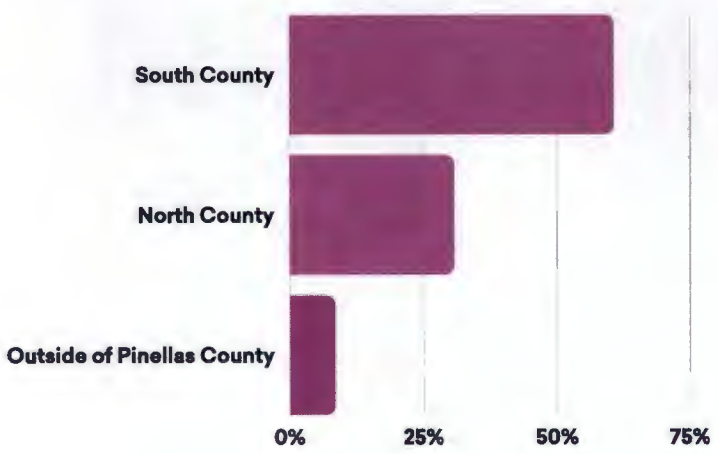


**Location of Survivors  
Accessing CASA's Services**



**72% increase  
over last year**

**FY 2020-21 Stats**

<b>501</b> Adults & children served through Emergency Shelter	Survivors spent <b>19,451</b> Bed nights in the CASA Shelter
<b>1,754</b> Adults served through Non-Residential Support Services	<b>5,242</b> Calls answered through CASA's 24-hour Emergency Hotline
<b>2,280</b> Justice Advocacy sessions provided at Pinellas County Courthouses	<b>580</b> Survivors referred to CASA's Injunction for Protection Attorney program

**Each year Domestic Violence costs Pinellas County a minimum of \$132 million**

**Workplace Productivity:  
\$25.6 Million**



**Resources spent in the courts, on protection, & law enforcement:  
\$53.2 million**



**Emergency Housing & Supplies:  
\$4.5 million**



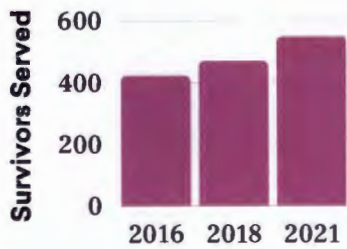
Source: USFSP Economic Impact of Domestic Violence in Pinellas County

