

Niagara County
**FAMILY
VIOLENCE
INTERVENTION
PROJECT**
Newsletter



Volume 9.2

March 2026

**A Note From the FVIP
Committee**

Spring symbolizes a sense of renewal, growth, and hope-making it a meaningful time to reflect on our collective responsibility to support survivors and protect children. April represents Child Abuse Awareness and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. We encourage you to show your support in attending events offered throughout Niagara County (see inside for more details). We also ask that you share and post information on social media to raise awareness.

FVIP appreciates your efforts in keeping a trauma-informed lens when serving clients affected by Domestic Violence. With so many shortfalls in funding, changes to policies and how that affects the safety of those we serve, it is more important than ever to stay connected.

For additional ways to support our community in raising awareness, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely, **FVIP**



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

April Awareness	2
NCVR Week	3
Take Back the Night	4
STRIVE Update	5
Hats Off	7
Upcoming Events	7
Extra Resources	8
Flyers	9-16
FVIP Information	17-18

LEARN & SHARES

Save the Date!

March

3/20: In Her Shoes Training
9:30-11:30am
At Pinnacle Community Services
See Flyer on Page 14 to Register

**How Can We Spread
Awareness in Other Months?**

March celebrates National Women's History Month which is set to honor and recognize the contributions Women have made throughout history. Established in 1987, this month-long observance highlights the impacts and achievements of women in various fields.

May represents Mental Health Awareness and has been a national observance since 1949 to raise awareness about mental health, reduce stigma, and promote support for those with mental or behavioral health challenges.

Pride Month is celebrated in June and raises awareness for LGBTQ pride, commemorating the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer culture and community.

July recognizes Minority Mental Health, highlighting the unique struggles that racial and ethnic minority communities face regarding mental health.

August promotes National Wellness, emphasizing the importance of self-care, stress management and healthy routines for the mind and body.

Child Abuse Prevention Month



In the early 1980's, Congress began to recognize the alarming rate at which children continued to be abused and neglected and the need for innovative programs to prevent child abuse and assist parents and families affected by maltreatment. April was proclaimed Child Abuse Prevention Month and a time for communities nationwide to come together and take action to support strong families, thriving children and healthier communities. During April, child abuse and neglect awareness activities are promoted across the county. The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN) coordinates Child Abuse Prevention Month, providing information and updated national statistics about child abuse and neglect each April.

The Pinwheels for Prevention campaign was introduced by Prevent Child Abuse America in 2008, to represent a vision for a world where all children grow up happy, healthy, and prepared to succeed in supportive families and communities. This campaign remains the national symbol. The Child Advocacy Center of Niagara is hosting their own Pinwheel Project to spread awareness in April. For more information, see flyer on page 13.

Wear Blue and the Blue Ribbon campaign, observed during April's Child Abuse Awareness Month, began in 1989. The color blue symbolizes the bruises sustained by children and serves as a visual reminder of the need for prevention. Wear Blue Days are often held on the first Friday of April or other days throughout the month.



Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April also recognizes Sexual Assault Awareness and 2026 marks the official 25th anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). SAAM was first nationally observed in 2001 after the newly launched National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

In the early 2000's, the primary goal of SAAM was raising visibility of the teal ribbon and the meaning behind it. By the mid-2000s, SAAM incorporated prevention more heavily, focusing on areas such as communities, workplaces and college campuses. These campaigns discussed ways individuals and communities can stop sexual assault before it happens by changing behaviors and promoting respect.

While each campaign might have a different theme, they all share some common goals: to raise visibility about sexual assault and share how it can be prevented, whether that's through education about healthy sexuality, consent, or bystander intervention.

This year's theme "25 Years Stronger: Looking Back, Moving Forward" honors the history and growth of the movement while reaffirming the commitment to a safer culture for all. Looking back, we remember the survivors and advocates who laid the foundation for change. Moving forward, we renew our focus on prevention, healing, and action.



Scan for Office for
Victims of Crime
NCVRW website

Crime Victims' Rights Week April 19-25, 2026

About:

Since 1981, National Crime Victims' Rights Week has challenged the Nation to confront and remove barriers to achieving justice for all victims of crime. During NCVRW, we recognize the accomplishments of the victims' rights movement and reflect on how far we have come.

