

Supporting Crime Victims with Disabilities

Be proactive! Learn how to support victims of crime with disabilities **before** they need your assistance. Some suggestions for getting started:

- 1. Make training on disabilities an integral part of your staff training program.** Training should address issues related to the needs of individuals with different types of disabilities. Resources:
 - SafePlace's disability awareness training for victim service professionals covers disability awareness, outreach strategies, best practices for serving abuse survivors, and how to design physically and programmatically accessible services. www.austin-safeplace.org
 - Speaking for Ourselves, run by and for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania, provides awareness training for victim service organizations. www.speaking.org
 - Blue Tower Training Center, a division of Macon Resources, Inc., provides training and resources to individuals with disabilities, their families, and service providers throughout the country. www.maconresources.org/bluetower
- 2. Recruit and train individuals with disabilities to become victim assistance volunteers or paid staff members.** Resource:
 - Job Accommodation Network is a free service that helps organizations hire, retain, and promote qualified individuals with disabilities. You'll be connected with a specialist who knows employment issues, public access issues, and ways to modify facilities to provide access for persons with disabilities. <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>
- 3. Distribute information about victim rights and services through local disability service organizations.** These groups have built-in constituencies that would welcome brochures and fact sheets about the criminal justice system and victim assistance programs. Local government agencies that serve persons with disabilities may also allow you to distribute material through their offices. Resource:
 - GuideStar operates a comprehensive database of nonprofit organizations—including many that are disability-related—located throughout the United States. www.guidestar.org
- 4. Develop coalitions of disability and victim service organizations to increase awareness and coordination within your own community.** Examples:
 - Carolina Legal Assistance established the Victims with Disabilities Project, which established a task force that regularly brings together crime victim advocates, disability advocates, and government representatives.
 - The North Carolina Office on Disability and Health conducts meetings between disability organizations and local domestic violence and sexual assault providers to improve working relationships, strengthen communications, and coordinate referrals.
 - The Building Partnership of the Massachusetts Disabled Persons Protection Commission, a collaboration between law enforcement and human service agencies, works to ensure that crimes against people with disabilities are promptly reported, investigated, and prosecuted. www.state.ma.us/dppc
 - The Victims of Crime with Disabilities Resource Guide project works to bridge the information gap between victim assistance and disability professionals. It is a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Justice's

Office for Victims of Crime, the Association for University Centers on Disabilities, and the Wyoming Institute for Disabilities. The following Web site offers extensive outreach and collaboration development materials.

<http://wind.uwyo.edu/resourceguide>

- 5. Acquire technology that can be used by crime victims with disabilities to access information about their rights and the criminal justice system.** Provide information in a variety of accessible formats including Braille, large print, and TTY. Resources:
 - A good place to start is learning everything you can about Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires Federal agencies (and federally-funded agencies) to make their electronic and information technology accessible to people with disabilities. www.section508.gov
 - WebAIM provides resources and training programs to help organizations make their Web sites more accessible to people with disabilities. www.webaim.org

- 6. Learn the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and support its vigorous enforcement.** Resource:
 - The U.S. Department of Justice, the federal agency responsible for enforcing the ADA, operates a comprehensive Web site. www.ada.gov

- 7. Establish education and outreach programs for crime victims with disabilities.** As a victim service provider, you are uniquely suited to educate victims about the nature of criminal victimization, the criminal justice system, where and how crimes should be reported, strategies for increasing personal safety, and support services. Examples:
 - Wake Technical Community College, located near Raleigh, North Carolina, offers a program to help students with developmental disabilities decrease the risk of victimization and learn what to do if they are victimized.
 - The ARC of Tucson, Arizona, provides training for individuals with developmental disabilities to help increase their environmental awareness (especially in public restrooms, on public transportation, and in shopping centers), learn appropriate interaction with law enforcement, and recognize dangerous or unsafe situations.
 - Safe Place in Austin, Texas, offers personal safety workshops for men and women with cognitive disabilities to enhance their assertiveness skills, danger avoidance, abuse recognition, and safety practice.
www.austin-safeplace.org

The National Center for Victims of Crime is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization dedicated to helping individuals, families, and communities harmed by crime. Their National Crime Victim Helpline, 1-800-FYI-CALL, offers crime victims supportive counseling, information about crime and victimization, referrals to local community resources, and skilled advocacy in the criminal justice and social service systems.

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