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Rockland County
Department of Social
Services
PSA Unit



FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Gladys Carrión, Esq.
Office of Children and Family Services

Welcome to the Fall Issue of the Adult Services Newsletter

This issue includes a list of the recipients of our 2010 Certificates of Recognition for Outstanding Programs and Practices Promoting Protection of Vulnerable Adults, together with a brief summary of the program or practice nominated. The nominations submitted by local commissioners describe a range of exemplary initiatives, including:

- ◆ an impressive modernization of a financial management system, adding enhancements in automation and efficiency;
- ◆ the development of coalitions with other public and private agencies and providers establishing programs to better serve our clients to address issues of hoarding, homelessness, abuse and neglect ;and
- ◆ programs to increase public awareness of the problems of adult abuse and the availability of Protective Services for Adults (PSA) to assist.

We congratulate the honorees for their innovations and their dedication to improving outcomes for our vulnerable adult clients. In upcoming issues of the *Newsletter*, we will provide additional details on some of these initiatives. We hope that you will find a new program or practice that you may wish to use or adapt for use in your own community.

Gladys Carrión, Esq.



From the Director:

Alan J. Lawitz
Bureau of Adult Services

A Disturbing Trend: Intra-Family Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Vulnerable Adults

A review of recent ASAP data confirms what many of us have come to believe over time: that the great majority of incidents of abuse, exploitation and neglect of PSA clients is reported to be perpetrated by the victim's family members, rather than by persons outside of the family.

In 2008 and 2009, our bureau worked with the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Division of Information Technology (IT) to further refine our data collection in ASAP so that all reported suspected perpetrators of abuse / neglect by caregiver or financial exploitation can be tracked as being in one of the following four categories:

1. Spouse / Significant Other;
2. Family Member (child, grandchild, nephew, niece, etc., but excluding Spouse / Significant Other);
3. Non-Family (again, excluding Spouse / Significant Other); or
4. Unspecified

Once the caseworker reports the suspected perpetrator under one of these categories, there is a prompt to provide the more specific relationship (e.g., not just Family Member but Uncle; not just Non-Family, but Landlord).

We reviewed 2009 data for PSA clients at the stages of Open-Assessment and Open-Ongoing, within the counties using ASAP (i.e., all counties in New York State except those located within New York City). (We used these stages of the case because caseworkers would have more detailed information than at the earlier stage of Open-Intake.) Here are the reported aggregate characteristics of suspected perpetrators under the following categories:

I. Physical Abuse

Open-Assessment

Males	54.05%
Females	39.19
Unspecified	6.76

Open-Ongoing

Males	50%
Females	37.5
Unspecified	12.50

Family Member	64.86%
Spouse/Sig. Other	16.22%
Non-Family	17.57

Family Member	54.17%
Spouse/Sig. Other	14.56
Non-Family	29.17

II. Psychological Abuse

Open-Assessment

Males	50%
Females	46.81
Unspecified	3.19

Open-Ongoing

Males	47.22%
Females	50.00
Unspecified	2.78

Family Member	72.34%
Spouse/Sig. Other	11.70
Non-Family	13.83

Family Member	66.67%
Spouse/Sig. Other	13.89
Non-Family	18.06

III. Neglect By Caregiver

Open-Assessment

Males	46.74%
Females	42.75
Unspecified	10.51

Open-Ongoing

Males	44.44%
Females	41.87
Unspecified	10.68

Family Member	63.41%
Spouse/Sig. Other	11.59
Non-Family	21.74

Family Member	62.39%
Spouse/Sig. Other	11.54
Non-Family	23.50

IV. Financial Exploitation

Open- Assessment

Males	42.33%
Females	42.86
Unspecified	14.81

Open-Ongoing

Males	40.67%
Females	43.33
Unspecified	16.00

Family Members	51.85%
Spouse/Sig. Other	2.12
Non-Family	43.92

Family Members	50.67%
Spouse/Sig. Other	2.00
Non-Family	45.33

Some observations may be appropriate here:

- ◆ Family members are the highest percentage of reported suspected perpetrators across all categories.
- ◆ In the category of Psychological Abuse, Spouse / Significant Other is the second highest percentage of reported perpetrators.
- ◆ In the categories of Neglect By Caregiver and Financial Exploitation, non-family is the second highest percentage of reported perpetrators, significantly higher than Spouse / Significant Other.
- ◆ Males are reported as perpetrators of Physical Abuse at a significantly higher percentage than females.
- ◆ The percentages reported for males and females under the category of Neglect By Caregiver are much more equivalent than is the case for Physical Abuse.
- ◆ In the category of Financial Exploitation, females are reported as perpetrators at a somewhat higher percentage than males, and non-family perpetrators are reported at a rate of about 43%.
- ◆ There is a high percentage (over 10%) of reported “Unspecified” gender in both the Neglect by Caregiver and Financial Exploitation categories. It bears repeating that it is critical that caseworkers report in ASAP (and in NYC, its comparable system) the gender as well as the relationships of suspected perpetrators, or document why they are unable to so report. Such reporting will increase our ability to discern trends, and may make it easier to support allocation of service and training resources.