## Housing Programs

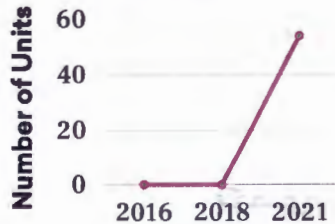
### Emergency Shelter



### Rapid Rehousing



### Permanent Supportive Housing

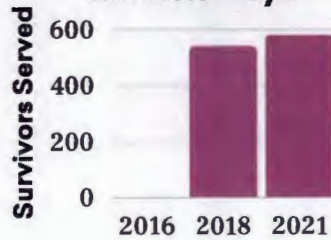


### Transitional Housing

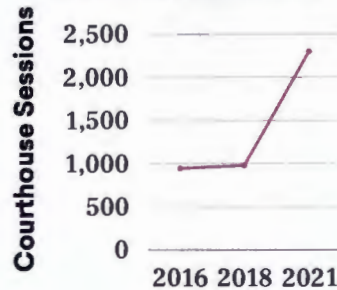


## Legal Programs

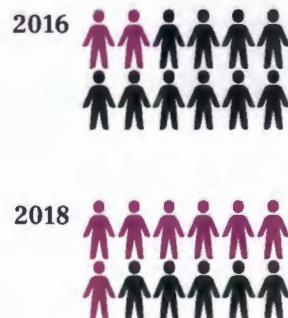
### IFP Attorneys



### Justice Advocacy



### Staff Members

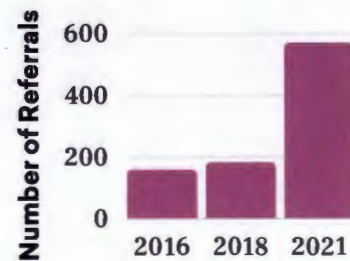


## Child Welfare Programs

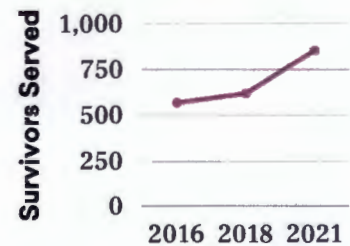
### Staff Members



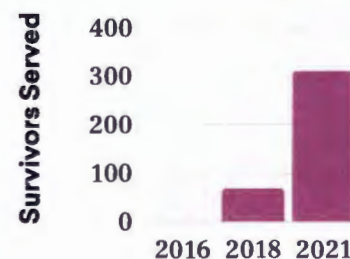
### CPI Referrals



### CPI Advocacy



### SPPD Childhood DV Advocacy





# In a hidden Florida shelter, a mom redefines home for her daughters after abuse

One year after their escape, much remains uncertain. But on an ordinary morning, they celebrated their independence day.



On the anniversary of the day they left their abuser, a mother and her daughters stand at their kitchen counter, the kind of quiet moment they have only enjoyed in the last year. [ MARTHA ASECIO-HINE | Times ]

by **Rose Wong**  
Published March 8, 2022

INELLAS COUNTY — Still in her pink and purple pajamas, the woman's younger daughter ate Honey Oats Crunch at the kitchen counter, eyes glued to her iPad. The girl laughed, mouth full, as she watched a detective comedy from her home country, released long before she was born.

It was at least her fourth time watching it.

Occasionally, the woman, 44, translated a character's line to English. Movies help her girls practice their native language.

And,” she said, “it lets us see Japan.”

In the apartment bathroom, her teenage daughter brushed her teeth. It was an ordinary morning, an ordinary routine. But each knew what Feb. 10 marked.

A year had passed since the woman and her daughters escaped their abuser and moved into the emergency shelter run by Community Action Stops Abuse, Pinellas County’s domestic violence agency.

After two months, the family moved to CASA’s transitional housing facility. A modest, unmarked building in Pinellas County, the facility has seven apartments. Survivors pay 30 percent of their income and live for up to two years as they regain independence. While residents for the most part enjoy the freedom of a typical rental, they have to abide by one rule — no guests.

The *Tampa Bay Times* is withholding the names of this family and a friend to protect their safety.

It was a weekday, so the 16-year-old hopped onto her purple bike. Her sister sprinted from her bedroom, hugging her stuffed koala, and held out a stuffed dog. Her big sister gives the yellow hound hug every morning before class.

In front of a reporter, though, she pushed the toy away with an embarrassed smile.

The girls’ mom opened the door. Still quiet outside. The sun was almost done making its way to the top of the cornflower sky. She watched her eldest from the doorstep with her younger daughter, waving until the teenager turned the corner and disappeared.

It was only 7 a.m. The elementary schooler’s bus wouldn’t come for another hour and 15 minutes. But she always gets up at 6 a.m. with her mom and sister.

Before the past year, they didn’t have these moments. The woman’s husband ruled the home with a violent fist, she remembered, often hitting her and her daughters, ripping curtains off walls, breaking dishes. He controlled the family’s finances and all aspects of their lives, deciding the clothes they could wear and places they could go.

Disagreeing led to a deluge of verbal abuse and sometimes physical violence. For his stepdaughter, the same, it could also mean not getting to eat dinner.

The 9-year-old picked up two small cups of water on the kitchen counter, placed in front of a framed photo of her mom’s late parents.

She refilled the cups, tipping her toes to turn the faucet. That’s her job in the mornings. Honoring her grandparents by fetching them fresh water.

“When it’s really cold outside, I give them hot water.”

The picture — along with three passports, the iPad and some clothing — was one of the few things the family kept in their escape.

...

the woman waved goodbye to her younger daughter, who peered through the school bus window. When she crossed the street, back toward the apartment, and folded her arms against the wind. A chilly morning for Florida, but it'd be 30 degrees in central Japan, where she grew up.

Her husband's dream, she said, had been to move to the United States. He loved baseball and romanticized becoming an American.

They had met through friends at a dinner party. She gave him her number so she could go back to talking to her girlfriends. He asked her on a date. He was funny and seemingly kind.

When they met, she was going through a divorce with a man with whom she shared a daughter. He didn't have kids. She admired his carefree way, how he melted away her stress.

After nearly a year of dating, she became pregnant with a second daughter. They married. He grew neglectful, mean, she said, then violent.

