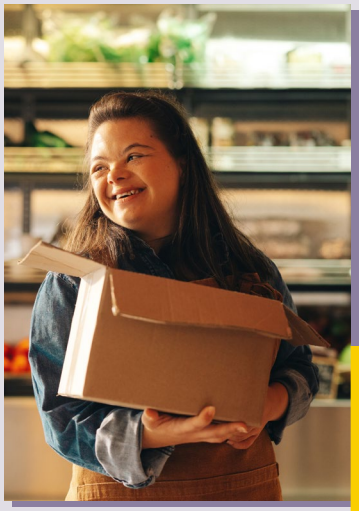

Purposeful Connections:

BUILDING CROSS COLLABORATION BETWEEN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY PROVIDERS

IMPACT REPORT 2022-2025

NEW YORK STATE

Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
Council on Developmental Disabilities

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Created in 1992, the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) is the country's only Cabinet-level executive state agency dedicated to the issue of domestic and gender-based violence. OPDV addresses domestic and gender-based violence through public policy, education, and public assistance, and partners with a statewide network of stakeholders to promote survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services throughout New York State. These values form the Three Pillars, which provide the foundation of our work. More information about OPDV is available on the NYS OPDV website.

The *Purposeful Connections: Building Cross Collaboration Between Domestic Violence and Developmental Disability Providers* project was supported, in part, by grant number 2301NYSCDD from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, the Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201 through the New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities (NYSCDD).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) and the New York State Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD) partnered to improve support for people with developmental disabilities (DD) who have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence. The project also aimed to strengthen collaboration between disability service providers and GBV service providers.

Project Purpose

Through this partnership with CDD, OPDV worked to address the higher rates of gender-based violence experienced by people with developmental disabilities and to improve cross-system collaboration to increase the accessibility of domestic and sexual violence services.

When survivors with developmental disabilities seek help, they often face barriers in four main areas:

- System barriers (policies and procedures that make access difficult)
- Bias and ableism
- Environmental barriers (physical or structural obstacles)
- Communication barriers

Project Highlights

This project was grounded in the belief that all survivors of gender-based violence deserve safety, healing, and justice. Working with CDD, OPDV focused on improving the response to gender-based violence by addressing inequities and expanding access to support using a survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive approach.

Key components of the project included:

- **Advisory Council** – A group of experts from the gender-based violence and the developmental disabilities fields.
- **Toolkits and Resources** – Practical tools and materials were developed for service providers and for people with developmental disabilities.
- **Building Meaningful Connections** – The project strengthened partnerships among the disability community, gender-based violence service providers, and other state agencies.
- **Consultants with Lived Experience** – Two consultants with developmental disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence helped develop materials and co-facilitated project activities.
- **Trainings (In-Person and Virtual)** – Trainings were created and delivered to improve service accessibility, strengthen responses to gender-based violence for people with developmental disabilities, and encourage collaboration across systems.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on feedback from participants and reflect the key themes that emerged during the project:

- Increase collaboration between the NYS agencies that oversee GBV and DD services to better address the overlap between these issues through regular leadership meetings, cross-system training and resource development.
- Expand training opportunities for disability service providers so they can recognize signs of gender-based violence and respond in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive way. Trainings should also help build partnerships with local gender-based violence providers.
- Continue providing training and technical assistance to GBV providers to ensure they can effectively support survivors with developmental disabilities with survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services.

Kelli Nicholas Owens,

Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

About the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV)

The Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, created in 1992, is the country's only Cabinet-level executive state agency dedicated to the issue of domestic and gender-based violence. It replaced the former Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence, established in 1983.

MISSION

To improve New York State's response to and prevention of domestic violence with the goal of enhancing the safety of all New Yorkers in their intimate and family relationships.

OUR VISION

To create a State in which communities and systems are committed to supporting and promoting equality, dignity, and respect so that individuals can feel safer in their intimate and family relationships.

