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The Arc
ABUSE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A SILENT EPIDEMIC
JUNE 26, 2014

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>> Kathryn Walker: Hi, everyone, we're about to get started. Welcome to The Arc webinar. My name is Kathryn. Because there are so many of you, all participants are in a listen-only mode. At any time during the presentation, if you need help you can post a question in the chat box on the side of your screen. At the end of the session, there will be a time for questions. You can either post questions in the Q&A section, or in the chat box. If you want your question to stay private, type private before you type your question. You can also email questions to NCCJD@thearc.org. If we don't get to your question during the presentation, we'll follow up afterwards. This webinar is being recorded and will be posted on our website. We will send you an email letting you know when it is available. During the presentation, you'll be asked to answer a few questions which help us document your involvement for our funders, so please participate.

You will receive a session evaluation after this webinar. Please take five minutes to complete and send it to us. Had webinar is funded by the United States Department of Justice. Thanks for your participation. The webinar today is the sixth in a series of monthly webinars sponsored by NCCJD and features Molly Kennedy, a self-advocate and businesswoman. Kecia also helped, but will not be present. Before we welcome Molly, we're going to do some poll questions.

So, the first poll question is, what is abuse, and you should on the right-hand side of your screen the polling tab flashing. All right, time for the next question. Here we go. What is abuse? And here's our last polling question. All right, thank you, everyone, for your participation. Now, please join me in welcoming Molly Kennedy.

>> Molly Kennedy: Thank you, Kathryn. Thank you to The Arc for hosting the webinar. I'm Molly Kennedy. I have a developmental disability and am a peer advocate. I am the chair of the Council of Developmental Disability. I am concerned about abuse of people with disabilities because it is about our human rights to be treated equally and respected. Just because we have a disability and sometimes don't express our thoughts, it does not allow others to abuse us. Too many people feel -- people with disabilities feel they are powerless and don't know how to stop abuse or report it. Kecia Weller -- this webinar is important to us as a long-standing self-advocate and peer advocate. In many ways, Kecia is the inspiration for this webinar.

She wants all people to be empowered with knowledge so they can take care of themselves and learn about abuse, know how to report it to people you trust. The objective of today's webinar is to raise awareness about how often abuse happens, go over the different types of abuse, learn it is okay to report abuse. Abuse happens twice as often as crimes against non-disabled people. People with disabilities are less likely to report abuse. Violent crimes do not get investigated enough. This information shows that abuse is a critical issue that affects many of us. Abuse of people with disabilities has been around many years. We are seeing more. We want to be safe in our homes and in our communities.

Kecia would like you to know, it's important that if we live in segregated places, it can be hard to find someone to trust at times. Being overly compliant can make you feel vulnerable, because you have to rely on another person to help with daily activities. Some of us were taught when we were in school to be obedient, but being compliant or obedient can be dangerous when we are adults who are being abused.

We don't know enough about our rights, and how to report to authorities or someone we trust. All people need to know how to be safe and know their rights. I have created my own safety plan. These are some examples of what I have in my safety plan. I write down what I would do in dangerous situations, like yell, "back off!" or make loud noises. I screen my providers, and make sure I feel safe with them. I let people know I have an abuse safety plan. My friends and family check in with me on an ongoing basis. I talk to someone I trust when I feel uncomfortable about people I encounter. I keep my cell phone near me, and I practice my safety plan often.

So, it is critical to have a safety plan, and that helps you to be empowered. Kecia and I, with the help of Mark Starford of the Board Resource Center, created a video to increase awareness of abuse. The video focuses on self-advocates and what they need to know. We spent time before filming the video researching about abuse. Kecia and I created our own outreach plan. We believe that we should offer any support. We need to lead by example. This webinar is one of our outreach activities. The video is short, but delivers a strong message. Now we are going to watch the video.

Abuse is a silent epidemic. We are all human beings, and we all have a right to live a life without abuse and without someone having power and control over us.

>> Kecia Weller: There are different forms of abuse, like financial, physical, psychological, sexual, domestic.

>> Molly Kennedy: People with disabilities need to work together to educate each other to protect ourselves from abuse.

