



Annual Report

# ALAMANCE COUNTY

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEWS

2022-2023

**PREPARED BY**

The Alamance County Family Justice  
Center and the Alamance County  
Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team.  
Special Thanks to Laney Cook, MSW  
Intern, for authoring this report.

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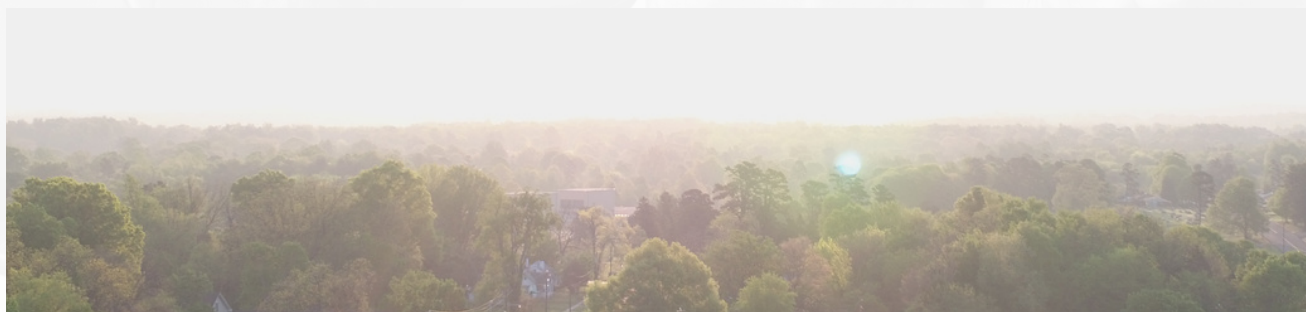
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# Dedication

This report is dedicated to all those who have lost their lives due to interpersonal violence, all those who are effected by it, and those who work to prevent it.

We stand with you.





# Introduction

## **What is the Alamance County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (AC DVFRT)**

In 2021, the Alamance County Family Justice Center (FJC) received approval from the Justice Advisory Council and the Alamance County Board of Commissioners to create a Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team to identify and analyze homicides, suicides, and other deaths caused by, related to, or somehow traceable to domestic violence.

### **Mission**

The mission of the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is to prevent deaths related to domestic violence in Alamance County. The AC DVFRT reviews resources and gaps in the systems, and recommends policy and procedure improvements to strengthen the community's ability to address domestic violence.

### **Purpose of this Report**

The purpose of this report is to document the DVFRT's findings and opportunities for systemic change. The team pulled themes and facts from 3 intensive reviews. This report also serves as a record of trends in domestic violence fatalities in Alamance County for the past 20 years. This report is in compliance with NC S.L. 2013-270, NC S.L. 2009-52, NC S.L. 2013-70, and local Administrative Order dated October 17, 2022.



# Members

**Facilitator: John Weil, Statewide DVFRT Consultant**  
**Linda Witherspoon**, Co-Chair, Family Abuse Services  
**Corey Ellison**, Co-Chair, Vaya Health  
**Skye Sullivan**, Lead Agency, Family Justice Center  
**Detra Betts**, Family Abuse Services  
**Lorrie Barham**, Survivor  
**Sharron Kurtz**, Alamance County District Attorney's Office  
**Jaleesa Alston**, Alamance County Sheriff's Office  
**Thomas Mowby**, Alamance County Sheriff's Office  
**Brian Philips**, Haw River Police Department  
**Kelle Sisk**, Burlington Police Department  
**Becky Dixon**, Gibsonville Police Department  
**Ada Cabanillas**, Graham Police Department  
**Keith Harris**, Medical Examiner's Office  
**Lynette Wellons**, Department of Social Services  
**Tony LoGiudice**, Health Department  
**Tiffany Foster**, Alamance-Burlington School System  
**Jeff Holan**, Magistrates Office  
**Sherea Covington**, Cone Health  
**Karen Resh**, Cone Health  
**Karen Hughs**, Alamance County Community College  
**David Grinstead**, Alamance County Community College  
**Hayden Ireland**, Probation and Parole  
**Hon. Katie Overby**, District Court Judge  
**Allison Young**, Legal Aid of North Carolina  
**Kevin Dull**, Commissioner Appointed  
**Meredith Edwards**, Commissioner Appointed  
**NaCasha Davis**, Family Justice Center  
**Laney Cook**, Family Justice Center Professional Intern

