

## MIAMI INCLUSION ALLIANCE

By: [Sharon Langer, Esq.](#)

This is the 30<sup>th</sup> of The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990. It provides protections from discrimination for individuals with disabilities. Under Titles II and III of the ADA, domestic violence shelters, one of the most important parts of the safety net for victims of domestic violence, must be accessible.

This means that shelters that serve victims of domestic violence and sexual assault are **required** to: admit people with disabilities into their shelter, provide reasonable accommodations, and eliminate structural barriers to access.

While the ADA gave us the legal framework for full accessibility, we are not there yet.

WHY does this matter?

BECAUSE:

- More than 80% percent of women with disabilities have been sexually assaulted. 50% of those women have been assaulted more than ten times. In addition, research suggests that women with disabilities experience more frequent and more severe acts of violence.
- Between 97% - 99% of abusers are known and trusted by survivors and may include family members (32%) or other caretakers, home health aides and living facility attendants (44%) making access to shelter extremely important. Some data has shown that abusers see people with disabilities as “ideal victims” because they are less likely to report, and less likely to be believed.
- Domestic violence can cause disability—it is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States.
- Only 3% of sexual abuse cases involving people with developmental and cognitive disabilities are ever reported. Yet, people with cognitive disabilities experience the highest rates of violence of all people with disabilities.
- Women with disabilities have a 40% greater chance of intimate partner violence than women without disabilities.

(These statistics come from the Violence against women with disabilities, Office on Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

YET currently survivors still have:

- Barriers to seeking support from outside sources, including isolation,
- Lack of communication devices and interpretation, lack of transportation, lack of privacy, community spaces that are architecturally inaccessible,
- And societal attitudes about disability.

Let us commit on this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, to make the full potential of the ADA a reality and make sure that victims with disabilities have the access and support they need.