>> Kecia Weller: Because people who are abused don't want to talk about it. The abusers make the person who's being abused be quiet and not report to authorities, and the cycle keeps going on. People don't always have the words to express what happened to them. We all need to learn how to report abuse to authorities. Some of the action steps that I myself am taking, I'm using social media like Facebook, Twitter, self-advocacy groups, board of directors, safety councils, writing and emailing and educating our state legislators to have tougher laws about abuse.

>> Molly Kennedy: I'm writing blogs and editorials and doing community presentations, working with self-advocacy groups to talk about abuse of vulnerable individuals and how it can be stopped. Share your experience and what you did to prevent abuse for yourself or your peers with disabilities, and share this video with everyone in your network so we can get the word out and improve the lives of all people with disabilities, and those who are being abused will have it stop and live more healthy

and happy lives.

>> Kecia Weller: And most important, we must work together to protect each other.

>> Molly Kennedy: Our voices and through our actions, we'll end this critical problem.

The video, the video narration and pictures tell a story about how abuse is -- how dangerous abuse is. Now I will talk about how many of us are affected. 40% of all people experience abuse. This is a huge number who are abused. I was surprised to learn the numbers. Then I learned this is a very low estimate. Kecia and I decided to name our video "A Silent Epidemic" because so many people have been hurt, but you never hear about it in the national news. We only can help stop this. It is not acceptable. It's just not okay in 2014.

As you can see, abuse is a high number. 70% of these crimes are not reported. Even when they are reported, only a small percent get action or attention. People with disabilities are victimized and traumatized repeatedly. People are seen as vulnerable, weak, and won't report. Abusers have not been punished. This information is important to Kecia. There is a misconception that most victims do not know their abusers. That is not true. Most abuse victims know their abusers. 90% were people in their everyday lives, such as family, neighbors, bus drivers, care providers.

A lot of women with developmental disabilities who are sexually abused sometimes don't believe anything will change if they report. Also, they are not told -- they are told not to report their abuser by their abuser. As you can see, these are crisis numbers. Here is one solution to help reduce abuse. Find a person who you do not depend on to trust. Later in this webinar, we will show other suggestions. When I talk about types, intimidation. When someone asks in a way that causes fear or harm. I have dealt with this type of abuse.

I am a member of a community board. I was in a meeting and I asked to see background information about a decision. I was told I would not understand. Even though I had to vote, no one offered information. I felt it was a way to control me and not understand what was being discussed. To stop this problem, I got leadership coaching to stand up for myself and get necessary support. Today, I ask for information and explanation ahead of time, so I am prepared as a board member.

When this happens, sometimes intimidation is difficult to identify, since it can be subtle. Sometimes when we have our own ideas about what we've been through, or what is important to us, that is challenging to some. Most of us are aware when people are very rude to us, and sometimes there are times when the intimidation is subtle, and we become scared and we're not sure why.

Physical abuse, when someone uses their body or an object to hurt you. This really does hurt. Some signs of what to look for, bruises, wounds, or broken bones,

burns, injuries that can't be explained. Many people hide when they are being physically abused, or cover themselves up with clothes, even when it's hot outside. People are afraid to report being subject to these types of abuse. Sexual abuse, when someone forces a person to take part in sexual activities against their will. Evidence of abuse can include bruises, scars, pain in sexual body areas, sometimes called private parts of your body. Sexually transmitted diseases. Torn, stained underwear. Fear, depression, or another new behavior. These apply to sexual activity that is not consensual, meaning you're forced against your will.

Financial abuse. Kecia felt this was very important. When someone takes advantage of your money. Many of us live on very little money. At times, people we know will demand us to give them money, or lend them money when we don't have any to spare. This happens to many people with disabilities. Also, many people run out of money, and borrow it at a place call payday loans, with high interest that can never be paid off.

Some solutions, report this, again, to someone you trust. Get help to make a budget. Report abuse. It will not stop if you do not report it. Again, go to people you trust. Someone who is not supporting you. A good friend, a trusted family member. People in authorities, police, doctor, nurse, or call an abuse hotline. We can help. You don't have to live being abused. If you or someone you suspect -- you suspect someone else is being abused, at the end of the webinar, there is a slide with national hotline contact numbers. I think it is important that we all learn not just to protect ourselves, but create an outreach plan to support other self-advocates.

