

DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN WHATCOM COUNTY

ANNUAL DATA REPORT

Published: Jan 2019

Data Period: Jan–Dec 2017

Note: This is the most recent year for which cross-discipline data is available.



COMMISSION
ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Inspiring and coordinating community efforts to address sexual and domestic violence

INTRODUCTION

THIS report examines available data on domestic and sexual violence in Whatcom County for the calendar year 2017. This year is the most recent period for which cross-discipline data is available. The intended audience of this report are our community leaders, elected officials, and agency decision-makers, as well as advocates, providers, and practitioners within systems that interact with survivors.

THE report features three sections. The first section is a **“SNAPSHOT REPORT,”** which provides context on domestic and sexual violence in Whatcom County—this is a snapshot of the numbers of people seeking help from various sources, based on the most recent data available to us. The following two sections are **“SPOTLIGHT REPORTS,”** which more deeply examine areas of focus related to domestic and sexual violence. These two sections were chosen based on the interests and questions that Commission members and community partners have shared with DV Commission staff. In this year’s report, the spotlights are: impact of federal immigration policy on survivors, and connections between homelessness/housing instability and domestic and sexual violence. These portions include data that was collected in 2018.

OUR MISSION

The Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence inspires and coordinates community’s efforts to address domestic and sexual violence. To fulfill this vital mission, we:

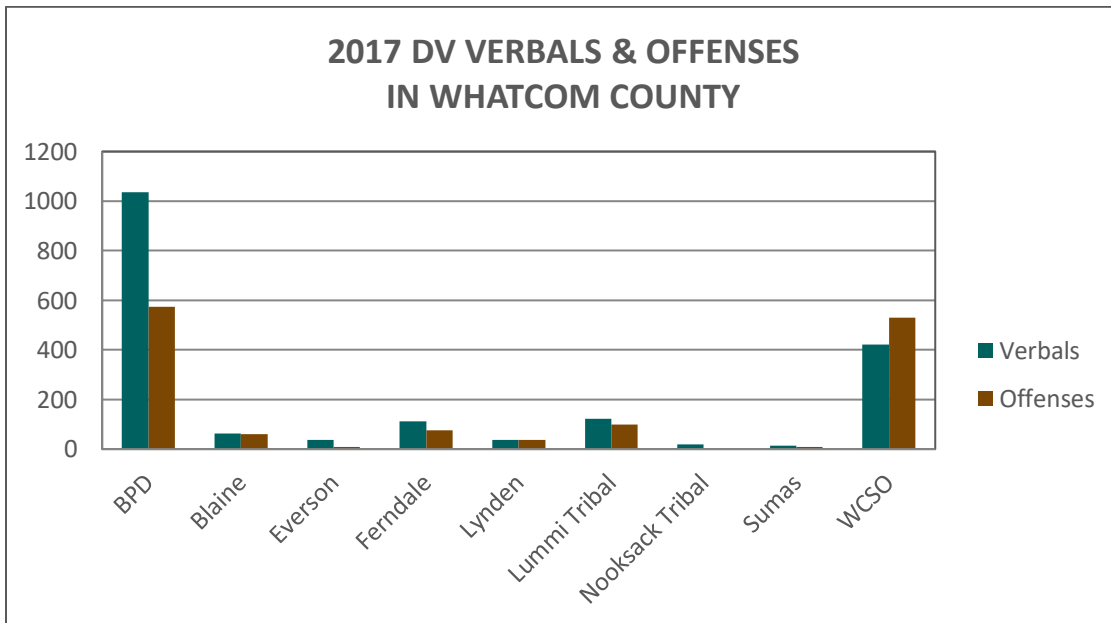
- Connect institutions, stakeholders, and communities to collectively increase understanding and effectiveness of community responses for sexual and domestic violence.
- Transform systems to ensure best practice prevention and responses for sexual and domestic violence.
- Foster safety, justice, and well-being for survivors and communities.

SNAPSHOT REPORT: DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN WHATCOM COUNTY

LAW ENFORCEMENT CALLS FOR SERVICE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

IN 2017 there were **3,260** *domestic violence* calls for service to Whatcom County’s law enforcement agencies. Of these calls for service, there were **1,858** verbal incidents* **(56%)** and **1,402** domestic violence offenses **(44%)**. The term **“verbals”** refers to incidents where the police have been called, but it has been determined that no physical violence (or offense warranting arrest) has occurred.

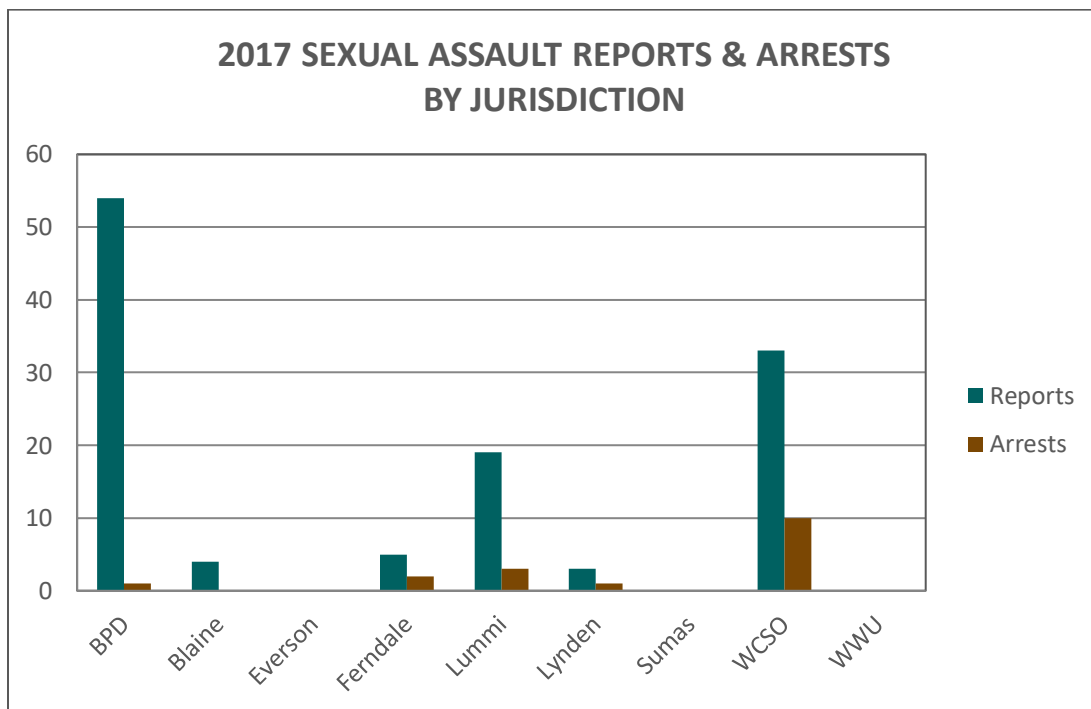


*Does not include verbal incidents from Western Washington University police.

