**Questions**

1. What are the biggest barriers for you or other people with disability in the criminal justice system?

Persistent attitudinal barriers, discrimination and structural violence which creates entrenched social disadvantage and social exclusion. The experience and skills of person's with disabiltites are profoundly devalued or ignored. They are often percieved as being unable to make their own decisons, take responsibility or as economically unvaluable. I have experienced such attitudes at community legal services where staff were often dismissive and reluctant to significantly intervene or advocate for me. The cost of legal advocacy is increasingly prohibitive-and one must be aware of current funding issues with public legal services. I have often encountered inexperienced and incompetent workers at community legal services and legal aid services. There is a reluctance and lack of skill among welfare and disability workers in regards to legal issues faced by clients. There is often a denial of issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse in families with the dominant model of carer relationships structuring many disability services. There is also an attitudinal response that somehow persons with disabilitites are more violent or prone to crime. There is often a great power imbalance with abusers and perpetrators of crime against persons with disabilites. Perpetrators are often able to 'hide' their behaviour and are not held accountable. This pattern often occurs in the care system where workers are often complicit with the crime-particularly financial crimes, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Also, persons with disabilities, lack awareness of their rights or advocacy and self advocacy-this may lead to behaviours which police or legal workers find challenging. They may internalise what they are experiencing for a long time and this may result in self-destructive behaviours associated with guilt and shame. They may also experience isolation. Lack of awareness and access to advocates may put some persons with disabilites at risk of comitting crime-as the 'fight back' against perpetrators or abusers. These issues may also be compaunded by factors such as regional and rural communitites, aboriginality, gender, religion and language and culture. Criminal violence is also a contributor to disability and many workers are unaware of this-chosing to focus on a medical 'fact', deficit or lack. There are also bureaucratic issues that create barriers to accessing justice. I left one state to get to safety but was unable to access an advocate as I had left the state where the crime had occurred. Often, no one is charged when a person with a disability experiences a crime and therefore they do not have access to victims services or crimes compensation. Many are left in extremely vulnerable positions. Crime also contributes to homelessness and homeless people have difficulty accessing legal support or reporting crimes against themselves. Police lack awareness of disability issues and stereotype and discriminate against persons with disabilitites. Increasingly services are being bureaucratised and people are numbers. They are falling through the gaps. I think most workers lack basic communication competencies. They also lack training, awarenss and skill in so many areas and are failing to have meaningful interventions in their clients lives. So people are falling through the gaps and being at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crimes. The disability sector is inefficient, poorly resourced, unaccountable and still basically runs like an institution. I also don't think many people with disabilities are encouraged early on to change challenging behaviours and this puts them at risk of criminal activity. They are treated like they cannot change-rather than looking at the context of their behaviour and many of the institutional environemnts they are in.

The nature of law iiself is prohibitive as it is constructed around a dominant subject-who is able bodied and able minded. Law is not necessarily ethical or moral but constructed around rules and language and precedents. The statutory acts are not necessarily made by person's with disabilities and make all sorts of assumptions about their identity and legal status. They are often constructed legally in such a way that they do not have the same human rights as other people. Lack of human rights for persons with disabilities than affects things like health care, marriage, housing and access to employment. The nature of law is that just because a person experiences a lost or harm-does not entitle them to be compensated for this.

2.      What could be done to remove these barriers and help people with disability in the criminal justice system?

More high skilled professional jobs for people with disabilities and research by persons with disabilities. Leadership roles for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities employed and at the centre of service delivery. Public Inquiries into abuse of Persons With Disabiltiies in which their voices are heard. There is growing anger. Changing attitudal barriers. More funding to address discrimination-particularly among educated professional workers. More awareness of harrassment issues. More awareness of harmful supports-drugs, sterilisation, physical restraints, limiting attidudes, incompetent and undereducated workers, education systems and training of workers. Changing research and teaching methodologies at universities. RESPECT. CARE. COLLABORATION. LEARNING. HEALING. DIGNITY.

3.      Can you provide information about support that has helped you or other people with disability to participate in the criminal justice system?

Women's refuges and women's services. Drug and alcohol services. Having a safe home and accessing a small holistic housing service.  It took nearly twenty years and a near death experience-but I finally met workers who unconditonally accepted and believed in me and have a safe home. I still have a way to go. But I am getting perspective and I am safe. Accountable services and protection for people who make complaints. Improving communication skills among workers. Access to meaningful mainstream education and employnment. Vocational Education and Training-Tafe. Police. Notice, I have not said DISABILITY SERVICES of FAMILY. Undertaking study of law. Studying conflict managmement, negotiation, reading the book 'Everyone Can Win'. Having a peer community through social media and becoming more aware of services (including legal services and law firms) through social media. Nelson Mandela. Learning about compassionate listening, non violence, forgiveness and reconciliation. Including hope in my vocabulary.

4.      Please tell us about any time that you or another person with disability experienced barriers to justice.

 As a victim of domestic violence I encountered police who just did not see me as worthy of their time. When I became homeless, they thought this was normal as I was a person with a disability. I also encountered legal services who did not have the time or resources-or care to provide adequate legal assistance. I have not been able to afford to pursue civil actions.

As a victim of sexual assault I did not have access to sexual assault services as a person with a disabiltity and experienced 'blame and shame' from disabiltiy workers and services. These experiences led to significant health problems, distress, grief and emotional disregulation over the years.

I experienced harrassment and discrimination and interanlised this as I did not have enough awareness of my rights or what I could do about this. I internalised this and blamed myself and this led to significant distress and health issues. When, I finally talked back-tried to stand up for myself, 'fight back'-as I was not aware of advocacy support or self-advocacy-it 'came out all wrong'-and I was brought to the attention of an organisation that investigates mass murder and terrorism. This is in part once more a steretype of the person with a disability as inherantly unreasonable, violent, different etc. and a way for a large organistion with a lot of power and money to reduce its liabilty. I think awarenss of violence is a good thing but I think broadening definiation of violence also enables large organisations to avoid being accountable to clients and to reduce their liabiltiy.

Most disability workers do not have the skills or knowledge to support clients with legal issues. In fact, most community services do not have resources for legal support. Community outreach by legal services are "crap"-totally inadequate and the workers are usually rude and arogant-and not resourced or skilled to deal with the hard stuff.

5.      Do you have any other thoughts, ideas or comments you would like to make about people with disability and the criminal justice system?

Please look at your methodologies and who is authoring this report. Please don't stereotype us a a bunch of victims-it is such a diservice and profoundly devaluing. Please listen for the stories of hope, resilience and reconciliation. So please really listen.