In the video, I shared what I do. I'm writing a blog about abuse. I give trainings for emergency service people, police, fire. I speak at the self-advocacy advisory committee, and other self-advocacy groups. Kecia has spent days and hours reaching out to advocate survivors. She focused on sending emails to all her professional contacts. We are here today because Kecia reached out to The Arc. She shared the video through her online network. She wrote letters to tell legislators that there needed to be tougher laws for abusers.

Report, report, report to a trusted person or authority. Help spread the word by showing the video. Teach students in schools how to take care of themselves. It is 2014. Spread the word through social media. As advocates, we can take the lead on this issue that affects so many of us. For professionals, help us spread the word that we can report. When someone you know seems a little distant, listen. Share the abuse video with every person in your professional network. Learn how to support someone who you suspect has been abused. Thank you for being here today. I will now turn the webinar over to Kathryn.

>> Kathryn Walker: Thank you, Molly. What a great presentation, and what good information. So now, I'm going to start reading some questions from the chat box, and

from the Q&A section. If you have questions, you can type them in and we'll ask Molly and get a live response. Also, don't forget that after the webinar, we have a short survey for you to fill out. All right. Let's also get our information screen up here. So, you can see here, if you or someone you know are abused, report, call 911 if it's an emergency. That 1-800 number is a nationally available number, and you can use our email address at the bottom, NCCJDinfo@thearc.org.

All right, Molly, here's the first question for you. What do I do if a friend of mine is being abused, but my friend is not sure if they should tell on their abuser? What advice should I give them?

>> Molly Kennedy: You should tell your friend that it needs to be stopped. They need to report it. So, they could go to the authorities, like the police, or a doctor. Or, they could find someone in their family or friends who they trust and ask for help to go report it.

>> Molly Kennedy: That's good advice. Here's another question. Do you think that men with disabilities are just as likely as women to be abused?

>> Molly Kennedy: Absolutely. People with disabilities, whether you're male or female, are more vulnerable to abuse. It doesn't matter if you're a woman or a man. Compared to non-disabled men, men with disabilities are abused at a lot higher rate.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. Here's another question. What's the first step for me to take if I want to start speaking out about abuse? Should I join a self-advocacy group who wants to talk about it, or what do you suggest?

>> Molly Kennedy: I would go to a self-advocacy group. We -- this video is on YouTube, and it will be linked on The Arc website. And you can get in touch about abuse, share this video. And talk about it in the public forum at a meeting, too. So, yes, it starts with just one meeting, and you going there and meeting everybody.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. And for those of you that are wanting to see the video, there's a link in the chat box, and then that link will also be on The Arc's website. Here's another question. How are people protected from the retribution of the violators, whether they are providers, or family? So, retribution is when the family that's abusing you, keeps abusing you even after you told on them. They're wanting to know how to get around that.

>> Molly Kennedy: Again, you have to, again, talk to someone you trust. Work with someone to try to get out of that situation. Go to people you feel safe with and tell them that you are being abused, and what you need to do. Have them help you deal with this situation. A caseworker, someone that you trust. You don't have to be in a situation that is abusive.

>> Kathryn Walker: That's a very good answer. Now, here's another question. In your opinion, what do you consider to be the biggest issue? So, there's three issues here. Knowing how to access law enforcement, providing documentation when you

think you've been abused, or knowing how to answer in a forensic interview. And do you have any advice for trying to talk to professionals about this issue?

>> Molly Kennedy: You know, I'm not a professional in that I don't know language. But, what I would say is, you're going to tell your story. So, when you meet with someone, you need to tell your story. And so be accurate, provide as much detail as possible, and feel that you are safe with the person to really say it. I'm not okay in this situation. And they will know how to put it into ways that can be used to, to prosecute people moving forward.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. And so this one, this is a tough one. So, this is in the moment, if your abuser is sitting near you or is right there with you, do you have any advice for people to deal with that?

>> Molly Kennedy: If you feel comfortable talking to them, that's one way. But if you don't, find someone you trust to tell them and ask them to help you deal with the situation. And, don't talk around the person who is abusing you. Talk somewhere separate with the person you trust.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. So, this is a technical question. So, when a person is being abused in their own home by a family member, are the police or abuse protection agencies allowed to investigate in their own home?

