We Won't End Gender-Based Violence Without Disability Justice

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In Canada, disabled people experience violent victimization at nearly three times the rate of abled people.[1] Disabled women are far more likely to experience all forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, regardless of disability type.[2] [3] Despite this reality, the disabled community is often excluded from gender-based violence (GBV) services, policy and prevention strategies. This exclusion is not accidental, it is an intrinsic part of ableism: a system of oppression that maintains abled people's power over disabled people.

Ableism upholds white supremacist and colonial definitions of who is and isn't valued. It is embedded in policies, institutions, and everyday interactions, shaping whose safety is prioritized, whose pain is believed, and whose lives are protected. Sins Invalid tells us, "The same oppressive systems that inflicted violence upon Black and brown communities for 500+ years also inflicted 500+ years of violence on bodies and minds deemed outside the norm and therefore 'dangerous'."[4]

Disability Day of Mourning

Held annually on March 1, the Disability Day of Mourning honours disabled people who have been killed by caregivers, institutions, partners or family members. It is a day to remember the lives lost to ableist violence, and to recommit to building a world where disabled people can live free from harm.

In 2025, the Disability Day of Mourning fell just days after Ontario's provincial election, which determined the future of housing, income supports, and health care — systems that directly affect disabled people's safety. The timing served as a stark reminder: policy choices cost lives.[5]

Ableism increases the risk of GBV and makes it harder to access safety and support. Disabled people are often desexualized (considered devoid of sexual agency and desire) and denied the right to define our own relationships, bodies, or boundaries. We are subjected to medical abuses such as institutionalization and sterilization. The lack of meaningful representation in media, education, or leadership sends a harmful message that disabled people are not whole, diverse, or valuable members of society.

Structural barriers also limit access to sexual health and GBV supports: discrimination and stigma, physical and digital inaccessibility, communication and language barriers, and culturally unsafe services. Combined with the pay gap and inadequate social supports like the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), many disabled people are forced to remain in violent environments, dependent on caregivers or institutions for survival. When disabled people are abandoned by policy, violence thrives.

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This violence has never gone unanswered. As society consistently fails disabled people, disabled community has had to actively resist GBV largely on our own: building care networks and safety plans, leading research, shaping legislation, and demanding systemic change. Organizations like Disability Alliance BC, established in 1977; The Disabled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada, which traces its roots back to 1985; and the Disability Justice Network of Ontario (DJNO) launched in 2018, are among those leading this resistance. The GBV sector is already being strengthened by disabled leaders, organizers, researchers, and survivors — it is time for the sector to look beyond inclusion and toward liberation.

This Backgrounder focuses on disabled wisdom and innovation, not as mere inspiration, but as essential infrastructure for justice work. Disability Justice (DJ) is a movement and a framework that positions disability as a political and collective experience shaped by systems of oppression and generations of resistance. DJ calls us to reimagine access, care, safety, and liberation. It centers the leadership and wisdom of those most impacted and offers principles that can transform how we understand — and respond to — violence.

Resources

- My Body Doesn't Oppress Me, Society Does https://youtu.be/7r0MiGWQY2g
- The Unfit in Canada: A History of Disability Rights and Justice https://www.djno.ca/dj-history
- Addressing Sexual Violence and Promoting the Sexual Rights of Women Labelled with Intellectual Disabilities https://www.gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-41/index.html

A Call to Re-Envision: Crip Wisdom

Despite what stereotypes and stigma might lead you to believe, disabled people are not helpless. To survive centuries of oppression we have had to collaborate and innovate, developing what we call "crip wisdom".

Crip wisdom is sharing freezer packs, heating pads and pain meds. Crip wisdom is masking during an ongoing pandemic. Crip wisdom is learning how to build DIY air conditioning and air filtration for the next heat wave or wildfire. Crip wisdom is calling friends instead of the cops. Crip wisdom is "we keep each other safe".

Crip wisdom holds our strategies of survival, resistance, and collective care. Crip wisdom enhances all fights for justice, benefiting everyone. Disability Justice emerges from crip wisdom.

A Note on Language

"Crip" is a term derived from the slur "cripple". Some disabled people reclaim "crip" as a source of power, self love and connection to disabled community.