OUR ROLE

To advise the governor and legislature on policies and best practices; train professionals across the state; facilitate coordination between state agencies and stakeholders on issues related to domestic violence; and serve as a resource on the issues of domestic and gender-based violence.

OPDV'S THREE PILLARS—THE LENS THROUGH WHICH WE VIEW OUR WORK

After reflecting on its mission, OPDV expanded its work beyond domestic violence to include other forms of gender-based violence. We know that we cannot address domestic violence without confronting other forms of gender-based violence, such as sexual violence, trafficking, and more. The White House (2023) defines gender-based violence as:

"Any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived sex, gender, gender identity, sex characteristics, or sexual orientation. [Gender-based violence] encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, and technological abuse or harm; threats of such acts; harassment; coercion; and arbitrary deprivation of liberty."

We know the gender-based violence response system must not apply a "one-size-fits-all" approach, which leads us to the three pillars that guide our work. Responses to gender-based violence must be survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive. OPDV defines these three pillars as:

- **Survivor-Centered**—an approach that works with survivors to meet their needs as they prioritize and define them.
- **Trauma-Informed**—an approach that realizes that trauma is common, recognizes the signs, activators, and symptoms of trauma, and uses this knowledge to inform practices, policies, and procedures.
- **Culturally Responsive**—an approach that actively incorporates a holistic approach to a person's complex identities and cultural values, going beyond simply acknowledging their cultural identity exists. Culturally responsive services respond to differences in identities to actively meet the needs of all survivors and communities.

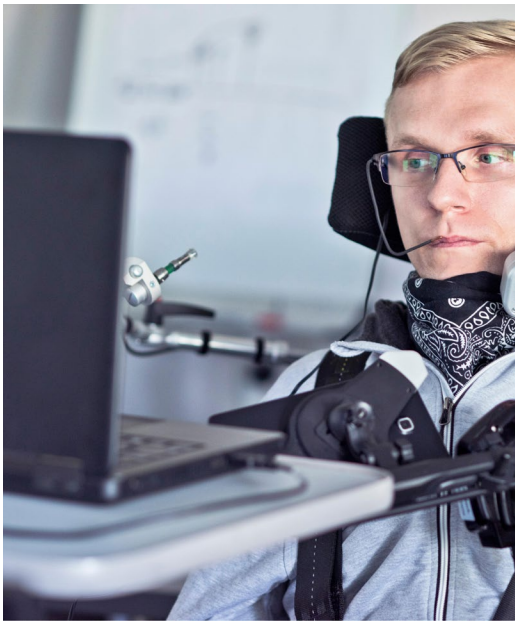
PROJECT PURPOSE

This collaborative project was necessary to address the alarming rate at which gender-based violence is perpetrated against people with developmental disabilities. This is caused by many factors, including social risk factors that contribute to higher rates of violence against people with developmental disabilities, and the significant barriers to disclosure and access to services.

Statistics

- People with disabilities experience violent victimization **4 times** the rate of those without disabilities.
- Persons with cognitive disabilities are **7 times** more likely to be a victim of sexual assault.
- Women with cognitive disabilities are **12 times** more likely to be a victim of sexual assault.
- **Only 13%** of victims with disabilities receive domestic and/or sexual violence services.
- People with disabilities are **5 times more likely** to experience domestic violence

Social Risk Factors And Victimization Of People With Developmental Disabilities



Using the Social Model of Disability, we examined the social barriers that contribute to the high rates of victimization for people with developmental disabilities. For example, the misconception that people with disabilities are not capable of making their own decisions often leads others to make decisions for them. This creates a power imbalance that can enable abuse. There is also little oversight and accountability when someone is in a position of power over a person with a disability, even when that power is legally obtained through guardianship and representative payee arrangements.