LAW ENFORCEMENT CALLS FOR SERVICE

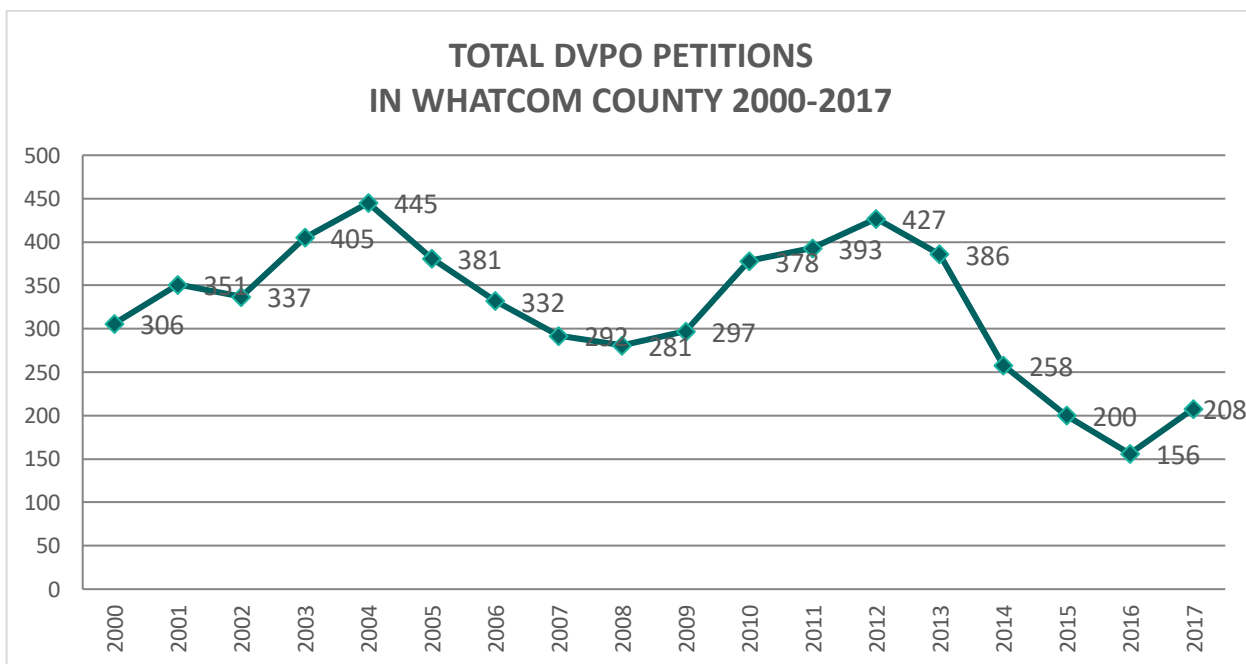
SEXUAL ASSAULT

IN 2017 there were **202** reports of *sexual offenses* to Whatcom County's law enforcement agencies. These calls for service included **118** reports of rape, **62** reports of fondling, **4** reports of incest, **15** reports of statutory rape, and **3** reports of a peeping tom. Of the **118** reports of rape throughout Whatcom County, **17 (14%) resulted in arrest**.



CIVIL PROTECTION ORDERS

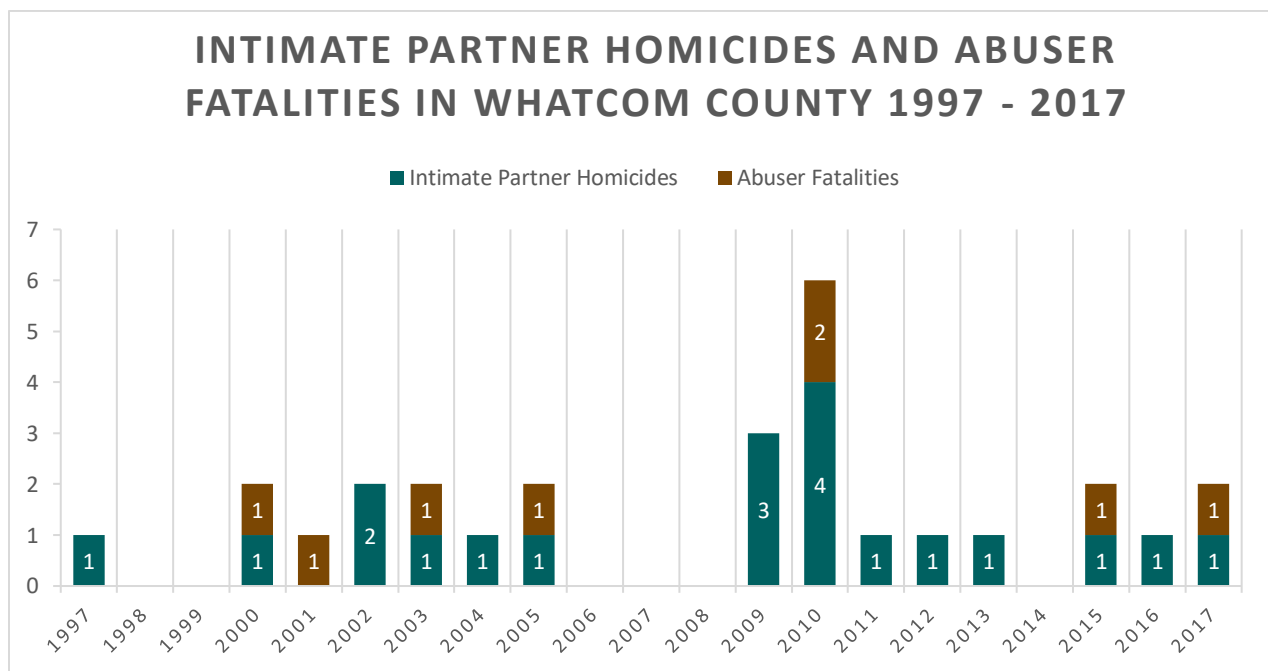
IN 2017 there were **208** civil petitions for **domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs)** filed in Whatcom County's District and Superior Courts. In the same year, **17** **sexual assault protection order (SAPOs)** petitions and **67** **anti-harassment/stalking order (AHOs)** petitions were filed in Whatcom County's District and Superior Courts. The DV Commission has not collected comparative numbers for SAPOs or AHOs from previous years.



BECAUSE of the decline of petitions for DV protection orders since 2012, this is an area that warrants further data collection and analysis.

INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDES

IN 2017 there was **1** intimate partner homicide, **1** abuser suicide, and **1** child homicide in Whatcom County. On November 20, 2017 43-year-old Tanya Rowe and her son 5-year-old son Benton were killed by 47-year-old Kevin Rowe, who then took his own life.¹ A total of **4** homicides were reported within Whatcom County in 2017. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), **55%** of female homicides in the United States are committed by a romantic partner.²



FOR more information about intimate partner homicide in Whatcom County, you can review the Whatcom County Fatality Review report, published in 2012.³

¹ Pratt, Denver. [“Police call Cordata deaths a homicide-suicide; victims identified.”](#) *Bellingham Herald*, Nov 21, 2017.

² Petrosky, Emiko, et al. [“Racial and Ethnic Differences of Adult Women and the Role of Intimate Partner Violence—United States, 2003-2014.”](#) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, July 27, 2017.

