

 **SafePlace**  
Ending Sexual & Domestic Violence

**Promoting Accessibility:**  
Effectively Serving Survivors who are  
D/deaf or have Disabilities

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Take time to deliberate; but  
when the time for action  
arrives, stop thinking and go  
in.

Andrew Jackson

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**Disability, Violence and Survival:  
A Personal Story**



**Kimberly Wisseman, LMSW**

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### A History

- 1995 – Researcher at the University of Texas approaches Austin Rape Crisis Center.
- 1995 - Initial needs assessment conducted. Findings indicated a need for abuse prevention education for people with disabilities.

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### Establishing a Program

- Disability Services ASAP (A Safety Awareness Program) begins at Austin Rape Crisis Center.
- Austin Rape Crisis Center and the Centered for Battered Women merge to become SafePlace.
- Establishment of an Advisory Committee

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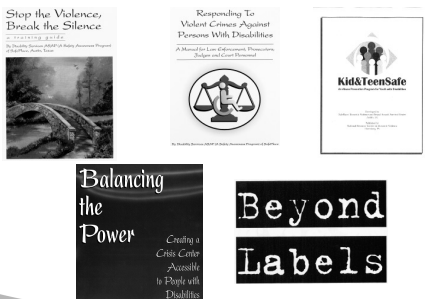
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### Lessons Shared and Resource Development



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### An Agency's Commitment

- Accessibility features built into SafePlace's new campus.
- SafePlace leadership is committed to accessibility in all of its forms:
  - Attitudinal
  - Programmatic
  - Physical

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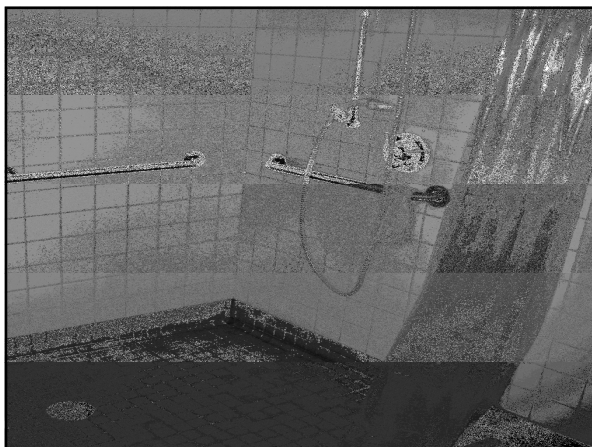
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**Services to the Deaf Community**

- DAWCAS (Deaf Abused Women and Children Advocacy Services) established (1998).
- DAWCAS is dissolved (2007).
- SafePlace expands service to Austin's Deaf Community.
- Deaf Services program established.

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### Revisiting Our Community's Needs

- Conducted comprehensive needs assessment in 2007-2008.
  - Deaf community needs
  - Disability community needs

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### Needs Assessment

- Methods used:
  - Focus groups and individual interviews
- Goals:
  - Identify service gaps, barriers and needs
  - Build internal capacity
  - Expand and sustain outreach and provision of services
  - Improve collaborative responses
- Participants (187)

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### What did we learn?

- Fear of retaliation and loss of confidentiality prevents survivors from seeking help.
- Upgrades needed to facility security.
- Confidentiality policies are critical.
- Communication must be ensured between hearing staff and D/deaf survivors.
- Collaboratives can be strengthened.

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### What did we learn?

- Outreach efforts are needed.
- Website accessibility needed for D/deaf/Blind community.
- Protocols need to be developed for disability advocacy agency.
- Needs for cross training for partners

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### Strategic Planning Activities

- **Technology**
  - ADA equipment for shelter and transitional housing programs
- **Communication**
  - Purchase videophones
  - Develop communication boards
- **Web Accessibility**
  - Web Spots

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**Communication board for Protective Order Court**

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### Strategic Planning Activities

- Welcoming Attitudes
  - Welcome to Shelter DVD
  - Institutionalization of employee/volunteer orientation

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### Strategic Planning Activities

- Welcoming Attitudes
  - Education and training
    - ASL Interpreters
    - State Protection and Advocacy staff, Advisory Committee and Board of Directors
    - SafePlace staff and volunteer training
  - Outreach
    - Deaf Services advisory committee
    - Outreach to Deaf community

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### Strategic Planning Activities

- Service coordination
  - MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between SafePlace and Protection and Advocacy Agency
    - Cross-referrals
    - Shared office space
    - Legal services for domestic violence cases for people with disabilities
- Screening for abuse protocol developed for protection and advocacy agency.