History:

National Crime Victims' Rights Week was established federally in 1981 by President Ronald Reagan to raise awareness of victim rights and services, observed annually in April. The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) leads the nation in the observance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Impact:

National Crime Victims' Rights Week Awareness has a significant impact on the community by increasing the public's knowledge, which can influence policymakers to implement changes that benefit the cause by enacting laws that protect and support survivors of crime. Awareness months foster a sense of community among individuals affected by crime and those who support the cause. Fundraising during awareness events can have significant impact on victims of crime, as it creates opportunities for financial, emotional and community support. Combining education, emotional support and financial resources can play a crucial role in helping victims recover, build their lives, and feel less alone in their journey.

2026 Theme:

The 2026 theme is "LISTEN. **ACT.** ADVOCATE. Protect Victims, Serve Communities." This year's theme is a powerful call to action—one that reminds us that supporting victims of crime requires more than awareness. It requires intentional listening, meaningful action, and unwavering advocacy.





Take Back The Night

Information from:
<https://takebackthenight.org/>

Take Back the Night is the oldest worldwide movement with a goal to end all forms of sexual violence, including sexual assault, sexual abuse, trafficking, stalking, gender harassment, and relationship violence, and to support survivors in their healing journeys.

Purpose

History through the Decades

In the 70's violence against women escalated and in 1976, a Tribunal Council of women from 40+ countries met in Belgium to advocate for the safety of women on the street. Through the 80's, hundreds of colleges and universities in North America began holding marches and rallies on their campuses. In the 90's, thousands of Take Back The Night Event holders decided how to affect change, take a stand within their own communities and culture and share their stories. Events ranged from girl rock band concerts and clanging pots and pans on marches to candlelight vigils and chapel speak-outs. Activists changed policies, laws, and handbooks, to ensure victims' rights and consent-based definitions of sexual violence. In 2001, the Take Back the Night as a Foundation came into existence. Corporations and professional sports teams began holding events to educate their employees and players. Survivors identifying as male and other genders walked, marched and shared their stories alongside those identifying as female. In 2010s, Take Back The Night continued to empower more people through walks, marches, poets, musicians, artists, and activists. Free 24/7 legal support for all became available through their 1-800-SHATTER hotline.

TBTN Event
Compilation Reel:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_iNs8R1UAc&t=40s

Niagara University's Office for Violence Prevention and Education hosts an annual Take Back the Night event that aims to end sexual, relationship, and domestic violence in all forms. This year's TBTN will be held on April 16th, 2026. The event features resource tables, a brief program, and a student-organized march across campus, concluding with a restorative reflection. For more details, see the tentative flyer on page 10 and continue to be on the look out for the official flyer!

Local 2026 TBTN

April 29th, 2026 Denim Day

Denim Day is celebrated annually and internationally on the last Wednesday in April in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. On this day, people wear jeans to protect against victim-blaming myths and in support for survivors of sexual violence. It originated after a 1999 Italian Supreme Court ruling overturned a rape conviction, falsely claiming that tight jeans implied consent. The day acts as a visible, social and fashion statement to challenge the misconception that a victim's clothing or actions excuse sexual assault. This year, Denim Day will be celebrated on April 29th, 2026. See flyer on page 9.



The STRIVE Initiative grant is built on collaboration and continuous growth. If you have any ideas, feedback, or suggestions that could help us enhance our services, we would be grateful to hear from you. Your voice helps shape the work we do.



NYS STRIVE Grant Update: Wrapping up Year 1 and Looking Ahead

It is hard to believe we are entering the final quarter of our first year with the Statewide Targeted Reductions in Intimate Partner Violence (STRIVE) Initiative grant. The year has moved quickly, and behind the scenes, there has been steady, meaningful progress to strengthen our foundation and position us for long-term success to address Intimate Partner Violence in Niagara County.

Over the past several months, the team has met monthly to stay aligned, troubleshoot challenges, and ensure consistent forward movement; we are fine-tuning internal processes, clarifying roles, and have addressed early obstacles. Some training needs have been identified, and targeted support has been provided to strengthen the changes being implemented. Significant effort has also gone into preparing STRIVE's data and evaluation requirements by tightening police report practices and aligning our work with grant expectations, which is critical for year two.

As we closed out year one, our focus is on completing a comprehensive system-based and community-based needs assessment and preparing for the implementation of the use of lethality and risk assessments that include the Danger Assessment for Law Enforcement (DA-LE) and Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA). We are also refining our coordinated community response by deepening collaborations among partners, and laying the groundwork for a culturally responsive Domestic Violence High Risk Team (DVHRT). These efforts will enhance our collective ability to identify risk, respond effectively, and better serve those most vulnerable.