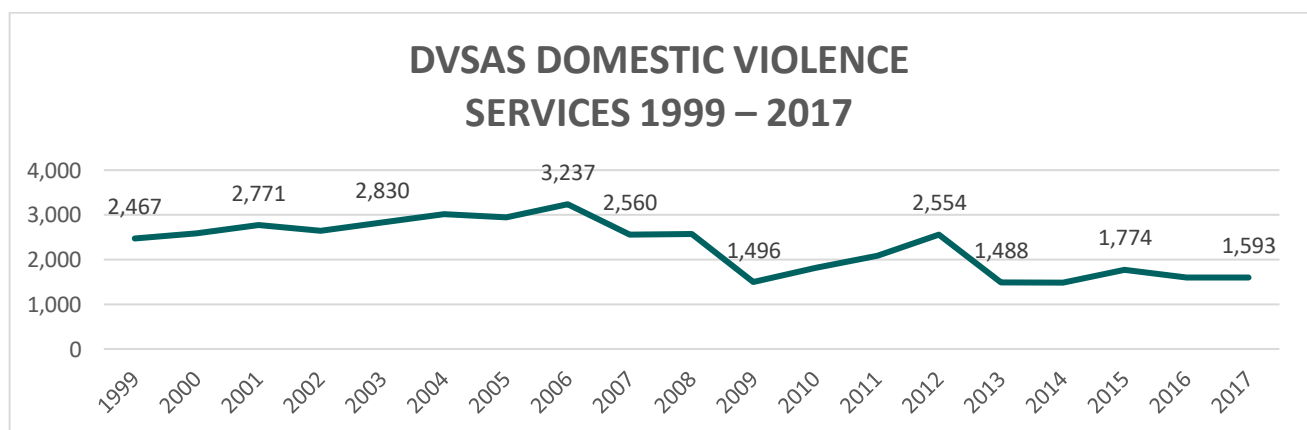
³ Bellingham Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence. [“It Happened in Our Town: Whatcom County Domestic Violence Fatality Review.”](#) October 2013.

DV & SA ADVOCACY SERVICES

IN 2017 Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County (DVSAS) served a total of **2,296** clients. **1,593** of those clients were survivors of domestic violence and **419** survivors of sexual assault. In 2017 **126** clients utilized DVSAS's safe shelter services. Additionally, **2,794** students in Whatcom County received education about consent and healthy relationships.

DVSAS services are available for anyone impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, or sexual exploitation.⁴ **DVSAS services include:**

IMMEDIATE HELP	ONGOING SUPPORT	SAFE HOUSING	EDUCATION PROGRAM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-hour helpline • Support center walk-in services • 24-hour forensic exam support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy counseling • Legal advocacy • Support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential shelter • Homelessness prevention services • Housing case management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Empowerment Project: 3-session prevention program for middle & high school students



⁴ DVSAS Annual Report 2017

IN 2017 Consultation and Sexual Assault Support (CASAS) at Western Washington University

(WWU) served **11** survivors of domestic violence and **107** survivors of sexual assault. CASAS helps any college student affected by sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, emotional abuse, or stalking recently or in the past.⁵ **CASAS services include:**

ADVOCACY & SUPPORT	REFERRAL & INFORMATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups • Reporting options • Academic support • Confidential 1-on-1 support • Sessions with advocate • Protection orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical assistance • Legal assistance • Financial aid solutions • Housing solutions • Emergency leave • Counseling referrals

IN 2017 Lummi Victims of Crime (LVOC) served **124** survivors of domestic violence and **36**

survivors of sexual assault. LVOC provides help to any adult or adolescent who has been affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, assault & battery, survivor of homicide, child abuse, and sexual assault.⁶ **LVOC services include:**

CRISIS COUNSELING	LEGAL ADVOCACY	TRANSPORTATION & REFERRALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person or via telephone • 24-hour hotline • Safety planning and information • On-scene advocacy for DV and SA crimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court hearings • Protection and restraining orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therapy referrals – sweats, smudges • Traditional healing • Transportation to medical, legal, and therapy appointments
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER	EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE	EDUCATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ne-Alis Tokw (My Sister’s Place) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of house door locks and car windshields, broken due to DV incidents • Boarding up house windows broken due to DV incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teen Girls groups • Free annual conferences • Annual Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Awareness Walk

⁵ <https://pws.wvu.edu/consultation-and-sexual-assault-support-casas>

⁶ <https://www.lummi-nsn.gov/Website.php?PageID=399>

LETHALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LAP)

THE Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) was developed by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence and is based on the research of **Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell**. Dr. Campbell's work showed that women killed by their intimate partners had very seldom been engaged by advocates.

WHEN a law enforcement officer responds to a domestic call, the LAP protocol directs them to:

1. Conduct an **11-item lethality screen** (see Appendix) with the victim.
2. If the victim screens in at high risk of lethality, the officer makes **immediate contact** with the local domestic violence advocacy agency (DVSAS).
3. The victim is then encouraged, but not required, to speak with the domestic violence advocate. The responding officer and the domestic violence advocate work as partners to provide the victim with **safety planning** and resource information.⁷

WHEN high-risk survivors are connected with on-scene domestic violence advocacy:

- There is a **60%** reduction in risk of severe assault.
- They are almost never the victim of murder or attempted murder.⁶

IN 2017:

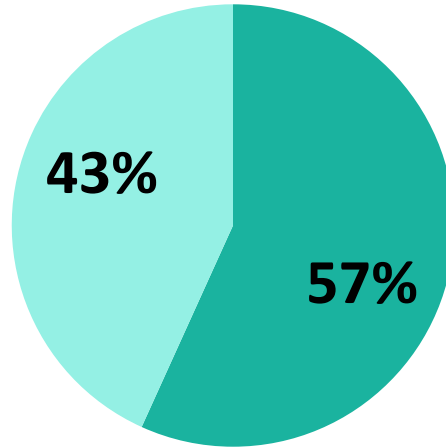
- **WHATCOM COUNTY** law enforcement agencies conducted the LAP with **465** survivors of domestic violence.
- **57%** of those survivors screened in as at high-risk for lethality.
- **45%** of these high-risk survivors spoke to an advocate for safety planning during the initial law enforcement response.

⁷ Lethality Assessment Program: The Maryland Model brochure

LETHALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LAP)

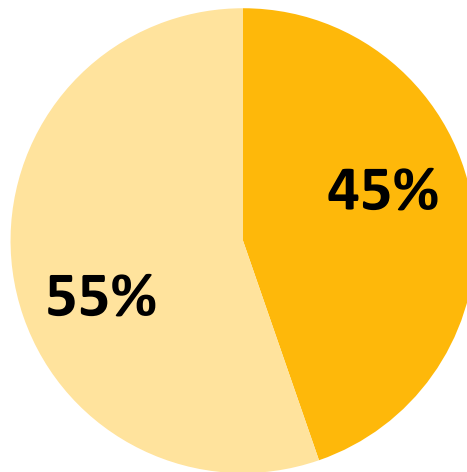
DV VICTIMS SCREENED AS HIGH RISK IN WHATCOM COUNTY

■ Screened as high risk ■ Did not screen as high risk



HIGH RISK VICTIMS CONNECTED WITH ADVOCATE IN WHATCOM COUNTY

■ Connected with advocate ■ Not connected with advocate



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HIGH-RISK TEAM (DVHRT)

THE Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT) is a multidisciplinary model designed to enhance our community's response to intimate partner violence cases that pose the greatest risk of escalating to lethal or near-lethal assault.

