

2022

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW REPORT



BUNCOMBE COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Buncombe County tied with Wake County, a jurisdiction nearly four times its size, for the second-highest number of DV homicides in North Carolina. The eight homicides that occurred in 2013 sparked a community-wide conversation.

The Buncombe Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT) mission is to prevent domestic violence (DV) deaths, increase safety for DV victims, and increase accountability for abusers through systems change.

AUTHORITY & PURPOSE

In North Carolina, Domestic Violence Fatality Review Teams (DVFRT) are defined by the NC General Assembly in Session Laws 2009-52 and 2013-70. Buncombe County was granted authority to implement a DVFRT on by Session Law 2018-116. The DVFRT includes a broad cross section of community service providers who meet quarterly to review domestic violence homicides within the County and improve cross-system communication.

The defined purpose of the DVFRT is to “identify and review domestic violence-related deaths, including homicides and suicides, and facilitate communication among the various agencies and organizations involved in domestic violence cases to prevent future fatalities.” The powers and duties of the Buncombe County DVFRT are outlined in Session Laws 2009-52 and 2013-70 and incorporated herein.

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ACTIVITIES

According to Session Laws 2009-52 and 2013-70 the DVFRT shall:

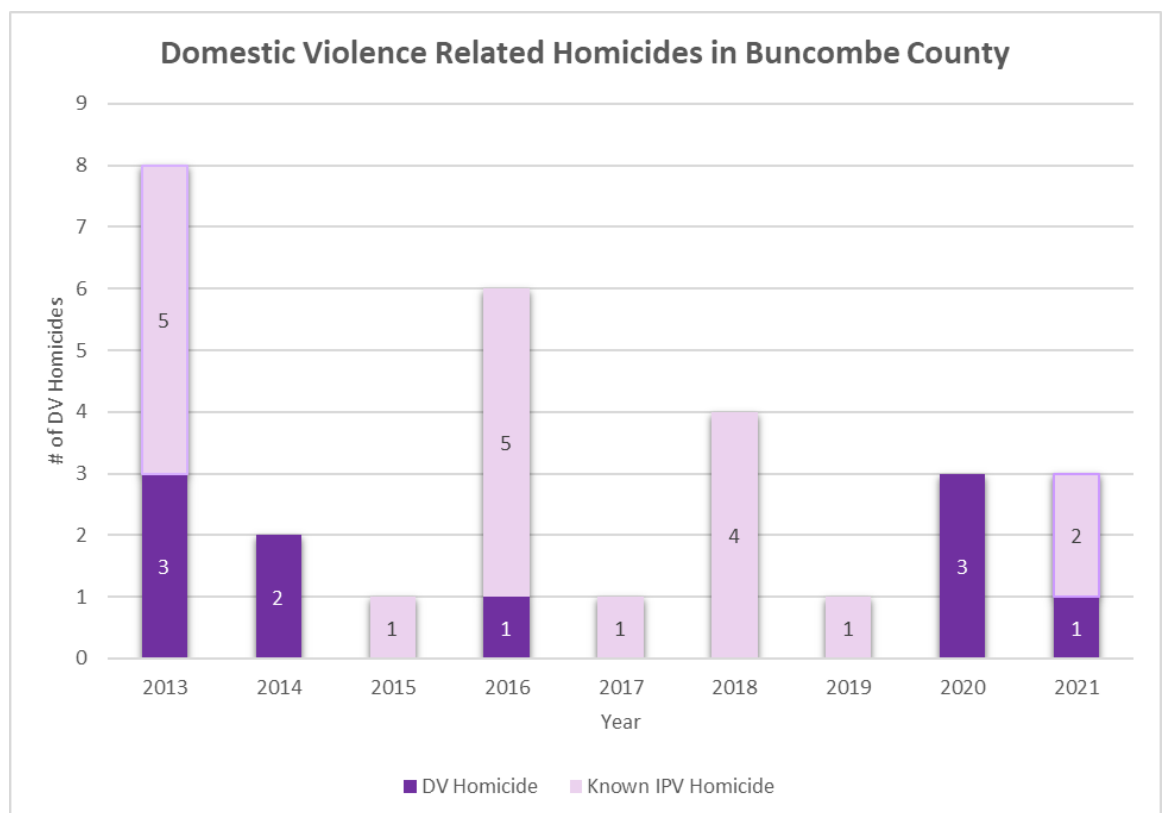
- Study the incidences and causes of death by domestic violence-related behavior in the community. The study shall include an analysis of all community, private, and public agency involvement with the decedent and family members prior to death.
- Develop a system for multidisciplinary review of domestic violence-related deaths.
- Examine the laws, rules, and policies relating to confidentiality.
- Access information that affects the agencies that provide intervention services to determine whether those laws, rules, and policies inappropriately impede the exchange of information necessary to protect victims of domestic violence and recommend any necessary changes.
- Perform any other studies, evaluations, or determinations the Review Team considers necessary to carry out its mandate.
- Make recommendations for system improvements and needed resources where gaps and deficiencies may exist.