...

The three-bedroom apartment is sparse and clean. The woman sat before an iPad at the small dining table perpendicular to the black couch, the sole pieces of furniture in the living room.

She cropped a photo of an Armani Exchange wallet and made a collage with a few product photos. She wrote a description in Japanese and added the wallet to her page on Buyma, a retail website. She works as a personal shopper for Japanese customers interested in U.S. luxury goods.

She responded to a happy customer who had received his Lacoste watch belt, thanking him for his business. She hummed along to Korean pop songs: "My daughters make sure I am very educated about K-pop."

Since starting with Buyma a few months ago, she has made less than \$100 per month. She hopes to make more as she masters the process. Her aunt occasionally sends money from Japan.

They live simply. They travel by bikes provided by CASA, buy the cheaper brand of rice, go without a home plan.

Her dreams are simple, too. She wants a job that can provide a safe and comfortable life for her family. A home where they can take root.

She misses her friends and family in Japan, and little things too — Japanese rice, a specific brand of bottled green tea, and Toto Washlet, a common electronic bidet with a heated seat.

She misses the familiarity of four decades.

Yet her new home has stolen her heart in unexpected ways. She loves the openness with which Americans communicate. She cherishes the warmth, wide skies and access to the beach. She didn't know her favorite color a year ago because her husband had never given her a choice.

Ocean blue."





he girls look through teen magazines while home at their apartment in CASA's transitional housing facility. [ MARTHA ASECIO-RHINE | Times ]

When her father died, back in Japan, he left her his apartment and a sum of money. But her husband demanded that she sell the property and give him all of her inheritance, just as he demanded her monthly paycheck as a hospital case worker.

In 2019, he used the money to get a student visa and move the family to a friend's house in Texas. He enrolled in a local college and studied English.

His wife didn't know anyone, falling into a common pattern of domestic violence in which an abuser moves a victim to an isolated place without a support network, said Zuleika Gonzalez, CASA's manager of batterer accountability services.

Her husband had a falling-out with their host in the following year and led the family to move to a Tarrant County hotel, where he knew the manager.

One day, after his wife took the girls to Target without his permission, he became verbally abusive, she said. Before leaving their two-bed hotel room to run an errand, he began recording his wife and daughters.

She remembers scanning the room, eyes welling. She saw her little one sitting at the end of the bed with her koala, quietly crying. The teen scrolled her phone, seemingly numb.

His laptop sat open on the desk, recording their every word and motion.

It felt like we were prisoners,” she said. “Stuck in a box.”

She didn’t know what she had done wrong or how their life had ended up this way. But it clicked that the only way to protect her girls was to leave — right away.

She knew a couple of her friends would be at the hotel bar that night. She hurried downstairs.

“He was shaking and crying,” said a friend who was at the bar.

Her friends called the police, who arrived as the husband returned. Officers isolated him as the woman went to gather her girls.

Another friend took them in for the night.

The next day, the friend called CASA.

• • •

At 2 p.m., her older daughter walked her bike into the apartment. The little one ran through the door soon after.

CASA advocate Mary Burney dropped by. Come to the office soon, she told them. There, residents can do laundry, make coffee or take free menstrual and shower products donated to CASA.

With the girls trailing behind, the mom entered a code into a keypad and stepped in. Camy Hayes, transitional housing facility manager, motioned for the family to come into the meeting room.

“Surprise!”

The third-grader saw a white sheet cake, decorated with a cherry blossom tree and each of their names in pink icing, and started bouncing up and down. The mom and teen clapped, eyes wide and grinning.

“We know this is your one-year anniversary and we want to do something special,” Hayes said. “We really have watched you blossom since you have been here and want you to keep up the good work.”

The 9-year-old launched into Hayes’ arms, making her stagger back.

“I haven’t gotten a hug like that in a while!” Hayes said.

The girls’ mom often wished that she had left her husband sooner, but emotional abuse has a way of manipulating the mind. Research shows that victims take an [average of six attempts](#) before successfully leaving an abusive relationship. The most potentially lethal moment is when they try to leave.

“He always said I was stupid,” she said, “and I believed I was stupid.”