The DVHRT focuses on examining risk factors and behaviors of offenders, identifying offenders who are at-risk for committing homicide or seriously injuring someone, and creating monitoring plans across disciplines to deter or minimize future assaults.

THE purpose of the DVHRT is to:

- **Facilitate early identification** of the most dangerous domestic violence offenders through research-based risk assessment.
- **Establish clear channels of communication** across all disciplines involved in responding to domestic violence.
- **Provide coordinated, multi-disciplinary responses** to highly lethal domestic violence cases.

CORE members of the DVHRT include representatives from:

LAW ENFORCEMENT

PAROLE

PROSECUTION

BATTERERS' INTERVENTION

VICTIM ADVOCACY

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

PROBATION

OTHER COMMUNITY PARTNERS
(invited to participate, as needed)

IN 2017:

- **19** domestic violence offenders were accepted for monitoring by the DVHRT.
- **52** domestic violence offenders were actively monitored by the DVHRT for all or part of the year.



**SPOTLIGHT REPORTS:
INTERSECTIONS WITH IMMIGRATION AND HOMELESSNESS**

SPOTLIGHT REPORT:

IMPACT OF FEDERAL IMMIGRATION POLICY on reporting of domestic & sexual violence

IN 2017 immigration-related arrests conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) increased by **30%** compared to the 2016 fiscal year.⁸ On a national level, a majority of advocates, law enforcement, and court officials are reporting an **uptick in the fears** for immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, especially among those who are undocumented. Conversations with local service providers and community partners conducted by the DV Commission echo these national sentiments. The strict enforcement of federal immigration policies has contributed, on a local and national level, to immigrant survivors' **growing unwillingness to report** crimes, cooperate with law enforcement, and/or pursue civil legal measures, such as protection orders and parenting plans. On the following two pages, we have provided a summary of key immigration policies and both national⁹ and local¹⁰ events that have contributed to this phenomena.

“The neighbors called the police and her partner was arrested. Now she can’t pay rent. She was named as the victim, but now ICE is calling her. [...] It may not have anything to with it, but it’s a big coincidence. Even when you try to fly under the radar, a well-intentioned act can cause all these troubles.”

—Service Provider

⁸ U.S. Immigrant and Customs Enforcement. [“Fiscal Year 2017 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report.”](#) December 13, 2017.

⁹ American Bar Association. [“The Trump Immigration Agenda: Timeline of Events January 2017-August 2018.”](#) August 2018.

¹⁰ Rasbach, David. [“ICE Arrests 16 in Whatcom County during ‘criminal investigation.’”](#) *Bellingham Herald*, Sept 5, 2018.

RELEVANT POLICY & EVENTS

2017

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13769

90-day suspension on immigration from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. 120-day suspension of Refugee Admission Program. Revoked and replaced on 03/03/2017, removing Iraq and reducing refugee admissions in 2017 to 50,000.

01
27

2018 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET

The White House proposes budget requesting \$1.5 billion for 51,379 beds to increase capacity at immigration detention facilities.

05
23

ICE'S SURGE INITIATIVE

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announces Surge Initiative, a new policy to detain the parents and sponsors of unaccompanied minors.

06
29

DHS ENDS TEMP PROTECTION STATUS FOR CERTAIN REFUGEES

DHS begins to end temporary protected status for certain refugees escaping national disasters and political exile. Over the next year, this will impact the status of refugees from Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador, and Nepal.

11
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EXECUTIVE ORDER 13768

Outlines plan to hire 10,000 additional immigration officers, deputize state and local law enforcement, penalize sanctuary cities, and reinstate 2008 Secure Communities Program, which allows local law enforcement to share information with ICE.

01
25

DHS MEMORANDA

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) increases use of expedited removal proceedings and expanded detentions and rescinds Obama-era prosecutorial discretion guidelines.

02
25

DAPA RESCINDED

DHS rescinds the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) policy, which extended stays for undocumented parents of lawful citizens.

06
15

DACA TEMPORARILY RESCINDED

Attorney General Jeff Sessions announces end to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which extended stays for undocumented high school graduates with no criminal record. In Jan 2018, a California judge issues a nationwide preliminary injunction on the recession, prompting the United States Immigration and Citizenship Service (USICS) to announce it will continue DACA.

09
05

RELEVANT POLICY & EVENTS

2018

MATTER OF A-B-

Attorney General Jeff Sessions reversed a ruling on an immigration appeal denying asylum protection to an immigrant survivor from El Salvador. This ruling went against the precedent set in 2014 by the Board of Immigration Appeals to grant asylum for individuals fleeing domestic violence.

06
11

MS. L V. ICE

On Feb 26, 2018, a complaint was filed in California challenging Trump's family separation policies. In response, Judge Dana Sabraw orders children detained at the border be reunited with their families, and urges the administration to end this practice.

06
26

"ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY"

Attorney General Jeff Sessions announces "zero tolerance policy" directing U.S. Attorney's offices at the Southwest border to prosecute all DHS referrals. This policy results in more than 2,000 children being separated from their families and held in DSHS detention centers.

04
06

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13841

The president responds to bi-partisan opposition to family separation and commits to "maintaining family unity." This policy results in the prolonged detentions of families at the Southwestern U.S. border.

06
20

431 CHILDREN REMAIN SEPARATED FROM FAMILIES

After requesting an extension on the deadline to reunite 711 children with their families, the government is unable to reunite 431 of those children due to the deportation of their parents.

07
27

ICE RAID IN WHATCOM COUNTY

ICE agents arrest and detain 16 employees of Granite Precast in Whatcom County. The community raises \$200,000 to provide relief to the workers and their families. The funds have assisted with bail bonds, legal fees, and basic needs.

08
29

PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

The president releases an official statement ordering that any individual who does not enter the country through an official point of entry will not be eligible for asylum. On Nov. 20, 2018, federal Judge Jon Tigar temporarily blocks this order.

11
09

U.S. CITIZENS DENIED PASSPORTS

Reports surface that Latinx U.S. citizens have had their applications for passports denied and their citizenship called into question. In some cases, individuals have been detained by immigration officials. The U.S. government denies any formal changes to policy regarding procedures for processing passport applications.