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BUNCOMBE COUNTY DV/IPV HOMICIDE DATA

The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) collects data specific to DV-related homicides from law enforcement agencies across North Carolina per NC General Statute 143-901.

Locally, we work with law enforcement agencies to determine whether the homicides were a result of an intimate partner relationship, in other words, intimate partner violence (IPV) or whether they were domestic and did not involve an intimate partner dynamic (e.g., parent and child related homicide). The graph below shows the number of DV and IPV-related homicides in Buncombe County from 2013 to 2021, according to the SBI report and local law enforcement data.*



*Some incidents involve one homicide while others involve multiple homicides

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SUMMARY OF INTENSIVE REVIEW

This report will give a high-level overview of the findings and recommendations to protect the confidentiality of those involved. From March to April 2022, records were obtained from as many case-involved partners as possible. Once gathered, they were distributed for review. In May of 2022, an intensive 2-day review was facilitated, and the group worked to finalize the report with findings and recommendations from June through September of 2022. The team focused on one violent incident.

Each fatality review will culminate with the creation of recommendations about intervention and prevention in future domestic violence cases. These recommendations will be refined and included in a report to be presented to the Coordinated Community Response to Domestic and Sexual Violence Leadership Team and Buncombe County Commissioners annually. Per Session Laws 2009-52 and 2013-70, the team shall issue a report to the Buncombe County Commissioners, Governor's Crime Commission, and NC Domestic Violence Commission every three years.



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DVFRT MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Name	Title	Agency/ Role Per Statute
Vanessa Conley	Administrative Coordinator	Buncombe County/Admin Support
Tracy Crowe	Sergeant	Asheville Police Department/Local Law Enforcement Officer
Angie Garner	County Relations Regional Director	Vaya Health/Local Mental Health Managed Care Organization
Kelda Harrison	Survivor Representation	Community Member/Survivor of Domestic Violence
Julia Horrocks	Managing Attorney	Pisgah Legal Services/Member At-Large
Anne Kouri	Obstetrical Care Coordinator	Buncombe County Health and Human Services
Katie Kurdys	Assistant District Attorney	40th Prosecutorial District/District Attorney
Jackie Latek	Executive Director	SPARC Foundation/Member At-Large
Paulina Mendez	Family Justice Program Manager	Buncombe County/Coordinator
Tonya Robinson	Director of Secondary Education	Buncombe County Schools/Public School
Judge Ward Scott	Judge	28th Judicial District/District Court Judge
Maggie Slocumb	Program Director	Helpmate/Domestic Violence Victim's Service Group
Rebecca Smith	Social Work Division Director	Buncombe County Department of Social Services
Dr. John Stewart	Medical Examiner	Medical Examiner
Katherine Watkins	Social Work Program Manager	Buncombe County Department of Social Services

