



## Quarterly E-Newsletter

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### **Chair's Column**



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Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the third edition of the ABA Commission on Domestic Violence's E-Newsletter. In this issue, we provide information on how to improve access to legal services for persons with disabilities who are victims of domestic and sexual violence, and victims who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Domestic violence legal service providers make on going efforts to increase accessibility of their services to victims with disabilities and deaf or hard of hearing survivors as required under the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act and state and local laws. Ensuring true integration of services to these vulnerable populations may be challenging. Nonetheless, it is essential.

A survivor of domestic or sexual violence may have been disabled prior to the victimization or may have become disabled as a result. Disabled survivors may be blind, physically disabled, have cognitive or other mental health disabilities, or may be addicted to drugs or alcohol. Studies indicate that as much as 60% of survivors of domestic violence have some form of post-traumatic stress disorder which may rise to the level of a disability under state or federal law. Moreover, we know that disabled persons are at a higher risk of sexual or domestic violence at the hands of an intimate partner or care

taker: The Colorado Department of Public Health estimates that at least 85% of women with disabilities are victims of domestic violence compared with 25 - 50% of non-disabled women, 80-85% of women with developmental disabilities experience sexual abuse and 44% of the perpetrators of intimate partner violence against a disabled person were service providers. Disabled survivors of domestic violence are an increasingly high percentage of all victims of domestic violence: In 2004, 14% of reported survivors of domestic violence in North Dakota were disabled, 32% of whom were physically disabled according to the North Dakota Council on Abused Women's Services.

Included in this newsletter are wonderful articles describing programs that are providing exemplary services to disabled victims of domestic violence. Linda Peyton and Tom Prettyman of the Legal Clinic for the Disabled, Inc., in Philadelphia describe the particular kinds of abuse faced by disabled survivors of domestic violence in their Anti-Violence Program as well as the tailored assistance that they provide. A second article excerpted from a publication of the Wisconsin's Violence Against Women with Disabilities entitled, *Accessibility Guide for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Service Providers*, discusses ways that service providers may improve their communication skills when working with victims with cognitive and other disabilities. Readers might also wish to obtain an article that addresses how to assist victims with mental health issues that appeared in the May 2003 – June 2003 Journal of Poverty Law and Policy by Denice Wolf Markham entitled, *Mental Illness and Domestic Violence: Implications for Family Law Litigation*.

Moreover, we have provided a Deaf Power and Control Wheel created by DeafHope of Hayward, California. DeafHope is an amazing organization that provides services to deaf victims of domestic violence. This power and control wheel describes the deaf community's separate culture and identity and how deaf survivors face different forms of abuse and different challenges in accessing assistance.

Finally, we provide a resource list of some organizations from across the country who specialize in providing services to disabled and deaf or hard of hearing victims. It is our hope that you will be able to integrate some of the strategies and services described in these articles into your programming and that you will contact the Commission if you need additional guidance or support.

As always, the Commission welcomes information from you regarding resources or promising practices in serving victims of domestic and sexual violence who are disabled or deaf/hard of hearing. Our heartfelt thanks to all of you for your work on behalf of survivors and their children.

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