# Data Overview

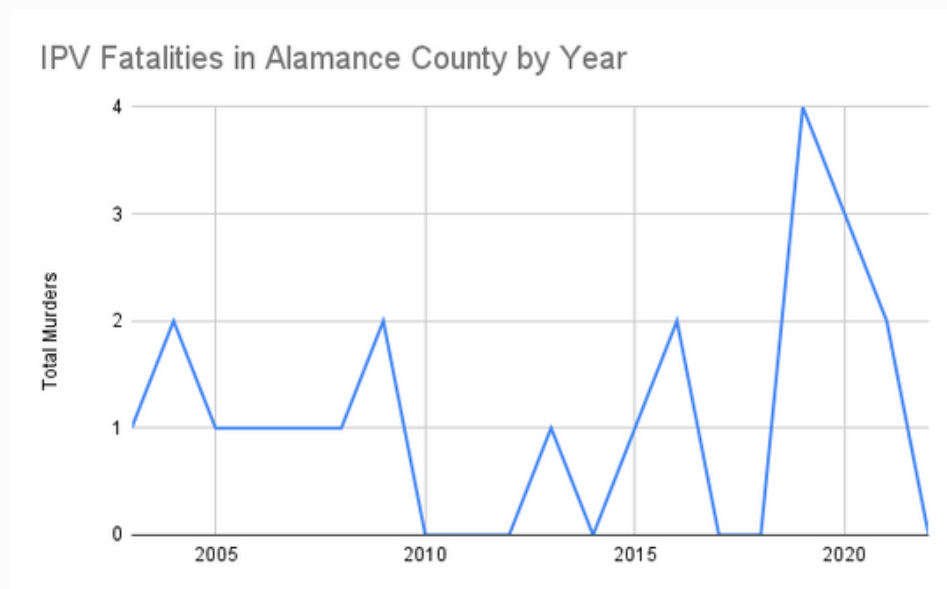
## Since 2003 in Alamance County...

- There have been **21 homicides** related to domestic violence.
- There have been **6 cases of murder-suicide**.
- There has been an **average of 1.1 DV fatalities** per year.
- In **17 cases**, the victim was an **intimate partner** of the perpetrator.
- In **four cases**, the victim was a **relative, friend, or bystander**.
- In **81% of the cases**, the perpetrator was a man.

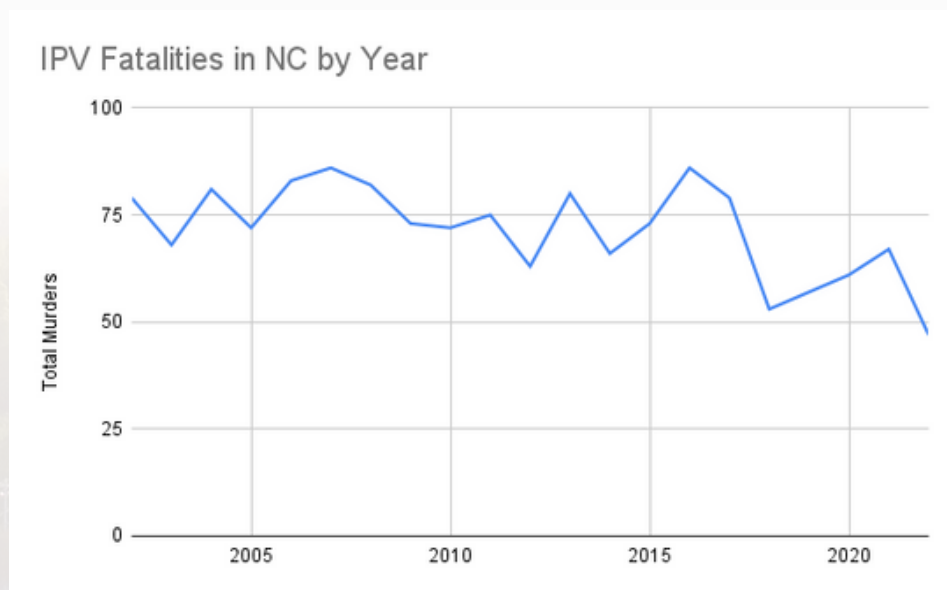
The data in this report was compiled from the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence's homicide list. Near deaths, deaths due to complications, and suicides are not captured due to the lack of standardization in reporting and the intricacies of domestic violence incidences.



