

BARRIER FREE LIVING'S HISTORY

Barrier Free Living (BFL) began in 1978 as a Federally-funded Research and Demonstration Project to work with newly disabled New Yorkers.

In 1981, the project spun off from the Federation of the Handicapped and became a separately incorporated tax-exempt not-for-profit.

In 1982, BFL became the first new program to be funded by the City Department of Mental Health in ten (10) years.

In 1983, BFL began to see a change in what was happening to homeless people with disabilities. With the combination of cutbacks in subsidized housing and stricter utilization review standards created under the Reagan Administration, we began to see more individuals in wheelchairs being discharged to the street.

In 1985, BFL was funded to create the first transitional shelter for severely disabled homeless people. BFL Transitional Residence Program was recognized by HUD and the State Department as one of 150 model programs for the homeless in the country during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

In 1986, the focus of the Mental Health Clinic expanded to begin work with disabled victims of domestic violence. From 1986 through 1997, BFL served some 1,800 disabled victims of domestic violence.

In 1987, BFL began a mobile outreach team to work with homeless people with disabilities. The team works with individuals living on the streets and in public buildings and parks as well as individuals living in shelters who need their special expertise.

In 1994, BFL collaborated with Shakti Productions in the making of "Sisters Heard, Sisters Unseen", a video about the forgotten populations in the domestic violence service arena. That film premiered in the 1995 International Woman's Conference in Beijing China.

In 1996, BFL's Domestic Violence Program received a national award from the National Safety Council for Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities.

In October of 1997, Barrier Free Living began a contract with the Human Resources Administration to provide non-residential domestic violence services to victims with disabilities on a citywide basis.

In 1998, Barrier Free Living began a collaboration with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office called Barrier Free Justice. This program, Funded with Violence Against Women Act Dollars, identifies every disabled victim of domestic violence In the Brooklyn Criminal Court System.

Every individual is evaluated for their need for service and relates to services at Barrier Free Living and South Brooklyn Legal Services. BFL has been instrumental in organizing training for district attorneys, police officers and agencies that work closely with the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office.

In 1998, BFL was recognized as one of ten model programs for disabled victims of domestic violence in the country by the Department of Justice's Office of Victims of Crime and the National Organization of Victim's Assistance.

In 1999, as part of its own VAWA initiative, BFL staff trained over 500 New York City Police Department sergeants and began a series of trainings that would ultimately train every domestic violence police officer in the City of New York on issues related to working with domestic violence victims with disabilities.

In 2000, BFL became the lead agency for providing Social Security outreach and counseling services to disabled New Yorkers living in Manhattan and Staten Island. The thrust of the program was to assist individuals in their transition from Social Security to work.

In 2000 and 2001, BFL received grants from The Doors of Hope and from United Way of Greater New York to institute a domestic violence prevention program with disabled students in New York City public schools. BFL staff have targeted ten public schools have provided training to both parents and teachers of disabled students.

In 2002, Barrier Free Living was asked to coordinate all Project Liberty post 9/11 outreach and counseling for disabled New Yorkers. BFL staff and partners served 10,000 New Yorkers in the life of that program.

In 2002, BFL's president was a presenter in the First International Conference on Abuse of Children and Adults with Disabilities in Riverside, California.

In 2002, BFL was funded to create the first totally accessible domestic violence emergency shelter in the country.

In 2004, BFL began construction of the shelter.

In 2005, BFL's President participated in a two-day Disability Grant Program Focus Group for the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Violence against Women

In 2006, Freedom House opened. It is the first totally accessible domestic violence shelter for disabled victims of domestic violence (or victims of domestic violence with children with disabilities). Freedom House has worked with victims with disabilities from over 40 states, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Ghana. Most individuals served are from New York City.

Barrier Free Living's Non-Residential Domestic Violence Program (Secret Garden) has received the prestigious 2009 Mary Byron Project *'Celebrating Solutions'* Award.

The highly-selective award is given to programs considered national models for their innovative and outstanding work in breaking the cycle of domestic violence.

In 2012, the U.S. Office of Violence against Women awarded BFL a grant to form a collaborative to create national protocols to address services for deaf victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. In an unprecedented move by OVW, that project has been funded through FY 2019. We have been encouraged by OVW staff to reapply for different issues. BFL's partners are the District Attorney of New York County, Harlem Independent Living Center, CONNECT, and the Sexual Assault Treatment Program formerly at St. Luke's/Roosevelt Hospital.

In 2015, BFL opened 120 units of supportive housing for survivors of domestic violence, people diverted from nursing homes and disabled vets.

In 2017, the Manhattan District Attorney awarded BFL a three-year, \$1.5 million grant to expand our work with deaf victims. This work is part of Manhattan District Attorney's \$250 million Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII). A deaf social worker and a deaf case manager have been hired, our American Sign Language/Certified Deaf Interpreter budget has been expanded and sign language classes for the staff of our domestic violence programs have been included.