What is Disability Justice?

DJ is a movement and a framework that examines how disability and ableism connect to all forms of oppression. It centers the lives and leadership of disabled Black, Indigenous and other people of colour (POC), as well as disabled queer, trans and Two-Spirit people with the understanding that our liberation will liberate the bodies and minds of all people. As Aurora Levins Morales writes, "What our bodies require in order to thrive, is what the world requires."[6] DJ moves us towards community care, transformed systems, and interdependence over independence, all of which are essential for ending GBV.

DJ was named in 2005 by the Disability Justice Collective, which included disabled activists Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Stacey Milbern, Leroy F. Moore Jr., and Eli Clare. It emerged as a response to the exclusionary, racist and single-issue approach of the Disability Rights Movement in the U.S., which centered white leaders and mobililty impairment, further marginalizing other disabilities and intersecting identities such as race, gender, sexuality, age and immigration status.

The DJ framework is built on *The 10 Principles of Disability Justice* developed by Patty Berne and Sins Invalid, a movement building and performance arts project. These guiding principles are essential to how we "get free," shifting power away from systems of oppression such as white supremacy, capitalism, and the medical-industrial complex.

Resources

- The 10 Principles of Disability Justice https://sinsinvalid.org/10-principles-of-disability-justice/
- What is Disability Justice? https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/what-is-disability-justice

Disability Justice and GBV Work

The 10 Principles of DJ offer a path towards transforming how we understand and respond to harm. Moving from theory to practice means reshaping the foundations of how support is offered, who is centered, and what we mean by safety. As explained by Mia Mingus, "We don't want to simply join the ranks of the privileged; we want to dismantle those ranks and the systems that maintain them."[7]

It is not enough for the GBV sector to simply expand access to "also consider" disabled people. We must fundamentally re-envision the work itself and transform how we structure supports and advocacy. In the following section, we explore each of the 10 Principles and how they can inform GBV work across the sector.

1: Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the experiences of Black women who were excluded from both feminist and anti-racist movements. DJ follows Crenshaw's work in recognizing that discrimination does not occur in discrete categories: ableism is entwined with white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchal violence. DJ invites us to examine how intersecting systems of oppression affect those marginalized by race, gender, ability, class, sexuality, age, religion, and immigration status. Our perspectives are never shaped by one identity alone, and neither is systemic violence. Ableism amplifies other forms of oppression, such as misogyny, racism, homophobia and transphobia, resulting in disproportionately high rates of GBV against disabled women, disabled people of colour, and disabled 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

The intersection of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and ableism results in increased rates and severity of police violence against disabled Black and Indigenous people. A staggering number of disabled Black and Indigenous

people across Canada are killed by police during mental health crises: Rodney Levi, D'Andre Campbell, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Nicholas Nembhard, and too many others. When we apply an intersectional lens, we can see why interventions that do not involve the police are so crucial. For disabled people of colour, police interactions can be fatal. Intersectionality helps us understand why non-carceral responses to harm are not just ideal, they are absolutely necessary.

Oppression also disables people. As Imani Barbarin says, "Every form of marginalization leads to disability".[8] Racist violence is disabling. GBV is disabling. Poverty is disabling. Intersectionality widens our understanding of GBV and how it connects to systemic violence such as racism, ableism, poverty, housing insecurity, environmental injustice, and more.

In Practice: GBV & intersectionality

In GBV work, we must understand how oppression shapes people's lives and experiences of GBV. This includes recognizing how intersections of identity and oppression affect how we collect data, assess risk, provide support and build safety plans.

Access to justice is rooted in Canada's colonial history and present-day social, political and legal structures. Benjamin Vandorpe writes, "Access to justice does not only apply to the Western legal system […] Justice spans also to healthcare, housing, personal safety, food security, and community (non-inclusive)."[9] Applying an intersectional lens in GBV work means more than naming multiple identities; it means transforming the existing systems that create risk and limit access to support.

