kid. Family and friends can wake up every day knowing that someone they care about so deeply is just a phone call away. **Together, we can make a difference, and we can have safer communities.**

360 Communities is a member program of Violence Free Minnesota. As a multi-service, non-profit organization located in Dakota County, 360 Communities offers a variety of programs and supports that deliver safety and stability that improves lives. Learn more here: 360communities.org.

360 Communities®
Help in the moment. Hope for the future.

DULUTH MURDERS-SUICIDE: 2 NEIGHBORHOODS; A CITY OF IMPACT

On November 7, 2024, Anthony Nephew, 46, went to his ex-partner Erin Abramson's home in the Cody neighborhood of Duluth. There, he shot and killed Erin, 47, and their son Jacob Nephew, 15. **He then returned to his home** in the Denfeld neighborhood, where he shot and killed his wife Kathryn "Kat" Ramsland, 45, and their son Oliver Nephew, 7, before fatally shooting himself. Our hearts remain with Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver's loved ones, and also with Anthony's, who are grieving and suffering a loss too.



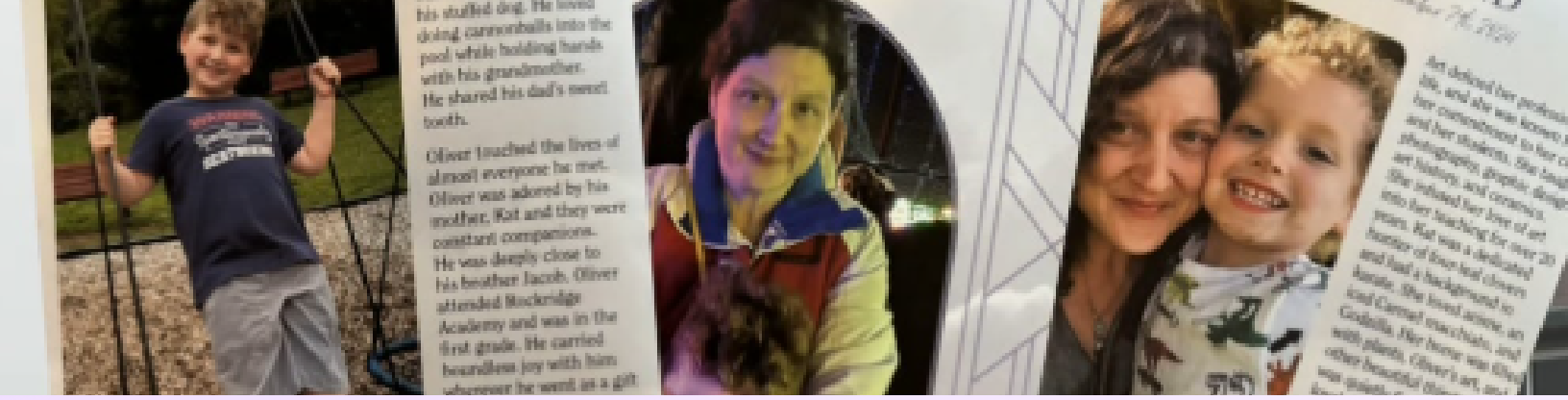
The murders of Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver devastated their neighborhoods, communities, and Duluth as a whole. The impact of their murders touched their families, friends, coworkers, schools, workplaces, and extracurricular organizations in ways that cannot ever be fully captured here.



Erin participated in the She/Moms Run This Town running group, with thousands of members in Duluth and Superior. On the second Saturday in a row Erin was not there running alongside them, the group completed their run and had breakfast, where they honored her and wrote letters to her family. **Their group still holds morning runs without her.**



Jacob was in his sophomore year at Duluth Marshall. Shortly after his death, he was honored as part of the University of Minnesota Duluth Honor Orchestra. He participated in Knowledge Bowl, Nordic Ski, Orchestra, Chess Club, and Environmental Advocacy Club. **Those clubs continue to meet in his absence.**



Kathryn was an art professor at Lake Superior College. A week after her death, the college celebrated her life with poetry, a choir performance, and testimonials from her students. Before she died, she connected one of her students, who dreamed of publishing a graphic novel, with a published graphic novelist. **We hope one day his novel comes to fruition.**

Oliver built a free toy library for children in his neighborhood, which community members later surrounded with stuffed animals and flowers. Duluth Public Schools held a book drive in his honor, collecting 100 books, including some of his favorites: LEGO, Minecraft, dinosaurs, and Harry Potter. **Somewhere, right now, a child is reading a book donated in Oliver's memory.**

A candlelight vigil was held the week following all of their murders. Participants walked between Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver's homes.

It is true that Anthony Nephew had a long and documented history of mental illness prior to the murders-suicide, and it is true that mental illness in our country is still stigmatized. It is also true that on July 3, 2024, he threatened to stab Kathryn and kill himself. This incident resulted in his hospitalization. **Several months later, on September 9, 2024, Nephew applied for a gun permit and received it on the same day. This decision had profound and preventable consequences, and it was a decision Nephew made despite abundant evidence of the danger firearms access posed to his family. Two months later, he shot and killed Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, and Oliver.**



In the wake of this tragedy, Violence Free Minnesota observed as dozens of media outlets across the state focused solely on Anthony Nephew's mental health history and his presumed political views. His op-eds on mental health were quoted extensively. **In none of these articles were the voices of Erin, Jacob, Kathryn, or Oliver represented.**

We believe that mental health and domestic violence can co-exist, but that mental health is not the sole cause of domestic violence. Any discussion or coverage of domestic violence-related murder-suicides involving someone with a history of mental health concerns should also include discussion of the domestic violence context. Women report mental illness at equal or greater rates than men, yet men continue to comprise the vast majority of murder-suicide perpetrators in our domestic violence homicide data since 1989. **These tragedies cannot be fully separated from a context of male privilege and entitlement.** Someone can struggle and suffer with their mental health, and still make a choice based on a belief that they are entitled to end someone else's life. **That is not a belief that anyone is ever entitled or justified to act upon.**

Erin and Jacob's home and Kathryn and Oliver's home were a mile apart. Across that mile spanned neighbors, and Oliver's free toy library. Surrounding that mile are a Dairy Queen, a Walgreens, an art gallery, a preschool—**all parts of an ecosystem that are deeply and wholly touched by the deaths of four remarkable human beings.** Beyond that mile, countless more miles. Of Erin, a friend said, "She did everything for [Jacob]. Her last post on Facebook was updating a map of the United States on all the states they'd been to. They only had 10 states left."

The following analysis seeks not to excuse Ashley Dyrdahl's actions, but to contextualize the years of abuse and legal systems failures that led up to them.

GENDER, ABUSE, AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS

Violence Free Minnesota's Analysis of the Burnsville Homicides

In February 2024, Shannon Gooden shot and killed Paul Elmstrand, Matthew Ruge, and Adam Finseth as they responded to a domestic and sexual violence call at Gooden's home in Burnsville, where Gooden had been holding his partner, Ashley Dyrdahl, and seven children hostage at gunpoint. We name Ashley here as she has already been publicly named in many news articles over the past year, **many of which neglect to contextualize her actions.**

In July 2024, several months after the shooting, the Star Tribune released an article in which the Dakota County Attorney stated that Ashley had called 911 in February after discovering Gooden had just sexually assaulted one of the children. Gooden then shot Paul, Matthew, and Adam as they arrived. **Authorities later found nearly 1,000 images of the child on Gooden's phone, most sexualized in nature.** Very few media outlets covered this new discovery. The Burnsville shooting and Ashley's later indictment for straw purchasing made front-page news both statewide and nationwide. Yet a credible, County Attorney-supported account of Gooden's perpetration of extensive child sexual abuse leading to the shooting **barely entered public consciousness.**

In September 2025, Ashley was sentenced to nearly 4 years in prison for straw purchasing for Gooden—the act of supplying firearms to someone who is unable to acquire them. Gooden was legally prohibited from possessing firearms. **According to reporters, domestic violence was not mentioned at Ashley's initial plea hearing, despite Ashley requesting a protective order against Gooden in 2017.** In the order, Ashley alleged that Gooden had assaulted her multiple times. **At least three women had filed Orders for Protection against Gooden. His history of violence was so severe that some women believed he would kill them.**

Legal systems far too often dismiss and ignore women's experiences with gender-based violence, and how dynamics of exploitation, coercion, intimidation and control may influence their decisions. Survived and Punished found that *"anywhere from **half to 90 percent** of women who are incarcerated experienced physical or sexual abuse before their incarceration. And furthermore, "[m]ost studies of incarcerated women have observed **high rates of victimization that link violence in women's lives to their entry** into the criminal justice system as defendants."*

SURVIVED AND PUNISHED

Learn more about criminalized survival at https://survivedandpunished.org/

Continued: Violence Free Minnesota's Burnsville Analysis

Gender dynamics and systemic sexism cannot be unlinked from the circumstances and history preceding Paul Elmstrand, Matthew Ruge, and Adam Finseth's murders. Court records documenting Gooden's abuse of multiple women are vast and immense. **They tell a story of a man who, for many years, used control, intimidation, threats, violence, and the weaponization of gender bias in family court to punish and abuse both Ashley Dyrdahl and another mother of his children.** In family court documents from 2017 involving Gooden and Ashley, Gooden introduced allegations about Ashley's substance use, portrayed her as unstable and erratic, and referred to her as "belligerent." **Ashley's writing from 2017 paints an entirely different picture.**

In her documents, she wrote to the court that Gooden had taken their 10 month old son away, and would block her and refuse to tell her the whereabouts of their son. At one point, he told her she would need to give up her rights and come back to live with him in order to see their son. Gooden, she wrote, had started abusing her from the very beginning of their relationship, and she had gotten pregnant quickly. **Gooden would headbutt her, scream at her, and throw her down stairs.** She experienced financial abuse from him to the point she lost her house, her car, and her phone. **An Order for Protection (OFP) petition Ashley filed in 2017 was denied due to "lack of proof." While it was pending, Gooden had filed for temporary sole legal and physical custody of their minor son. A month after the OFP hearing, he was granted that custody.**

In a 2020 OFP petition, the mother of Gooden's other children wrote that Gooden would constantly accuse her of cheating; slap and hit her and pull her hair; and cut her clothes with a knife. She believed Gooden would eventually kill her, and he had thrown her against the wall and would sometimes refuse to return their children. **Just as they had with Ashley's 2017 OFP petition, the courts denied her petition, citing a "lack of proof."** Around the time of the mother's 2020 OFP petition, Gooden demanded sole legal and physical custody of their children, just as he had with Ashley. In his affidavit, he *again* portrayed the mother as an unstable, erratic, unfit parent; introduced allegations about her mental health and substance use; repeatedly denied the existence of domestic violence; and repeatedly referred to himself as a good father. **The sexist stereotypes in these documents are clear: mothers are routinely portrayed in family court as "crazy," aggressive, and hysterical, while fathers are portrayed as calm, regulated, and emotionally stable.** And despite the fact that Gooden had a 2005 domestic assault charge and a 2008 conviction for assault with a dangerous weapon, the judge granted joint custody between Gooden and the mother, and made Gooden's home the primary home for the children during the school year.