# Data Continued

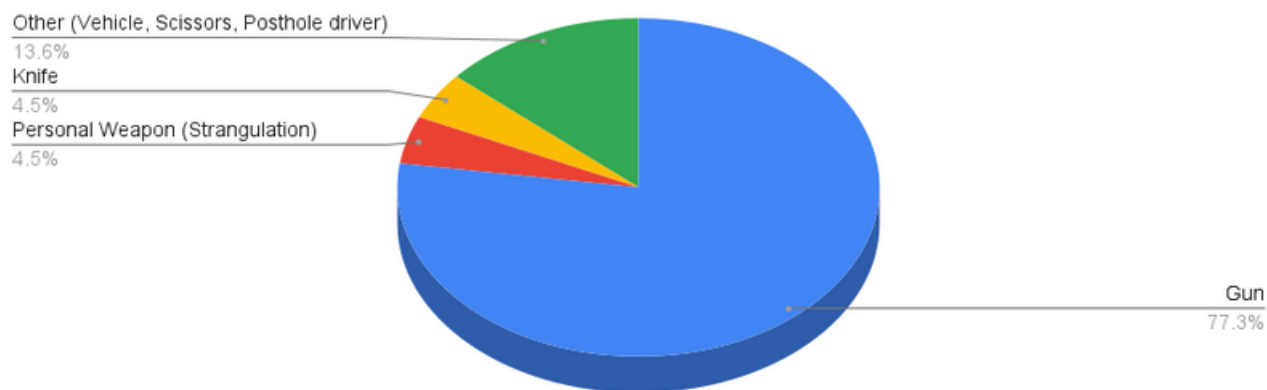


Alamance County has an average of **.64 IPV Homicides** per **100,000 people**.

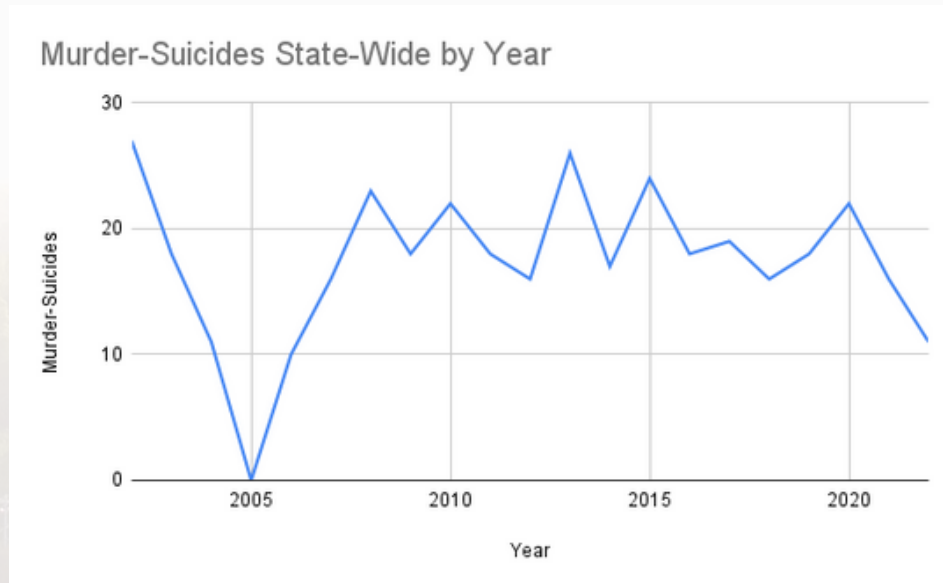


NC has an average of **.68 IPV Homicides** per **100,000 people**.

# Data Continued



A **gun** was used in **77.3%** of the homicides.



NC has an average of **17.4 Murder-Suicides** per **year**.  
**Alamance County** has had **6 cases of murder-suicide** since **2003**.



