



DELAWARE COALITION
AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The Collaboration

The First State Equal Access to Safety Collaboration, formed in October 2010 with a grant from the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW), U.S. Department of Justice, consists of:

- Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Center for Disabilities Studies at the University of Delaware
- National Alliance on Mental Illness in Delaware.

The vision of the Collaboration is to create a system in Delaware that is responsive to the needs of all persons who are victims of domestic violence – including people with disabilities and/or mental illness – using trauma-informed approaches.

National Facts and Figures

- Women with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be sexually assaulted than women without disabilities.¹
- Victims who do report abuse or seek services often do not find adequate help.²
- Many programs that serve domestic violence victims are not equipped or trained to offer proper care to victims with disabilities.²

Project Products

The **strategic plan** was designed to build capacity, provide technical assistance and to facilitate systematic, sustainable change in statewide service delivery for victims with disabilities and/or mental illness.

Three major recommendations came out of the plan:

- Service providers' response to the unique needs of survivors with disabilities and/or mental illness needs to be **trauma-informed**.
- Direct service providers should **review their attitudinal, communication, and physical environments**.
- Direct service providers should address **gaps in their policies and procedures** at the intersection of domestic violence, disabilities, and mental illness.

Three additional products were developed:

- **Intersection Training Materials** - 3 modules titled Domestic Violence Basics, Disability Basics, Mental Health Basics.
- **Access and Safety Assessment Tool** - Guides review of environments to eliminate barriers to access and safety, providing welcoming and engaging environments.
- **Policy and Procedures Assessment Tool** - Guides identification and action on gaps in policies and procedures to ensure consistency and congruency within and across organizations.

The Intersection



Needs Assessment

Purpose of the Needs Assessment:

- To gather information at our partner organizations in order to develop appropriate resources for agencies that encounter a victim of domestic violence with a disability and/or mental illness.

Methodology:

- Focus groups, interviews, and electronic surveys.
- Data were collected from a variety of sources including: staff, board members, domestic violence service providers, domestic violence survivors, program participants with disabilities and/or mental illness, self-advocates, and Deaf individuals.

Key Findings from the Needs Assessment

Accessibility/Safety:

Organizations must become more accessible and provide safe environments

Welcoming Point of Entry:

Services at the “point of entry” must be high quality for full engagement.

Staff Knowledge/Responsiveness:

Service providers must have a deeper knowledge of domestic violence, disabilities, mental illness and trauma-informed approaches to service delivery.

Policies and Procedures

Existing policies and procedures are limited in addressing victims' needs at the intersection. There is a need to identify best practices and move toward consistency in policies and procedures at the intersection.

Advocacy/Collaborative Relationships

The Collaboration partners are actively involved in an array of statewide relationships with service providers, advocacy organizations, self-advocacy groups, and task forces relevant to their respective missions. Building upon our common ground at the intersection will strengthen the Collaboration's ability to create equal access to safety in Delaware.

Organizational Culture/Sustainability

Collaboration partners bring a diversity of perspectives, philosophies and values to the intersection of disability, mental health, and intimate partner violence that will strengthen the design and sustainability of service model.

Voices at the Intersection: Helping to Shape Priorities for Systems Change

“If we had a place for Deaf DV women, we could do so much better for them. They wouldn't go down that dark hole. They have mental health problems and get drugged up. They try and kill themselves. If they don't do it they go back into the situation and some else does it for them. The deaf community is very small and they don't want other people to know. Before you know it, it's too late.” – from a Deaf advocate

“We have work to do. How do we create systems where, for example, a Spanish speaking person with a mobility issue and a mental illness can get help without going to three different places?” - from a Collaboration Partner

Lessons Learned at the Intersection

- This project has started a rich conversation about creating integrated, trauma-informed, and fully accessible services at the intersection. The team uncovered challenges in service delivery; services for people with disabilities and/or mental illness remain compartmentalized and fragmented.
- The person-centered, confidential, and accessible approach used by the team provided an atmosphere of trust and safety that resulted in people sharing their poignant and, at times, painful stories. These experiences reinforce the value of having people with disabilities and/or mental illness and domestic violence survivors involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation activities.
- There is under-reporting of the prevalence of intimate partner violence in the lives of people with disabilities and mental illness. Service providers are open and willing to learn more about the extent and impact of domestic violence on people with disabilities and/or mental health problems.
- People with more severe cognitive disabilities had difficulty explaining how they access services and what would make for a welcoming environment. The methodology of the needs assessment did not lend itself to acquiring thorough responses from this population. We need to learn how to better engage people with intellectual disabilities
- There are dramatically different perspectives among collaboration partners regarding terminology, including the term “intimate partner violence,” and the issue of mandatory reporting. The Collaboration acknowledges that there are traditions and beliefs that are in direct conflict that will require identification of commonalities if we want to impact victims with disabilities and/or mental illness. Ongoing discussion of complex philosophical tensions and critical issues affecting the intersection is needed.

REFERENCES

1. Brownridge, Douglas. (2006) “Partner Violence Against Women With Disabilities: Prevalence, Risk, and Explanations.” Violence Against Women.(12)1
2. West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “People With Disabilities.” Resources. Accessed online at http://www.wvcadv.org/people_with_disabilities.htm, July 2007.

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