"He made it seem or portrayed to the world [that] he's this perfect person"

*Not victim's actual writing

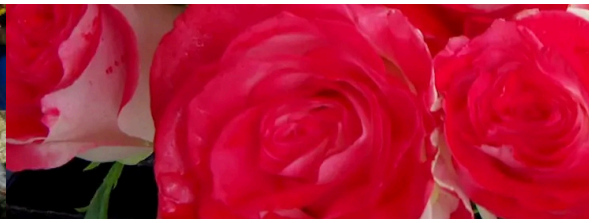
Continued: Violence Free Minnesota's Burnsville Analysis

In January 2025, after Gooden killed himself after killing Paul Elmstrand, Matthew Ruge, and Adam Finseth, Ashley, who had already been indicted for straw purchasing, submitted a custody petition to the courts in an effort to prevent Gooden's family from receiving custody of their children. **She repeated in that petition that Gooden had been physically, sexually, and emotionally abusive to her for years, and to one of her children; the same child she discovered he had been sexually abusing before she called 911 on February 18, 2024.** She told the courts that Gooden would sometimes threaten to take her children away. And by all accounts, he had. **Because Gooden was dead, Ashley was finally awarded sole legal and physical custody of her and Gooden's minor son, *8 years* after Gooden was first awarded the same.**

If a woman had done what Gooden did to his children and their mothers, she would have been accused of "parental alienation." Instead, the courts repeatedly failed to take Ashley and the other mother's extensive claims of domestic violence seriously, and frequently made decisions in favor of Gooden. "Parental alienation" is a concept developed by Dr. Richard Gardner, a New York psychiatrist and psychoanalyst whose career largely involved testifying on behalf of fathers accused of sexually abusing their children, like Shannon Gooden. "Parental alienation," he argued, involved one parent attempting to manipulate a child to keep them away from the other parent. **Though the concept is nearly always used to malign women seeking safety from abusive fathers,** many courts still accept it, and it often doubles women's chances of losing custody, according to a 2020 national study funded by the U.S. Justice Department. **One of the most common reasons why abusive fathers are awarded custody is because the mother is not perceived as credible. In many cases, not being perceived as credible means that women are perceived as psychologically unwell—and Shannon Gooden knew this. In one of his documents, he used the term "alienating."**

Matthew Ruge, Paul Elmstrand, and Adam Finseth were all killed while responding to domestic and sexual violence to protect Ashley Dyrdahl and her children. These deaths were preventable if systems had protected Ashley and her children sooner and before a critical incident. The losses of Matthew, Paul, and Adam are now felt across their communities: among their families and friends, their departments, and every person they served.





**Left photo credit to Pioneer Press*



Racial Disparities: Statement from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) Office and the Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls (MMBWG) Office

Stronger Data Equals Safer Communities

Robust and accurate data is foundational to building informed public safety policy. It helps identify crime patterns, strengthen law enforcement response and ensure resources are allocated in an equitable, effective and just manner. But these objectives can only be reached when the data itself is complete and reflects the experiences of communities. **Minnesota has taken important steps to understand and address the epidemic of missing persons and homicide cases that disproportionately impacts Black women and girls, and Indigenous relatives.** Yet, as outlined in research from the Minnesota Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force Report (2020) and the Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force Final Report (2022), **incomplete data collection and reporting continue to hinder effective investigation, prevention and justice efforts.**

Initial Reporting

The first 72 hours of a missing person case is critical. Although state law requires law enforcement to take missing persons reports immediately, interviews cited by both reports show families still face delays and refusals especially when the missing person has system involvement or is considered "high risk." **Mistrust of law enforcement within the Black and Indigenous communities is a well-documented factor that contributes to reporting delays and failure to report. Among those who do report, families often describe feeling like they must be in extreme crisis to be taken seriously.** Any barriers to filing the initial report prevent individuals from being entered into national or statewide databases, receiving a public alert, and reduce the likelihood of being found safe. This initial report serves as the basis for public safety and public health interventions and underreporting at this level can have a large impact.



Racial or Ethnic Misclassification

While racial and ethnic classification can be a highly subjective topic, inaccurate information can distort public health data and mask the full impact of a problem. Interviews with medical examiners and law enforcement indicate that **Indigenous victims may mistakenly be logged as "white," Black individuals may be coded as "other" and multi-racial individuals can often be excluded** from demographic categorization altogether.

Jurisdictional Challenges and Overlapping Authority

While the root causes of the disproportionate number of cases of missing and murdered Black and Indigenous women and girls are recognized on a system-level, the most vulnerable often have complex backgrounds that make it difficult to address on an individual level. **Poor coordination and communication across child welfare, housing, social service and law enforcement can cause delays or gaps. For Indigenous relatives, jurisdictional issues that span Tribal authority may add further confusion.** Without strong communication protocols, not only is the jurisdictional authority to act unclear, but information and data become divided across multiple agencies and providers. This creates barriers to a full suite of information for law enforcement in moments of crisis and for prevention professionals working to identify and help those who are most at risk.

Death Cases are Closed Without Full Investigation

When a person is found deceased, a medical examiner makes a determination about the "cause of death" or the specific injury that led to the death, as well as the circumstances surrounding or the "manner of death." While the definitions of these determinations are carefully defined by the medical examination community, the common understanding of some terminology may not exactly match up. The reports document **this disconnect has not only resulted in confusion with families seeking answers but can obscure the connections between suspicious deaths and domestic violence, sexual assault, overdoses and human trafficking.**

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) and Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls (MMBWG) offices within the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS) are working to address these systemic issues. The missing and murdered offices have begun to implement a centralized case management system designed to improve how data is shared, collected and analyzed. In the short term, the goal is to aid law enforcement agencies by centralizing information about these complex cases from family interactions, community-led searches, social service agencies and other law enforcement organizations. This will enable more robust investigations from the outset of a case. Historical data from these offices will also allow law enforcement to conduct complex risk assessments on current cases and identify potential new avenues of investigation. Fully operational and complemented by data sharing agreements with law enforcement, this system will also support the ability to identify crime patterns and more complete better demographic tracking statewide.

Minnesota
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives
Office

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office

In July, DPS' MMIR Office announced the official opening of the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund Tip Program. **This historic initiative offers monetary rewards of up to $10,000 for tips in eligible missing persons, suspicious death and homicide investigations. The goal is to help advance the investigation and support families in resolution.**

To be eligible for an award, cases must have completed the MMIR intake process and be open with a law enforcement agency. Tips must provide specific and actionable information that advances the investigation. The amount of the award is determined by the lead law enforcement agency investigating the case. The reward fund's policy outlines defined reward amounts in terms of their impact on the investigation.

- Between $1,000-$2,500: For tips that result in significant investigative progress identifying persons of interest, primary suspects or accomplices.
- Up to $5,000: For tips that lead to the arrest of a suspect or suspects, or substantial progress in the investigation.
- Up to $10,000: For long-term missing or homicide cases that result in location of remains, supports the decision to prosecute or results in case closure.
- The public can support the ongoing efforts of the reward fund **by purchasing an MMIR license plate** through DPS' Driver and Vehicle Services division.

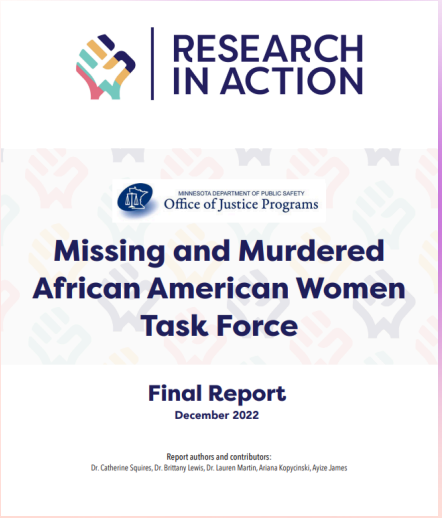
Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls Office

The office develops targeted strategies to support survivors and families, advance prevention efforts and drive systemic change. Through data collection, research and policy recommendations, we aim to transform how cases involving Black women and girls are investigated, prosecuted and resolved. Collaboration is central to our mission, working with state agencies, law enforcement and community leaders to close system gaps and strengthen responses.

The creation of the nation's first Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls Office, signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz on May 18, 2023, **has brought long-overdue attention to an issue too often ignored.** This visibility is essential for building public understanding, mobilizing resources and creating lasting change.

