

GUEST COMMENTARY



# Domestic Violence does not stop at the front door

**BY LINDA OBERHAUS**  
CEO The Shelter for Abused Women & Children

On Sept. 16, 2023, Laura Candia was violently murdered on a public street in Immokalee. Her life was taken just 7 minutes from our emergency shelter.



OBERHAUS

Laura was a passenger in her grandmother's car when her abuser struck them with his vehicle and shot round after round into their car. Laura died at the scene and her grandmother was flown to the hospital with 15 bullet wounds.

While nightly news stations carried accounts of her killer's arrest, the story didn't make the local daily newspaper until 11 days later, and even then, it fell to page 17 — 14 pages behind news of Catesby's lilies blooming at a Lee County recreation area and new parking systems set for local beaches. If her abuser had shot a stranger on a public street in downtown Naples, we would have read about it for weeks, but somehow Laura's murder slipped through the cracks.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and as Americans, we live in an era of heightened security. We are urged to be vigilant and report anything suspicious, but too often we turn a blind eye or fail to recognize the signs of domestic violence.

Laura is the 80th documented victim of domestic violence homicide in Collier County since The Shelter started keeping records in 1993. It is vital that we, as a community, speak out and work to raise awareness for services that help victims before they become a statistic.

We are fortunate that Laura's killer did not take more lives during his public murdering spree, but many other com-

munities have not been as fortunate. We see it on the news every night. Failure to recognize and report domestic violence not only endangers victims but puts our entire community at risk because, as Laura's story shows, violence in the home does not stop at the front door. It endangers all of us.

In addition to the devastation these crimes inflict on their victims, the financial cost to the community is staggering. In 2022, the financial cost of domestic violence exceeded \$31 million in Collier County, including law enforcement, court costs, medical care, social services, lost wages and job productivity.

Each day in America, three women are killed by domestic violence. Outside of their families and immediate communities, few will hear anything about their murders. And when we do learn of them, the news value will somehow be minimized by the fact that the killer was an intimate partner and not a random stranger.

Laura was just 20 years old. She leaves behind a beautiful daughter and a family struggling with tremendous trauma and loss. Laura could have been your daughter, granddaughter, or great-granddaughter because domestic violence does not discriminate. It crosses all ethnic, economic, and geographic boundaries. Victims and abusers live next door, socialize at your club, work out at your gym, and sit next to you at worship.

Domestic violence is domestic terrorism. It is imperative that we stand as a community, raise awareness, know the signs and support the resources that will ultimately end domestic violence in Collier County. By not speaking out, our silence condones it.

If you know someone affected by domestic violence, call The Shelter's 24-hour crisis hotline at 239-775-1101. For more information on how to recognize and act on the signs of domestic violence, visit [naplesshelter.org/help](http://naplesshelter.org/help). ■

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