An important note about risk factors is that they are all rooted in social barriers. GBV is never the survivor's fault or responsibility. For example, when individuals are not taught about bodily autonomy, consent, body parts, sexual activity,

and gender-based violence, it increases their risk of being victimized and takes away opportunities for advocacy and empowerment. The social risk factors identified throughout this project fall into these categories:

- Lack of comprehensive sexuality education, including education on gender-based violence
- Limited opportunities to form genuine, meaningful personal relationships
- Expectation and demand for compliance
- A lifetime of trauma that normalizes victimization
- More relationships with a power imbalance
- Reliance on others
- Perceived lack of credibility
- Being taught to trust too easily
- Guardianship and representative payee structures that can contribute to abuse
- Infantilization
- Overprotection from support system

Barriers to Disclosure for Survivors With Developmental Disabilities

While there are barriers to disclosure for any survivor of gender-based violence, survivors with developmental disabilities may face additional challenges, which include:

- Fear of:
  - Not being believed, due to a perceived lack of credibility
  - Retaliation, including getting someone else or themselves in “trouble”
  - Losing independence
  - Not knowing who to report to or how to report
- Communication differences
- Not recognizing that they are a victim, due to the lack of education about the signs of abuse and/or a lifetime of victimization
- Reliance on the perpetrator
- Lack of opportunities to disclose

Barriers to Accessing Gender-Based Violence Services for Survivors With Developmental Disabilities

Some examples of barriers to accessing services that may be present:

- **Systemic**
  - GBV and DD Service Provider Policies and Procedures
    - Many of the policies and procedures that exist are not in plain language or large print
    - Extensive documentation requirements
    - Time-limited interviews
    - Interpretation services or assistive technology are not available
    - Independence requirements for shelters and the inability to accommodate a support staff
    - Confusion between accessibility and accommodations
    - Counseling services with rigid eligibility criteria
- **Bias and Ableism**
  - Structural ableism refers to the way organizations, systems, and policies are set up that unintentionally exclude or limit people with disabilities. Often, these barriers are so embedded in everyday practices that staff may not realize they are creating obstacles or, in some cases, breaking the law.

Some examples include:

- Some providers and survivors shared that people are denied services because they have a disability. One person seeking GBV support was told, “We don’t do disability services,” and was sent back to the disability service provider instead of receiving help.
- Even experts in the field said they struggled to understand how GBV and developmental disabilities intersect. One person said, “I’m having a hard time wrapping my mind around where the intersection of gender-based violence

and developmental disabilities exists." When systems do not fully understand this connection, the issue can be overlooked, which increases risk for people with developmental disabilities.

- **Environmental**
  - Older facilities built before the ADA are generally not required to be fully rebuilt to meet all current standards
  - Facilities that do comply with the ADA, but not for every space that would be available to others. For example, ADA-compliant shelters are available only on the first floor due to the lack of elevators.
  - Challenges in rural communities with limited availability to accessible and inclusive services that can address the unique needs of survivors with developmental disabilities
  - Public transportation and paratransit services often do not have enough accessible vehicles, making it hard to get timely, flexible rides, and usually require reservations. Due to transportation delays, a survivor may be unable to leave an unsafe situation.
  - Spaces that do not consider sensory factors, such as lights, sounds, and touch, may be challenging for people with sensory needs or people who have Autism.
- **Communication**
  - Asking complex or multi-part questions
  - Lack of training in different methods of communication, including the use of communication devices and alternative communication
  - Limited support for survivors who need more time to process information, need information repeated or broken down, or have challenges articulating thoughts
  - Materials not available in plain language
  - American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation not provided

Need for an Intersectional Understanding of Survivors With Developmental Disabilities

Throughout this project, we used an intersectional perspective, encouraging participants to consider the multiple identities of people with developmental disabilities. Due to ableism, people with disabilities are often viewed one-dimensionally, with their disability overshadowing other aspects of their identity. We explored how identities, such as LGBTQI+, race, ethnicity, class, gender, immigration status, and others, intersect with disability. These overlapping identities shape how someone may experience gender-based violence, the specific tactics of abuse used against them, and their openness to seek help from formal and informal gender-based violence response systems.