The office is now fully staffed with six full-time positions including a director, head of advocacy and victim support, principal planner, case review and systems coordinator, justice and advocacy research analyst, and violence prevention and training coordinator. **Guided by the 2022 Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force Report, we work each day to honor victims, support families and prevent future harm.**

Read about the MMBWG Office and the 2022 Missing and Murdered African American Women Task Force Report at https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/offices-missing-murdered/mmbwg-mmbwg





FIREARMS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARE A DEADLY COMBINATION FOR VICTIMS—AND BYSTANDERS AND INTERVENORS

Almost every year since Violence Free Minnesota began tracking domestic violence homicides in 1989, firearms have overwhelmingly been the most common means of homicide. Overall, the frequency of other means of homicide, such as stabbing or vehicular homicide, do not even come close to the frequency of firearm-perpetrated homicide. In **2024, 75% (18 victims) of the total 24 victims were killed using a firearm.** This is not a trend nor recent; it's a well-established, long-term pattern with an abundance of data, lived experience, and research behind it. **Abusive partners should not have access to firearms,** and if they're legally prohibited from possessing them, those prohibitions must be enforced as a priority. **This isn't debatable. We continue to hear "Guns don't kill people; people kill people." No—abusive partners kill their partners *with* guns.** Domestic violence and firearms are a deadly combination, and not only is it leading to the unacceptable and preventable deaths of too many victims in our state; **it is also leading to the unacceptable and preventable deaths of too many bystanders and intervenors.**

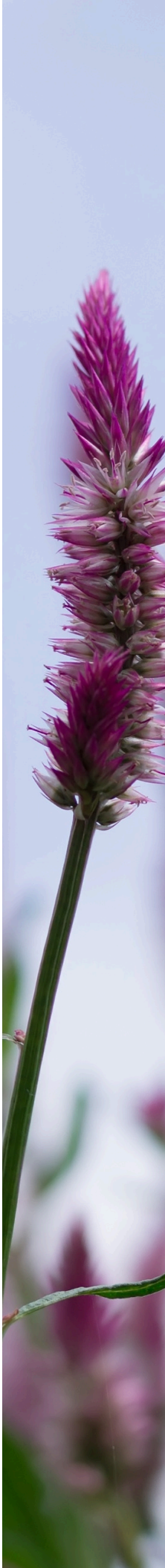
In 2023, Violence Free Minnesota documented 11 bystander and intervenor deaths due to relationship abuse, the highest number we've tracked since starting this work in 1989. In 2024, we again documented 11 bystander and intervenor deaths, and 10 of those deaths involved a firearm. Domestic violence and gun violence are public health crises.

2024 SUSPICIOUS DEATHS

Nearly every year, Violence Free Minnesota tracks suspicious deaths where the circumstances suggest a likely connection to domestic violence as the sole or contributing factor, but where domestic violence has not been officially determined as the sole or contributing factor to the death. Reasons for this lack of confirmation may include a Medical Examiner's inability to determine the cause or manner of death, lack of media coverage on the death, substantial lack of progress in a death investigation, the person's body is missing, the person has not been found but has been declared legally dead, etc. **As a result, for last year's Homicide Report, we updated our report inclusion criteria to include a new suspicious deaths category.** This category is intended to expand public understanding of the impacts of domestic violence in Minnesota, and the factors that may contribute to a lack of clarity around certain deaths.

It is important to note that trans and gender expansive individuals, Indigenous women, Black women, and women of color are frequently overrepresented in the suspicious deaths cases we track, often for the reasons noted above. Full details of the suspicious deaths criteria can be found in the Report Methods section later in this report.

On the next few pages, we share the stories of the three individuals we are honoring in our 2024 suspicious deaths category, as well as explanations for why they are honored in this category. Their memorials can also be found at the beginning of this report.





ALLISON LUSSIER: SUSPICIOUS DEATH

Allison Lussier, 47, a Native woman, was found dead by police on February 22, 2024 in her Minneapolis apartment. She died of a subdural hematoma (a blood buildup between the brain and skull). The Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office initially stated it could not determine her manner of death or what caused the subdural hematoma. Allison's death was publicly classified as suspicious by police on March 1, 2024. **Her former partner had a long, severe, documented history of domestic violence against her, as well as against numerous other women dating back to at least 2013, including strangulation, beating, stalking, threats of harm and homicide, and physical restraint.** Activists have referred to the violence he subjected Allison to as torture. Police took as many as six reports from her regarding domestic violence in the 18 months before her death, and she had an Order for Protection (OFP) against him in 2022. In that OFP petition, she mentioned he had threatened to remove her lips with a razor. Allison called the police to her apartment on February 17 before her death, but no arrest was made. **Her body was found in her apartment five days after telling a family member that if she didn't stay in touch, "Then know [former partner] got [her]."**

A probable cause pickup order was issued for her former partner on March 30, 2024, over a month after Allison's death, but he eluded law enforcement until late July when they arrested him on unrelated burglary and assault charges. As of February 2025, he was jailed in Hennepin County on multiple unrelated felony counts.

Allison's family has been vocal about ongoing dismissive treatment from the police, as well as numerous gaps in the police response or lack thereof prior to and after her death, which they believe can be attributed to systemic racism and ongoing failures that result in high numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women. At the time of this report, her family continues to fight for adequate investigation into her death, and the Office of the Minneapolis City Auditor is conducting a special review of the Minneapolis Police Department's investigation into Allison's death. Because we cannot yet make a conclusive determination of Allison's manner or cause of death, we honor her under our suspicious deaths category. She leaves behind at least one child.



MARCUS ANTWAN MARTIN, JR.: SUSPICIOUS DEATH



Marcus Antwan Martin, Jr., 28, was strangled to death in Mayo Park West in Rochester on June 15, 2024. Bystanders directed police to Marcus, who was lying dead in the grass. On June 26, police were informed that Ruth Ann Miller, 26, wanted to talk with them about Marcus's death. **Miller claimed that she and Marcus engaged in a sexual interaction in the park** and that afterward he asked her to kill him, at which point she strangled him. On March 17, 2025, Miller was sentenced to 27 years in prison after being convicted of second-degree non-premeditated murder with intent. Miller has a history of assault convictions, including against a man she was previously living with.

At the time of this report, Miller's claims of a sexual (intimate partner) interaction have not yet been substantiated, and there has been no additional information about her relationship with Marcus leading up to his murder. Because we don't have confirmation of such details at this point in time, we honor Marcus in our suspicious deaths category.

VICTORIA JO GAMBLE: SUSPICIOUS DEATH

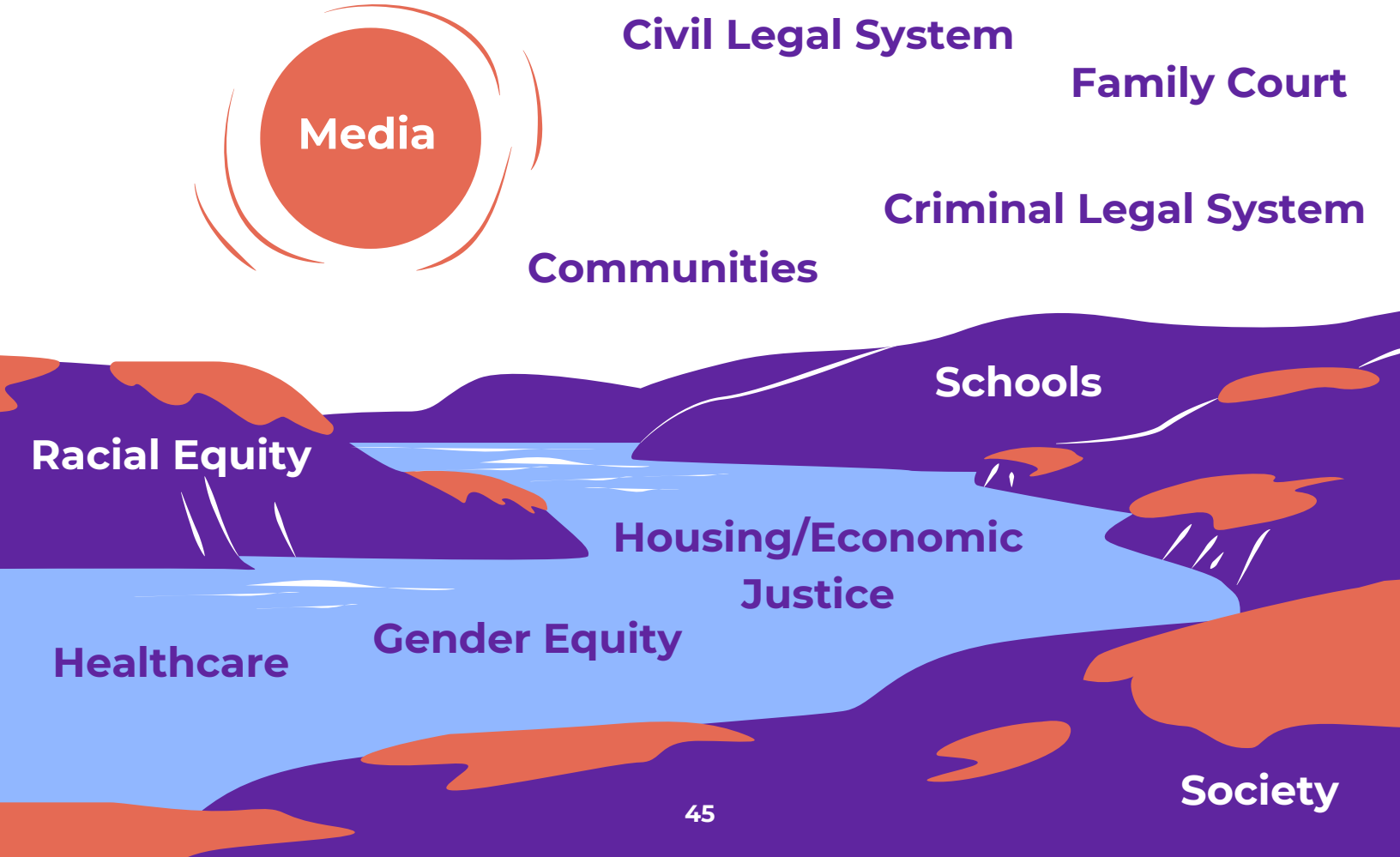


Victoria Jo Gamble, 38, was strangled to death in her apartment in Sauk Rapids on or around August 12, 2024. Christopher Neal, 45, is charged with two counts of second-degree murder, one count of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle, and one count of theft of a motor vehicle. Victoria and Neal were seen on security camera footage leaving a Sauk Rapids bar together early the morning of August 12. Bar patrons told police that Neal and Victoria had just met that night. They then went to Victoria's apartment. Neal later left the apartment alone. He was later found in a Louisiana hotel with Victoria's stolen car. **Previously, on August 1, Neal was charged with domestic assault by strangulation in Aitkin County in a case involving another victim and was released on bail. On August 12, the Aitkin County Sheriff's Office reported a violation of a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order (DANCO) that was put in place between Neal and the victim in that assault.** A warrant was issued and he was formally charged for the violation on August 19 after being arrested for Victoria's murder.

At the time of this report, we do not know if an intimate interaction occurred between Victoria and Neal prior to her homicide, or if she turned down any romantic advances from him. Because of this, we honor Victoria under our suspicious deaths category.

