



DISABLED PERSONS PROTECTION COMMISSION SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE (SAR) TEAM

ABOUT

In July 2017, the Sexual Assault Response (SAR) Team was created at the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC) to increase access to trauma services for sexual assault victims with disabilities thanks to the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance through a Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA) grant from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funding. SAR provides navigation, peer support and clinical matching services to victims of sexual assault. SAR works with individuals with disabilities, families and support staff by providing information, resources, referrals and guidance. The goal of SAR is to increase access to trauma services for persons with disabilities to aid in their recovery of sexual abuse.

SAR NAVIGATOR

The SAR Navigator works to ensure that 100% of the sexual abuse cases reported to DPPC's 24-hour Hotline, the victim and/or significant others are informed of trauma service options that may meet their unique needs. The SAR Navigator, in partnership with the SAR Peer Support Leader (PSL), strives to connect sexual assault victims with disabilities to all the state's victim services including Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, rape crisis, legal aid, victim compensation, victim witness, therapy and more. After offering victims the opportunity to make informed choices about available services, the SAR's Navigators facilitate the connection of victims to services they are interested in receiving, while also addressing barriers to access services such as applications, transportation, insurance, and communication. Navigators provide valuable access to trauma services for victims of sexual abuse who may not otherwise be informed of or have the ability to utilize these crucial resources. At the DPPC, the Navigator:

- Educates victims, families, caregivers and support persons to understand what someone may be experiencing and how best to help those impacted by trauma;
- Shares information about services that are available to victims including medical, clinical support, civil/legal, safety, peer support and more;
- Assists with obtaining meaningful access to trauma services by working with the victim, support team and service providers to make sure services are accessible;
- Works to understand the needs of the victims and works with the support team to ensure these needs are met; and
- Serves as a go-to as long as the victim needs to access meaningful services.

SAR INTERFACE WITH WILLIAM JAMES COLLEGE

- Assists sexual assault victims with disabilities in obtaining a licensed mental health provider;
- Addresses specialty needs, availability, scheduling, insurance and location challenges;
- Recruits providers to work with victims with disabilities;
- Offers clinical consultation to providers serving victims with disabilities; and
- Follows up with the victim and provider to ensure an effective match.



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SAR PEER SUPPORT LEADER

Peer support programs employ people who have similar life experiences to the population being served by the agency or organization, so that the Peer Support Leaders (PSLs) can work directly with the target population and help them move towards hope and empowerment. At the DPPC, this looks like employing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are survivors of sexual abuse—just like many of the people that the DPPC serves. These PSLs play a crucial role in supporting victims with disabilities through their healing process. Victims of sexual assault with disabilities can choose to meet with a PSL just once or several times over the course of weeks or months. You can learn more about the DPPC peer support program through its video entitled *Start by Believing* available on dppcmass.gov.

Peer Support Leaders show victims that it is possible to go through a traumatic life event like the one they experienced, heal from it, and come out on the other side. PSLs share specific resources and self-care practices that helped them in their own healing process and provide an important source of social connection and support during a time that is usually very isolating. At the DPPC, the Peer Support Leader:

- Works in partnership with the SAR Navigators to educate victims, families, caregivers and support persons to understand what someone may be experiencing and how best to help those impacted by trauma;
- Provides support as a peer to sexual assault victims with disabilities;
- Talks with victims about their own path to healing and introduces victims to trauma services and how to access those services in partnership with the SAR Navigators;
- Conducts outreach to persons with disabilities and others to let them know about abuse, impact of trauma and available services to recover;
- Teaches individuals with disabilities self-care skills through an interactive self-care bingo exercise;
- Provides outreach and professional development opportunities to trauma services agencies on the prevalence of abuse of persons with disabilities and providing accessible services to sexual assault victims with disabilities; and
- Attends conferences and other outreach events and manages information tables to inform attendees of the work of SAR.

SAR VOLUNTEER ADVISORY COUNCIL

The SAR benefits from a robust and active volunteer Advisory Council. Members serve as key advisors to the DPPC in its ongoing development of SAR. The Advisory Council members share their professional/experiential wisdom to guide and enhance SAR operations. Advisory Council members also serve as ambassadors for SAR within the members' own spheres of influence by taking action within their own organizations to prevent and effectively respond to sexual violence against persons with disabilities. Further, the Advisory Council members are called upon for assistance with introductions to stakeholders in the fields of disability services and advocacy, sexual violence, law, mental health, criminal justice, law enforcement, medical health, education and employment. DPPC and SAR have benefited greatly from the collective experience offered by the individual members of the volunteer Advisory Council.

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