Effective responses to survivors with developmental disabilities require recognition of their full range of identities. We learned that more needs to be done to address this important dynamic, as it is often absent from conversations about supporting people with developmental disabilities.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The project expanded in scope and impact over time. What started as a project to develop a single training curriculum for disability and domestic violence service providers expanded to include both domestic and sexual violence and led to multiple training and networking opportunities. As the project reached more people, it sparked greater awareness of the problem and inspired partners to engage in the work.

Advisory Council

As part of this project, OPDV formed a 15-member Advisory Council. Members included professionals who work at the intersection of gender-based violence and developmental disabilities throughout New York State. The Advisory Council met virtually bimonthly throughout the project to provide feedback on training and resources and to support outreach efforts.

Appointed Members:

- **Stephanie Blackwell**, Queens Center for Progress
- **Michelle Cook**, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe
- **Alexa Donnelly**, Person Centered Services
- **Vanessa E. Eybers**, Venture Together
- **Laura Holland**, All Ability Wellness
- **Anastasia Holoboff**, Woman Enabled International
- **Mona Kelly**, NY START Region 5
- **Janna Kopacki**, Southern Adirondack Independent Living
- **Sherrie Lynn Lilley** BA, MS Ed. MHC-LP, HEAL Creative Solutions & Inspire Bermuda
- **Nancy Nowak**, Disability Rights New York
- **Mary K. O'Neill**, NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities
- **Tiffany Pavone**, Hope of Western NY
- **Andrew Richardson**, Heritage Christian Services
- **Sue Ruff**, Southern Tier Independence Center
- **Imani Whifield**, Office of the Albany County District Attorney

Project Consultants

Consistent with OPDV's Three Pillar (survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive) approach, we hired two project consultants, Shanell and Tina.

OPDV believes survivors' voices should guide our work. Shanell and Tina both have lived experience as people with developmental disabilities and as survivors of gender-based violence. Shanell and Tina were more than consultants; they helped lead the project and were involved in making important decisions throughout the process.

The consultants were an integral part in training and resource development and helped lead the trainings as co-facilitators. Their strong backgrounds in disability rights and self-advocacy strengthened every part of the project. Because of their leadership and lived experience, survivor voices were included in the work in a truly meaningful way.

We could not have had the same impact without their expertise and the connections they brought through their networks.

QUOTES FROM PROJECT CONSULTANTS:

"[This project] helped me in my own healing journey by giving me the courage to really talk about it. Sharing my journey was very therapeutic, and I hope it resonates with others as well."

"[This project] impacted me in a couple of ways. It gave me a place where it was okay to talk about being victimized and what that victimization does to people, especially people with disabilities [...] It gave me a space to share how that happens with other professionals, and I believe sharing my experiences and how I've incorporated them into who I am, what I see, and what I do, could make a big difference for somebody else or maybe help a professional understand."

TRAININGS

The Intersection of Gender-Based Violence and Developmental Disabilities: Recognize, Respond, Refer

OPDV developed and delivered a training series on the intersection of gender-based violence (GBV) and developmental disabilities. We created three versions of the training to tailor the content for GBV service providers, disability service providers, and a mixed audience of both. OPDV worked in partnership with Elevatus Training LLC and the project consultants to deliver the training virtually and in person throughout New York State.

Topic-Specific Webinars

Training participants indicated they wanted to learn more, and in response OPDV created and hosted an additional series of webinars focused on gender-based violence and people with developmental disabilities. We used feedback from participants and partners to choose topics that went beyond the general connection between GBV and developmental disabilities.

The webinars were designed for a range of audiences, including people with developmental disabilities and providers in both the GBV and disabilities fields. Webinar titles included:

- Know the Signs, Know Your Rights
- Intersectionality: The Impact of Intersectional Identities for Survivors with Developmental Disabilities
- Supporting Survivors with Developmental Disabilities and Their Support Systems
- Understanding Augmented and Alternative Communication Methods for Survivors with Developmental Disabilities
- Anti-Discrimination Law and Rights of People with Disabilities

All these webinars were facilitated with Elevatus Training LLC and project consultants, except the final webinar, *Anti-Discrimination Law and Rights of People with Disabilities*, was presented by the NYS Division of Human Rights.