RECOMMENDATIONS

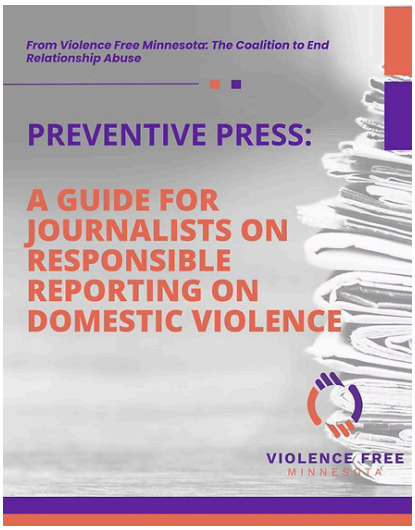
Intimate partner violence is a public health crisis and a social issue. **It is often predictable and preventable.** Like any public health crisis and social issue, implementing policy changes to our systems and institutions can lead to positive outcomes, including fewer instances of intimate partner violence and safer communities. Survivors, community-based advocacy programs, and programs led by and for culturally specific communities should be at the center of all policy recommendations, from inception to implementation. **Each and every part of an ecosystem has a role to play** in preventing and ending domestic violence, from schools to healthcare systems to media to community members. **Together, we can end relationship abuse.**



MEDIA

RECOMMENDATION: Media agencies should read Violence Free Minnesota's Preventive Press media guide on ethical reporting on domestic violence; share the guide with media partners; incorporate the recommendations into their practice; and engage in ongoing relationship building with domestic violence agencies.

- Journalists should **consult domestic violence experts** for articles;
- Journalists should include the **statewide Day One Hotline (Call: 1.866.223.1111, Text: 612.399.9995)** in ALL domestic violence stories and include local resources, which can be found at **https://www.vfmn.org/find-a-program**;
- Journalists should ensure that all articles focus on the perpetrator's actions, refrain from victim-blaming, honor the victim, and **place deaths within a context of abuse;**
- Journalists should always discuss and include the **domestic violence context of murder-suicides;**
- Journalists should have conversations with domestic violence expert interviewees about **which statements/context must be included** and what the experts want readers to know;
- Media agencies should seek **ongoing relationship building** with domestic violence agencies serving BIPOC victims, 2SLGBTQIA+ victims, victims with disabilities, immigrant victims, male victims, and women, and make specific efforts **to enhance the quality, frequency, and respect** of their reporting involving these communities.



EXAMPLE: Violence Free Minnesota's Preventive Press media guide for journalism on relationship abuse includes best practice guidelines; sample imagery; headline examples; and language tips.
https://www.vfmn.org/communications

HEALTHCARE

RECOMMENDATION: All health centers, clinics, and hospitals should create and institutionalize policies and procedures for addressing domestic violence. All professions in the healthcare setting should be included with specific roles.

- All healthcare settings should consider transitioning from checklist screenings for domestic violence to a universal education method such as **CUES** (Confidentiality, Universal Education, Empowerment, Support) that reduces power imbalances and does not rely on patient disclosure to receive resources. Healthcare settings should use the CUES method to assess for patient relationship safety as appropriate and **be prepared to engage in warm referrals with community-based advocacy partners.** Brief Minnesota-specific CUES training modules are available at **https://tinyurl.com/r2ew39am**;
- Healthcare settings should ensure that their domestic violence training (such as that offered by the **Health Partners on IPV and Exploitation Center**) is comprehensive, mandatory, and ongoing for all staff, and includes content on **strangulation and brain injuries**, such as that offered by the Center on Partner-Inflicted Brain Injury, as well as robust education on ways to assess and identify bruising and injuries on survivors of color;
- All health settings should **establish mutually beneficial relationships** with local domestic violence agencies, be knowledgeable of services offered and cultures served, and engage in referrals and cross-training.

EXAMPLE: Violence Free Minnesota brought five advocates from domestic violence agencies across the state to the 2025 Futures Without Violence Connected for Care: Advocate Health Summit in San Francisco, which brings together domestic violence advocates from across the United States to reframe how to do their work with a health lens.

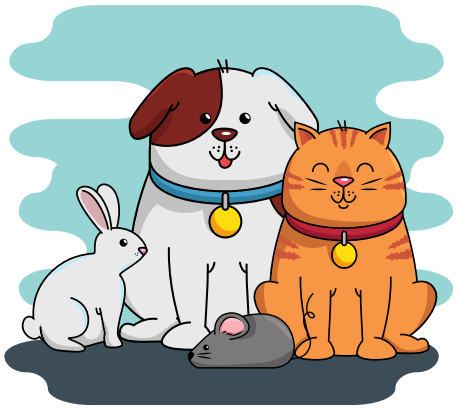
FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE



HOUSING & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

RECOMMENDATION: All levels of government should recognize that domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness and economic instability, that all people experiencing housing and economic instability deserve support and care, and that this large-scale crisis in our nation will require a large-scale solution.

- The Child Support Division at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families **should clarify and realign the Good Cause policy** to ensure a consistent, victim-centered approach across Minnesota;
- **Child support programs should implement comprehensive domestic violence policies and procedures** to increase victims' safe access;
- The Office of Justice Programs should remove application barriers to financial assistance from the **Minnesota Crime Victims Reimbursement Fund**;
- Housing funders should continue to fund and support apartment-style shelter to **increase inclusivity for male victims and 2SLGBTQIA+ victims**;
- All employers should consult with local domestic violence agencies to establish a domestic violence policy and procedure. Examples can be found at the Futures Without Violence Workplaces Respond resource center at **https://workplacesrespond.org/;**
- Employers should familiarize themselves with **Minnesota's earned sick and safe time law** and its application to domestic violence victims, and be prepared to connect employees with local community-based domestic violence resources;
- **Continuums of Care (CoCs) should partner with their local domestic violence organization(s)** to create or strengthen an access point for domestic violence victims/survivors to safety planning and services.



EXAMPLE: Several domestic violence agencies throughout Minnesota offer pet-friendly housing and shelter, with services such as routine vet care, supplies and food, and exercise and play spaces. A lack of pet-friendly shelter is a common barrier to leaving abusive relationships.

RECOMMENDATION: The state should prioritize funding for culturally specific domestic violence services, which are developed by and for underserved communities, and may be best situated to meet the needs of some survivors.

- Government and private grant funders should simplify grant application processes and **remove barriers that have a disproportionate impact on culturally specific programs.** Culturally specific programs tend to be smaller and newer than long-established mainstream programs and may not have dedicated staff for grant writing.

RECOMMENDATION: Victims' rights advocates must start and/or continue the process of self-auditing for harms they have contributed to against marginalized communities in efforts to support some survivors.

- Victim services programs should internally evaluate the ways that victims' rights have been historically used to justify racialized harms, and should work to address those harms. **Victims are often leveraged and exploited as the stated justification for "tough on crime" approaches** to justice which have led to mass incarceration, mass deportation, and disparate impacts on communities of color, immigrant communities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Victim services providers should seek to understand where they fit in that narrative and how they can challenge that narrative.

RECOMMENDATION: All levels of, and actors involved in, the policy making process should incorporate principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion to ensure no groups of survivors are excluded, and that previous exclusions are reddressed. Every step of policy making should include a robust analysis of intended, unintended, and unannounced consequences of policy changes.

- Policymakers, legislators, lobbyists, advocacy organizations, human resources professionals, and others who help draft law and policy should **always apply an equity lens to domestic violence policy proposals** to identify marginalized communities who may not receive the full benefit of the policy based on historical evidence. These communities include, but are not limited to: racial and ethnic, disabled, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.



COMMUNITY

RECOMMENDATION: Social institutions and communities play a critical role in victim/survivor safety and support, and accountability for people using harm. Institutions and communities should take proactive, collaborative measures to prevent and intervene in domestic violence, including:

- All K–12 schools should implement **standardized, ongoing, age-appropriate curricula** that addresses consent and healthy relationships. Schools should proactively establish relationships with their **local domestic violence agencies** who can offer this training to students;
- **Faith communities should partner with local domestic violence organizations** to offer resources, support groups, and educational programs to their leadership and members, including support for children; and within faith-based settings should promote messages of safety, respect, and equality in relationships;
- **Daycare centers and supervised visit/safe exchange facilities** should develop policies for responding to domestic violence experienced by clients;
- Barbershops and salons should establish relationships with their **local domestic violence advocacy agencies,** and **implement domestic violence training that supports barbers and hairstylists** in recognizing the signs of domestic violence and understanding how to safely refer clients experiencing abuse to those local advocacy agencies;
- Individuals and families should be prepared to have **supportive conversations with loved ones who may be experiencing abuse**;
- Individuals and families should be prepared for and equipped to have conversations with loved ones who may be harming a partner; and **men in particular should be actively engaged in ongoing efforts** to prevent and end gender-based violence among their peers and in their communities.

EXAMPLE: Men as Peacemakers in Duluth offers several programs to prevent domestic violence, including a Restorative Program, which helps people who have used domestic violence "repair harm, gain accountability, restore relationships, and reintegrate into healthy community."

