

What can you do?

- Receive training on the American with disabilities ACT and support its enforcement.
- Be proactive in acquiring technology that would help the victim with disabilities to be informed, present, heard and understood when they communicate with law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges.
- After your agency is accessible and trained, publicize your ability to work with crime victims with disabilities by putting the universal symbol of access (a line drawing of a wheelchair) and a TDD/TTY number on all literature including promotional material and business cards.
 - Reach out to local disability organizations, providing information about victims' rights and services.
 - Implement streamline interviewing and intake procedures so that victims with disabilities do not have to undergo repeated interviewing in different locations.
 - Develop specific protocols on disclosure, confidentiality, and safety for crime victims with disabilities, particularly where there is a potential for retaliation by a caregiver or a disability service agency.

Wyoming Office of the Attorney General

Division of Victim Services

Herschler Bldg. 1st Floor West

122 W. 25th Street

Cheyenne, WY 82002

Victim Helpline

1-888-996-8816 V/TTY

Phone: 307-777-7200

Fax: 307-777-6683

Web Site:

<http://victimservices.wyoming.gov>
VINE 1-866-WY-4-VINE

Wyoming Office of the Attorney General

Division of Victim Services

*"Speaking as One Voice for
Crime Victims"*

Helpline:

1-888-996-8816 V/TTY

**Crime Victims
With Disabilities
What Every
Advocate Should
Know!**



Working with Crime Victims with Disabilities

During the past two decades, the victim assistance field has made tremendous progress in securing fundamental justice and comprehensive services for all crime victims. However, many crime victims remain un-identified and unserved.



Many crime victims with disabilities have never participated in the criminal justice process, even those who have been repeatedly and brutally victimized. Advocates efforts need to ensure that crime victims with disabilities have full access to the criminal justice system and receive their entitled services.



We know that the issues involved in assisting victims with disabilities present tremendous challenges. But we have full confidence that the victim assistance and disability advocacy communities will embrace these challenges like they have so many others.



Working with Crime Victims with Disabilities represents a small but significant step toward ensuring justice and access to services for all crime victims.



Obstacles Unique to the Disability Community

Isolation

Our society often segregates persons with disabilities through physical and social isolation, with institutionalization representing the extreme. As a result of pervasive isolation, people with disabilities may not learn about available services and resources nor are they routinely informed of rights they have by law. Indeed, many people who are chronically victimized do not even know that society condemns such predatory conduct and has tools to end and redress that wrong.

Physical Accessibility

In many instances, crime victims with disabilities do not have physical access to services. Architectural barriers in buildings and public transportation systems mean that many crime victims with disabilities cannot visit criminal justice agencies or victim assistance programs.

Attitudinal Accessibility

Attitudes toward the person with a disability is as important or more so than physical accessibility. In addition to accessible physical environments, program staff must be welcoming toward people with disabilities and show in their demeanor and in the quality of their programs that they sincerely want to work collaboratively to serve the community.

Limited Advocacy

Despite progress by disability rights activists, advocacy on their own behalf is still limited. Again, just as with many crime victims, a person who wants to access criminal justice decision making processes is unable to do so without adequate tools to enable full participation.

Myths

The following three myths contribute to stereotyping which often results in discrimination against people with disabilities:

The first myth is the perception that people with disabilities are "suffering" rather than extending legal rights and protections. Being kind to a person with a disability is not an acceptable substitute for the provision of civil rights protections.

The second myth is that people with disabilities lack the ability to make choices or determine for themselves what is best for them in all spheres of life (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, political, sexual, and financial). Although individuals with severe cognitive impairments may need greater support and advocacy services, this does not impede their ability or preclude their right to participate actively in decisions affecting their lives.

The third myth is that many people in society fear contact with crime victims generally, as though their distresses are contagious. An even stronger stigma attaches to people with disabilities. Our society is not socialized to integrate differences in abilities as a part of our perception of "normality." The cultural norms for functioning include good hearing and vision, physical independence and mobility, mental alertness, the ability to communicate primarily through the written and spoken word, and physical attractiveness. Deviations from those norms tend to frighten those in the "able bodied majority" who define the concept of normal abilities. When the two forces of stigma are joined victimization and disability attitudinal barriers to providing healing and justice can seem even more formidable.