Resources

- Putting Intersectionality into Action https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOmm3RStblI
- What is Transformative Justice? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-_BOFz5TXo
- Intersections of Disability Justice and Transformative Justice https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dKystkbHKQ

2: Leadership of those most impacted

We have a saying, "Nothing about us without us". Meaning that no solution should be enacted without the full and direct participation of the people it will impact most. DJ prompts us to center, uplift, listen to, read and follow those who are directly affected by the violence we seek to dismantle. Following disabled leadership also disrupts "saviour" narratives that position us as passive or helpless victims who can only receive support from abled people, rather than be the ones who shape and provide that care.

In Practice: GBV & leadership of those most impacted

In GBV work, this means learning from and being accountable to disabled survivors, advocates, and organizers. This could look like hiring disabled people in leadership and training roles, developing peer support models and communities of practice led by disabled survivors, and allying with organizations that are disability-led and investing in community-based research, education, policy and advocacy that keeps disabled voices at the forefront. At the most basic level, do your disabled coworkers, clients, and community members have what they need to thrive and fully participate?

3: Anti-capitalist politic

Capitalism is an oppressive system that reduces people to profit-generating units, accumulating wealth for a white ruling class at the expense of everyone else. Capitalism is inherently ableist, as it forces us to devalue and abandon anyone unable to generate profit. Capitalist policies drive housing insecurity, deepen pay gaps and undermine social supports, pushing disabled people closer to violence, poverty, and death. DJ invites us to resist and dismantle these capitalist ideals.

Disabled people developed crip wisdom to survive under capitalism. Sins Invalid points out that disabled peoples' "non-conforming" bodies and minds inherently resist capitalism because "our worth is not dependent on what and how much we can produce."[10] Our existence allows us to center the inherent worth of all beings, regardless of what an individual may produce or earn. By valuing co-creation, care work, reciprocity and mutual aid, we divest from capitalist and colonial authority.

In Practice: GBV & anti-capitalist politic

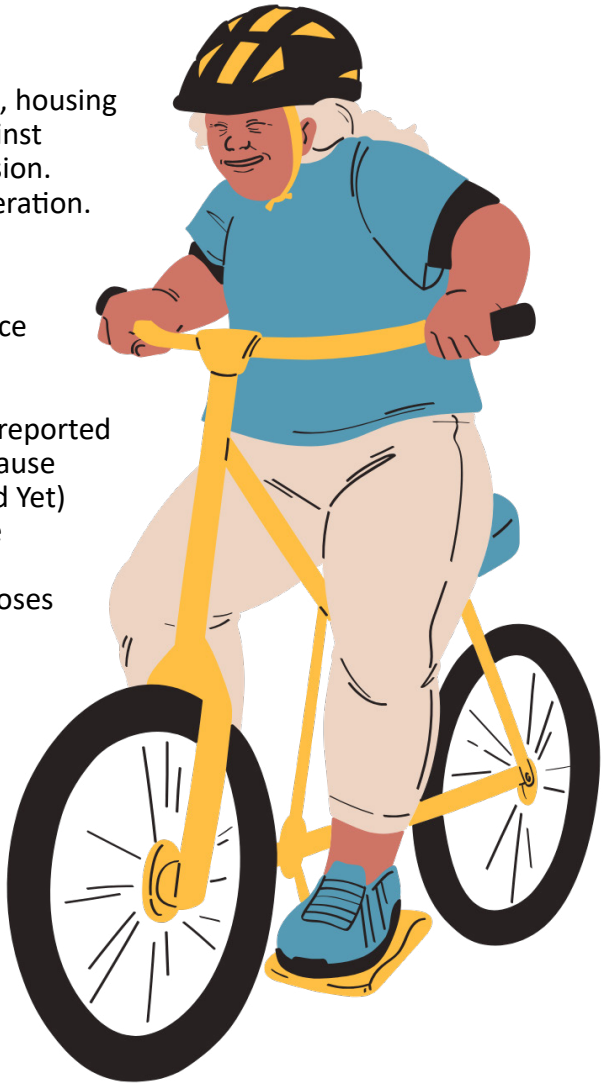
Adopting an anti-capitalist politic is vital to ensure that GBV work is not abandoning those who have been relegated to society's margins, or replicating these systems of marginalisation. The GBV sector can work in service of anti-capitalism by ensuring equitable access to supports and resources.