Know the Signs, Know Your Rights

The *Know the Signs, Know Your Rights* training was particularly relevant because people with developmental disabilities often do not receive education about gender-based violence in private or public schools or adult education programs. Throughout the project, we consistently heard that a lack of prevention education increases risk.

To help address this gap, we worked closely with Elevatus Training LLC and project consultants to develop a two-part workshop specifically for people with developmental disabilities and self-advocates.

The workshop focused on recognizing the potential signs of GBV, understanding the characteristics of healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships, and learning about survivors' rights and available resources.

CONTRACTED PARTNERSHIPS

OPDV contracted with three community-based organizations that provide direct services to people with developmental disabilities: Elevatus Training LLC, Barrier Free Living, and Community Services for Every1. Although each organization completed different deliverables, all had a profound impact on the project's scope and reach.

ELEVATUS TRAINING

Elevatus Training LLC co-developed and co-facilitated several trainings and resources for disability providers, gender-based violence service providers, and people with developmental disabilities.

barrier free living

Barrier Free Living provided training across New York State to GBV service providers, focusing on increasing service accessibility.

Community Services FOR EVERY1

Community Services for Every1 developed three curricula for GBV service providers to train disability service providers, people with developmental disabilities, and parents and families.

INTAKE MAPPING SESSIONS

The collaborative project offered organizations that serve people with developmental disabilities a chance to participate in mapping sessions. The goal was to better understand their intake processes and to find ways to make it more survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive when screening for gender-based violence.

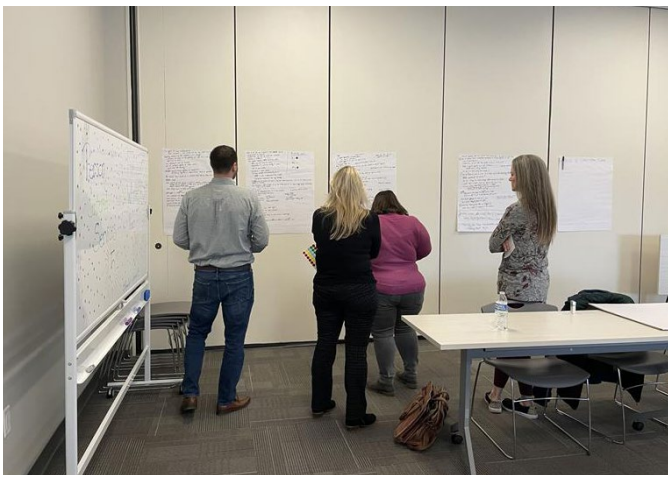
Each session began with a brief presentation explaining the purpose of the meeting. OPDV staff then led a step-by-step discussion about the intake process. After reviewing the process, each agency identified areas for improvement and decided which changes to prioritize. Participating organizations had to meet the following criteria:

- Be a disability service provider or care coordination agency that serves individuals with developmental disabilities in New York State
- Have previous engagement with the OPDV/ CDD collaborative project through:
  - Learning exchanges
  - Webinars and educational sessions
- Commit to implementing agency-wide initiatives that work to end gender-based violence against people with disabilities through survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services
- Have the capacity to complete all requirements outlined in the mapping award letter

We conducted intake mapping sessions and developed individualized reports for seven disability organizations across the New York State.