08
30

NATIONAL IMPACT

THE American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) conducted a national survey of law enforcement officials, judicial officers, and prosecutors¹¹ and found that:

69%

OF LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEYED REPORTED MORE DIFFICULTY INVESTIGATING domestic violence

59%

OF LAW ENFORCEMENT SURVEYED REPORTED MORE DIFFICULTY INVESTIGATING sexual assault

54%

OF JUDGES SURVEYED REPORTED THAT COURT CASES HAVE BEEN DROPPED DUE TO survivor fears

82%

OF PROSECUTORS SURVEYED REPORTED THAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HAS BEEN underreported

THE National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) conducted a survey of community-based advocates and legal advocacy professionals¹² and found that:

62%

OF ADVOCATES SURVEYED REPORTED AN INCREASE IN immigration related questions

78%

OF ADVOCATES SURVEYED REPORTED IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS HAVE SHARED concerns about contacting police

75%

OF ADVOCATES REPORTED IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS HAVE EXPRESSED fears about going to court

43%

OF ADVOCATES SURVEYED REPORTED WORKING WITH SURVIVORS WHO dropped criminal or civil cases

“Any legal intervention, even civil, is seen with suspicion. [...] People hear stories in the community and that has a ripple effect.”

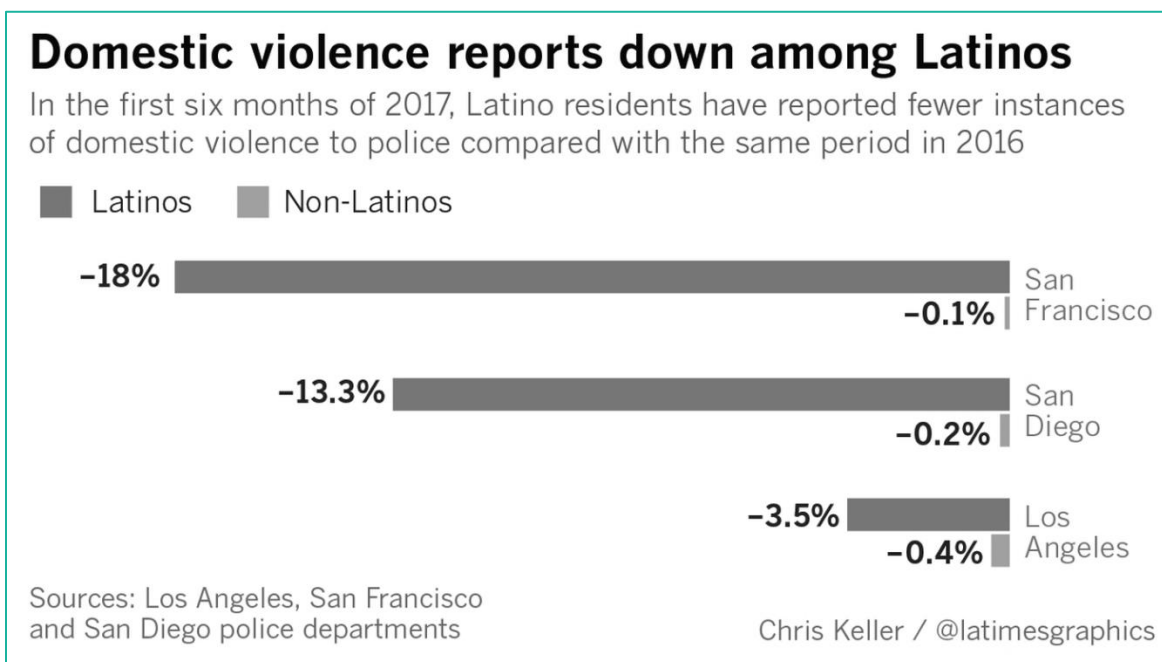
—Service Provider

¹¹ American Civil Liberties Union. [“Freezing Out Justice: How immigration arrests at courthouses are undermining the justice system.”](#) May 3, 2018.

¹² National Network to End Domestic Violence. [“Key Findings: 2017 Advocate and Legal Services Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors.”](#) May 18, 2017.

THE Los Angeles Times conducted a survey that found within the first **6** months of **2017** Latinx residents were reporting fewer instances of domestic violence to **California** police, when compared to the same time period in 2016 (see below).¹³

SIMILARLY, the New York Times reported that domestic violence reports to law enforcement among the Hispanic population in **Houston, TX** decreased by **16%** in **2017**, while calls to local domestic violence agencies in the area increased among this demographic.¹⁴



“There’s no explicit policy against sharing information, so there is a belief that the police are a direct communication pipeline to ICE.”
—Community Partner

¹³ Queally, James. [“Fearing deportation, many domestic violence victims are steering clear of police and courts.”](#) Los Angeles Times, Oct 9, 2017.

¹⁴ Englebrecht, Cora. [“Fewer immigrants are reporting domestic abuse. Police blame fear of deportation.”](#) New York Times, June 3, 2018.

LOCAL IMPACT

THE DV Commission interviewed **9** service providers and community partners from diverse sectors (victim advocacy, health care, legal advocacy, spiritual leadership, and community organizing) who have worked with immigrant populations in Whatcom County. The quotes that appear throughout this spotlight report were generated from those conversations. We asked their perceptions of the impact of federal immigration policy on local immigrant survivors. A majority shared experiences that resonated with the national data. (It should be noted that a majority of interviewees were most familiar with individuals and families who immigrated to the United States from Latin American countries of origin.)

IN WHATCOM COUNTY

- Approximately **5.2%** of the population are non-citizens.¹⁵
- **Canada, Mexico, and the Philippines** are the top three countries of origin.¹⁶
- There are approximately **14** different indigenous Latin American languages spoken.

“[Undocumented immigrants] are escaping socio-political violence and corruption in their countries of origin. [...] They can’t trust outsiders because their past experience hasn’t been good.”

—Service Provider

“The DV victim panicked and was regretful about contacting the police. She didn’t want her partner deported. He was sent to Tacoma.”

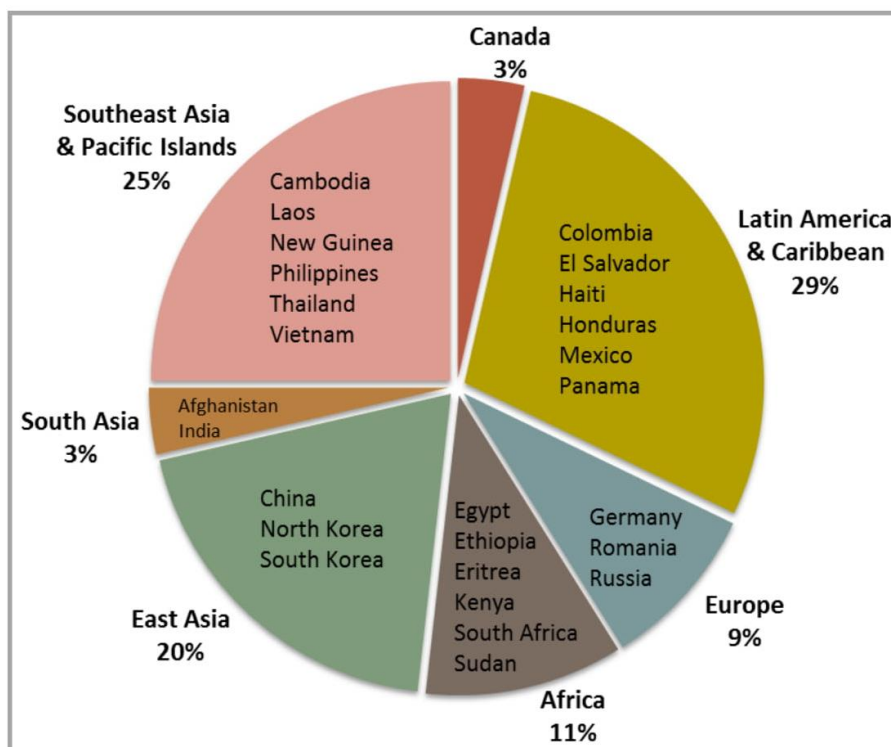
—Service Provider

¹⁵ 2016 U.S. Census.