Obviously much more work needs to be done, both in analyzing currently available data and in continuing to refine our capacity to collect data in the future to help us all better understand trends and service needs. We believe the Elder Abuse Prevalence Study funded by OCFS will be of great benefit to us all in this regard. You will be hearing much more about that study in the months to come.

I would also point out that the ASAP data summarized above appears to be consistent with data culled from 2008 Domestic Incident Reports (DIRs) reporting domestic abuse of the elderly investigated by law enforcement authorities across the state. The 2009 annual report of the New York State Committee for the Coordination of Police Services to the Elderly (a multiagency committee of which OCFS is a participant) found:

- ◆ Family relationships (defined to include spouse, child, grandchild, other relatives) accounted for the majority of elder Domestic Incident Reports, 93% in NYC and 86% outside of NYC. (Compare this to our ASAP data for Physical Abuse, Open Assessment for outside of NYC: if you add the Family Members and Spouse/Significant Others categories together, the result is 85.18% of reported perpetrators.)
- ◆ The offender in a domestic violence incident involving the elderly was the child of the elderly victim in almost half (46%) of the incidents in NYC, and 42% in the rest of the state.
- ◆ Offenders characterized as a relative other than the child of the victim comprised the second largest group of offenders (32% in NYC, 25% outside of NYC).
- ◆ Partners (Spouse/Significant Others) comprised 16 % of the DIRs involving the elderly in NYC and 245 in the rest of the state.

In a future newsletter, we will report on ASAP data relating to the characteristics of victims of abuse, exploitation, and caregiver neglect.

In the meantime, please keep recording the gender and relationship to the victim of the suspected perpetrator in your cases.



**CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE 2010
CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION
HONOREES!**

See page 5 for a list of the honorees under the third round of the OCFS Certificates of Recognition, with a new focus on Outstanding Programs and Practices Promoting Protection of Vulnerable Adults.

Our winter newsletter will have stories and pictures celebrating the impressive work of these PSA units from across the state.



**CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION
FOR OUTSTANDING PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES
PROMOTING PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE ADULTS**

LIST OF HONOREES:

1. **Columbia County Department of Social Services:** Adult Services / Foster Care Teaming Initiative, creating a team providing services to bridge the gap between adolescence and adulthood.
2. **Dutchess County Department of Social Services:** Use of Case Manager Aides to provide valuable services (transportation, shopping, teaching homemaking skills) to PSA clients, working in conjunction with PSA case managers and supervisors.
3. **Nassau County Department of Social Services:** Homeless Intervention Team, comprised of representatives of several county agencies, whose mission is to provide outreach and immediate shelter and services to the homeless.
4. **New York City Human Resources Administration:** Financial Focus (Automated System for Management of Representative Payee Accounts), serving over 2,500 clients, replacing the previous system which involved nine separate systems applications, backed up by manual ledger books.
5. **Orange County Department of Social Services:** Mental Health Supportive Case Management – DSS/PSA Collaboration, in which DSS provides adult preventive financial management and other case management needs are met by the mental health system; Orange County Adult Abuse and Neglect Task Force, a coalition of community agencies, business and individuals who meet to resolve complex cases, partner with other providers to serve the needs of vulnerable adults, and increase public awareness of the abuse and neglect of elderly and disabled adults; and Adult Services Petty Cash Fund, a fund established voluntarily by agency employees in memory of a co-worker, which provides additional funds to respond to food and medicine emergencies as well as some of the day to day needs of clients.
6. **Rockland County Department of Social Services:** DSS (Determined to make our Seniors – and all adults – Safe), an annual campaign to raise public awareness of the issues of adult abuse and neglect.
7. **Schenectady County Department of Social Services:** Collaboration Works!, a program of extensive outreach, training and collaboration with other agencies in the community, the results of which have improved outcomes for PSA clients.
8. **Tompkins County Department of Social Services:** Tompkins County Task Force on Hoarding, a multidisciplinary team that organized a conference on hoarding and developed a field guide and an assessment tool in response to increased demand for more local hoarding resources, and which accepts referrals on hoarding cases.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF THE HONOREES!