Participating organizations included:

- Access to Independence of Cortland County
- Catholic Charities Disabilities Services
- Community Services for Every1
- Independent Group Home Living
- Person Centered Care Services
- Person Centered Services
- Southern Tier Independence Center



CONFERENCES AND EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

To share what we learned and expand the project's reach, we presented at several state and regional conferences and events, including:

New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation Conference - 2023, 2024, 2025

- Foundling Conference – 2024
- Anderson Center for Autism Family Partners – 2025
- Syracuse University Inclusive U, Let's Talk About Sex and More – 2025
- Self-Advocacy Association of New York State Statewide Conference - 2024, 2025

RESOURCES

Participants told us they needed practical tools. In response, we created four key resources to support both providers and people with disabilities.

- **Gender-Based Violence Safety Planning Tool** - Created by Barrier Free Living to accompany the *Increasing Accessibility for Survivors with Developmental (Dis)Abilities* training for GBV service providers. This tool assists professionals in safety planning with survivors with disabilities, addressing the unique factors that may not apply to those without disabilities.
- **Regional Resource Guides for Developmental Disability Service Providers** - Accompanies the in-person *Intersection of Gender-Based Violence and Developmental Disabilities* training for disability providers. These resource guides list GBV service providers in each region, including contact information. Providers can print and share in residences, day programs, and administrative offices.
- **Recognize, Respond, Refer Quick Fact Sheet for Gender-Based Violence Service Providers** - Designed to accompany the *Intersection of Gender-Based Violence and Developmental Disabilities* training for GBV service providers. This fact sheet guides providers on recognizing, responding to, and referring survivors with developmental disabilities.
- **Equality with Interdependence Wheel & Power and Control Wheel** - Developed by Elevatus Training LLC to accompany the *Know the Signs, Know Your Rights* training for people with developmental disabilities. This resource is available in English, Chinese, Spanish, and Large Print.

BUILDING PURPOSEFUL CONNECTIONS WEBINAR SERIES

As a culmination of the project, we hosted a webinar series featuring experts from the gender-based violence response system and the disability community. The series was designed for disability service providers, GBV service providers, and people with developmental disabilities.

- **Accessible Safety Network: How Providers Can Work Together to Support Those at the Intersection of Disabilities and Gender-Based Violence** - Stephanie Saunders, Community Services for Every1
- **Overview of Assistive Technology** - Melinda Dolezal and Gemma White, Westchester Institute for Human Development and the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs
- **Creating Pathways to Healing for Survivors with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities** - Sandra Harrell, Activating Change
- **Navigating Guardianship in Survivor-Centered Services Overview** - Prianka Nair, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
- **History of the Self-Advocacy Movement** - Daniel Flanagan and Robert Belden, Self Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS); Tina Fitzgerald, Self-Advocate
- **Staying Safe Online: Understanding Harmful Behaviors and How to Protect Yourself** - Katherine McLaughlin, Elevatus Training LLC; Tina Fitzgerald, Self-Advocate
- **Responding Together: Supporting Survivors with Developmental Disabilities** - Esther Chong, OPDV; Dee Levy, Justice Center; Mary O'Neill, OPWDD
- **Creating Accessible Spaces for Survivors with Disabilities Experiencing Gender-Based Violence** - Cynthia Amodeo, Barrier Free Living
- **Supporting the Whole Person** - A Guide to Developmental Disability Services and Inclusive Engagement - Nisha Tumber and Evalesse Segarra, Person Centered Care Services
- **"Nothing About Us Without Us" A Survivor Panel** - Tina Fitzgerald and Shanell Davis, Self-Advocates

PROJECT IMPACT

Participants shared that they appreciated having open conversations about gender-based violence and learning practical ways to better support survivors with developmental disabilities. Many participants said they planned to apply what they learned in their own roles and organizations.

Participant Reach and Evaluation

Over the course of four years, the project engaged a total of 2,369 people through trainings, presentations, tabling, and other outreach activities.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
14 People	340 People	874 People	1,141 People	2,369 People

Among this group, a total of 1,984 participants (84%) attended formal trainings.