¹⁶ Ibid.

THE 2011 Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality Review conducted by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV) found that 19.7% of domestic violence homicide victims in Washington State were born outside of the U.S. Comparatively, between the years 1997-2009, 12.1% of all people in Washington State were born outside of the U.S.

Birth countries of immigrant & refugee domestic violence homicide victims in Washington State, 1997-2009¹⁷



“The layer of being a non-citizen has an enormous life impact. There is a loss of any sense of control. [...] We need real and significant change.”
—Service Provider

¹⁷ WSCADV Washington State Domestic Violence Fatality Review (June 2011).

EMERGING THEMES

- Past negative experiences (such as the former use of border patrol for translation and 911 dispatch) have contributed to **distrust of advocacy, medical, and legal services** among undocumented locals.
- Transportation, finances, English-language proficiency, literacy, and cultural differences are **barriers to accessing services** and legal interventions.
- There is a need for mobile and **culturally-relatable education** on consent and healthy relationships.
- The dynamics of abuse and the **impacts of trauma are heightened** for undocumented survivors.
- Local survivors have expressed fear of **deportation of abusive partners** and the resulting impact on their family unit (both emotionally and financially).
- There were numerous anecdotal accounts of **ICE agents meeting with Whatcom County court officials**, detaining individuals outside the jail or the courthouse, and using services created for victim safety (such as the victim notification service, VINELink) to track undocumented individuals.
- Despite attempts to increase awareness of recent changes, there is **little public knowledge that border patrol no longer has a role** in providing 911 dispatch and interpretation services for local law enforcement.
- It is **unclear under what circumstances law enforcement and prosecutors will sign applications for U-Visas**.

“[An undocumented survivor] might not trust DVSAS’s confidentiality, especially if they’re unfamiliar with the organization. [...] The services are built for white, English-speaking people.”
—Community Partner

RECOMMENDATIONS

ALL PRACTITIONERS & AGENCIES

- Ensure your agency has a meaningful and safe **language access plan**. Familiarize yourself with this plan and practice it often. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services offers a comprehensive toolkit for developing your agency's language access plan, **available [here](#)**.
- **Attend efforts and events** to strengthen relationships with leaders in immigrant communities, build trust, and increase the cultural relevancy of current services and responses. Local agencies and organizations working with or providing support to immigrant and undocumented populations include:
 - **[Imagine No Kages](#)**, which facilitates rapid response training for community preparedness in the event of an ICE raid.
 - **[Community to Community Development \(C2C\)](#)**, which hosts weekly **[Dignity Vigils](#)** to support local undocumented families and people.
 - **[Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship](#)**, which partners directly with C2C and **[hosts education and activism events](#)** to support the organization's mission.
 - **[Whatcom Community Foundation](#)**, which operates an **[immigrant relief fund](#)** to support immigrant families in Whatcom County.

SERVICE PROVIDERS & ADVOCATES

- Assist clients in developing a **Family Preparedness Plan**. The Immigrant Legal Resource Center offers templates in multiple languages, **available [here](#)**.
- Remember that leaving the relationship may not be a practical or desirable option for an undocumented survivor. Seek **resources for safety planning** for survivors who remain in their relationships and familiarize yourself with **culturally relevant treatment services for offender treatment** (such as **[La Esperanza](#)** in Skagit and Snohomish County).
 - **[ASISTA](#)**, a national organization supporting immigrant survivors of violence, offers a comprehensive webinar on safety planning with immigrant survivors, **available [here](#)**.
 - Washington State Department of Social and Health Services provides an updated list of domestic violence intervention professionals and the languages they speak, **available [here](#)**. In some cases, **practitioners can petition DSHS to allow for online video conferencing** for non-English speakers.
- Seek **training on immigration policies** and issues impacting survivors who are undocumented. The National Latin@ Network frequently offers webinars on related subjects, **available [here](#)**.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Increase culturally appropriate and accessible messaging to inform community members that border patrol no longer has a role in providing **911 dispatch**.
- Increase culturally appropriate and accessible to inform community members that border patrol no longer has a role in providing **interpretation services**.

LAW ENFORCEMENT, PROSECUTION, & COURTS

- Provide guidance for personnel **not to assist ICE**, unless by judicial order.
- If it is necessary to meet with an immigration official, **conduct meetings off-site** from public facility (e.g. courthouse, police station, service provider's office).¹⁸
- **Sign U-Visa applications** for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who are undocumented immigrants and participating in the criminal legal process, **per House Bill 1022 requirements**. Refer survivors to civil immigration attorneys and advocates if there are concerns about potential negative implications of a U-Visa application for a survivor's continued presence in the U.S.¹⁹

ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Advocate at a federal level for courthouses to be added to the list of "**sensitive locations**" that are protected from immigration enforcement (such as schools & churches).²⁰
- Communicate to immigration enforcement partners that **it is harmful to community safety and safety of victims for raids to be conducted in the community**.

“The family is seen as a unit. The [perpetrator] needs help, too. [...] The model of ‘leave the abuse and start a new life’ doesn’t work.”

—Service Provider

¹⁸ ACLU, “Freezing Out Justice” (2018).

¹⁹ Bellingham Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence. Sexual Assault National Demonstration Audit: Examining our Community's Response to Sexual Assault. Whatcom County (2018).

²⁰ Ibid.

“People working with [undocumented communities] need to be patient. The process will take more time. [...] You need to find leaders in the community. You need to do one-on-one communication. Fliers don’t work. Many don’t use computers or newspapers. Many don’t know how to read.”
—Service Provider

SPOTLIGHT REPORT:

HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING INSTABILITY and sexual and domestic violence

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

IN 2017 DVSA served **30** clients (7%) who were seeking sexual assault services and identified as homeless. While there is no causal relationship between sexual violence and homelessness, sexual abuse increases an individual's probability of becoming homeless, and homelessness can increase the risk of sexual victimization.

A national study of over **2,500** homeless individuals found that, in the previous year, sexual violence impacted:

- **9.4%** of women.
- **1.4%** of men.
- **11.9%** of transgender persons.

COMPARED to low-income women who have housing, the sexual assault experiences of homeless women are more likely to be violent and include multiple sexual acts.²¹ *"The condition of homelessness itself dramatically increases women's risk of being sexually assaulted,"* states a study by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, *"women on the streets do not enjoy the same degree of safety as women who have four walls and a roof to protect them."*

THE Whatcom County Point in Time Count, which collects demographic information about people experiencing homeless in Whatcom County, does not ask specifically about sexual assault and sexual victimization.

