

## Differences of our Needs

### Pat Kelln Spokesperson Pacific DAWN

Women with disAbilities face not only the most severe domestic violence but also experience abuse longer, from a wider selection of potential abusers and face multiple barriers in trying to keep themselves safe. We can face not only the barriers of having a disAbiltiy but of living in poverty, being of a racial minority or Aboriginal, elderly, young etc. We do though have more similarities than differences, as each of us is an individual who wants to be heard and believed and to live violence free.

There are many different types of disAbility each having their own vulnerability and barriers. Accessibility is not only about building a ramp but also of inclusion.

We vary from having a severe disAbiltiy to those with moderate disAbilities, intermittent or not visible. We may have been born with a disAbiltiy or acquired one in later life. Some become disAbled because of the abuse and sexual assault.

We may no nothing about abuse, unaware that it is happening to us. We may have been trained to be compliant, to follow orders by people who are in charge or take charge. Or have difficulties controlling our behaviour, including anger.

We may be Aboriginal, Visible Minority, Immigrant, Young, Old, any sector of our population, with those attendant barriers.

We may have difficulties one or any combination of the following: \*

- Mobility-which can range from using a cane to being a paraplegic. Women with Spinal Cord Injuries, Muscular Dystrophy, Cerebral Palsy Multiple Sclerosis are include in those with Mobility problems
- Communication-which includes not being able to communicate at all to being able to communicate with some type of assistive device or being able to speak with great difficulties
- Deaf –both the Deaf (big D), who do not think of themselves as disAbled but rather a separate cultural group and those who are deaf (small d and usually someone who becomes deaf later in life. Also included in this category are those who are Hard of Hearing and the Deaf Blind
- Cognitive Disabilities- affect a person’s ability to comprehend, remember or discern and are often the result of a head injury
- Learning DisAbilities-those with learning disAbilities receive inaccurate information through their senses and have problems processing that information
- Mental Health DisAbilities which includes, but is not limited to Schizophrenia, Major Depressive disorder and Bipolar Disorder
- Hidden DisAbilities which includes, but is not limited to Seizure Disorders/Epilepsy, Environmental Illness, Respiratory Diseases/Asthma, AIDS, Diabetes, Chemical Dependency

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Common types of disabilities and the barriers associated with them include:

- **Deafness:** There are two broad groups in this category. People who are hard of hearing can typically function fairly well with hearing aids. However, with out their hearing aids they can be quite vulnerable. People who are profoundly deaf are vulnerable to abuse because they cannot hear their abuser sneak up on them nor call for help. They also have communication barriers to overcome in seeking assistance from those in authority.
- **Blindness:** People who are blind are vulnerable to abusers sneaking up on them. They also cannot easily run away from an abuser.
- **Mobility impairments:** People with mobility impairments can not fight back or defend themselves. They cannot easily escape from an abusive situation. Typically, shelters and half way houses are not wheelchair accessible.
- **Speech impairments:** People can have mild to severe speech impairments. People with severe speech impairments often cannot call for help nor easily communicate with others. They often require some kind of assistive devices such as bliss boards or electronic devices. In stressful situations their speech is further impaired. People in authority can have difficulty understanding what they say. People may also not believe what they are saying.
- **Mental disabilities:** Mental disabilities cover a broad range of mental impairments. People with mental disabilities tend to be very trusting and easily led on by people. They may not be able to distinguish between a good or bad relationship. They may not know how to seek help. If they do speak to people in authority, they may not believe them.

\*This category of disAbilties was taken from Enough and yet not Enough An Educational Resource Manual On Domestic Violence Advocacy for Persons with DisAbilties in Washington State,.

<http://www.wscadv.org/resourcesAlpha.cfm?ald=CA9A1567-C298-58F6-01344B9FFFF3E00F>

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