In the workplace, we can pay disabled people fairly and recognize that access work is not separate from the "real work". While accessibility includes physical accommodations like ramps and scent-free spaces, it also requires embracing different working styles, flexible schedules, and access needs as part of organizational norms. Resisting capitalism means building systems of care that center people over output, and making sure that safety is not reserved for those who can meet institutional expectations.

Resources

- Disability justice movements: history and practice https://tempestmag.org/2023/06/disability-justice-movements-history-and-practice
- Painting the Ocean & the Sky: The Language of Nuance and Purpose in our Non-Carceral Community Crisis Response https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com/resources-all/ocean-sky

4: Commitment to cross-movement organizing



Disability Justice is not a silo. It is deeply connected to racial justice, housing justice, labour rights, prison abolition, climate justice, the fight against colonialism, and all the ways we build movements to resist oppression. Disabled people have always been part of broader struggles for liberation. DJ reminds us that true collaboration also means holding aligned movements accountable for their own ableism.

One urgent example of this interconnectedness is Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) — a process that allows disabled people in Canada to access assisted death. In Ontario, nearly half of those approved under MAID's "Track 2" (which does not require a terminal illness) reported housing instability.[11] Many disabled people are choosing death because ableism makes life unlivable. As TVNDY (Toujours Vivant – Not Dead Yet) argues, this is not about autonomy; it is about abandonment.[12] The expansion of MAID without corresponding investments in housing, income, and care is social murder (and entirely avoidable) — it exposes how our society would rather kill disabled people than support us.

Housing is a DJ issue. Disabled people are overrepresented in institutions, face higher rates of homelessness, and are often denied accessible or affordable housing.[13] In Ontario, people receiving assistance through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) can have their benefits reduced or cut off if they marry or live with a partner, because their spouse's income and assets are counted in eligibility assessments.[14] This policy forces many disabled people into financial dependence on our partners, limiting autonomy and increasing vulnerability to abuse. Organizations like Disability Without Poverty, the ODSP Action Coalition, and Parkdale Housing Justice Network have long drawn these connections between inadequate support and increased risk.

DJ is also deeply tied to labour rights, particularly when it comes to care work. The JUST CARE Toolkit from the Disability Justice Network of Ontario (DJNO) Prison Project highlights how disabled people and care workers alike are navigating systems that are exploitative, unsafe, and often invisibilized. Care work is deeply racialized and gendered, and DJ calls for collective transformation in how we value and structure care.

The criminal legal system is another structure where violence intersects. Disabled people, especially those experiencing mental distress, are often criminalized rather than supported. The DJNO Prison Project reminds us that for many disabled people — particularly Black, Indigenous, trans and queer people — interactions with police can be deadly. Sins Invalid, in their statement on police violence, writes:

"We do not see training as a viable solution, since it leaves intact the fundamental belief of the police that their purpose is to 'control the situation.' As people with disabilities, our bodies and minds are not controllable and cannot always comply — this must be understood. Our bodies and minds are not criminal. We are unique and we celebrate our complexities."[15]

Cross-movement organising extends to climate justice, with clear links between colonial violence on the land and on Indigenous communities. We see the disabling effects of colonial violence in Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows) First Nation in Ontario. Between 1962-1970 the Dryden paper mill contaminated the English-Wabigoon River system with mercury, poisoning the water and fish. Mercury poisoning continues to impact generations of Indigenous people in Grassy Narrows and neighbouring Wabaseemoong (Whitedog) First Nation, causing severe health impacts and disability.[16] As Sins Invalid writes: "We must address not just health, not just respect for bodily autonomy, but also the fight for justice for all oppressed people and the earth itself."[17]

We are also living through global, mass-disabling events such as COVID-19 and multiple genocides including Palestine and Sudan. Both reveal large-scale failures of care, public health, and international justice. DJ frameworks recognize that disability does not occur in isolation, but emerges from collective traumas and systemic neglect. Justice for disabled people must also mean justice for the land, for migrants, for colonized people, and for future generations.