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### Accessibility



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**Core Legal Obligation**  
– The ADA and The ADAA

This Civil Rights Law (1990) guarantees that people with disabilities have the right to equal opportunity and equal access to the very same benefits and privileges enjoyed by people without disabilities in their own communities. Requires rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs to make *reasonable modifications to policies and procedures*.

For more information:

- Department of Justice – Disability Rights Section  
Americans with Disabilities Act Office  
800/514-0301 (Voice)  
800/514-0383 (TTY)

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**According to the ADA**

An individual with a disability:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
- has a history or record of such an impairment; or
- is perceived by others as having such an impairment.

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**The ADA Amendments Act**

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 overturned Supreme Court decisions that have reduced protection for people with disabilities originally intended to be covered by the ADA, including individuals with diabetes, heart conditions, epilepsy, cancer and mental disabilities.

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We make these modifications not just because it's the law, but because it is the right thing to do. Providing services to individuals with disabilities is not an extension of our work, it is our work.

Disability and Deaf Services of SafePlace

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### Attitudinal Accessibility

Attitudinal accessibility can be defined to mean refusing to accept prejudice, myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities, and identifying and removing any negative attitudes about the capability of people with disabilities.

(Definition adapted from ARCH: A Legal Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities, Toronto, Ontario)

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### Why is this important?

In our work, the attitudes that are held by an agency, its volunteers and staff inform the assessments and the decisions that are made about services (e.g., who gets services, what kind of services, how the services are provided and for how long).

(Definition adapted from ARCH: A Legal Resource Centre for Persons with Disabilities, Toronto, Ontario)

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**Increasing Access Within  
Domestic Violence and Sexual  
Assault Agencies**

- Advocate for staff training.
- Hire staff/recruit volunteers with disabilities.
- Create an agency accessibility task force.
- Make short and long range-plans to increase accessibility.

Adapted from Open Minds Open Doors, 1996

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**Small Steps for Accessibility**

- Remove clutter from reception areas, hallways or meeting rooms.
- Assist with forms for survivors with limited reading skills.
- Place white or yellow tape running sideways on steps for people with visual disabilities.
- Budget money in grant proposals and annual budgets for accessibility needs.

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**Small Steps for Accessibility**

- Hold meetings or counseling sessions on the ground floor.
- Contact the local transportation services or city authorities to identify accessible bus routes.
- Collaborate with local construction businesses to get physical accessibility adaptations donated.

Adapted from Hoog, 2003

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**Outreach: Building Relationships with the Disability Community**

- Invite members of the community for tours of the DV/SA agency.
- Personal safety education.
- Invite people with disabilities to write or be interviewed for articles.
- Invite people with disabilities to join existing domestic violence/sexual assault task forces.

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**Outreach: Advocating within Disability Service Agencies**

- Offer cross-training between victim and disability service agencies.
- Develop an MOU with the disability service providers in the area.



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**Supporting Member Programs**

- Train coalition staff on the letter and spirit of the ADA to ensure that member programs' capacity to serve is strengthened.
- Provide technical assistance and monitoring to promote access to survivors with disabilities.
- Conduct statewide needs assessment.
- Develop caucus and allied groups.

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### Supporting Member Programs

- Conduct keynotes, workshops and webinars.
- Develop and disseminate resource materials.
  - Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
  - Texas Council on Family Violence
  - SafePlace

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### Allies to Survivors with Disabilities Texas Council on Family Violence

<http://www.tcfv.org/membership/caucuses-ally-groups-and-networks-cans/allies-to-survivors-with-disabilities-asd/>

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“There is an elementary aspiration which [supports] the humane impulse in our history and our culture and binds us together as political activists. This is a simple, ... indisputable aspiration.

It is the ‘dream of justice’ for a beloved community, in which the level of terror in people’s lives is sharply reduced or maybe eliminated. It is the belief that extremes and excesses of inequality must be reduced so that each person is free to fully develop his or her full potential.”

Senator Paul Wellstone  
October 23, 1985

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**SafePlace**  
*Ending Sexual & Domestic Violence*

Disability Services ASAP  
(A Safety Awareness Program)  
512-267-7233  
[www.SafePlace.org](http://www.SafePlace.org)

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