**INTERVIEW with JOHN FELLA and
MARJORIE WINDHEIM
Rockland County
Department of Social Services
PSA Unit**

John Fella is the director of Adults and Special Services, and Marjorie (Marge) Windheim is a supervisor for the Protective Services for Adults unit of the

Rockland County DSS. Paula Vielkind and Alan Lawitz recently spoke via telephone with John and Marge for the following discussion:

Q. John and Marge, where are you from? Have you always lived in the Hudson Valley?

A. John: I am originally from the Bronx. We moved to Rockland when I was five years old. I have always lived in Rockland County since.

A. Marge: I'm from "Joisey" (Jersey) City, New Jersey. I moved to Rockland County in 1960.

Q. How many years have you been working at Rockland County DSS?

A. John: A lifetime – over 30 years. I have been in various units within the DSS, and since 1986 have worked with PSA.

A. Marge: Over 30 years. I started out in Family Services. I have over 25 years with PSA.

A. John: Marge is still going strong. She's just getting warmed up!

Q. Can you talk about Rockland's PSA caseload and how many staff you each supervise?

A. John: Geographically, Rockland is a very small county. It has about 280,000 people. We have a large senior citizen population. We also have diverse ethnic groups. The current caseload is 219 protective cases. On average we get about 30 cases per month. We just had an outreach in May for Older Adult Month. Usually we get a spike which can go up to 50 or 60 cases. We have also had a restructuring of the agency. Some of those cases that don't neatly fit into any services definition have been referred to us. We made 39 assessments of persons who will be losing their homes or condos due to tax foreclosures. We do an assessment, advise them of resources available.

A. Marge: Rockland is unique, in that it has two PSA units. There are 13 PSA caseworkers and three community services workers. I am one of two PSA supervisors who share supervision responsibility for the PSA unit. I also supervise an Adult Services unit with five caseworkers who conduct joint assessments with Public Health Nurses and deal with Medicaid eligible consumers who need personal care services at home. We have approximately 1,000 cases for personal care.

Q. How do the caseloads look in terms of younger and elder clients?

A. John: The larger part of the caseload is the elder client, age 65 and up. We did have a very large young to middle-age population at one time, but as they got older, they became more involved in the mental health system, as opposed to PSA. We have worked with the Mental Health Association as well as county Mental Health and mental health case managers to try to resolve situations before they need PSA.

B. Marge: We are finding that age 18-25 is a very problematic group. There are not as many resources, particularly in the area of housing. We consistently find that's an unmet need in Rockland.

- Q. Where do the younger clients come from? Are there any that are coming from foster care or juvenile justice?
- A. John: Many are transients that have come and gone. Many from New York City. We don't have that many coming out of foster care or juvenile justice.
- A. Marge: Or they may be having difficulty with their families. The schools may bring cases to our attention. Luckily we recently got a new facility, Project Turning Point, a runaway and homeless shelter in Nanuet which serves clients until age 21. There has been a real lack of resources for the younger client. They need permanent housing, employment, mental health and substance abuse services.
- Q. What is Rockland's manner of delivering financial management services to clients?
- A. John: Our policy is that if the services are not voluntary, if we have to do it against their will, then we have to do it as a protective service case. If the client is willing, and by willing, they have to sign a document that they agree to the department managing their funds and there is an indication that there is a need for the service, then in those cases, we will serve it as preventive. Of course, what sometimes happens is that they may have some other problems which make them eligible for protective services, even if they have signed the document agreeing to the financial management services.
- Q. How often does PSA staff do public outreach about PSA, and who is involved in such outreach?
- A. John: Everyone assists with public outreach. We do it on an ongoing basis. Within our agency, outreach efforts are very cooperative, so if a child welfare worker is doing outreach, often they will also distribute PSA brochures as well.
- A. Marge: We do outreach in connection with Adult Abuse Awareness Month every year. We go out into the community, to supermarkets, to libraries, doctors' offices and clinics, to spread the word about adult abuse: what it is, how it can be prevented, and what services are out there to assist the consumer. We bring brochures and have some give-away items as well. All the workers are involved.
- Aside from Adult Abuse Awareness Month, we make a special effort to reach hospital discharge planners and police academies, because that's where a lot of our referrals come from. We have a good relationship with both. We meet with the police rookies every year to familiarize them with protective services for adults. There is a new unit starting, a crime victims unit, which focuses on both child and adult abuse. It will be a free-standing site, very near to Good Samaritan Hospital. There will be APS workers available to respond if they believe it is a case for APS.
- Q. Are you seeing more financial exploitation cases lately?
- A. John: This has been one of the areas of the highest increase in cases. There are issues of fraudulent transfers of property, transfers of a house to an adult child without fair consideration, or to get a mortgage to get cash. Sometimes we need to check records to find out who really owns the house. We use both on-line records and check with the county clerk's office to get information. PSA has the ability to go out in the field and visit a person in their home, that makes us very unique, and we provide a very direct service. We go out there and see what the situation is; not just seeing the person and seeing their cognitive ability, but also looking at what their living condition is, whether they are able to manage, and engage the person to be able to assist them. That is one of the best things about Adult Services, and that is why we are called on a lot.

