

At the Intersection of Disability and Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault

By: Sharon Langer

My column usually describes statistics about the intersection of domestic violence and sexual assault and disability or describes gaps and barriers to help for persons with disability. This month, in honor of Cerebral Palsy Month, I wanted to share some positive initiatives. The following is a statement from End Abuse of People with Disabilities. [The End Abuse of People with Disabilities website](#) is managed by the Center on Victimization and Safety (CVS) at the Vera Institute of Justice.

“A growing number of organizations around the country have committed to take a stand against abuse of people with disabilities and are on their way to becoming fully accessible, responsive, and welcoming to survivors with disabilities. These organizations are engaging in an intentional process to build their capacity to better serve survivors with disabilities. The process emphasizes:

- Engaging experts in the community, including survivors with disabilities
- Identifying specific organizational strengths and needs through a structured assessment process
- Developing a strategic plan that addresses the most pressing needs and charts a path for future work
- Builds buy-in and momentum for the work

Disability organizations are implementing screening tools to safely identify people they serve who have experienced domestic or sexual violence; protocols to help staff provide basic safety planning and other crisis interventions to survivors; and other enhancements to increase the safety, confidentiality, and healing of their services.

Child advocacy centers, rape crisis centers, and domestic violence programs are removing physical, attitudinal, and programmatic barriers that prevent people with disabilities from using their services; creating policies that promote full access, inclusion, and autonomy for people with disabilities; and providing their staff with training, resources, and practical tools to guide their interactions with survivors with disabilities.

Disability and victim service organizations are also joining forces to share resources and create a coordinated response to abuse of people with disabilities.”

The only way to eliminate the abuse of persons with disabilities is a conscious, planned and funded effort exactly as described above. In future articles I will highlight some specific programs that are making the above described changes and successfully reducing the unacceptable statistics of abuse.