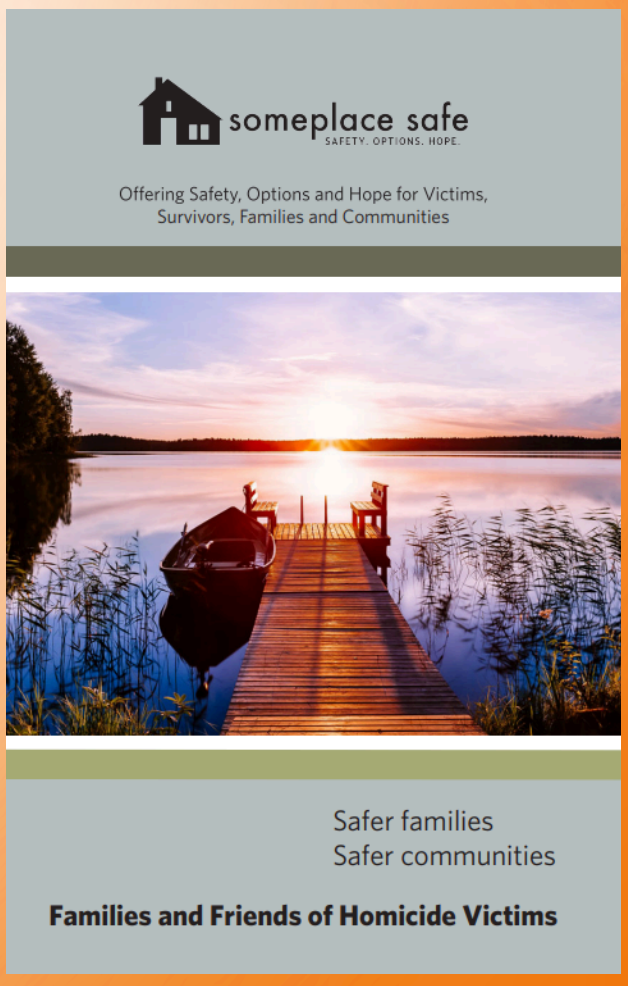
MEN AS PEACE MAKERS

COMMUNITY, CONTINUED

RECOMMENDATION: The state of Minnesota and community-based agencies should expand their resources and services with the specific purpose of supporting families and communities post-intimate partner homicide, including through initiatives such as:

- Expanding **funding opportunities** to support this work;
- **Expanding financial and childcare assistance to surviving family members;**
- **Offering support groups** that are specific to grieving and responding to the aftermath of intimate partner homicide, including murder-suicide;
- Offering **peer support services to surviving family and loved ones** of intimate partner homicide victims who are grieving and seeking healing.

EXAMPLE: Someplace Safe, a Violence Free Minnesota member program providing crime victims services in West Central Minnesota, created a handbook for family and friends of homicide victims. The handbook contains resources and information about media, social media, crime victims' rights, financial assistance, legal systems navigation, and more.



FIREARMS

RECOMMENDATION: The state of Minnesota must prioritize ongoing efforts to end intimate partner violence involving firearms.

- **Community-based domestic violence advocates should seek training on firearm safety** to support victim safety planning around firearms in their home, including sharing information about safe storage and potentially having gunlocks available on site to provide to victims;
- Cities should establish **a clear line of responsibility for implementation of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)** to ensure that family and household members in their communities inquiring about ERPO relief are reliably referred to a city employee with knowledge about the mechanisms of filing an ERPO in their community;
- **ERPOs should be considered an important crisis response mechanism** that can reduce immediate danger for intimate partner violence victims and enhance the protections offered by Orders for Protection;
- **Gun violence and intimate partner violence organizations should acknowledge the overlap between gun violence and intimate partner violence** and establish ongoing relationships to support one another with initiatives such as policy advocacy; data gathering; and discussion of emerging needs and trends.

EXAMPLE: The Hennepin County Domestic Abuse Service Center (DASC) recently hired a dedicated legal support specialist with expertise in mental health and disability. This specialist's role is to support family and household members in understanding the options available to them for firearms removal through Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) and Orders for Protection (OFPs).



CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

RECOMMENDATION: All levels of Minnesota's criminal legal system should eliminate systemic barriers for victim/survivors through early connections with confidential, community-based advocacy programs.

- **Warm referrals, relationship building with community-based advocacy, opportunities for feedback, and meaningful internal equity work** should all be prioritized;
- **All levels of the criminal legal system should regularly conduct training on relationship abuse** and, when possible, should do so in conjunction with other legal systems partners and local advocates. This training should be consistent across and present for every county in Minnesota. National leaders in training and technical assistance initiatives around domestic violence include **Praxis and the Battered Women's Justice Project**;
- Law enforcement agencies, prosecutors offices, and supervision agencies should **develop ongoing relationships with all local community-based advocacy services in their areas**—including culturally-specific domestic violence and sexual assault agencies—and warm referrals to these agencies should be standard practice;
- **All law enforcement, prosecutors, and supervision agencies should familiarize themselves with the confidentiality laws** applying to community-based domestic and sexual violence advocates in Minnesota to better understand the confidentiality protections for survivors with whom community-based advocates are working.

EXAMPLE: Across the past four years, Violence Free Minnesota, in partnership with advocacy and systems partners, explored how the criminal legal system is disproportionately failing racial and ethnic minority communities, and possible solutions for survivors. As part of this project, we heard the stories of five brave survivors whose experiences illustrate the systemic failures that occur when survivors are arrested. Their stories will inform training, advocacy, and policy work across Minnesota.



CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM, CONTINUED

- **Law enforcement agencies should proactively create ongoing opportunities for local advocates and survivors** to speak with officers about victim experiences with law enforcement response in their community;
- Law enforcement should **always offer and provide medical assistance when needed to all intimate partner violence victim/survivors,** as strangulation and head injuries can have long-lasting consequences that are not apparent immediately after violence has occurred; and should have comprehensive, mandatory training on strangulation and head injuries, such as that offered by the **Center on Partner-Inflicted Brain Injury**;
- All levels of the criminal legal system should **start and/or continue the work of identifying and addressing individual and systemic bias**—against women, BIPOC people, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, neurodiverse individuals, folks living in poverty, and so many others—in systems.

VICTIM STORIES

Since its inception, the Intimate Partner Homicide Report has detailed how victims were killed. These descriptions provide insight towards intervention, and reflect the horrific nature of relationship abuse. However, we know each victim is so much more than the moment of their deaths, which is why we include community members' and loved ones' memory keeping efforts at the beginning of our report.

SANDRA WILSON GOERTZ



Age 81
Lake Benton
January 4, 2024

Sandra Wilson Goertz, 81, was shot and killed by her husband, Irwin Goertz, 80, in their Lake Benton home on January 4, 2024. Irwin shot Sandra multiple times before killing himself. **Sandra leaves behind two children and three grandchildren.**

PAUL ELMSTRAND, MATTHEW RUGE, ADAM FINSETH







Ages 27, 27, 40
Burnsville
February 18, 2024

Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, both 27, and Adam Finseth, 40, were shot and killed in Burnsville by Shannon Gooden, 38, while responding to a 911 call "regarding an alleged sexual assault allegation," on the morning of February 18, 2024. When officers arrived, Gooden barricaded himself in a bedroom and refused to come out. After a period of attempted negotiation failed, Gooden began shooting, killing Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge, and non-fatally shooting another officer. Adam Finseth was killed while attempting lifesaving measures on one of the officers. Gooden then shot and killed himself. Gooden had a history of intimate partner violence and abuse. Two women who had children with Gooden filed for orders for protection against him, one in 2017, and another in 2020. In the 2017 petition, the woman stated Gooden headbutted her, causing a concussion and black eyes, and threw her down the stairs. She also said he had a history of being "emotionally and physically abusive from the very beginning," and the police were called to their residence on multiple occasions. The petition for this order was dismissed. The woman who filed the 2020 Order for Protection said Gooden caused her to fall down the stairs while he cut her clothes with a knife, and that she believed Gooden would kill her. The judge in that case dismissed the petition due to a "lack of proof."

After a 2007 conviction for assault, Gooden was prohibited from possessing firearms for life. He petitioned the court in 2020 to rescind this restriction, but was denied. Seven of Gooden's children, along with his current partner, were in the Burnsville home when he shot and killed Paul Elmstrand, Matthew Ruge, and Adam Finseth. Some of the children witnessed Gooden kill himself. It was later determined that the police call leading up to Gooden killing Paul, Matthew, and Adam was initiated by his partner, who had just witnessed the aftermath of Gooden possibly sexually assaulting one of the children. Nearly 1,000 images of the child, described as sexualized in nature, were later found on Gooden's cellphone. **Paul Elmstrand and Adam Finseth each leave behind two minor children.**

DAVID JOSEPH NANOVIC



Age 45
Credit River
March 4, 2024

David Joseph Nanovic, 45, was shot and killed in his girlfriend's home in Credit River on March 4, 2024. His girlfriend Jennifer Lieber, 45, is charged with second-degree murder. On the night of March 4th, police were called to Lieber's home by her ex-husband for a welfare check, where they found David's body in the home. David's minor son stated that he, Lieber, and David were watching TV when Lieber, who had been drinking all night, "became very agitated" and grabbed a handgun, which she pointed at them throughout the night while threatening to kill them and calling David racial slurs. David and his son later left the main house to go to the pool house. While attempting to return to the main house, David approached with his hands up. His son reported this was the last time he saw his father before police found his body. The Medical Examiner determined David died of a gunshot wound to the forehead. David and his son had been living in Lieber's home since 2022 and at some point David and Lieber had begun dating. The son reported that living in Lieber's home was like "living in hell" and that Lieber had a history of physically and verbally abusing David. **David Joseph Nanovic is survived by his minor son.**

ALLISA MARIE VOLLAN



Age 27
Duluth
March 22, 2024

Allisa Marie Vollan, 27, was strangled or smothered to death in her boyfriend's home in Duluth on March 22, 2024. Her boyfriend Dale Howard, 25, was sentenced in October 2024 to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree murder. Howard had previously been arrested and charged with domestic assault on March 9th after a neighbor reported him kicking Allisa in the head 5 times and slamming her head into the door. Allisa told officers on scene that day that Howard demonstrated jealousy over her past relationships, had previously been violent with her and had called her gendered slurs, and had previously threatened her about a dozen times. He also had a history of sexually assaulting her. On March 12th, a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order had been issued, prohibiting Howard from having contact with Allisa. They had been dating for five months.

TOUMAI GAYNOR



Age 21
St. Paul
May 30, 2024

Toumai Gaynor, 21, was shot and killed in St. Paul on May 30, 2024. Martavious Roby-English, 21, was sentenced to 22 years in prison in April 2025 after pleading guilty to one count of second-degree murder in February for Toumai's murder. Roby-English's ex-girlfriend had been in a car with Toumai that night. She told police that Roby-English had grown progressively more upset that she wasn't coming over and was angry that she had turned her location off, as "it was a sign of mistrust." At one point, Roby-English sent his ex-girlfriend a text threatening to walk over and shoot her. His ex-girlfriend and a witness stated that Roby-English eventually ran up to the car she was in with Toumai and repeatedly yelled, "Get out of the car or I will kill you" before shooting and killing Toumai. After the shooting, Roby-English claimed to police that he had later learned Toumai had been dating his ex-girlfriend. Prosecutors believe he was attempting to kill his ex-girlfriend during the shooting. Roby-English was legally prohibited from possessing a firearm at the time he killed Toumai due to previously being adjudicated delinquent of a crime of violence.