In Practice: GBV & Commitment to cross-movement organizing

For GBV practitioners, the cross movement organizing principle is a call to expand the boundaries of our work. GBV is compounded by housing insecurity, poverty, incarceration, environmental racism, barriers to accessing care and more. When survivors have access to safe housing, livable income, and community support, they have more options, autonomy, and resources to navigate safety on their own terms. When we partner across movements — housing, income justice, disability rights, abolition, climate justice, and others — we reduce the risk of violence and increase the conditions for safety. This might look like supporting tenant organizing, advocating for stronger income supports, or challenging ableism within our own organizations. Cross-movement work is not a distraction from GBV, it is one of the most powerful tools we have to prevent and respond to it.

5: Recognizing wholeness

DJ teaches us that disabled people are not broken, lacking, or in need of fixing: we are whole. Our lives are not defined by what we lack, what we struggle with, or what systems fail to provide. Rather, our lives are complex, valuable, and filled with meaning — not despite disability, but within and through it.

Mia Mingus writes, “I was forced to put on my painful brace. A brace that I didn’t need to be whole, but others needed me to wear so that I could be “the right kind of disabled child”. One who they needed to be seen as trying to be as abled as possible, trying to fix myself and my walk and my body to be something other than I was. Something other than I am.”[18]

Mingus’s reflection speaks to a broader societal pattern — one where disabled people are expected to appear as though they are trying to “improve” in order to be seen as worthy of care. The idea that support must be earned through compliance or the performance of progress underlies many forms of ableist violence and neglect. It is deeply embedded in medical systems, social services, and even GBV supports. This shows up in language that labels survivors as “non-compliant” or “difficult” when we decline certain supports, or in policies that require proof of impairment to access accommodations. It assumes that disability is only legitimate if it is tragic, fixable, or documented.

Recognizing wholeness rejects the idea that value is tied to productivity, conformity, or the ability to appear “normal.” It insists that disabled people are experts in our own lives, and that care should be built around dignity and trust, not compliance or control.

In Practice: GBV & recognizing wholeness

In GBV work, recognizing wholeness means rejecting the impulse to fix, cure, or correct. It means offering support based on what a person says they need — not what a system assumes they should want. Disabled survivors are the experts of our own experience. Practitioners can hold space for the fullness of who we are, beyond diagnostic labels or trauma narratives. This also means designing services that reflect the multidimensional realities of disabled people — as parents, partners, youth, elders, newcomers, queer and trans people, and people with intersecting identities.

6: Sustainability

Sustainability in DJ challenges the pace and priorities of capitalism. It is not just about longevity or resource management — it's about honouring our diverse bodies, capacities, and needs. This principle reminds us that sustainability begins with care for ourselves and each other. It asks us to reject urgency for urgency's sake, and to build movements that last by centering care, pacing, and interdependence. We are not machines, and our organizing cannot mirror the systems we are trying to undo. adrienne maree brown reminds us that ease is natural: "What is easy is sustainable. Birds coast when they can."[19]

DJ invites us to slow down. To resist the culture of hyperproductivity that pushes us to overextend ourselves in the name of efficiency or progress. In our movements, it shows up as burnout, scarcity thinking, and crisis response cycles that leave no room for reflection, grief, or rest. Tema Okun names "urgency" as a core characteristic of white supremacy culture — a pressure to move fast, make quick decisions, and prioritize output over people.[20]

In Practice: GBV & sustainability

In GBV work, sustainability means resisting the pressure to push forward at all costs. This sector is chronically underfunded and overworked, often operating in permanent crisis mode. But urgency can't be our default. Sustainability means developing realistic work plans. It means leadership that understands things often take longer than expected. It means timelines shaped in collaboration, not imposed from above. On a basic level, it means offering food at meetings, quiet places to rest, and asking what people need in order to stay present. We cannot dismantle violence in ways that reproduce harm. DJ reminds us that how we work is part of the work.

7: Commitment to cross-disability solidarity

DJ means there is no disability hierarchy. It calls us to resist the tendency to prioritize one kind of access over another, or to only center support for those whose needs are most visible or most convenient to meet. It is a call to remember and protect each other.

In her essay *Wherever You Are Is Where I Want To Be*, Mia Mingus writes about crip solidarity as our refusal to abandon each other across differences in access, communication, and embodiment. She describes a love that is political and practical — showing up for each other not only in the ways we are familiar with, but in the ways others need.[21] This kind of solidarity demands emotional maturity, flexibility, and a commitment to connection that isn't built on performance or convenience.

