

# Meg Baldwin: We've made progress against domestic violence

Written by Meg Baldwin My View

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Meg Baldwin

Since 1987, October has been recognized as Domestic Violence Awareness Month —or “DVAM,” as we like to say at Refuge House.

Over the last 25 years, we have all learned a lot. We know the overwhelming number of women, children and men who are abused by spouses, intimate partners and family members.

Do you remember what “1 in 4” stands for? That 1 in 4 women will be the victim of domestic violence from an intimate partner in her lifetime. The most recent research pegs the ratio a little higher: 35.6 percent, or 1 in 3. And much of this abuse is happening right now. Nearly 6 percent of United States adult women have experienced physical violence, stalking or rape just in the last year.

What we are all learning, too, is to put what we know about domestic violence into action —as employers, as landlords, as law enforcement agencies and as allies. It takes all of us. Over the last year, we can all be proud that:

- The Leon County Commission passed a Workplace Policy on Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking, recommended by the Leon County/City of Tallahassee Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, promising greater safety and support for 700 Leon County employees.
- The Leon County Domestic Violence Lethality Review Team recommended workplace and landlord actions that can help reduce the risks of domestic violence homicides. And in our Big Bend counties, the number of domestic violence homicides dropped in the last two years.
- The Leon County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council provides a forum for concerted action among diverse domestic violence advocates and organizations. The council’s public service announcements featuring faith leaders urging action against domestic violence are sending a powerful message.
- The Tallahassee Police Department took 965 reports of domestic violence and made 414 arrests. The Leon County Sheriff’s Office took 265 reports and made 144 arrests.
- U.S. Attorney Pamela Marsh, Northern District of Florida, convened a Big Bend Human Trafficking Coalition, bringing together agencies providing services for victims, as well as local, state and federal law enforcement leaders to improve collaborative responses for survivors.
- The Institute for Family Violence Studies at Florida State University built on its research and training on law enforcement officer domestic violence prevention, and helped develop a curriculum for university students on dating violence prevention.

Our agency partners are crucial allies. Survivors served by Refuge House benefited from on-site services offered by the Apalachee Center, Ability 1st, WorkForce Plus, Legal Services of North Florida, Rambana and Ricci P.A., Leon County Schools, Dr. Suzanne Harrison of the FSU College of Medicine, and support from the Department of Children and Families. Other agency partners assist daily with services and resources for survivors and their children, mindful of the safety concerns especially urgent for victims.

And last, but we hope not least, stands your Refuge House. Over the last year, Refuge House again provided face-to-face services to more than 3,000 survivors and hotline responses to more than 4,000 callers.

To our allies, friends, and supporters, we are grateful for our thriving year in the community. For survivors, we are the “foxhole” —offering safety planning, hope, and skills for the often dangerous transition from violence to freedom. But every survivor —and Refuge House —needs you to part of the solution. You are already doing it. Let us know how we can help you help stop domestic violence. Together, we can.

Please join us at Tom Brown Park from 6 to 8 p.m. on Wednesday for our annual DVAM Candlelight Vigil and Speak Out.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault, please call our hotline at 681-2111.

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