We are incredibly grateful to Dr. Dana Radatz for sharing not only her time, but also her passion and expertise. From developing and delivering risk assessment training, to providing ODARA instruction and supporting data analysis, her contributions have been invaluable. What stands out most is the care and guidance she consistently offers mentoring team members, availability for questions, and serving as a steady source of encouragement. Her generosity and dedication have already made a lasting impact, and we are fortunate to have her as part of our community.

Thank you to everyone whose dedication and flexibility make this work possible. Your collaboration and shared commitment continue to drive STRIVE forward. Here's to finishing year 1 strong and building momentum for the important work ahead!

~ Kathy Stack
STRIVE Coordinator

Research Corner: Custody & Orders of Protection

If you would like a PDF copy of the article, please email Dr. Dana Radatz at dradatz@niagara.edu

Study Abstract:

This study explores the experiences of 18 maternal IPV survivors seeking protection through civil courts. The mothers described a core experience of *navigating protective precarity*- the juxtaposition of seeking protection yet experiencing increased vulnerability. Three themes of navigating protective precarity include i) fathers' rights versus survivors' safety; ii) constrained survivor agency and iii) systemic unshielding. Paradoxical system responses leave adult and child survivors vulnerable to additional harm. We discuss how these findings can inform policies and system change that centers adult and child safety and well-being.

Spearman, K. J., Durfee, A., Bagwell-Gray, M. E., & Messing, J. (2025). Navigating Protective Precarity: A Thematic Analysis of Civil Protective Orders and Child Custody for Maternal Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Feminist Criminology*, 21(1), 60-76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851251388463> (Original work published 2026)

NCSO Annual Scholarship Opportunity



In honor of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, the Niagara County Sheriff's Domestic Violence Intervention Program and Victim Assistance Unit is offering a \$500 scholarship to one High school senior student in Niagara County. Students must complete the application and submit a short essay on how victimization has impacted themselves or someone else.

The application and instructions can be found on Page 11 and must be submitted by April 6th, 2026.

This year's theme follows the 2026 NCVRW theme: "LISTEN. **ACT**. ADVOCATE. Protect Victims, Serve Communities."

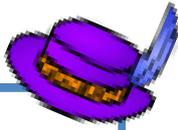
The Model Behind Child Advocacy Centers



When police or child protective services believe a child may be experiencing abuse, the child is brought to the CAC - a safe, child-focused environment - by a caregiver or other "safe" adult. At the CAC, the child tells their story once to a trained interviewer who knows the right questions to ask in a way that does not retraumatize the child. Then, a team that includes medical professional, law enforcement, mental health, prosecution, child protective services, victim advocacy and other professionals make decisions together about how to help the child based on the interview. CACs offer therapy and medical exams, plus courtroom preparation, victim advocacy, case management, and other services. This is called the multidisciplinary team (MDT) response and is a core part of the work of CACs. To learn more on CACs, visit: <https://cacofniagara.org/about-us/the-child-advocacy-center/>



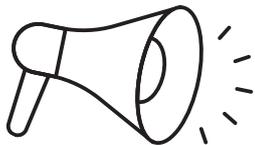
“Hat’s Off!” to...
Caleigh Skinner!



Caleigh joined Pinnacle Community Services in May 2019 as the Community Advocacy Coordinator with the Domestic Violence Program, later stepping into the Director role in 2022. Over the years, she has dedicated herself to supporting and empowering survivors of abuse through direct advocacy, counseling, and community education. Caleigh has strengthened services for survivors and has been a strong, reliable leader- not only for her own team, but many others around her. She consistently prioritizes collaboration, working closely with numerous community partners to enhance advocacy throughout the greater Niagara region. Her commitment is further shown through her service on the FVIP Steering Committee since 2022.

Recently, Caleigh embarked on a new professional chapter, offering direct mental health counseling. We know she will thrive in this role and continue to positively impact countless individuals. Caleigh, thank you for your dedication, compassion, and leadership in supporting survivors. We wish you all the best in your new professional journey.

Hats off to you, Caleigh!



Upcoming Events...
You’re Invited!

Flyers for all listed events can be found starting on page 9

Friday, 3/20- *In Her Shoes DV Simulation* hosted by Pinnacle Community Services. 9:30am at 1522 Main Street, Niagara Falls. RSVP required, see page 14 for more details.

Saturday, 3/28- *NCSO Annual Easter Egg Hunt* hosted by Niagara County Sheriffs Office. 1pm at NCLEA @ SUNY Niagara (Lot 4). RSVP with children’s ages using the link on page 12.