She still has nightmares about her husband or becomes angry with herself for marrying him at all. Journaling and watching YouTube videos about mental toughness help. She’s hoping CASA will refer her and the girls to a family therapist.



he knew her husband had since returned to Japan. Since the family's legal status in the U.S. depended on his student visa, they became undocumented.

"We can't go back to Japan," she said. "I think he would kill me or find us and take (my younger daughter) away."

The mom sought a U visa, which gives legal status to crime victims who have suffered physical or emotional abuse, such as domestic violence survivors. But she lacks a critical requirement, a police report indicating domestic abuse.

In fact, her name appears in no public records the *Times* was able to review. Nor did her husband's. They had never signed a lease or signed a phone contract.

ASA is connecting her with an immigration lawyer to seek other avenues to stay. Though it won't be easy, the family is hopeful about the possibilities. She also hopes to get a divorce.

Turney said when the mom arrived, their conversations were filled with long silences. Not anymore.

Marrisa Lagunas, CASA's director of housing, handed the mom a box of tissues.

"I could not have done it on my own," she said, face red. "Our English is not so good, but you guys are always kind and try to understand. ... The girls didn't have the smile they do now, so thank you."

She turned and sobbed into Lagunas' shoulder. Hayes reached for the tissues.



mother and daughters sit for a portrait, holding hands on the anniversary of their independence day. [ ARTHA ASECIO-RHINE | *Times* ]



Once again, her younger daughter was negotiating for a later bedtime.

At since taking charge of the home, she had never relented to a bedtime past 9 p.m. on weeknights.

The child dragged herself in defeat to the bathroom to shower, taking her slippers off before stepping onto the bath mat.

When the family first moved in, they wanted visitors to take their shoes off at the door, an Asian tradition that symbolizes entering a clean and private space. But the mom felt uncomfortable imposing the rule on CASA staff, so they have adjusted to shoes off in the bathroom only.

The younger daughter crawled into bed with her koala. K-pop posters, birthday cards and encouraging notes from teachers covered a bulletin board.

This is her first room of her own.

"Whenever I'm sad, I come in here and I feel better," she said.

In about a year, as their time in the transitional facility ticks down, the family will have to find another home.

CASA has a rapid rehousing program that helps survivors find an affordable apartment and pays for their deposit and moving fees. Families can also move into its permanent housing facility in partnership with the Boley Centers, which asks for rent amounting to 30 percent of the survivor's income.

Permanent housing units are limited. Rent in Tampa Bay is skyrocketing.

Mayes hopes CASA can help the mom attain legal status, so she can apply for the federal housing voucher program for low-income families.

Through the uncertainty, the girls' mom said she feels oddly calm. For the first time in a decade, the family is in good hands.

"I trust myself," she said. "I think we can figure it out."

The younger daughter crawled into bed with her koala. She knows her future — she will grow up to become a singer-dancer-turned-scientist who stops koala extinction.

"She tells the koala not to worry," her mom said, "that she'll protect him and his family."

## How to get help

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. The Florida Domestic Violence Collaborative can be reached at 800-500-1119 or via TDD at 800-621-4202.

Here's how to reach Tampa Bay's domestic violence agencies for help:

**Hillsborough County:** Call or text The Spring of Tampa Bay's 24-hour crisis line at 813-247-7233 or visit [thespring.org](https://thespring.org). The Talk to You line is 813-248-1050.

**Pasco County:** Contact Sunrise of Pasco County via its 24-hour hotline at 888-668-7273 or 352-521-120, or go online to [sunrisepasco.org](https://sunrisepasco.org).

**Pinellas County:** Contact Community Action Stops Abuse, or CASA, by calling the 24-hour hotline at 727-895-4912, texting [casa-stpete.org/chat](https://casa-stpete.org/chat) or visiting [casapinellas.org](https://casapinellas.org). The Talk to You line is 727-28-1269.

...

### Domestic violence warning signs

- Abuser isolates victim from friends or family.
- Victim is encouraged or forced to stop participating in activities important to them.
- Abuser controls finances or puts victim on an allowance, asks for explanations of spending.
- Victim is blamed for their feelings, yelled at or made to feel “small.”
- Abuser criticizes and controls victim’s appearance, including what they can wear.
- Abuser abandons victim in places they don’t know.
- Abuser keeps victim from eating, sleeping or getting medical care.
- Abuser throws or punches things around victim.