AMIR DEMARION HARDEN



Age 8
Burnsville
June 9, 2024

Amir Demarion Harden, 8, was shot on June 5, 2024 in his Burnsville home and died in the hospital on June 9, 2024. His mother stated that his father Danair Harden, 30, was attempting to shoot and kill her when Amir tried wrestling the gun away from him and was then shot in the head and neck. Amir's four siblings were present. Danair Harden then shot himself and died 10 days later as a result. Danair Harden was in court the morning before the shooting on charges that he had strangled Amir's mother on May 30 after she tried to end their relationship after a history of abuse and control. She answered yes to several lethality assessment questions asked of her by police on May 30 after he strangled her. A Domestic Abuse No Contact Order was issued against Amir's father in June 2024. He was released on bail about seven hours before he shot and killed Amir.

LIARA KAYLEE TSAI



Age 35
Minneapolis
June 21, 2024

Liara Kaylee Tsai, 35, was killed in her home in Minneapolis on or about June 21, 2024 with sharp force injuries listed as her cause of death. Margot Lewis, 32, of Iowa, a former romantic partner of Liara's, is charged with two counts of second-degree murder. Hours after Liara was killed in her home, investigators arrived at a crash scene on June 22 along Interstate 90 in Olmsted County, where Lewis had been speeding in the median before hitting a guardrail with Liara's body in the backseat. When police arrived, they determined Liara's death was not due to the crash and that Lewis had not attempted to avoid the guardrail. Liara had a large stab wound on the side of her neck around her carotid artery. Liara's former spouse told police that Lewis had flown in from Boston to stay with Liara for several days beginning on June 21.

PATRICIA ANN SPITZMUELLER



Age 71
Minnetonka
July 18, 2024

Patricia Ann Spitzmueller, 71, was shot in the head and killed on July 18, 2024, in an apartment in Minnetonka. Authorities determined that Patricia's husband Kenneth Spitzmueller, 76, shot and killed Patricia before killing himself. **Patricia Ann Spitzmueller is survived by five children.**

JAELYN NICHOLE WALKER



Age 14
Moorhead
August 20, 2024

Jaelyn Nichole Walker, 14, was stabbed and killed in Moorhead on or about August 20, 2024. Isaac Arndt, 18, Jaelyn's ex-boyfriend, is charged with second-degree murder. Jaelyn was reported missing around 12:35 am the day she was found. Following the missing persons report, police searched the area of her last known location, where they discovered her body on the banks of the Red River. Police found text messages between Jaelyn and Arndt agreeing to meet at Gooseberry Park in Moorhead the night of August 19th. Arndt finally admitted to police that he had stabbed Jaelyn 13 times, cut her throat, and left her body by the river. Arndt told investigators that he and Jaelyn had "been in a relationship for several months" and had "recently broken up."

PAYAO VANG



Age 27
Empire
August 25, 2024

Payao Vang, 27, was shot and killed in a field in Empire on August 25, 2024 by her husband Smith Coop Brown, 65, who then shot and killed himself. Brown's son/Payao's stepson had become concerned when Payao and Brown did not return from a trip to their farm plot. Brown's son/Payao's stepson and another family member went to the plot where they found Payao and Brown dead. A gun was discovered in Brown's hand and another gun was found in his jacket. He had shot Payao in the head.

JANET LOUISE ANDERSEN



Age 82
Annandale
September 12, 2024

Janet Louise Andersen, 82, was stabbed and killed in her home in Annandale on September 12, 2024. Rodney Andersen, 85, Janet's husband, is charged with second-degree intentional homicide. Janet and Rodney Andersen were married for 65 years. Police were called to the home the morning of the 12th, where they found Janet's body with several wounds to her abdomen. Rodney Andersen told police they "continuously argued" throughout their marriage and that they had "a big argument" starting around 7am that morning, during which he grabbed a knife in the kitchen and stabbed Janet before calling 911.

DAMARA ALEXIS KIRKLAND



Age 35
St. Paul
October 19, 2024

Damara Alexis Kirkland, 35, was shot and killed in her North End St. Paul apartment on October 19, 2024. Kirkland's ex-husband, Mychel Stowers, 36, was charged with intentional second-degree murder of Damara, and second-degree murder of an unborn child. Damara was estimated to be eight to nine weeks pregnant. Police found Damara lying in her bedroom on the night of October 19 after residents reported gunshots. Stowers also shot a man in the leg and stole his car shortly after killing Damara, then went on the run until November 9, when police received a tip regarding his location. They fatally shot Stowers when they arrived on scene. On the day of the shooting, Stowers had been granted a pass to visit Damara from the halfway house he was living in. Damara and Stowers, who had married in December 2021, were in the middle of a divorce initiated in June.

ANONYMOUS



October 22, 2024

This individual was shot and killed on October 22, 2024, by a perpetrator fleeing police after committing an act of domestic violence against his former partner. The perpetrator is charged with second-degree murder, second-degree attempted murder, first-degree assault, and fleeing police. He non-fatally shot or threatened to shoot multiple people before killing Anonymous, and told police he would kill bystanders if he couldn't speak to his ex-girlfriend, whom he had threatened with a gun beforehand. **This individual leaves behind several children.**

LYLE MASKE



Age 62
Brainerd
November 1, 2024

Lyle Maske, 62, was fatally shot in Brainerd on November 1, 2024 after intervening in a domestic violence incident. Chad Aanerud, 35, is charged with two counts of second-degree murder, one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, five counts of kidnapping, two counts of second-degree assault, one count of first-degree arson, and one count of theft. Aanerud is suspected of sexually assaulting his pregnant ex-girlfriend in Brainerd on or around the night of October 31st after threatening to shoot her children if she did not engage in sexual activity. He then began dumping gasoline on her family members' home, which later burned to the ground, and began taking firearms from the home. His ex-girlfriend asked her children to go down the road to Lyle's home to ask for help. Aanerud fatally shot Lyle when he arrived to intervene. Aanerud then kidnapped his ex-girlfriend and her children at gunpoint and fled by vehicle as a statewide Amber Alert was sent out. He was eventually arrested and his ex-girlfriend and children were recovered. Aanerud was legally prohibited from possessing firearms at the time he killed Lyle, and had a lengthy domestic violence and sexual assault history against multiple women dating as far back as the early 2010s. **Lyle leaves behind four children and was also a grandfather.**

SAMANTHA KOEHNE



Age 38
Edgerton
November 2, 2024

Samantha Koehne, 38, died as a result of probable asphyxia on November 2, 2024 in a home in Edgerton. Joseph Benson, 35, described as Samantha's boyfriend, is charged with second-degree murder. Police were called to the home in Edgerton on November 2nd, where Samantha and Benson were housesitting, after Benson told the homeowner he had killed Samantha. Police found Samantha with a cord wrapped around her legs and across her body, with blood matted in her hair and ears, and marks on her throat. They also found a video of Benson following Samantha, in which she showed the camera bruises on her face that she stated were from him beating her. There was also text evidence that he tried to convince Samantha to slit her throat. Benson has a criminal history of domestic abuse against at least one past partner. **Samantha Koehne leaves behind three children.**

ERIN ABRAMSON, JACOB NEPHEW, KATHRYN "KAT" RAMSLAND, AND OLIVER NEPHEW





Ages 47, 15, 45, 7
Duluth
November 7, 2024

Erin Abramson, 47; her son Jacob Nephew, 15; Kathryn "Kat" Ramsland, 45; and her son Oliver Nephew, 7, were shot and killed on November 7, 2024 in their respective homes in Duluth. All four were killed by Anthony Nephew, 46, who was Erin's ex-partner and the father of Jacob Nephew; and who was Kathryn's husband and the father of Oliver Nephew. After shooting and killing both women and his sons, Nephew shot and killed himself. Nephew had a history of mental illness and substance use issues, and had also previously threatened Kathryn with a knife in July 2024. After that incident, Kathryn told the police he attacked her and held the knife to her throat. Nephew applied for a gun permit on September 9, 2024 and received it the same day.

DEJUAN HEMPHILL



Age 24
St. Paul
November 15, 2024

Dejuan Hemphill, 24, was shot in St. Paul on November 5, 2024 and died in the hospital on November 15, 2024. Kenneth Terry, 18, and Jehovah Nelson, 19, were arrested for the murder. Terry was charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder, and Nelson was charged with second-degree murder and two counts of attempted murder. Dejuan and his two cousins were walking in St. Paul when Nelson shot Dejuan and then fled with Terry. A woman told investigators that she had previously been in a relationship with Terry and had a child with him, but they no longer had contact. The woman stated that Nelson shot Dejuan because Terry was jealous that she had been spending time with one of Dejuan's male family members. Investigators believe Terry and Nelson attempted to kill Dejuan's cousins as well. A month later in December 2024, Terry was charged with violation of a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order that had been issued in August prohibiting him from contacting a previous girlfriend whom he had a history of strangling, threatening, and beating.

Dejuan Hemphill leaves behind a four-month-old baby.

ANDREA "DREA" BROYLD



Age 41
Red Wing
November 17, 2024

Andrea "Drea" Broyld, 41, was shot and killed inside a home in Red Wing on November 17, 2024. Darryl Nixon Jr., 41, is charged with one count of second-degree murder. Andrea was in a relationship with Nixon Jr. and they were issued a marriage license in August 2024. Police were called to Nixon Jr.'s home on November 17 after Nixon Jr. allegedly informed the caller that Andrea had been shot and was "gone." When police arrived, Nixon Jr. made more comments about shooting Andrea, and then locked himself in his residence, prompting a three hour standoff before surrendering. Andrea was then found dead inside the home. She had been shot 10 times. Nixon Jr. had access to multiple firearms. In 2020, he was convicted of carrying or possessing a pistol without a permit in a public place.