Cross-disability solidarity means advocating for policies and practices that support all disabled people — whether we use wheelchairs, screen readers, interpreters, medication, service animals, rest breaks, stim toys, flexible participation, or simply need others to move at a slower pace. It means recognizing that access isn't a checklist, it's a relationship with self and others that is built on trust, consent, and care.

DJ explicitly includes mental health issues, trauma, and neurodivergence. This means recognizing that PTSD, complex PTSD, depression, anxiety, brain injuries, sensory processing differences, and cognitive disabilities are all part of disability. DJ pushes back against the medical model, which often isolates and pathologizes these experiences, and instead embraces a political, cultural, and relational model of disability. Within this framework, trauma is not just a personal diagnosis, it is a response to systemic harm.[22] Survivors of GBV often live with trauma-related disabilities, and they deserve access and care that reflects the full range of how disability is experienced.

Mia Mingus reminds us that disability justice requires us to imagine new ways of being in relationship — ways that hold space for complexity, interdependence, and the emotional labour of care. She writes: "We will find other ways (create our own ways) and talk liberation and access and interdependency with our comrades. We will weave need into our relationships like golden, shimmering glimmers of hope — opportunities to build deeper, more whole and practice what our world could look like."[21]

In Practice: GBV & commitment to cross-disability solidarity

In GBV work, this principle reminds us that access must be expansive, responsive, and holistic. It is not enough to provide one kind of support and assume it works for everyone. One survivor might need plain language and extended processing time. Another might need scent-free space and flexible lighting. Another might need support workers, extra time, or accessible tech. Cross-disability solidarity invites us to expect difference and to design our spaces and services with that difference in mind. In doing so, we create environments where more people can participate, heal, and lead, and where no one gets left behind.

8: Interdependence

DJ rejects the capitalist ideal of hyper-independence — that each person is solely responsible for their achievements and failures, and that empathy is a weakness. DJ is rooted in shared responsibility and collective care. It reminds us that all people depend on one another, and that interdependence is not something to be ashamed of, but rather, is something to build, nourish, and protect. In fact, networks of care and mutual aid can meet our needs more directly than the often-inadequate systems set up for us. By caring for each other, we reduce our dependency on waged labour and divest from capitalist and colonial authority (see 3: Anti–capitalist politic).

Interdependence means building relationships rooted in trust, reciprocity, and shared responsibility, not control, compliance, or hierarchy. It means helping disabled people maintain spaces where we can openly share our experiences and support each other. And it means creating systems of care that are flexible, community-led, and sustainable.

In Practice: GBV & interdependence

In GBV work, interdependence offers a pathway out of isolation and into community-based care, connection, and healing. It reminds us that survivors do not just need services, we need people. Friends, family, neighbours, colleagues and community members who are prepared to show up with commitment and care. Supporting interdependence means helping survivors build and maintain these networks. It means recognizing that safety lives not in systems, but in relationships.

One practical tool that can support this work is “pod mapping”, developed by Mia Mingus for the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC). Pod mapping invites us to identify people in our lives — not professionals, but chosen community — who we can turn to in moments of harm, crisis, or need. These “pods” form networks of mutual care and accountability that do not rely on carceral systems, and can guide survivors in naming and nurturing safe, trusting relationships.

For disabled survivors in particular, this work is vital. Many have been isolated not only by abusers, but by systems that failed to recognize our needs, dismissed our access barriers, and taught us that relying on others is shameful. Some of us may have withdrawn from connection as a way to protect ourselves from harm or surveillance. DJ reminds us that healing is relational — that care does not have to come from institutions, but can emerge through mutual aid, chosen family, and peer support rooted in consent and trust. When GBV service providers support disabled survivors in building and sustaining our own networks of care rather than insisting on professionalized or institutional responses, they are honoring the principle of interdependence. They are saying: you do not have to navigate violence, life and disability alone, and you do not have to do it on someone else’s terms.

Resource

- Pods: The Building Blocks of Transformative Justice & Collective Care https://www.soiltjp.org/our-work/resources/pods

9: Collective access

Collective access is not just about physical access, or inclusivity, it is about recognizing and transforming the inequalities that exist between us. This principle teaches us that access is not an individual need or a one-time fix. It is something we create together, in community, through relationships, trust, and flexibility.