Thursday, 4/16- *Take Back the Night* hosted by Niagara University’s Office for Violence Prevention and Education. 5-7pm at Niagara University’s Gallagher Center. No RSVP required.

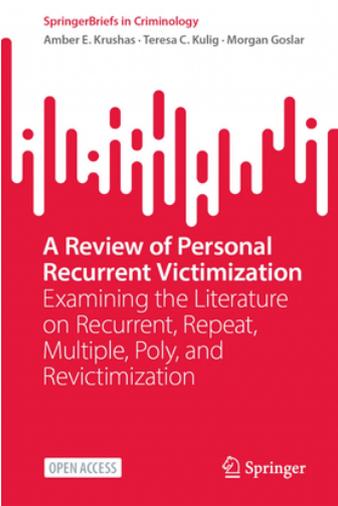
Sunday, 4/19- *Baby Shower Event* hosted by United Way Women United honoring Pinnacle Community Services. 11am at Griffon Brewery and Gastropub, Lewiston. \$35 includes breakfast buffet and coffee. Please RSVP using the QR code on the flyer located on page 15.

Tuesday, 4/28- *Walk to End Child Abuse* hosted by The Child Advocacy Center of Niagara. 4:30pm at Hype Park Ice Pavillion. No RSVP required. See flyer on page 12.

Wednesday, 4/29- *Denim Day* Join in solidarity by wearing denim or jeans to support survivors, speak out against victim blaming and to bring awareness toward sexual violence. Donations can be made to o NCSO. See flyer on page 9.

Saturday, 5/2- 130th *Anniversary Gala & Casino Night* hosted by Pinnacle Community Services to celebrate their 130th Anniversary. 6pm at Double Tree Hotel, Niagara Falls. Stay tuned, more information and tickets to come. Email mwillnave@pinnaclecs.org to be notified for ticket sales.

Extra Resources



[A Review of Personal Recurrent Victimization](#)
 This book was recently published by scholars Amber Krushas, Teresa Kulig, and Morgan Goslar, on recurrent, repeat, multiple, polyvictimization, and revictimization over the last four decades. They outline over 550 studies that assess the five different forms of recurrent victimization. It is open access and downloadable to the public.
 Link to access the free book:
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-88601-0>

[How to Support Survivors of Sexual Abuse: A Trauma-Informed Guide](#)
 This free guide offers clear, compassionate guidance for those supporting survivors of childhood sexual abuse or sexual assault. Through short, accessible lessons, you'll learn how trauma affects the body and mind, how to respond with safety and empathy, and how to care for yourself while helping others heal.
 To access free guide (will have to sign in with an email):
<https://www.nolongersilent.life/participant-page/how-to-support-survivors-of-sexual-abuse?programId=bf5b8300-9617-4404-8b5a-74d5cd12194f&participantId=c8385889-c549-40e9-a912-15c4132a9c23>



**National Sexual Assault Legal Hotline:
Free Legal Assistance for Survivors**

If you are a survivor of sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape or other sexual violence, learn your legal options from victim-focused attorneys. Call 567-SHATTER (567-742-8837) or complete the form here.

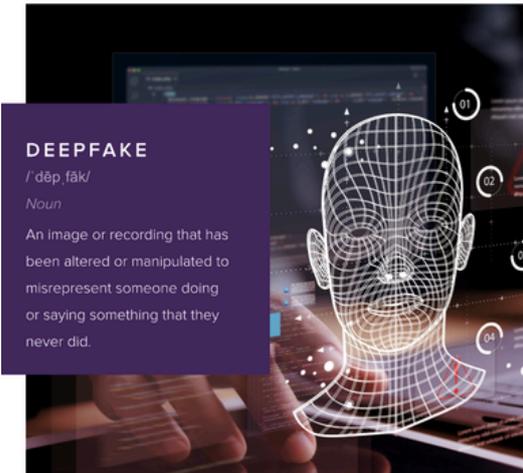
[Get Help Now](#)

Offered by the Take Back the Night Legal Team.

- 24/7 connection with real person, all information is confidential
- Response time is typically within 3-4 business days but may be up to 6 weeks for certain cases

<https://takebackthenight.org/legal-assistance/>

[Spot the Deepfakes!](#)
 This interactive activity by the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence serves as an educational resource for participants to learn about how deepfake images of real people look. We are in an era where technology is advancing, especially through AI-generated imaging.
<https://indd.adobe.com/view/14dcf766-598c-4075-a158-b472236f497e>



 **Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence**

Spot the Deepfakes!