APOSTLE L

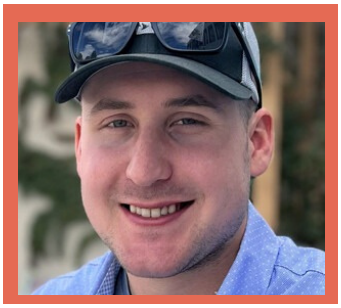


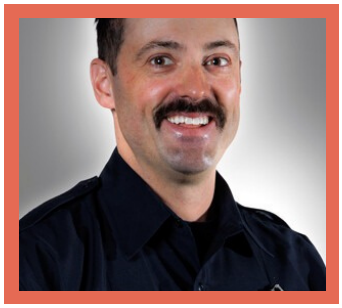
Age 61
Maplewood
December 13, 2024

Apostle L, 61, was killed in a car crash on or around December 13, 2024. Nicholas Price, 37, is charged with one count of fleeing a police officer resulting in someone's death and one count of criminal vehicular homicide, in addition to charges for threats of violence and domestic assault by strangulation. On the night of December 13, Price's ex-girlfriend called police to report that he had shoved her against a wall, strangled her, and threatened to light her on fire. Several hours later, police spotted Price's vehicle in Roseville and attempted to conduct a traffic stop to pull him over for the domestic assault, but Price fled. As more police officers joined the pursuit, Price continued to flee. He reached speeds of 50–60 miles per hour over the speed limit without his lights on, and eventually crashed into Apostle's car in Maplewood. Apostle was trapped in the car and told officers he couldn't breathe. He was removed from the car and transported to the hospital, where he later died. In April 2024, Price had been charged with Domestic Assault and violating a Domestic Abuse No Contact Order, and has a lengthy history of felony stalking and assault against multiple ex-girlfriends.



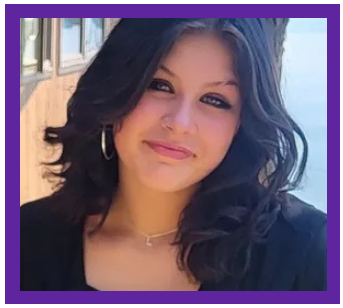
- January 4, 2024: Sandra Wilson Goertz, 81, died as a result of gunshot in Lake Benton.
- February 18, 2024: Paul Elmstrand, 27, died as a result of gunshot in Burnsville.
- February 18, 2024: Matthew Ruge, 27, died as a result of gunshot in Burnsville.
- February 18, 2024: Adam Finseth, 40, died as a result of gunshot in Burnsville.
- March 4, 2024: David Joseph Nanovic, 45, died as a result of gunshot in Credit River.
- March 22, 2024: Allisa Marie Vollan, 27, died as a result of homicidal violence, potentially smothering, in Duluth.
- May 30, 2024: Toumai Gaynor, 21, died as a result of gunshot in St. Paul.
- June 9, 2024: Amir Demarion Harden, 8, died as a result of gunshot in Burnsville.
- June 21, 2024: Liara Kaylee Tsai, 35, died as a result of stabbing in Minneapolis.
- July 18, 2024: Patricia Ann Spitzmueller, 71, died as a result of gunshot in Minnetonka.
- August 20, 2024: Jaelyn Nichole Walker, 14, died as a result of stabbing in Moorhead.
- August 25, 2024: Payao Vang, 27, died as a result of gunshot in Empire.
- September 12, 2024: Janet Louise Andersen, 82, died as a result of stabbing in Annandale.
- October 19, 2024: Damara Alexis Kirkland, 35, died as a result of gunshot in St. Paul.
- October 22, 2024: Anonymous died as a result of gunshot in Greater Minnesota.
- November 1, 2024: Lyle Maske, 62, died as a result of gunshot in Brainerd.
- November 2, 2024: Samantha Koehne, 38, died as a result of asphyxia in Edgerton.
- November 7, 2024: Erin Abramson, 47, died as a result of gunshot in Duluth.
- November 7, 2024: Jacob Nephew, 15, died as a result of gunshot in Duluth.
- November 7, 2024: Kathryn "Kat" Ramsland, 45, died as a result of gunshot in Duluth.
- November 7, 2024: Oliver Nephew, 7, died as a result of gunshot in Duluth.
- November 15, 2024: Dejuan Hemphill, 24, died as a result of gunshot in St. Paul.
- November 17, 2024: Andrea “Drea” Broyld, 41, died as a result of gunshot in Red Wing.
- December 13, 2024: Apostle L, 61, died as a result of vehicular homicide in Maplewood.



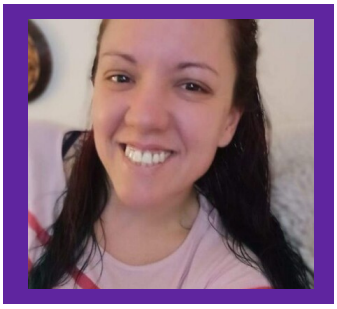
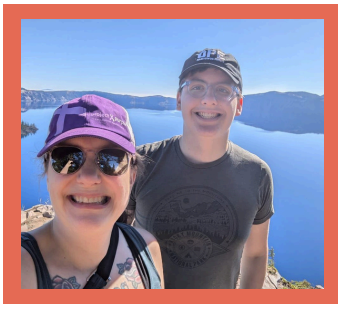
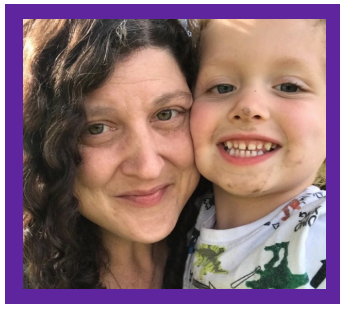


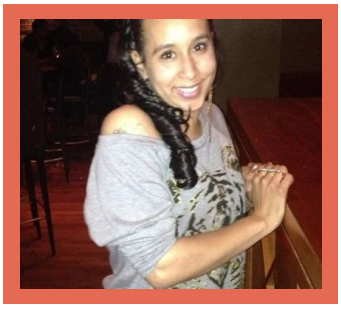









WE REMEMBER: SUSPICIOUS DEATHS

- February 22, 2024: Allison Lussier, 47, died under suspicious circumstances in Minneapolis.
- June 15, 2024: Marcus Antwan Martin, Jr., 28, died as a result of strangulation in Rochester.
- August 12, 2024: Victoria Jo Gamble, 38, died as a result of strangulation in Sauk Rapids.







To all 24 confirmed victims of domestic violence homicide and all 3 individuals who died under suspicious circumstances in Minnesota in 2024: you are deeply missed, incredibly loved, and fondly remembered.

REPORT METHODS

Violence Free Minnesota tracks homicides in which the known or suspected perpetrator was a current or former intimate partner (excluding cases of self-defense), or the homicide is the result of domestic violence against current or former intimate partners. This includes family members, friends, and intervenors killed as a result of domestic violence.

Explanation of Data

For over 30 years, Violence Free Minnesota has produced annual documentation on intimate partner homicides. The information contained within 30-plus years of reports can be overwhelming in terms of the sheer number of individual deaths. However, the reports do not reveal the enormous number of people impacted by those deaths, nor do they reflect the hundreds of thousands of individuals who, across these years, have survived domestic violence.

Report Measures

In 1989, Violence Free Minnesota—then known as the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women—began collecting the names of women killed due to domestic violence. The report has always recorded the deaths of women killed by current or former boyfriends and husbands. Over time, the report has expanded to include anyone killed due to domestic violence. This includes homicides of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and men. The report also documents the deaths of loved ones, neighbors, intervenors, and bystanders who are killed due to domestic violence.

Since 1993, the report has included individuals killed while engaging in sex work OR being sexually exploited. These deaths are included because Violence Free Minnesota recognizes people engaging in sex work face violence due to stigma, and that sexual exploitation is a system of violence against women and children. These numbers were tracked separately for a number of years but are now included in the general count.

Current Inclusion Criteria

- The homicide victim and perpetrator were current or former intimate partners, including dating partners; or
- The homicide victim was someone present during, or intervened in, an intimate partner violence incident, including friends, family members, new intimate partners, law enforcement officers or other professionals attempting to assist a victim of intimate partner violence; or
- Children who are killed by a parent's current or former intimate partner where there is sufficient public information that the perpetrator killed the child as an act of abuse against the parent; or
- The perpetrator killed the homicide victim due to perceived or actual rejection of romantic interest; or
- Homicides of sex workers killed in connection to their work; or
- Homicides of victims of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation killed in connection to the exploitation;

AND

- If the homicide happened in Minnesota; if the body of the victim was found in Minnesota; or if the body was found in a nearby state but the circumstances surrounding the homicide began in Minnesota.

We do not include cases where victims of domestic violence have killed an abusive partner in retaliation or self-defense. To make this determination, we examine each case individually, and consider the history of abuse, circumstances of the homicide, and information from family members and friends.

REPORT METHODS CONTINUED

New Inclusion Criterion: Suspicious Deaths

The suspicious deaths criterion was added to our 2023 Intimate Partner Homicide Report. The inclusion of this criterion was primarily motivated by the 2024 death of Allison Lussier, which was believed to be connected to domestic violence but which at the time of this report still has not been confirmed as such. The suspicious deaths criterion includes deaths where the circumstances surrounding the death suggest a likely connection to domestic violence as the sole or contributing factor, but where domestic violence has not been officially determined as the sole or contributing factor to the death.

The following are factors we will consider in our examination and inclusion of suspicious deaths cases. Any one factor on its own will not automatically result in the inclusion of a death under this criterion; rather, careful attention to multiple factors in combination will be considered.

Factors

- The decedent's partner had a documented history of domestic violence against them
- The decedent's partner claims the death was suicide or an accident and this claim does not match the crime scene or investigators' knowledge
- The decedent experienced an untimely or premature death
- The decedent had previously reported to friends, family, systems, or others that their partner had threatened to kill them
- The decedent's partner had previously made comments to their friends or family, or to loved ones of the decedent, suggesting they had planned some sort of violence against the decedent
- The decedent had previously told friends or family they wanted to leave or were planning to leave their relationship with their partner
- The decedent was found in their partner's residence that was not their shared residence
- The decedent's cause of death was determined to be strangulation or suffocation

The suspicious deaths criterion is intended to expand public understanding of the impacts of domestic violence in the state and the factors that may contribute to a lack of clarity or care around certain deaths:

- Racism and bias in medical determinations of a victim's cause or manner of death
- Racism and bias in law enforcement investigations, such as dismissal, ignorance of, and neglect to investigate or show adequate levels of care about cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, Black women, and transgender and gender non-conforming individuals
- Abusers' attempts to conceal homicides
- Lack of legislative investment in funding and resourcing agencies in the state that examine and/or document deaths due to domestic violence

These suspicious deaths will be recognized in the Homicide Report but not in the total victim count until or if sufficient information arises that confirms the deaths were a direct result of domestic violence. If a suspicious death is confirmed to be a result of domestic violence after that year's report is released, the victim will be retroactively included in the total victim count.