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2022 FINDINGS

- The systems' opportunity to intervene was limited by a short window of escalation exhibited by the person who committed the murders, as well as the few intersections between the people involved to conventional system supports.
- The persons murdered were negatively impacted by multifaceted life stress, multi-generational, historical, and community trauma.
- Poverty, race, education, and socio-economic status significantly impacted the resources and opportunities available to the people murdered.
- Financial insecurity and access to transportation to maintain power and influence was used.
- Murder weapon used was a legally obtained semi-automatic rifle to commit the murders. The use of this weapon contributed to the lethality of his attack.
- The lack of record sharing between jurisdictions, i.e., states, makes it challenging to identify history of violence or other historical indicators of domestic violence.
- The DVFRT statute has limited seats for participation in ongoing reviews. Currently, it is not intentional to include members with representation from different backgrounds and different lived experiences.



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2022 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.COMMUNITY CONNECTION/PREVENTION

- a. Expand funding and support for Helpmate, Our VOICE, and prevention in schools and organizations
- b. Continued support for organizations focusing on Social Determinants of Health and tangible support for children and families
- c. Support and strengthen educational/career development opportunities to provide hope and pathways out of generational poverty like the Marvelous Math Club, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, My Sistah Taught Me That (MSTMT), My Daddy Taught Me That (MDTMT), Open Doors, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Skills Training and Employment Program (STEP), Getting Ahead and MotherLove at the YWCA, Asheville Buncombe Institute for Parity Achievement (ABIPA), Green Opportunities (GO), ESTA Program at Eliada, Goodwill Career Center, and Community Action Opportunities.
- d. Support people with lived experience or who have established trust within the community with resources
- e. Includes domestic violence (DV) education, resources, and resiliency skill building
- f. Link to Buncombe County Communications and Public Engagement (CAPE) Department (e.g., Community Navigators, Community Fairs/Markets), Community Centers (e.g., Eddington Center, Shiloh Center), Faith Communities, Nurse Family Partnership, the Department of Social Services (DSS) Prevention Team, 211, NC Care 360, and resources listed above

2. LEGISLATION/ADVOCACY

- a. Buncombe County has already committed to Educated and Capable Communities and Vibrant Economy initiatives, which seek to increase affordable housing stock and access to high-quality childcare. We recommend that these and similar efforts should be expanded upon. DVFRT found that access to transportation, childcare, and affordable quality housing reduces victims' dependence on their perpetrator's control over their life and their risk of being killed.
- b. Accountability workgroup for following up on how recommendations are implemented in legislation on local and state levels.
- c. Advocate for amendment of automatic expunctions to not include DV-related charges.
- d. Automatic expunctions of DV records significantly inhibit the ability of courts and prosecutors to consider prior incidents of violence when addressing future charges. It also impacts the ability to review bodies like ours to analyze possible prevention measures to reduce future violence.
- e. Acknowledge the connection between firearms to DV homicides, child fatality, and suicide and revisit the adoption of House Bill 525, as well as any other legislation that limits access to firearms of violent DV offenders
- f. Require purchase permits for all firearms.

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3. EQUITY & INCLUSION

- a. Be intentional to include members with representation from different backgrounds with different lived experiences through engaging with the Coordinated Community Response (CCR) Leadership Team Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee, doing outreach to area communities, and interviewing community members in communities where the incident occurred.
- b. Increase the number of at-large members for the DVFRT so that other skillsets can be represented on review teams longer term and not just when reviewing certain cases

4. CROSS SYSTEM OPPORTUNITIES

- a. Develop a multi-faceted approach to remove barriers to accessing and navigating court systems and resources, including peer support navigator, social work access on site, and funding for community organizations that provide services (e.g., childcare, My Daddy Taught Me That).
- b. Review and improve screening protocols at provider agencies so that the discloser feels safe and encourages disclosure through providing safety and security.
- c. Create a DV Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to include Pisgah Legal Services, DA's Office, Helpmate, Law Enforcement, Pretrial, SPARC, VA, and Probation.

