**Executive Summary**

Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women in Canada

**Issue and Need:**

The Criminal Code and Family Laws throughout Canada prohibit violence against women. Human Rights legislation, including international treaties such as the CEDAW and the CRPD further prohibit systemic discrimination. However the lived experiences of women with disabilities and Deaf women tell a different story.

Women with disabilities and Deaf women, through the intersectional lens/multiple identity positions they hold, are the largest, poorest minority group in Canada with the highest rates of physical, systemic, financial, psychological and interpersonal/family violence. The rate of violence for this cohort is 2 to 3 times that of non-disabled women.

Since it is largely within Provincial and Territorial jurisdictions (P/T) that the issue of violence would be addressed from both a policy and programmatic perspective, it follows that our initiative will focus in these areas.

**Objectives:**

* To encourage the development of provincial/territorial policies, programs and services in the Police, Victim Services and Violence Against Women (VAW) sectors so that they are better able to address violence against women with disabilities (WWD) and Deaf women.
* To raise the awareness of policy makers and service providers in the Police, Victim Services and VAW sectors of the specific needs of WWD and Deaf women who are experiencing violence.
* To empower WWD and Deaf Women to provide their recommendations and solutions to addressing violence directly to policy makers and service providers in the Police, Victim Services and Violence Against Women (VAW) sectors.

**Project Management and Design:**

With our most recent /current funding from the Women’s Program - Status of Women Canada, DAWN-RAFH Canada and its community-based partners have spent the last three (3) years working in (13) thirteen communities across Canada with our IN FOCUS initiative to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of abuse experienced by women with disabilities and Deaf women in Canada. With this knowledge, a Toolkit and Training Resources including a workshop series and educational resources designed from an intersectional /cross disability perspective have been developed for Policy Makers and Service Providers. These resources are also designed to support women with disabilities and Deaf women who are experiencing violence to be empowered to come forward, to seek resources and to speak out against it.

A key to the success of the IN FOCUS project was the establishment of networks at the community level that included important stakeholders such as women with disabilities and Deaf women and service providers (Police, VAW and Victims Services, Disability organizations, Social and Health Services). Together, they identified the issues and recommended solutions at the local level. A clear message that has emerged from this community research is that beyond the urgent need to create a national network of resources including accessible shelters and transition houses, there is a need to address the alarming rates of secondary systemic violence experienced by women with disabilities and Deaf women due to gaps in service provision.

This initiative builds on the important learnings drawn out through the In Focus initiative and grounds us beyond theory into the practical realm of how change happens for individuals - which is through an engaged community development process that continuously informs policy (and policy-makers) who are responsible for ensuring that service providers are able to deliver services that reflect the real community need.

**Planned Results:**

As a result of this initiative, provincial/territorial policies, programs and services in the Police, Victim Services and Violence Against Women (VAW) sectors will be better able to address violence against women with disabilities (WWD) and Deaf women.

As well, women with disabilities and Deaf Women will be better able to articulate their recommendations and solutions to addressing violence directly to policy makers and service providers in the Police, Victim Services and Violence Against Women (VAW) sectors.