

Communicating with Police

March 2013

- Voiceover** Krystine Donato talks about her experience communicating with police to Pamela Cross, lawyer.
- Pamela Cross** I think we have all heard stories about experiences that individual people have had when they have tried to access say a lawyer for advice or have gone to the police to report a crime sometimes those are stories with happy endings and sometimes not.
- I know a story I heard recently about a woman with a communication disability who was sexually assaulted by a taxi driver in her home and he actually said to her, “Oh, I thought you would want it” which is pretty outrageous itself. She initially didn’t do anything and then saw on the news that this guy was charged with assaulting another woman with a disability, and of course, it is every likelihood that this guy has a pattern....that he has been methodically assaulting women with disabilities and assumed he could get away with it, because as we have already talked about in our conversation, often people with disabilities, especially with communication disabilities, are reluctant to go to the police.
- So that’s the bad end of the story, but Krystine, you were talking to me a few minutes ago about a situation where you had to give a statement to the police and things went quite well. Can you talk to us a bit about that?

Krystine Donato Yeah, without going into details, I did have to give a statement and I was quite impressed. Everything that we talked about with communication disabilities, like going to a quiet place to talk, really focusing on the person. Everything that we've already said the officer did. He took me to a quiet room, he listened to my statement. He looked for clarification. If he didn't understand, he didn't assume that he knew. What I said he asked me a couple of times just to be sure that he had the whole story right so I was quite impressed. So, yeah.

Pamela Cross Did you feel like the officer allowed you enough time?

Krystine Donato Oh yes. Definitely. He told me I could take my time. You know even when he was going over the questions again he made sure that I was comfortable and he wasn't looking for me to repeat it because he didn't believe it. He wanted me to repeat it because he wanted to make sure he got it right.

Pamela Cross So you felt believed?

Krystine Donato Oh definitely.

Pamela Cross Well, it is great to hear those stories because so often that's not the case. I think when we are trying to talk about how to make things better we tend to focus on where the problems are but I think it's also important to acknowledge that there are great police officers, there are great lawyers. You know there are lots of attendant care providers who do an excellent job, who are respectful who are not the least bit abusive with their clients and so on.