Too often, access is framed as a checklist: a ramp, an ASL interpreter, a plain-language document. These are essential, but they are only part of the picture. DJ reminds us that access is not neutral. It reflects whose needs are already expected, whose comfort is prioritized, and who is seen as too much, too complicated, or too costly to include. Stacey Milbern tells us, "disability justice (and disability itself) has the potential to fundamentally transform everything we think about quality of life, purpose, work, relationships, belonging."[23] Collective access is part of that transformation. It shifts us from "accommodating" individuals to changing how we move, gather, and care for each other. It invites us to plan for difference from the start, not to achieve perfection, but to meet each other where we are.

Sins Invalid reminds us that collective access is also a cultural practice that has been shaped by generations of disabled BIPOC communities who have long created access outside of systems: "As brown, Black and queer-bodied disabled people we bring flexibility and creative nuance that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity, to be in community with each other."[10] This kind of collective access is not institutional. It is adaptive, relational, and born out of love and necessity. It is not about doing everything for everyone. It is about building spaces where people can ask for what they need without shame, and where we respond not with compliance, but with care.

Mia Mingus describes this as "access intimacy" — the experience of feeling genuinely understood, anticipated, and cared for in relation to one's access needs. She writes: "Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs. It could be someone who already knew you needed something without you having to ask, or someone who you've just met who is open to hearing and responding to your access needs without judgment."[24] Access intimacy reminds us that collective access is not just a structural commitment, it is a form of relationship. It is the difference between being tolerated and being expected; between accommodations that "make do" and access that feels like home.

In Practice: GBV & collective access

For GBV practitioners, the concept of collective access is not about doing more, but about doing things differently. It means recognizing that collective access aligns with what you already know: that safety is not a one-size-fits all and healing doesn't happen on a timeline. Collective access asks us to bring that same care to how we design our spaces, policies and relationships. Collective access in this context might look like scent-free policies, low-stimulation environments, support workers, flexible timelines, or culturally specific approaches to healing. But more than any one practice, it is a shift in values: from standardization to adaptability. From checking a box to making a commitment. From doing for to doing with.

10: Collective liberation

No one is left behind: this is the heart of collective liberation. This principle means that we must move together, not just for one another, but with one another. In DJ, liberation is not something we fight for separately, within our own identities or issues. It is something we build through solidarity, interdependence, and shared struggle. As Mia Mingus writes: "Ableism is connected to all of our struggles because it undergirds notions of whose bodies are considered valuable, desirable and disposable."[7]

Ableism does not just hurt disabled people, it upholds the systems that define who is worthy of safety, dignity, or survival. It is intertwined with racism, colonialism, transmisogyny, classism, and societal beliefs about which bodies are seen as "acceptable," "valuable," or "normal." So when we fight ableism, we are also fighting the foundations of many forms of violence, including GBV.

Sins Invalid tells us: “No body or mind can be left behind – only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require.”[10] Collective liberation calls us to recognize that the struggles for racial justice, migrant justice, prison abolition, environmental justice, and GBV work are all connected. None of these movements will succeed if disabled people, especially disabled people who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, queer, trans, poor, and undocumented, are not at the center of the conversation.

In Practice: GBV & collective liberation

In GBV work, collective liberation means building responses to violence that include disabled survivors from the start. Not as an afterthought, not as an “add-on,” but as part of the movement for safety, justice, and freedom. It means understanding how ableism shapes the risks disabled people face, and how systems, including shelters, police, health care, and legal services, often fail to protect or include us. This principle asks us to fight for a future where disabled people are not only safe, but free. Free to move, to love, to lead, and to thrive.

A call to action

Disability justice is essential for our collective work, in the GBV sector and beyond. DJ is more than a framework to apply. It is not just a checklist, or a set of access features, or a policy add-on. It is a cultural, political, and relational commitment to each other, and to a future where no one is left behind. **We cannot end gender-based violence without disability justice.**

This backgrounder has explored the 10 principles of DJ and how they apply to gender-based violence work. Together, they call us to shift how we think about safety, inclusion, leadership, and liberation. Next, we offer some reflection questions and resources. This is an invitation to begin, to revisit, to reimagine together.