### JOSE WONG

Mental Health Reporter

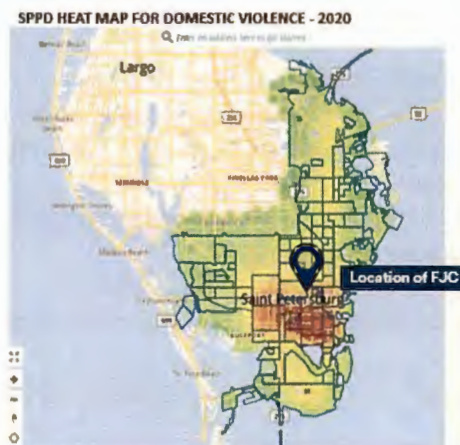
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- About 32% of child removals in Pinellas County are due to Domestic Violence.
- 93 Lives were lost due to Domestic Violence in Pinellas County over the last 10 years.

#### WHY ST. PETERSBURG

- In Pinellas County, Domestic related homicides occurred most often in St. Petersburg (FDLE: UCR)
- Pinellas County has some of the highest rates of domestic violence in Florida, with St. Petersburg being the “hotspot.”



#### DV OFFENSES BY POLICE DEPARTMENT- 2020 (UCR DATA)

Police Agency	Population	# of DV Offenses	% of Total Pinellas DV Offenses
St. Petersburg Police	271,044	2,187	35.8%
Pinellas County Sheriff	397,354	1,935	31.6%
Clearwater Police	118,017	801	13.1%
Pinellas Park Police	54,202	407	6.7%
Largo Police	84,574	402	6.5%
Tarpon Springs Police	25,937	189	3.1%
Gulfport Police	12,598	49	0.8%
Treasure Island Police	6,930	82	1.3%
Kenneth City Police	5,145	44	0.7%
Florida Highway Patrol	n/a	7	0.1%
Indian Shores Police	1,479	5	0.08%
Belleair Police	4,096	3	0.05%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>984,054</b>	<b>6,111</b>	

#### PROVEN OUTCOMES

Family Justice Centers have been proven to be effective in addressing public safety

- 90% Drop in DV Homicides in the City of San Diego, CA
- 75% Reduction in DV Homicides in Alameda County, CA
- **Filing Rates** increased from 45% to 81% within 3 years of opening the Alameda County, CA FJC. Therefore increasing victim safety.

Source: Gwinn C, Strack G (2010). *Dream Big: A Simple, Complicated Idea to Stop Family Violence*. Wheatmark Press



## FOR A VIOLENCE FREE PINELLAS

CASA will open a Family Justice Center (FJC) located in St. Petersburg, Florida in October 2022. The FJC will consist of co-located community professionals, such as law enforcement, attorneys, specially trained advocates, child welfare workers, mental health professionals, and more.

### WHAT IS A FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER?

- A **“one stop shop”**, co-located, multi-disciplinary service center for victims & their children of domestic violence, stalking, human trafficking, elder abuse, sexual assault, and family violence
- The FJC concept was pioneered by Casey Gwinn, who was the elected City Attorney for San Diego, CA, from 1996-2004.
- A **“best model practice in the field of domestic violence and prevention services”** according to the US Department of Justice.
- There are over 100 FJC’s throughout the US – **None yet in Florida**
- The Pinellas County Family Justice Center will be the only one in the state of Florida
- Orange County, FL is working on opening an FJC with the support of their local government



### PUBLIC SAFETY

Family violence is a public safety issue, not just nationwide but locally

- Pinellas County has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest number of DV offenses out of Florida’s 67 Counties.