"I was living behind Walmart [after I reported the sexual assault] and no one ever told me anything."

—Survivor

²¹ Stermac, Lana and Paradis, Emily K. ["Homeless Women and Victimization: Abuse and Mental Health History among Homeless Rape Survivors."](#) *Resources for Feminist Research*, Spring-Summer 2001.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

IN 2017 DVSA served **351** clients (22%) who were seeking domestic violence services and identified as homeless. In the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2012 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Program Point-in-Time Count, the largest subpopulation of homeless persons in Washington State were victims of domestic violence.²²

According to the Whatcom County Point in Time Count:*

- **18%** of respondents listed domestic violence as a reason for their homelessness **in 2018**.
- **29%** of respondents listed domestic violence as a reason for their homelessness **in 2014**.

ON its own, **housing instability** has significant negative impacts on victims. Individuals experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of:

EXTREME DANGER

POORER QUALITY OF LIFE

PTSD & DEPRESSION

MISSED DAYS OF WORK OR SCHOOL

**UTILIZATION OF HOSPITAL,
EMERGENCY, OR URGENT CARE**

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

Children of survivors are also affected by the combination of domestic violence and housing instability.²³ Of the families interviewed in a 2013 report by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV):

- **37.3%** of children missed six or more days of schools.
- **23.2%** displayed declining school performance in the prior six months.
- **45%** exhibited some type of behavioral problem.

*In 2015 – 2017, domestic violence was not specifically asked about as a potential reason for homelessness.

²² Olsen, Linda, et al. *The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homelessness*. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Volunteers of America Free Home Program, June 2013.

²³ Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. *Housing: Safety, Stability, and Dignity for Survivors of Domestic Violence*, June 2013.

IN 2013 the DV Commission released the report, *It Happened in Our Town: Whatcom County Domestic Violence Fatality Review*. In all reviewed cases, the victim's lack of access to safe and affordable housing made her more vulnerable to the abuser's violence. Specifically, the Whatcom County Domestic Violence Fatality Review (DVFR) Panel found that:

- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** is a leading cause of homelessness. A survivor's efforts to escape abuse can result in loss of housing, employment, childcare, health care, and access to a partner's income. Domestic violence puts families at risk of homelessness, if not because of safety needs, then because of economic impacts.
- **HOMELESSNESS** and/or a lack of safe and stable housing make women and their children vulnerable to victimization.

IN reviewed cases of local domestic violence homicides, the DVFR Panel noted the following:

- A victim and her children were homeless when she met and moved in with the abuser; the **victim's dependence** on her abusive boyfriend for housing for herself and her children **limited her options** for safety.
- A victim had moved out of the home she shared with the abuser, was staying with friends, and was actively **looking for a place to live** at the time of the murder. Her child stayed in the home with the abuser while she looked for safe, permanent housing, and as a result she spent a lot of time in the abuser's home in order **to care for their child**.
- A victim and her child were living with a male roommate prior to the homicides. According to the victim's family, **the victim felt unsafe with the roommate**, and worried that he was interested in her sexually and would not respect her boundaries. She **had her boyfriend move in** with her, because she believed the roommate would leave then her alone. The boyfriend then killed her and her child.

HOMELESS YOUTH

IN 2017 Northwest Youth Services (NWYS) served a total of **61** young people in their housing program. Of those youth, **10** (16%) disclosed experiencing domestic violence. Of those 10, **2** (20%) disclosed that they were fleeing domestic violence.

FROM 2014–2018 NWYS served **196** young people in their housing program. Of those youth, **53** (27%) disclosed experiencing domestic violence. Of those 53, **7** (13%) disclosed that they were fleeing domestic violence.*

A SURVEY of homeless youth between ages 13 and 21 found that **23%** of females and **11%** of males had experienced sexual victimization on at least one occasion since being on the street. It was found that the age at which a young person leaves the home directly relates to their likelihood of sexual victimization on the streets – *“the younger they are when they leave, the more likely they are to be victimized.”*²⁴

THE primary cause of homelessness for youth is *“family dysfunction: parental neglect, physical or sexual abuse, family substance abuse, and family violence.”* The majority of homeless youth have witnessed or experienced physical abuse.²⁵

“Violence is a daily experience for young people living on the streets in Whatcom County – including sexual violence and abuse by partners. As children, many of them also experienced domestic violence between parents, and leaving home because of domestic violence is one of the 6 indicators of long-term homelessness for young adults. ”

—Riannon Bardsley,
former NWYS Executive Director

*NWYS does not specifically ask youth about sexual assault or sexual exploitation. Whatcom County point in time does not specifically ask youth about DV or SA as a reason for homelessness.

²⁴ Tyler, K.A., et al (2004). [“Risk factors for sexual victimization among male and female homelessness and runaway youth.”](#) *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19(5), 503-520.

²⁵ Ibid.

A STUDY conducted by Seattle University found that the more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) an individual goes through, the more likely they are to experience homelessness as an adult. ACEs include abuse, neglect, and experiencing domestic violence in the home. Individuals surveyed in Washington State who had 8 or more ACEs were **33.3%** more like to have experienced homelessness as an adult.²⁶

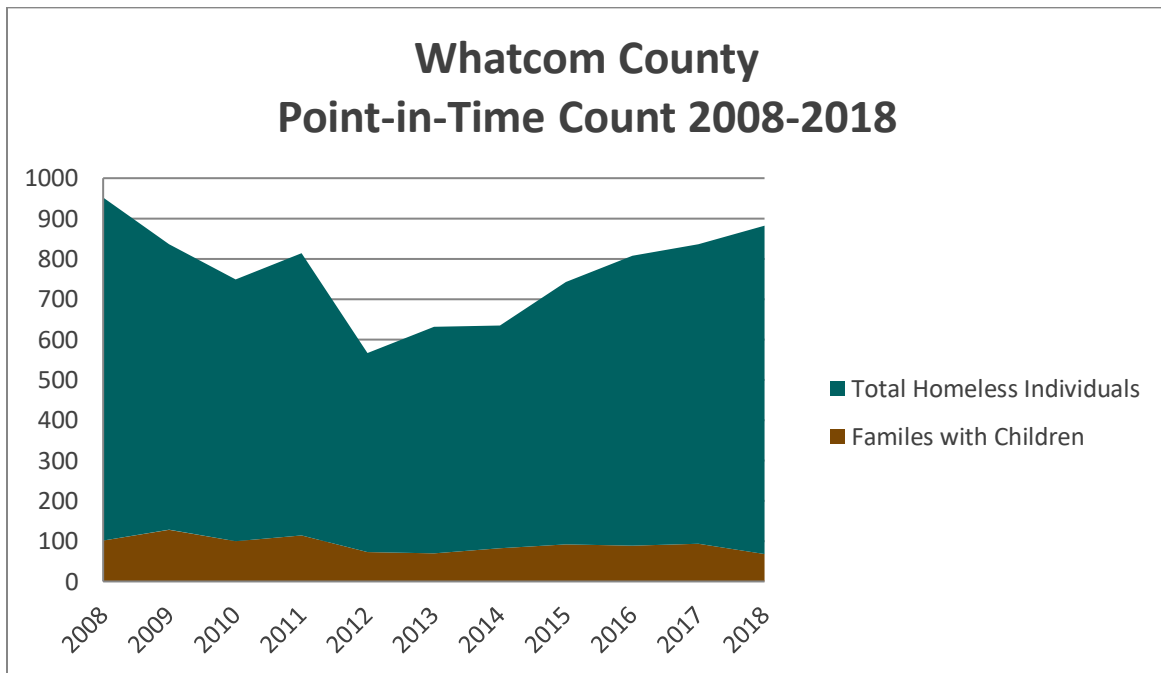
The infographic below was created by Seattle University's [Project on Family Homelessness](#).