Reflection questions

1. How can we respond to violence and harm without creating more violence and harm?
2. What would it mean to work *in service to* disability justice rather than claiming that you are personally doing disability justice?
3. What’s one thing you can shift in your work, your relationships, your assumptions?
4. What supports will help you stay committed for the long haul?

Disability Justice is a movement and a framework that calls us to reimagine access, care, safety, and liberation. It centers the leadership and wisdom of those most impacted and offers principles that can transform how we understand — and respond to — violence. The 10 Principles of Disability Justice, developed by Sins Invalid, offer a path towards transforming how we understand and respond to GBV. Moving from theory to practice means reshaping the foundations of how support is offered, who is centered, and what we mean by safety.

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Practicing Disability Justice in GBV Work: 10 Principles in Practice

Intersectionality

How intersecting systems of oppression affect marginalized peoples.

Leadership of those most impacted

Disabled people are leaders, researchers, teachers and changemakers.

Anti-capitalist politic

Our worth is not measured by our productivity.

Cross-movement organising

We won't end GBV without housing justice, racial justice, climate justice and disability justice.

Recognizing wholeness

Disabled people are complex, brilliant, whole and multidimensional.

Sustainability

Rest is not optional. Urgency is not care.

Collective Access

Access is not a one-time fix, it's a shared, evolving responsibility.

Interdependence

Needing each other is not a failure, it is a strength.

Collective Liberation

No body or mind can be left behind.

Cross-disability solidarity

There is no single way to be disabled. Access must reflect our differences.

Based on and adapted from the Learning Network Backgrounder "We Won't End Gender-Based Violence Without Disability Justice" authored by Kitty Rodé and Jenna Lopez.

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Resources

- *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People (2nd ed.)* by Sins Invalid.
- *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: https://arsenalpulp.com/Books/C/Care-Work
- *Disability Justice Audit Tool* envisioned by Stacey Park Milbern and written by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: https://www.northwesthealth.org/djauditool
- *Forced Intimacy: An Ableist Norm* by Mia Mingus: https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/08/06/forced-intimacy-an-ableist-norm/
- *Making It Work How-To Guide: Intersectionality in practice:* https://www.makingitwork-crpd.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/MIW%20How-To-Guide-Intersectionality%2008March2022.pdf
- *Sex & Disability with Chanelle Galland and Cyree Jarelle Johnson:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYqB3c37x5A
- *Integrating Crip Theory and Disability Justice into Feminist Anti-Violence Education* by Samuel Z. Shelton: https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/download/704/965
- *Cripping and queering gender-based violence prevention: bridging disability justice, queer joy, and consent education* by JJ Wright and Caitlin Manuel: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691058.2024.2380768
- *What is White Supremacy Culture?* by Tema Okun: https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/what-is-it.html
- *Care without Institutions* by seeley quest: https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/care-without-institutions
- *femora and fury: on IPV and disability* by Peggy Munson in *The Revolution Starts at Home:* https://www.akpress.org/revolutionstartsathome.html
- *Access is Love: List of Readings and Resources* by Sandy Ho, Mia Mingus, and Alice Wong: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TY9k_S0oLUVXEhI1FdmT8yaG_28cbcBStuyM9wXag6k/edit?usp=sharing
- *Rooting Resilience: A Needs Assessment about Women with Disabilities, Gender-Based violence, and the potential of Peer Support Services* by Dr. Jihan Abbas and DAWN Canada: https://dawncanada.net/resource/rooting-resilience-a-needs-assessment-about-women-with-disabilities-gender-based-violence-and-the-potential-of-peer-support-services/
- *Inclusion in practice: helping people with intellectual disabilities experiencing gender-based violence* by Disability Alliance BC: https://disabilityalliancebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Inclusion-In-Practice-Guide.pdf
- *Providing Disability-Affirmative Care: Deconstructing Ableism in Trauma Support* by Dr. Kaley Roosen: https://www.gbvlearningnetwork.ca/webinars/recorded-webinars/2020/webinar-2020-7.html
- Readings & Other Media by the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC): https://batjc.org/readings-other-media/

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