Q. So you would consider that one of your greatest strengths?

A. John: Clearly, our greatest strength. One of the tax foreclosures showed in the record a single-family dwelling, but when we went there we saw that no one had built on the land, so no one was at risk of losing a home. Our ability to go out and respond very quickly is one of our strengths.

Q. Talk to us about your clients' needs regarding housing.

A. Marge: It is hard to find affordable housing. The economy has impacted many; they may not be able to stay where they are. They may need to relocate. We are really active in helping clients look for benefits they may be entitled to, such as food stamps. Another great strength of our workers is creativity. They work very hard to find resources to assist their clients.

A. John: I would also say that, where possible, we work to try to get the clients to help themselves. Sometimes we are able to establish a plan to build on the strengths of the client. It's not just going in and resolving the problem. Workers are willing to jointly problem-solve a situation, and to offer not false hopes, but realistic hopes. This is something that is not understood by everyone.

Q. John and Marge, you are both longtime valued members of the Adult Abuse Training Institute (AATI) Advisory Group, and both of you have been very much involved over the years in presentations at AATI on how to work with self-neglecting clients. What kinds of advice do you give your caseworkers about working with these individuals?

A. John: You have to have a respect for an individual's right to self-determine. They can make a bad choice. We have to start with that premise. Then we have to see how bad it is, and whether they understand the consequences and whether it becomes an issue of quality of life, or an issue of saving a life, depending on our intervention. We appreciate the right of self-determination, but I have consistently said this since the '70s: the right of self-determination is the ability to change as well. We have to balance these factors to see what kind of intervention is appropriate: Is it necessary? Is it not? As an example, we have an 80-year-old man who smokes. We all know smoking is bad. It is not possible to change a person; the change has to come from the person themselves.

A. Marge: One of the hardest things for workers are these self-neglect cases, because they try to engage the client and it is not always easy. That's where the creativity comes in. I remember one client who was a veteran who didn't feel he had to pay his utility bills. He felt the government should pay. We had to become his rep payee, and the only way to work effectively with him was to ask him what he wanted. He wanted to get a haircut monthly. By having the caseworker arrange to take him for this haircut, he was willing to cooperate with us to allow financial management. We were thus able to pay his taxes, keep his utilities on, etc. He was happy and we were able to maintain him in his home for many years. The bottom line is, is there a risk, and do they understand the risk. It is a tough job and we are very grateful we have workers who care enough to do this tough job.

A. John: That is one of the good things about the AATI. The trainings that are provided by your division really help the workers look at the problems from a different perspective and give new ideas and creative approaches that workers may be able to use. That is so important and so good. The trainings that your agency and Brookdale have given have been really excellent in quality. Every time workers have gone to it and come back they are so enthusiastic about the training.

Q. Thank you for that. What have your workers encountered in terms of domestic violence or family violence issues?

A. Marge: There is an increase in interfamily verbal violence. We have seen that more than physical violence. Possibly this is due to stresses about the economy, like one family member turning against another family member who is living with them. It can become very complicated. There are cases where these are strictly family issues. They may try to pull PSA into it, but that is not always appropriate. In some cases they may need to get an attorney. In the past we have felt that the elderly who face domestic violence were not getting their “share of the pie,” because the DV system is geared towards younger victims. When we sent an older person to a DV shelter, they did not remain very long because they felt they did not belong there. That’s an area that needs to be looked at. We have noticed a difference in recent years as the DV people are making an effort to engage the older client.

Q. What are the most challenging parts of the job?

A. Marge: Helping to assist a client while not taking over, as John said before. We have some workers who would do everything for the client, but that is not always the best way. It helps to step into the client’s shoes to empathize, but if you really want to help them, you need to step out of the client’s shoes. That’s the challenging part.

A. John: With APS, in all my years at DSS, I can say I’ve never had a dull day at work. There has always been a financial crisis but this seems to be a little bit longer, a little bit deeper. We have to work on it because so many people are counting on us, so many people who are vulnerable and isolated. That is what our role is and we really have to step up to the plate to meet the needs of our community.

A. Marge: We are very appreciative of the help we get from the State in dealing with questions of policy. It’s very helpful to us as supervisors and then we pass this information on to our caseworkers.

A. John: We have a good rapport with the State and with our neighboring counties and it is good to be able to share with the Hudson Valley counties at our regional meetings and otherwise.

John and Marge, you both have a lot to be proud about. We appreciate your time and your dedication to the job. Thank you very much!

