Adult Advocacy Centers

An Inclusive and Individualized Response for Victims of Crime with Disabilities:

The Adult Advocacy Centers' Model

National statistics show that individuals with disabilities are more likely to experience abuse than people without disabilities (Harrell, 2017).[1] The Disability and Abuse Project (2013) reported that more than 70 percent of people with disabilities who were surveyed reported that they had been victims of abuse. More than 63 percent of family members said their loved one with a disability had been a victim of abuse. Focusing exclusively on individuals with developmental disabilities, 62.5 percent reported that they had experienced abuse (Coleman, 2013)[2] and are 2.5 to 10 times more likely to experience abuse and neglect than their non-disabled peers (Kendall-Tackett, 2002).[3] In spite of the high rates of abuse and trauma faced by individuals with disabilities and the likelihood that the actual numbers of abuse cases are much higher (possibly underreported due to increased isolation, fear of not being believed, fear of retribution, communication styles, etc.), there is still a shortage of research and training regarding how to provide support for crime victims with disabilities (McGilvery, 2018).[4] The national statistics demonstrate a significant prevalence of abuse against people with disabilities and the clear need for a unique response.

This presentation introduces audience members to the Adult Advocacy Centers (AACs), a new model of services created to support adults with disabilities who have been abused. Ohio is the first state in the nation to develop centers that will be equipped to provide holistic, accessible, and trauma-informed services for adult crime victims with disabilities in a universal and multisensory environment. Ohio is also unique due to its robust system that was established over sixty years ago to provide services for individuals with developmental disabilities. Ohio's 88 counties each have their own county board of developmental disabilities and those 88 county boards are mandated through the state of Ohio's Department of Developmental Disabilities. The AACs conducted a needs assessment in 2019 through the county boards to determine what services were available to crime victims with disabilities. The assessment results validated what had long been suspected—Ohio currently lacks adequate support services, prosecutions, and appropriately-trained forensic interviewers for adult victims of crime with disabilities. With local

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[1]Harrell, E. (2017). Crime against persons with disabilities 2009–2015 - Statistical tables. *Bureau of Justice Statistics.* https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0915st.pdf

[2] Coleman, T. (2013). Statistics on Abuse Should Inform the Legislative Process. http://disabilityandabuse.org/abuse-statistics.pdf

[3] Kendall-Tackett, K. (2002). The health effects of childhood abuse: Four pathways by which abuse can influence health. *Child Abuse Neglect*, 26(6–7), 715–729.

[4] McGilvery, S. (2018). The Identification and Treatment of Trauma in Individuals with Developmental Disabilities. Kingston, NY: NADD Press.

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and statewide support, Ohio is committed to working toward equality in the field of victim services. The AACs will be the embodiment of this commitment.

10 Adult Advocacy Centers (AAC) and a mobile unit will be located throughout Ohio and will collaborate with community, regional, and state agencies to coordinate a response that promotes the safety and well-being of all individuals. To provide these services, the AACs will facilitate multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) within local communities. The AACs' Multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) include the following: local county boards of developmental disabilities, mental health agencies, AAC staff counselors, victim service agencies/advocates, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, medical staff, adult protective services, and other agencies, as needed. This presentation will highlight some of the essential services provided through the MDTs and how to coordinate the services in order to ensure that crime victims with disabilities are supported in a comprehensive and trauma-informed manner. Some of these services include the following:

- Forensic interviews by highly-trained and skilled investigators
- Forensic medical exams conducted by forensic nurses who specialize in working with crime victims with disabilities
- Connection to law enforcement agencies
- Early connection to prosecutors
- Mental health screenings, consultations, and services
- Connection to disability-specific agencies and organizations
- Victim services, advocacy, court accompaniment, case updates, and notifications
- 24/7 emergency medical responses (at local ERs)
- Mobile forensic interview teams for individuals in locations unable to reach an AAC
- Monthly case review meetings with the MDTs
- Ongoing training to better serve crime victims with disabilities
- Peer review to help forensic interview team members stay up-to-date on current best practices

At the end of the presentation, audience members will leave with a greater understanding of the various needs of crime victims with disabilities and how the AACs unique design and collaborative efforts will ensure equal accessibility to necessary investigative, prosecutorial, and treatment services when there are allegations of abuse and neglect. People with disabilities who have been victims of abuse or neglect deserve to have their needs met in a holistic manner and remain at the center of the investigation and treatment plan.