EDUCATIONAL TOOL

Test your ability to recognize a deepfake image.

[START](#)

JOIN
NIAGARA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
IN SUPPORTING

DENIM Day

APRIL 29TH

DENIM DAY REPRESENTS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT
TO END VICTIM BLAMING SURROUNDING
SEXUAL ASSAULT

**WEAR DENIM IN SUPPORT OF SEXUAL
ASSAULT SURVIVORS**

**\$5 DONATION TO BENEFIT
NCSO'S VICTIM SERVICES**
CRIME VICTIMS ARE ASSISTED
WITH DONATED FUNDS

PAYMENT CAN BE MADE TO NCSO
CRIME VICTIM ADVOCATES AT
(716) 438-3306



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MOVEMENT AT

[HTTPS://DENIMDAY.ORG/WHY-DENIM/](https://denimday.org/why-denim/)

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY OVPE PRESENTS

TAKE BACK *the* NIGHT

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026
GALLAGHER CENTER GYM

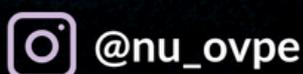
5:00 PM - Resource Tables

5:45 PM - Program & Speaker

6:30 PM - Campus March

6:45 PM - Restorative Reflection
at the Castellani Art Museum

***Please Note:** This event may contain triggering and/or sensitive material. Sexual violence and sexual assault are some topics mentioned within this event.



This project was supported by Grant No. 15JOVW-23-GG-04480-CAMP awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.



Niagara County Sheriff's Office Victim Services 2026 Scholarship Award Application (\$500)

Senior students are encouraged to apply by completing the application information below and writing a short essay. The essay must include how victimization has impacted themselves or someone else. *Applications must be submitted to NCSO by April 6th, 2026.* A winner will be chosen and presented with a check during National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone Number: _____
High School Attended: _____
Intended College: _____
Intended Major: _____
Parent/Guardian: _____



Niagara County Sheriff's Office Victim Services provides case-specific information and ongoing assistance to victims of crime. Advocates support victims of varying crimes throughout all of Niagara County. Assistance includes safety planning, court accompaniment, transportation, and filing claims with the NYS Office of Victim Services. In addition, advocates provide 24/7 on-call availability to local law enforcement agencies. In honor of National Crime Victims' Rights Week, our Domestic Violence Intervention Program and Victim Assistance Unit is offering a \$500 scholarship to one senior in Niagara County.

Mail to: Niagara County Sheriff's Office Victim Services
5526 Niagara Street Extension, P.O. BOX 496 Lockport, New York 14095-0496
(716) 438-3306 / Email: Stacy.suess@niagaracounty.com



Join NCSO for the 5th Annual

EASTER Egg Hunt

EASTER BUNNY - GOLDEN EGGS - PRIZES!

MARCH 28 1:00 PM

NCLEA @ SUNY Niagara (LOT 4)
3111 Saunders Settlement RD
Sanborn NY 14132

ALL KIDS WELCOME!



If interested, please follow the link to RSVP:

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=vuAfrJg4z0G_uqfDqivUrdPYfB810nZOpZ9fQdEe29ZURFdZODBRRjUyQIVDT0ZOMERIRUtVSlc5Ti4u&route=shorturl

Join us for this FREE Community Event!

2026

WALK TO END CHILD ABUSE

Tuesday April 28th, 4:30pm

NOT ALL HEROES WEAR CAPES

Hyde Park Ice Pavilion

911 Robins Dr. Niagara Falls, NY



Costumes Encouraged!
Meet Real Life Superheroes,
Bikers Against Child Abuse,
Community Resources,
Kid's Crafts & More!



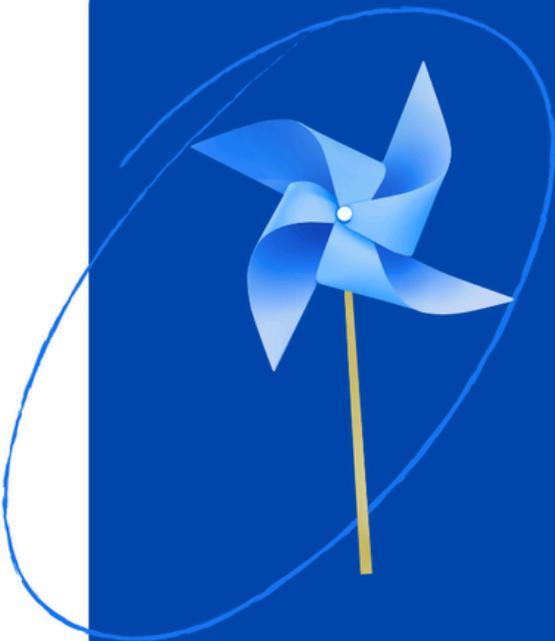
Rain or Shine!