Violence Free Minnesota will carefully examine potential suspicious deaths on a case-by-case basis and will make every effort to sensitively and appropriately share information about these deaths while still maintaining the privacy of the alleged perpetrator to the best of our ability. Additionally, this criterion will likely continue to evolve over time and be continually refined in accordance with best practices for privacy and confidentiality. Violence Free Minnesota also recognizes that we will not be able to capture every possible suspicious death that is the likely result of domestic violence.

REPORT METHODS CONTINUED

What The Report Does Not Measure

The definition of domestic abuse in Minnesota law is broader than the definition we use for this report. The legal definition of domestic abuse is physical violence or threats of physical violence against a family or household member. This includes violence between any family members or household members, for example: adult child to parent, between cousins, roommates who have no intimate relationship, uncles who kill nieces, and parents who kill children. Violence Free Minnesota specifically looks at those killed by current or former intimate partners or as a result of domestic violence between current or former intimate partners* (*This definition does not apply to the Suspicious Deaths criterion).

Why do we limit our definition? While all of these homicides are tragic and there are many similarities, Violence Free Minnesota has expertise in intimate partner abuse. We hope that by limiting this report to the intimate partner definition and looking at those deaths in light of research about lethality and risk factors for that specific population, we may find information to help improve our work to end domestic violence.

Violence Free Minnesota also primarily documents those killed in Minnesota, although we do sometimes include homicides of individuals killed in other states if the circumstances of the homicide began in Minnesota. For example, if a person starts a relationship with someone while in Minnesota and is killed by that person while visiting them in another state, we may include them in our report. Conversely, someone from New Jersey may be visiting Minnesota and be killed by their intimate partner while in Minnesota. We would also include that homicide in our count. The reason we make these statewide connections to deaths is because we gather the Intimate Partner Homicide Report information in part to illuminate systemic gaps experienced by victims in Minnesota and create potential policy and/or service solutions. In recent years, we have also included cases where the victim's body is found in Minnesota after murder in another state, and homicides that occurred in Minnesota but the body is later found in a different state.

What Won't Appear in This Report

What you will NOT see recommended in this report is a demand for harsher penalties for domestic abuse crimes. Violence Free Minnesota does not believe the answer to ending intimate partner homicide lies in the creation of new crimes or the enhancement of criminal penalties. Our decades-long investment in the criminal legal system, often perceived as the primary and best response to domestic violence, has not resulted in the clear diminishment of intimate partner homicides or a reduction in domestic violence.

There is still much work to do across the state in improving our criminal legal system's response to domestic violence—from improving how victim/survivors are treated at every point in our systems to ensuring consistency and equitable application of our laws across the state and across populations. We are committed to improving these systems for victims/survivors who find themselves navigating these systems, and you will find some concrete recommendations for how to do so in this report. However, there is so much more to be done to end relationship abuse and intimate partner homicides beyond the criminal legal system. Critical work to change the landscape in Minnesota through prevention efforts and transforming the behavior of individuals who abuse remains massively un- and under-funded.

The development of community-based responses to relationship abuse that can assist victim/survivors without the potential collateral consequences of criminal legal system involvement remain undeveloped and too easily dismissed when our reports show that, on average, approximately 30% of homicide victims in our reports never had any interaction with the criminal legal system for the abuse they experienced. Lack of affordable housing and economic insecurity—the biggest barriers to safety, according to victims themselves—are rampant for our state's most vulnerable and marginalized victim/survivors.

REPORT METHODS CONTINUED

What Won't Appear in This Report, Continued

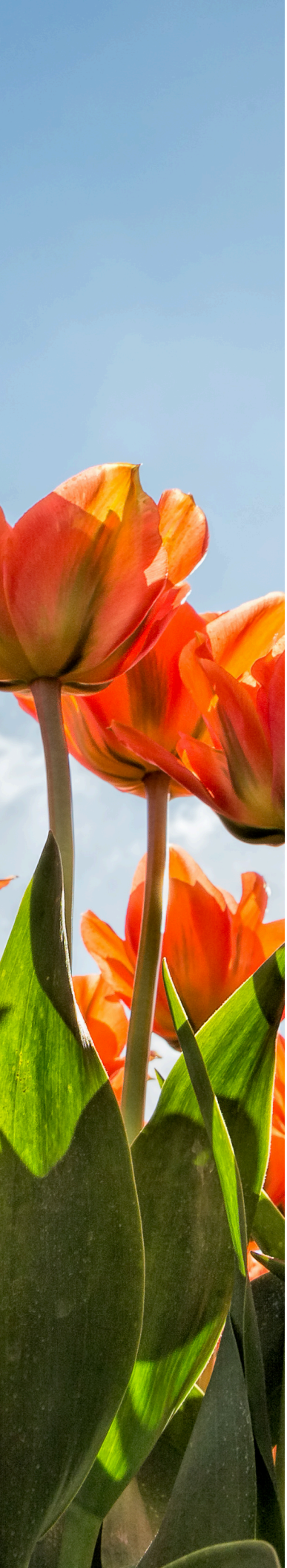
Harsher penalties for convicted domestic abusers will not solve these issues for victims/survivors in Minnesota. We must invest in prevention efforts. We must support the development of community-based alternatives for victims/survivors who want them. We must increase access to financial stability and safe, affordable housing. In doing so, we increase safety for victims/survivors, and we work to prevent domestic violence homicides.

Limitations of the Report

We rely on public information to create this report. In the early days of the report our sole source of information was media reporting. Currently, we identify most cases through media search results that are tracked daily. We also look at other sources of information such as public court data, reports issued by Medical Examiners' offices, and social media. The way we gather information and the amount of data available to us has changed drastically over the years. However, we still struggle with inconsistent and incomplete information due to discrepancies in the way information is collected and shared across the state.

We use the phrase "at least" when describing the number of people killed each year because we cannot be certain we have recorded all domestic violence homicides since we rely on public records, primarily news accounts. In addition, almost every year there are deaths of women that are considered suspicious but the cases are not resolved. No state or federal agency collects comprehensive data on domestic violence homicides. In addition, the murders of women and children of color, Native people, people who are immigrants and refugees, people living in poverty, people with disabilities, rural women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people who engage in sex work, and people who are sexually exploited may be under-reported here as they frequently go unreported in mainstream media.

The information in Violence Free Minnesota's Homicide Report is a compilation of data gathered from public sources—it is not research, nor are we a research agency. We gather this information to bear witness to those killed, to raise public awareness of domestic violence, and to help inform our policy and service work. Our reports cannot address why there are sometimes such drastic fluctuations in homicide numbers and what this means. We present this information in the hopes of raising questions, opening the door to deeper conversations, and encouraging research agencies to further investigate.



A NOTE ON NON-INTIMATE PARTNER FAMILY VIOLENCE

As addressed in our Report Methods section, Violence Free Minnesota's Intimate Partner Homicide Report is **limited to memorializing intimate partner domestic violence homicides.**

However, we frequently see non-intimate partner family violence homicides. These commonly include a parent killing a child, a sibling killing a sibling, or a child killing a parent. While our Homicide Report is specific to intimate partner violence, we recognize that many of the underlying patterns of behavior involved in non-intimate partner domestic violence homicide are similar. We often see fit to comment on these patterns and the narratives that emerge from them that are substantially related to our work.

For anyone looking for resources for non-intimate partner family violence, we encourage you to view the Get Help section of our website at https://www.vfmn.org/get-help. The Minnesota Children's Alliance is another resource. For individuals interested in homicide data regarding non-intimate partner family violence, the Minnesota Department of Health's Violent Death Reporting System shows a breakdown of all victim-offender relationships in aggregate data at https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/injury/midas/mnvdrs.html.

ABOUT

Founded in 1978, Violence Free Minnesota is a statewide coalition of over 90 member programs working to end relationship abuse. Violence Free Minnesota strives to end relationship abuse by taking strategic action in partnership with the power of survivors and member programs across the state. As Minnesota's state domestic violence coalition, we shape public policy, raise public awareness, and build the capacity of community-based programs to address the needs of survivors of relationship violence and advocate on their behalf. We ask that Violence Free Minnesota be credited when information from this report is used.

OUR MISSION

- Represent relationship abuse victim/survivors and member programs;
- Challenge systems and institutions;
- Promote social change;
- And support, educate, and connect member programs.

VIOLENCE FREE
MINNESOTA

OUR VISION

To end relationship abuse, create safety, and achieve social justice for all.

RACIAL EQUITY STATEMENT

Violence Free Minnesota, the coalition to end relationship abuse, believes that race equity is the intentional process of prioritizing and honoring the voices and advocacy of Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC) as powerful decision-makers in determining the priorities that guide our movement to end relationship abuse.

VFMN is committed to the collective work of transforming systems and organizations that have historically excluded and harmed BIPOC communities - impeding their access to safety, stability, economic resources, and opportunities.

As part of this commitment VFMN will continue to:

- Maintain a diverse staff and Board of Directors, and create leadership development opportunities for advocates from historically marginalized communities in Minnesota;
- Highlight racial disparities in intimate partner violence and in services for BIPOC victim/survivors in our conversations with policymakers and stakeholders in the work to end IPV;
- Transform the mainstream narrative around relationship abuse from that of a crime allegedly best prevented through policing and punishment to that of a public health and social justice issue rooted in oppression;
- Transform the narrative of what it will take to end relationship abuse when providing leadership and guidance to partners and stakeholders across the state, acknowledging the human capacity for change and centering BIPOC-led prevention initiatives;
- Continually uplift the stories of historically excluded groups in our community;
- Dismantle the habits of white supremacy culture in our work with one another, with members, and partners of all kinds across the state.

We believe that achieving race equity through shared power, ongoing accountability, and liberation for all is necessary to end relationship abuse. We are committed to being part of the change in Minnesota.



VIOLENCE FREE
MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

If you are experiencing abuse,
contact Day One at 1.866.223.1111 to connect with services.

Violence Free Minnesota
60 East Plato Boulevard, Suite 230
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55107
Ph. 651.646.6177
www.violencefreeminnesota.org