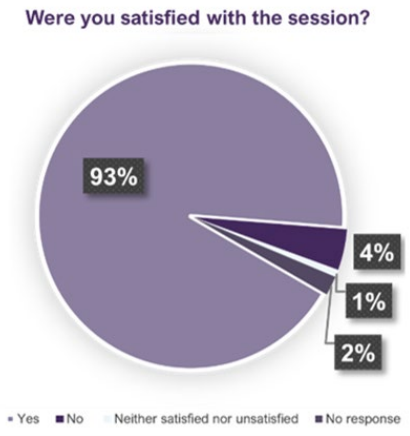
Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
0 People	340 People	663 People	981 People	1,984 People

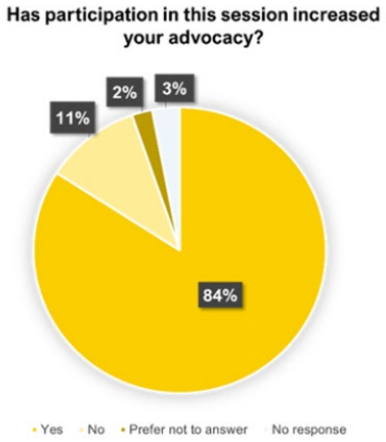
Participants came from across New York State and represented a wide range of roles and organizations, including those in the disability and gender-based violence fields, courts, education, healthcare, law enforcement, and other sectors.

After each training, participants were invited to complete a voluntary online evaluation. We received 396 responses collected across 12 surveys. Some participants attended multiple sessions and may have completed more than one evaluation.

Satisfaction and Advocacy

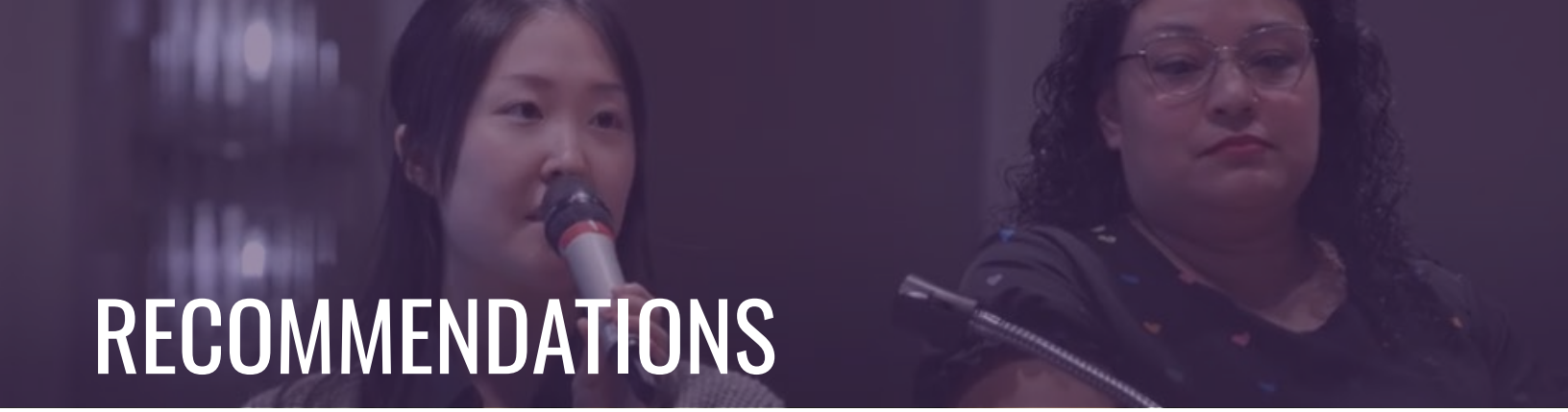
Participants reported high levels of satisfaction and an increase in general advocacy after participating in the session.





Quote from participant:

> *"I am very grateful to have participated in this. It addressed an important and prevalent social issue that strongly impacts the lives of people with disabilities, their families, and providers, but it is not often discussed."*



RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this project is to improve how systems prevent and respond to gender-based violence against people with developmental disabilities and to strengthen collaboration between disability providers and domestic and sexual violence providers.

