

# Immokalee domestic violence center opening delayed

Plans this month to open a new 21,000 square foot, 60-bed Immokalee shelter for victims of domestic violence and human trafficking have been delayed, according to The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

“Due the Stay at Home Order in response to the coronavirus, The Shelter will be postponing the opening of The Shelly Stayer Shelter in Immokalee,” said Shelter CEO Linda Oberhaus, “We hope to open as soon as possible, but in the meantime, we urge Immokalee families to use our Naples shelter if they find themselves in unsafe circumstances.”

Oberhaus added The Shelter will make every effort to assist Immokalee victims with transportation to the Naples shelter if necessary for families in need.

On April 1, Gov. Ron DeSantis issued a “Safer at Home” order for the entire state of Florida.

“Unfortunately, home is not a safer place for everybody,” Oberhaus stressed. “Victims of domestic violence can become trapped in their homes with their abusers and away from the people and resources that could help them.”

Oberhaus said no one should have to be isolated in a home with an abusive partner, adding “It is a toxic situation that impacts the safety and wellbeing of the family, the

neighborhood and the entire community.”

According to the Collier County Sheriff’s Office, domestic violence-related 911 calls have shown an increase. The news was expected by those who work with domestic violence.

Oberhaus said places like work and school typically provide victims with reprieve from the violence in their homes. Without these opportunities, being confined at home with their abuser makes victims more vulnerable and the violence will likely increase. Multiple studies have found that emotionally stressful events such as the current pandemic can lead to an increase in aggressive behavior at home.

Oberhaus said it is vital that the community know the Naples emergency shelter is open and available to families in need.

“Domestic violence does not stop at the front door; it impacts our whole community,” she said. “Now more than ever before, the community’s assistance is critical to saving lives. Tell people about The Shelter and that we are open for survivors. If you see something, say something. Call 911.”

If you or someone you know is affected by domestic violence, call The Shelter’s 24-hour Crisis Line at 239-775-

1101. Victims can also email [info@naplesshelter.org](mailto:info@naplesshelter.org) to access information and assistance.



## Veterans Services Continues to Serve Veteran Community

On March 20, Collier County Veteran Services offices suspended in-person services due to COVID-19. Veteran Services Officers (VSO) continue to serve the veteran community without interruption.

VSOs are still filing claims, working on appeals and educating clients on benefits that they may be entitled to through their military services. To maintain the safety of both staff and clients, all communication is done over the phone and email.

“While so much of our everyday lives have come to a standstill, some things must be kept moving, especially when it comes to the needs of local veterans” said Manager of Veteran Services Alex Scardino. “VA claims and appeals can be a long process, so we are doing everything we can to ensure that our veterans are taken care of and benefit acquisition keeps its momentum,” added Scardino.

Like many other services in Collier County, Veteran Services has had to adapt during this rapidly changing environment. While the face to face interaction is temporarily lost, VSOs are able to maintain contact with both clients and VA staff.

To make an appointment with a VSO, please call (239) 252-VETS (8387). Additionally, to get more information about veteran benefits or to file a claim, visit the VA website

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