Engaging Women with Disabilities in the Anti-Violence Movement: Strategies for Meaningful Inclusion

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Speaker Introduction

• Alice Kieft
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Question-1:

• Why is it important for victim services to work with women with disabilities?
Question-2:

- Why is it important for women with disabilities to work with victim services?
The Anti-Violence Movement meets the Self-Advocacy Movement

• Feminism and Self-Advocacy: What’s the connection?
• We are connected by our oppression, violence, power, strength, activism, voices, and passion for a new world.
Nothing About Me Without Me

• The people who are most affected by the decisions are involved in making the decisions.
Illinois Imagines

- Statewide team
- 32 collaborative teams
- Women with disabilities at the center of our work together
Outreach-1

- Self-advocacy groups
- Centers for Independent Living
- Disability Service Organizations
- Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Mental Health Organizations
- Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI)
- Universities
Outreach-2

- Focus groups
- Prevention education participants
- Community events
- Other team members
- Relationships
Empowerment

- Three kinds of power
- What do you see when you look at me... a broken person who needs fixed or someone with value?
Accommodations-1

- Ask each member of the team what they need to fully participate.
- Can have a short survey that each person completes.
- Follow-up to see if the person is comfortable with the accommodation(s) and the partnership.
Accommodations-2

• Ask about location of meetings
• Ask about time of meetings
• Ask about transportation to meetings
• Ask about materials
• Ask about communication (not everyone has email)
• Do not make assumptions (person is her own expert about what she needs/wants
Example Accommodations-1

- I want pictures on the agenda
- Call on me or I will just listen
- “You talking people go on and on and it is hard for me to jump in.”
- Slow down
- Meeting reminders
- No fragrances
Example Accommodations-2

- Large print
- Braille
- American Sign Language Interpreters
- Phone calls before meetings
- Meet before/after the meeting
- Service animals
- Locations—minimal walking
Example Accommodations-3

- Chair with arms
- Chair without arms
- Sitting near the door
- Who the person sits next to
- Providing paper and a pen
- Snacks
- Mail materials
Accommodations Enjoyed by Many

• Use plain language
• “Let’s have an acronym-free zone.”
• Avoid jargon and technical terms.
• Documents in WORD, not PDF
• Breaks
• Spacious meeting rooms
Group Activity

• The opportunity to broaden our relationships with someone we may not have otherwise known, leads to personal and professional growth.

• Gather in teams of 4 or 5 and participate in an Ice Breaker activity.
Meaningful Inclusion-1

• “If you just want me to come and sit at the table with you so you can say you have a person with a disability involved, I am not interested. However, if you want me to be an equal partner with you so we can change the system, I am all in.” self-advocate in Illinois
Meaningful Inclusion-2

“Do not work on me. Work with me.”
--A Credo for Support
Meaningful Inclusion-3

• We are all teachers and students.
• Create an environment where it is ok to say, “I don’t understand.”
• Create an environment where every voice is valued (ask people what they think).
• Learn about and use respectful language.
• Be aware of your own attitudes.
• Presume competence.
Meaningful Inclusion-4

• Create opportunities for people to get to know each other’s interests, dreams, abilities, etc.
• Find a balance between ‘what’ is done and ‘how’ it is done.
• Listen deeply and pay attention.
• Be open to new ways and new ideas.
• Set an intention of shared power.
Group Activity 2

• What bright ideas do you have to sustain the meaningful inclusion of women with disabilities in the anti-violence movement?
Keeping Inclusion Alive-1

• People feel respected.
• People feel free to disagree.
• People know the purpose of our work together.
• People know their actions make a difference.
• Group actions are meaningful.
• There is enthusiasm and hope for positive change.
Keeping Inclusion Alive-2

• Accommodations are revisited and revised as needed and preferred.
• Women with disabilities are valued as experts on their experience.
• Those who desire leadership roles have the opportunity to lead.
• Conflict is honored and respected.
• People enjoy being together.
Leaders with disabilities have...

- Conducted training at victim services agency
- Completed victim services volunteer training
- Taught violence prevention classes with prevention educator
- Chaired Teams and Committees
- Trained nationally on violence and people with disabilities
- Spoken at Take Back the Night
Leaders with disabilities also....

- Wrote parts of statewide tool kit
- Lobbied for policy changes
- Written poems for victim service organizations
- Taken crisis calls
- Served on Boards
- Spoken up
- Made new friendships
In addition, leaders have:

- Spoken out against disrespectful language in legislation.
- Reviewed and analyzed disability accessibility reviews completed in 33 Rape Crisis Centers. Wrote a report with recommendations. Presented the report to the Governing Body of the State Coalition.
- Spoken out on DVDs.
One Person’s Story

• “I share my story so others will not experience what I did.”
• Unquestionable dedication
• Community and state collaborative teams.
• Trained Judges, lawyers, nurses, counselors…
• Spoke at National Conferences
• Publication in International Newsletter
• Some personal ‘firsts’
Got Questions?
Anti-violence workers

you give us hope.
Widening the Community

• When we bring different passions, abilities, experiences, and attitudes together with one primary focus, the possibilities to change the status quo are endless.
Widening the Community 2

• “By demanding full participation in society and the accommodations to make that participation possible, the activist disabled women’s community offers a liberating vision of human connectedness—for everyone.”

Laura Hershey, disability activist
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