

Washington, DC's Project Peer

Who: “Project Peer” is a collaboration of anti-violence and disability support agencies/groups working together to share their strengths. It includes Anchor Mental Health Association, the DC Coalition against Domestic Violence, the DC Rape Crisis Center, Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Institute, Project ACTION!, Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities, and Ramona’s Way. Late in 2013, the District Alliance for Safe Housing joined the collaborative.

What: Is an ongoing collaboration improving services for women with developmental disabilities and/or mental health issues who have experienced or been threatened with violence and/or abuse. It began with funding from the US Department of Justice/Office on Violence against Women (OVW).

When: Now and ongoing. Project Peer’s initial OVW award expired on September 30, 2011. Our partners remained committed to continuing our collaboration and key initiatives (see below). On September 30, 2013, OVW announced a continuation award to Project Peer.

Where: Across the District of Columbia.

Why: Women with developmental disabilities and/or mental health issues are especially vulnerable to violence and abuse. For example, women with developmental disabilities are 6 times more likely to be abused and up to 10 times more likely to experience sexual assault than women without these disabilities (Sobsey, 1994). Despite their increased risk, there were limited outreach and services in our community for these survivors. As a result of our project, agencies that respond to violence and trauma and agencies that support people with disabilities are coming together to understand and collaborate to support women with disabilities who experience violence and abuse better.

How: With OVW support, Project Peer partners have listened and learned from each other and survivors with disabilities. We are changing our own systems and services to improve quality and expand access to services for survivors with disabilities. Initiatives have focused on:

- ✓ **Confidentiality:** Building a shared understanding of best practices in confidentiality across our disciplines and practice settings to enable survivors to maximize control over their “stories”.
- ✓ **Collaboration Growth and Sustainability:** Improving information sharing and building lasting partnership across our partners by developing a charter, cross-referral and liaison systems and annual memoranda of understanding to sustain our collaboration into the future.
- ✓ **Staff Knowledge Development:** Developing and piloting training to improve staff understanding of the four disciplines within our collaboration (developmental disabilities, mental health issues, domestic violence, and sexual assault) and do the intersecting work necessary to enhance survivor-centered advocacy, access and accommodations.
- ✓ **Women’s Knowledge Development:** Developing and piloting trainings to increase what women with disabilities know about sexual and domestic violence, personal safety and how to heal and to build the leadership skills it will take for them to offer this training to other women with disabilities in the future.
- ✓ **Policies and Procedures:** Improving how our partner organizations identify, respond to, and accommodate survivors with mental health issues and/or developmental disabilities.

We believe any woman with developmental disabilities and/or mental health issues who has been hurt will be able to get help from any of our partners as a result of this project.

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