²⁶ Sekheran, Vineeth. ["Infographic: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Homelessness."](#) *Homeless Hub*, Feb 24, 2016.

WHATCOM COUNTY

SINCE 2008 there has been a **33% decrease** in homelessness for households with children in Whatcom County. In that same time period, our County has seen a **4% decrease** in homelessness for individuals, but between 2017 and 2018, Whatcom County saw a **10% increase** in the number of homeless persons – this number has been steady increasing since **2012** when the number of homeless persons in Whatcom County was **493**. Today, there are at least **815** homeless persons residing in Whatcom County, according to the **2018** Whatcom County Point-in-Time Count. This discrepancy indicates a great need for more emergency housing services for **single people experiencing homelessness** and housing instability in Whatcom County.



“I stayed for so long because I had no other place to live. And I have two pets who are very important to me and who I won’t leave behind.”

—Survivor

RECOMMENDATIONS

ALL PRACTITIONERS

- **Read the following reports and books:**
 - [Risk Factors for Sexual Victimization Among Male and Female Homeless and Runaway Youth](#), published by University of Nebraska.
 - [Housing: Safety, Stability, and Dignity for Survivors of Domestic Violence](#), published by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV).
 - [Youth of Color Needs Assessment](#), published by Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse.
 - [Community Survey Project: Factors that Influence Disclosure of Domestic Abuse to Providers](#), published by the DV Commission.
 - [Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People](#), published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Coalition for the Homeless.
 - [Domestic Violence Advocacy: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices](#) and [Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices](#) by Jill Davies.
- Provide **safety planning to meet the unique needs** of survivors of domestic violence who are homeless:
 - [Crafting Safety Plans for Survivors of Domestic Violence](#)
- **Increase safety planning** for survivors of sexual violence who are homeless:
 - [Staying Safer on the Streets, A safety planning discussion tool for sexual assault survivors experiencing homelessness](#)
- **Increase support for youth** who are homeless and have experienced relationship abuse:
 - [Runaway and Homeless Youth and Relationship Violence Toolkit](#)
- Seek **cross-training on the inter-related needs and supports** for people who are homeless/unstably housed and also have experienced domestic and sexual violence and **on adjacent issues** such as substance abuse and mental illness.
- Seek **training on providing culturally accessible, appropriate, and equitable outreach** and services for people who experience multiple oppressions, such as people who are transgender, people of color, immigrants, Native people, and people with disabilities.

HOUSING PROVIDERS

- **Whatcom County Point in Time Count** implement questions for both adults and youth that ask about domestic violence and sexual violence as a cause of homelessness.
- **Northwest Youth Services** implement questions for youth in their housing programs about sexual violence as a cause of their homelessness.
- Require people who are abusive to **attend a state-certified domestic violence perpetrator treatment program** as part of their housing retention contract.
- Use the DV Commission's *Housing Provider Toolkit for Responding to Domestic & Sexual Violence* to **start conversations with people who are homeless and are survivors**, using abuse, and/or children impacted by abuse; support safety and well-being for survivors and their children; and support accountability for offenders.

ADVOCATES

- Show up for **community groups and events** for people who are homeless, such as Homes NOW Not Later, Whatcom County Point-in-Time Count, and Project Homeless Connect.
- Provide **mobile advocacy on-site** at housing programs, food banks, and resource centers, as described in the [Domestic Violence Housing First Training Toolkit](#) developed by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV).
- Whenever possible, continue to **designate funds for flexible financial assistance**, as described in the [Domestic Violence Housing First Training Toolkit](#) developed by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV).

“I’ve been through two domestic violence marriages and my last boyfriend [used] domestic violence and that’s why I left that house to live in my vehicle to get away from that.”

—Survivor

ELECTED OFFICIALS

- Designate funding and structural support for specific programs and services that **prioritize single homeless persons** to narrow the gap between this population and homeless families.

DV COMMISSION

- Develop a *Housing Provider Toolkit for Responding to Domestic & Sexual Violence* to **support conversations with people who are homeless and are survivors**, using abuse, and/or children impacted by abuse; safety and well-being for survivors and their children; and accountability for offenders.
- Re-convene **Whatcom County Triple Play** to decrease silos, increase dialogue and partnerships, and coordinate cross-training for practitioners in the fields of domestic and sexual violence, housing and homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health. As part of Triple Play:
 - **Coordinate trainings** with advocates and housing providers, using the [Domestic Violence Housing First Training Toolkit](#) developed by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV).
 - **Host conversations** on the [Full Frame Approach](#) and the [Five Domains of Well-Being](#), to explore how this framework can inform services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

“She was financially supporting me so I couldn’t leave. I packed up to leave many times but she always convinced me to stay and the alternative was homelessness. (...) There was violence and it was scary, but I also felt accepted by her for who I was with all my issues, and even though it wasn’t exactly safe, being with her was kind of a safety net. At least I had a place to sleep.”
—Survivor

APPENDIX



COMMISSION
ON SEXUAL & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Inspiring and coordinating community efforts to address sexual and domestic violence

Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission Against Domestic Violence

Community Members:

Alan Artman
Faithlife Corp

Riannon Bardsley
Washington State Office of Homeless Youth

Karen Burke
DVSAS

Beth Boyd
PeaceHealth Medical Center

Christina Kobdish
Unity Care Northwest

Ken Levinson
Nooksack Tribe Family Services

Michael Parker
Whatcom Homeless Service Center

Katie Plewa Olvera
Licensed Psychologist

Sharon Rutherford
St. Joseph Hospital

Garret Shelsta
Christ the King Church-Bellingham

Mary Welch
Northwest Justice Project

Michele Zlotek
Whatcom Transportation Authority

Moonwater
Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center

Government Members:

David Doll
Bellingham Police Chief

Regina Delahunt
Whatcom County Health Department

William Elfo
Whatcom County Sheriff

Silvia Johnson
DSHS Children's Administration

Starck Follis
Whatcom Co Public Defender

Eric Richey
Whatcom County Prosecutor

Jon Mutchler
City of Ferndale

Darlene Peterson
Bellingham Municipal Court

Linda Quinn
Ferndale School District

Dave Reynolds
Whatcom County Superior Court

Mike Riber
DSHS/CSO

Peter Ruffatto
Bellingham City Attorney

Bruce Van Glubt
Whatcom County District Court

Visit www.dvcommission.org for more data about domestic violence in Whatcom County and nationally; information about projects of the Commission Against Domestic Violence; and resources for addressing domestic violence.