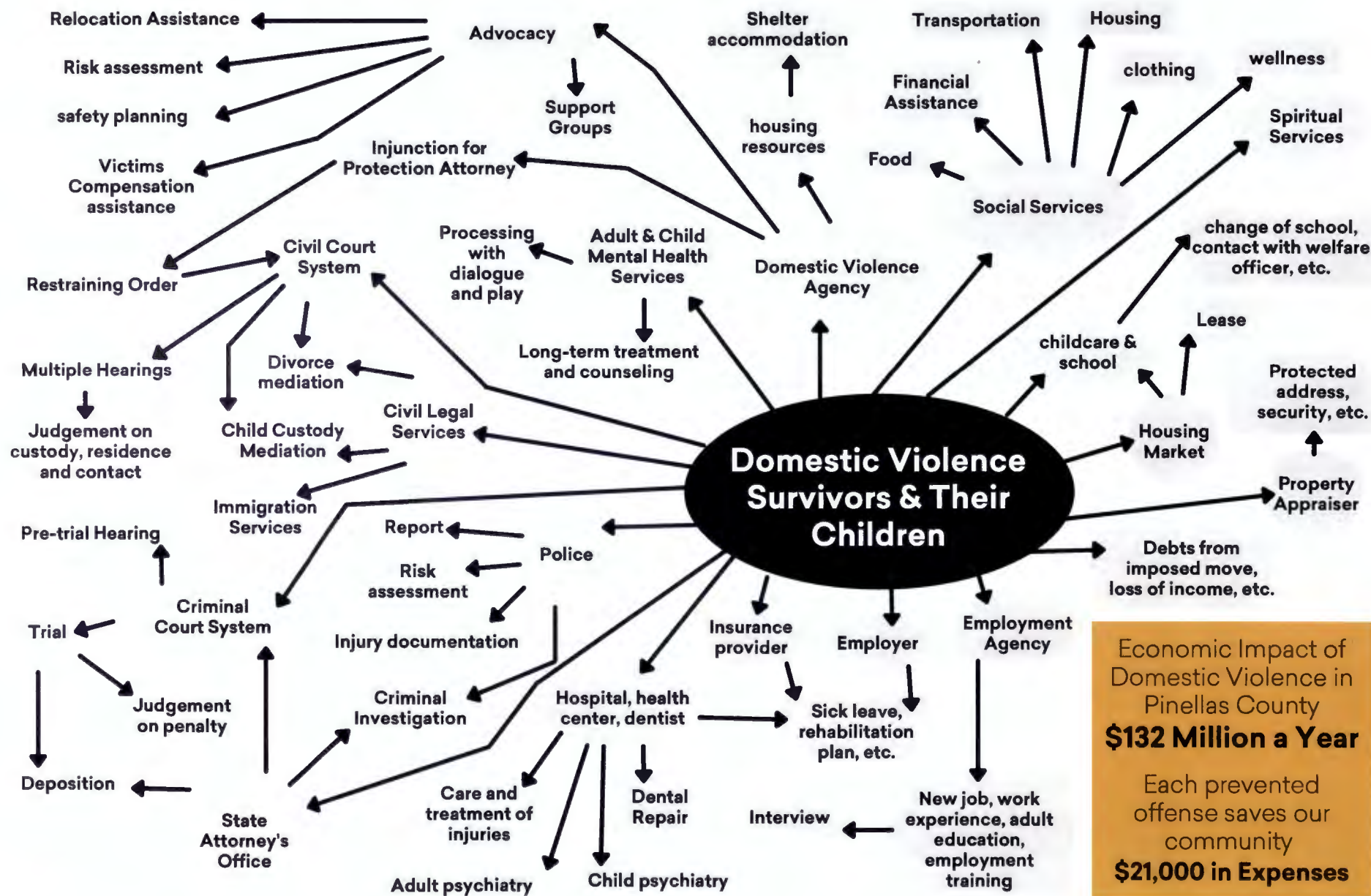
DV Offences by County (FDLE: UCR)		
FL County	Number of DV Offenses in 2020	Population
Duval	8,731	982,080
Orange	7,900	1,415,260
Miami-Dade	7,470	2,832,794
Hillsborough	7,083	1,478,759
<b>Pinellas</b>	<b>6,111</b>	<b>984,054</b>
<b>FLORIDA TOTAL</b>	<b>106,515</b>	<b>21,596,068</b>

- Pinellas DV offenses are more prevalent than Robbery, Murder, Rape, Vehicle Theft, Burglary, and Aggravated Assault.

Pinellas Crime Offenses Totals (UCR)	
Crime Type	2020 Crime Offenses
<b>Domestic Violence</b>	<b>6,111</b>
Aggravated Assault	2,620
Burglary	2,180
Vehicle Theft	1,459
Robbery	591
Rape	450
Murder	27



# NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM AS A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR IN PINELLAS COUNTY





# CASA

## ENVISIONING CASA'S NEW CAMPUS