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month



Pinwheel Garden Project

Awareness Event & Fundraiser Benefiting the CAC of Niagara



Pinwheel garden kit, containing pinwheels and a yard sign, are \$30. Funds cover the cost of kit + donation.

Community agencies, non-profits and schools receive a kit for FREE!

Choose a spot, plant your pinwheels and grab a pic.

Tag the @cacofniagara on Facebook and use these hashtags:
#bandagainstchildabuse
#childabuseprevention month

To participate, email: marissa.virtuoso@nfmcc.org

Orders must be in by March 2nd.

Help spread awareness this April. Plant a pinwheel garden to help make child abuse prevention a priority.



THE
CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER
OF NIAGARA

Working Hand in Hand for Children

716.285.0045
cacofniagara.org

 @cacofniagara
 @cacniagara



IN HER SHOES®

Friday, March 20th

9:30am | 1522 Main St, Niagara Falls

Take the in person opportunity to learn more about what domestic violence survivors face everyday and the decisions they need to make.

FREE EVENT



RSVP with Larissa Bachman
lbachman@pinnaclecs.org | 716-285-6984 ext.104

YOU'RE INVITED!



\$35
inc. breakfast buffet
and coffee

Women United of Greater Niagara is excited to host a community baby shower in support of our friends at Pinnacle Community Services.

We invite guests to browse our Amazon registry for much-needed essentials—and we'd love for you to bring your favorite children's book to share the joy of storytime.



Gift Registry



Proud Recipient of the Baby Shower



RSVP by 4.10



Save The Date

ALL IN FOR EMPOWERING LIVES

130TH ANNIVERSARY GALA & CASINO NIGHT
TO BENEFIT
PINNACLE COMMUNITY SERVICES

MAY 2, 2026

AT 6 PM

Double Tree Hotel

401 Buffalo Ave.

Niagara Falls, NY

Sponsorships are available
at pinnaclecs.org



What Is FVIP?



The Niagara County Family Violence Intervention Project (FVIP) is a coalition of agencies and organizations committed to addressing interpersonal violence and child abuse through collaborative responses, community education and professional training.

For nearly 20 years, FVIP has recognized the co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence and worked together to protect children and adults alike. Volunteer FVIP Steering Committee members set the FVIP's strategic agenda for training, collaboration and networking for mutual support for a shared mission.

We are so excited to share the FVIP Newsletter with the community. We will be sharing news, events, and program highlights on a bi-annual basis!

The FVIP is coordinated by the Child Advocacy Center at Niagara, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center.

For more information on FVIP, please visit our website:

<https://cacofniagara.org/services/family-violence-intervention-project/>



Domestic Violence
Hotline Numbers:

Passage (716) 299-0909

YWCA (716) 433-6716



STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Child Advocacy Center of Niagara

Shelley Hitzel, LMSW, Executive Director, shelley.hitzel@nfmmc.org

Marissa Virtuoso, Education and Outreach Coordinator, marissa.virtuoso@nfmmc.org

Neighborhood Legal Services

Kathy Kephart, Staff Paralegal, Family Unit, kkephart@nls.org

Niagara County Sheriff's Office Victim Services

Stacy Suess, Niagara County Victim Services Coordinator, Domestic Violence Intervention Program & Victim Assistance Unit, stacy.suess@niagaracounty.gov

Niagara County Department of Social Services

Bridget Janese, Deputy Director of Services, bridget.janese@dta.state.ny.us

Niagara University

Dr. Dana Radatz, Professor, Criminology & Criminal Justice, dradatz@niagara.edu

Pinnacle Community Services

Larissa Bachman, LMSW, Chief Operating Officer, lbachman@pinnaclecs.org

YWCA of Niagara Frontier

Rachel Sandle-Sacco, Rape Crisis Program Supervisor, rsandle@ywcantf.org

Niagara Falls Police Department

Kathy Stack, STRIVE Coordinator, kathy.stack@niagarafallsny.gov