# Findings

- The victims limited their interactions with formal systems such as government, institutions, and social service organizations due to a **culture of mistrust** and instead **relied on social supports** like family and friends when in need.
- The victim's social support systems like family and friends **do not have access** to the **resources necessary to prevent homicides**.
- A **history of domestic violence** was found in the relationship prior to the homicide.
- Homicides stemmed from the offender's **loss of power and control**, such as a breakup.
- **Significant histories of trauma** were found for both the victims and offenders.
- **Substance use** and **lack of available treatment** options worsen incidents of domestic violence, and were contributing factors in the cases reviewed.
- Access to **firearms by offenders** is a contributing factor to intimate partner homicides.
- **Law Enforcement** officers experienced difficulties in **identifying predominant aggressors**, which led to decreased involvement with officers for more serious incidents.
- Current **screening tools and self-report data** in social services, medical settings, and justice related settings are **unreliable and inadequate**.
- **Victims** had little to **no interaction with victims' services agencies** prior to their deaths.

# Recommendations

## Advocacy Opportunities for North Carolina Law Makers

- Advocate against any bills that limit the ability to identify and serve victims in schools.
- Enact anti-bullying laws to catch abusive behaviors early.
- Make strangulation a higher class of felony.
- Enact laws to create criminal charges specific to domestic violence and make the charge gender neutral.
- Make forensic strangulation exams free to victims, reimbursed by the state, and expanded to include imaging.
- Update session law to mandate participation in DVFRT state wide and make state level recommendations.

## Primary Prevention

- Mandate comprehensive health curriculum in K-12 schools including but not limited to: safe relationships, conflict resolution, social media, bullying, internet safety, sexting, toxic masculinity, risky behaviors, community services, and how to report abuse.
- Ensure school participation in outreach programs currently available in Alamance County.
- Expand mental health services and other support services for children who witness domestic violence.

## Protocol Recommendations for Alamance County Organizations

- Standardize screening tools for victim identification, trauma history, and lethality across all public and private entities.
- Implement protocols specific to strangulation.
- Introduce Adverse Childhood Experiences screening tools into all facets of the justice system.
- Train all entities on high risk case identification, mandated reporting, and available resources.



# Recommendations

## Continued

### **Building Community Trust in Alamance County**

- Engage with and train faith leaders in violence prevention, identification, and intervention.
- Include minoritized populations and their community leaders in program design, implementation, and evaluation.
- Hire more bilingual and culturally appropriate staff across systems.

### **Resource Expansion**

- Recommend funders such as the Governor's Crime Commission prioritize sustaining victims' services.
- Recommend funders such as the Governor's Crime Commission prioritize funding collaborative and multi-agency approaches.
- Invest in a system-wide inventory of screenings regarding trauma and resiliency and implement data-backed trauma protocols.
- Prioritize collaboration and integration of mental health resources and victims' services funding.
- Fund first responder and social services departments at competitive rates to recruit and retain experts.
- Eliminate duplication of services and siloing of agency efforts.

### **Comprehensive Community Education and Outreach**

- Create an outreach and education curriculum coalition in to assess and coordinate current efforts in Alamance County.
- Expand outreach efforts to houses of worship, parent-teacher nights, salons, health clinics, and all public spaces.
- Invest in PSA's on T.V., radio, social media, billboards, and Spanish Language media.

# Successes

**Alamance County is an innovator in the Domestic Violence prevention field continually leads the way and sets precedence for North Carolina. For Example...**

- In **1990** Alamance County established the Domestic Violence Advocacy Committee now known as the **Victims Advocacy Council of Alamance**.
- Thanks to the commitment of Family Abuse Services, Law Enforcement partners, the District Attorney's office, Judges, Alamance County government, and the Department of Social Services **Alamance County opened NC's first Family Justice Center in 2010**.
- Alamance County's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team is **1 of only 5 in NC**.
- The Family Justice Center of Alamance County has **served over 13,000 clients over 17,000 times** since it opened in 2010.
- The Family Justice Center was the **first in the nation** to implement a complete **electronic protection order filing system**.
- Alamance County was **1 of 10 counties nationwide** to receive the Elder Protection Initiative grant in 2016. The innovative work has continued to enhance services for victims 50 years old and older.
- In 2015 Alamance County launched the **Lethality Assessment Program** with Burlington Police Department and by the end of 2023 every law enforcement agency will be trained in the program.
- Alamance County's **professional culture** of open communication and access between agencies and departments has led to **efficient and effective multidisciplinary teams** that serve a variety of victims.
- Alamance County's DVFRT is an **active participant** in the NC state **review team collaborative**.