When this project started, OPDV committed to promoting a survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive approach. The recommendations below build on the last four years of work and will improve response, prevention, and access to services for survivors with developmental disabilities.

Need for State-Level Collaboration

To achieve the project goal of developing cross-system collaboration at the community and provider level, state agencies must work together and provide clear guidance on how to coordinate across systems to improve the response to violence against people with disabilities.

During this project, OPDV strengthened partnerships with the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center), the NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), and the NYS Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD). This collaboration included:

- OPWDD participation in the project's advisory council
- Justice Center staff participation in several learning exchanges
- GBV training for Justice Center staff on how to recognize, respond, and refer
- OPDV, Justice Center, OPWDD collaboration on a webinar about responding to GBV together for the Building Purposeful Connections webinar series
- OPDV, Justice Center, and CDD quarterly leadership meetings

These collaborations also identified gaps in state guidance. For example, disability providers are not required to screen for gender-based violence. As a result, many agencies are unsure whether they should screen, and, if so, how to do it safely and consistently.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM MAPPING SESSIONS

- Screening questions are usually not asked.
- Providers were hesitant but became interested in implementing screening with support.
- Agencies wanted clear guidance from state regulators before making changes.

We focused on screening because:

- Survivors with developmental disabilities face many barriers to disclosure.
- Many people may not recognize abuse without direct, concrete questions.
- Many people receiving services have never been educated about gender-based violence.

This is just one example of how the project revealed deeper and more complex needs than expected.

Key Recommendations

OPDV recommends building on the existing collaboration between OPDV, CDD, and Justice Center to include other NYS agencies that are involved in disability services and gender-based violence services, with the following goals:

- Develop cross-system training
- Develop best practices for screening and responding to gender-based violence

- Require the GBV Recognize, Respond, Refer training as part of annual training for all program staff funded by OPWDD and for people receiving services
- Develop GBV response policies for disability providers, care coordinators, and self-directed services, which fall outside of the Justice Center's jurisdiction
- Develop tools to increase accessibility of GBV services in NYS
- Provide ongoing training and technical assistance to GBV providers
- Modify the *Intersection of Gender-Based Violence and Developmental Disabilities* training to be applied across other systems that intersect with gender-based violence and developmental disabilities, including law enforcement, courts, health care and more

CONCLUSION

OPDV and CDD started this project because we recognized an important need: people with developmental disabilities experience gender-based violence and not enough is being done to address it. CDD was more than just a funder, they were also active partners throughout the project. Their steady guidance, support, and trust in our expertise played a major role in the project's success. It was an honor to work with such a forward-thinking agency.

This project brought together partners from many different fields and engaged a wide range of stakeholders. We reached hundreds of people through learning exchanges, trainings, conferences, and meetings. We adjusted our approach when needed to better meet people's needs and build trust. For example, lack of interest in learning exchanges for parents and families led to the discovery that people did not feel comfortable discussing this topic in a new group setting. So, we changed our plan and joined existing parent groups and held smaller, focused discussions instead. This allowed us to gather important information that strengthened the project.

Because of this thoughtful and flexible approach, we created a lasting impact. Participants shared that they now think differently about violence against people with developmental disabilities. Gender-based violence service providers learned how to better support survivors with developmental disabilities. Disability service providers and families learned how to recognize and respond to gender-based violence in ways that put survivor choice first, are sensitive to trauma, respect cultural differences, and connect people to community resources. This work does not end with the project.

At OPDV, this work is now permanently part of our culturally responsive efforts, trainings, and agency policies. We remain committed to a survivor centered approach as we work to improve the response to gender-based violence for all survivors in New York, including those with developmental disabilities. We will continue to offer training and support but change at this level cannot happen through one agency alone. The need for collaborative action is urgent and ongoing.

NEW YORK STATE | Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence

The Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV) is the country's only cabinet-level executive state agency dedicated to the issue of gender-based violence.

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