

Guest Viewpoint from Sheriff Fred Akshar: Community Partnerships Help Prevent Domestic Tragedies and Save Lives

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Every resident of Broome County has the right to live in safety and free from domestic violence and abuse.

That's why the Broome County Sheriff's Office has partnered with the Crime Victims Assistance Center (CVAC) and the Family Violence Prevention Council to give our community another valuable tool to better protect victims of domestic violence, prevent domestic tragedies before they can occur and save lives.

In January, we implemented a new Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) to help identify victims who are at an increased risk of being killed by their intimate partner and get them the help they need. LAP utilizes evidence-based screenings to help law enforcement better assess potential lethality by identifying common red flags, patterns and responses associated with domestic homicides.

When a Sheriff's deputy responds to a domestic violence incident, they complete a LAP screening with the victim. Based on their answers, the deputy can determine whether the victim is at high risk for domestic homicide and connect them with the appropriate support services. While all victims are connected to local resources like CVAC, consenting victims identified as high-risk are immediately paired with a local Domestic Advocate to develop a safety plan and other prevention measures.

In the first few weeks of implementation, the LAP program has successfully assisted in three separate domestic incidents, helping victims access support when they need it most.

Make no mistake, the threat of domestic violence permeates throughout communities across our nation. According the U.S. Department of Justice, domestic violence accounts for 21% of all violent crime, with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men having been victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. National Institute of Justice reports that 76% of all female homicide victims had been stalked by the person who killed them, with 54% of the victims reported stalking to the police before they were killed by their stalkers. 89% of the victims who had been physically abused had also been stalked in the 12 months before the murder. A study published in the American Journal of Public Health reported that the presence of a gun in a home where there is domestic violence increases the risk of homicide by 500%.

In 2023, our own community experienced multiple horrific incidents, including a domestic murder-suicide in Windsor and the murder of an infant child during a domestic dispute in Colesville.

We will likely never be able to eliminate from our society all the crime and harm individuals inflict upon one another, but every day, we are using every tool and partnership we can to identify and prevent potential tragedies from befalling our families before they take place.

If you or someone you know is in a dangerous domestic situation, please don't hesitate to get help immediately. For 24/7 Crisis Help and Support, please contact the Crime Victims Assistance Center at 607-722-4256 or text 607-725-8196. To report a crime to the Sheriff's Office, please call 607-778-1911, but in an emergency, always dial 911.

Akshar is the Broome County Sheriff.