



# Department of Justice



## Office of Justice Programs

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CONTACT: KARA MCCARTHY. 202-307-1241  
KARA.MCCARTHY@OJP.USDOJ.GOV

### **DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RECOGNIZES BRONX ORGANIZATION WITH INNOVATION IN VICTIM SERVICES AWARD**

WASHINGTON – The Office for Victims of Crime, a component of the Justice Department’s Office of Justice Programs, presented staff of Barrier Free Living from Bronx, New York, with the Professional Innovation in Victim Services Award. This award category recognizes a program, organization, or individual who has helped to expand the reach of victims’ rights and services.

“For over three decades, Barrier Free Living has been a fierce advocate for the D/deaf and disabled community, providing a wide range of critical services, including shelter and housing, occupational therapy, emergency childcare and multi-language sign language classes,” said Amy L. Solomon, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General of OJP. “Its talented and dedicated staff—both hearing and Deaf social workers, mental health counselors and case managers—have been a lifeline to underserved victims of abuse from across the country.”

Barrier Free Living was founded in 1981 to provide services to D/deaf and disabled individuals, but staff quickly learned there was a need for specialized care for clients who suffered abuse from family members or significant others. Domestic violence became a primary focus of its mental health program and evolved into the creation of several innovative programs: Secret Garden, Freedom House, Beyond Freedom and Barrier Free Living Apartments.

Secret Garden, a safe and secure community-based program for adult domestic violence survivors with disabilities and those who are D/deaf, offers occupational therapy as part of its healing and recovering process. Freedom House is a domestic violence shelter that also offers counseling for children and their parents and a childcare center. Beyond Freedom is a transitional support group of current and former Freedom House residents who meet to discuss experiences, progress, challenges, barriers and successes as they navigate life after residential living. The Barrier Free Living Apartments program offers permanent housing for people with disabilities who have experienced violence. It opened in 2015 and now has 70 studio apartments for single individuals and 50 one- and two-bedroom apartments for families.

“Victims who are D/deaf or have a disability endure exceptional hardship and face extraordinary challenges, and they are often unable to find the support they need and deserve,” said Kristina Rose, Director of OVC. “Barrier Free Living offers a place of refuge and opens up avenues to healing as

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survivors try to navigate their next steps in life.”

Every April, OVC leads communities across the country in observing National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. President Ronald W. Reagan proclaimed the first Victims’ Rights Week in 1981, calling for greater sensitivity to the rights and needs of victims. This year’s observance is taking place April 24-30, and features the theme, “Rights, Access, Equity, for All Victims.”

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance and other resources to improve the nation’s capacity to prevent and reduce crime, advance racial equity in the administration of justice, assist victims and enhance the rule of law. More information about OJP and its components can be found at [www.ojp.gov](http://www.ojp.gov).

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