>> Molly Kennedy: Yes. And if you call, like, the Adult Protective Services, which every city has, they will come out and investigate what is going on in your house. If you think you're being abused, someone should come to investigate.

>> Kathryn Walker: And this is a personal question for you. How did you learn so much about this topic, and how did you get started with this work?

>> Molly Kennedy: I just started researching it and learning about it, and seeing that it's a critical issue that people are not being protected. I feel as people with disabilities, we should not let this happen anymore. And we need to stop it. And that's why I started to work on creating awareness, and that led to a video, and now the webinar, and all that.

>> Kathryn Walker: Great, thank you.

>> Molly Kennedy: And I want people to be in a safe place. And, we also talked about this at the Self-Advocacy Committee a year ago about being a high priority.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. If anybody else has any questions, you can type them in the chat box right now. Let's see. All right, here's a good question. What can caseworkers or support people do to be seen as more trustworthy and safe so that victims can feel comfortable reporting to them?

>> Molly Kennedy: I think you should observe and be, always be aware if something is not, you know, normal with the person. If they're more anxious, or not wanting to be around the caregiver, then follow up. Always, you know, ask them, you know, questions. Are you feeling safe, or that kind of stuff. Do not judge their behavior.

Try to understand or observe if their behavior is different.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right, here's another question. Do you have any suggestions for how to get law enforcement to take this very seriously?

>> Molly Kennedy: Education. We educate law enforcement about interaction with people with disabilities. And we communicate with them. And it's very important that we as people with disabilities get out there and educate them so they see us as real individuals. It's always -- about us without us. Law enforcement should be educated by people with disabilities and as an expert.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right, here's a good one. Do you plan to make any more PSAs in the future, and what are the future projects that you're working on?

>> Molly Kennedy: Yes, we are developing some more videos that talk more about financial abuse. You know, it affects so many people. People with disabilities, the poor, minorities, the elderly. And we see this as a critical issue that we will be working on.

>> Kathryn Walker: Okay. Here's someone who was recently at a conference, and they talked to someone and said that the consumer she supports was being abused, and she didn't know because she wasn't asking the right questions. What are some questions that support staff and other professionals can ask to see if someone being abused?

>> Molly Kennedy: It's good to know about asking, but, it's about observing their behavior. If there's bruises, or something that is on their body that looks like, how would they get that bruise? Seeing if they're more anxious, or depressed, and seeing what you are dealing with, you know, those are the ways to kind of engage the individuals. Also, if people are more withdrawn, then they normally are.

>> Kathryn Walker: Okay, do you have any special advice for minors? If you're a minor, what should you do? That's somebody who's not 18 yet.

>> Molly Kennedy: I think it's the same thing. Either find a trusted person, or go to authorities, teachers, your school, counselors. They're supposed to be very supportive and know what to do when someone reports they've been abused. They are trained to help individuals at schools.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. So, why do you think it's important for people with disabilities to provide training themselves? So, to train law enforcement, and other people? Why do you think that's important?

>> Molly Kennedy: Because no one knows what it's like to be disabled unless you have a disability. And so, people think, you know, it's great to hear from them who know all the stuff, but, it's just as important to hear from a person with a disability to understand their issues, how they communicate. I'm not an expert, but I am living the life, and that's very valuable to share. And this is what training is all about.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right, does anybody else have questions? We've gotten a

lot of questions in the chat box today. Thank you, everyone, for participating. If you think of a question later, you can email it to us. Oh, here's a good one. How can you be aware of abuse or fear if an individual is unable to speak or communicate verbally?

>> Molly Kennedy: Again, it goes back to observations. If that person is doing things, if they're acting out more in their way, then -- or if it seems something is not right. You need to look at these situations and keep notes, and see if it's an ongoing thing. And if it's progressive, they get more frustrated. They get more feeling not very engaged like they used to be.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right. I don't think we have any more questions in the chat box right now. So, Molly, do you have any closing remarks for us?

>> Molly Kennedy: I just appreciate everyone's time. This is very valuable, and I hope they will really take this information and use it in their communities. We did this webinar in a way that was clear and simple so that it could be used throughout the country. The numbers are too big to be ignored. We have to work together to stop this silent epidemic. Thank you.

>> Kathryn Walker: All right, thank you, Molly. This concludes our program for today, and thank you, everyone, for participating. This was a great session. So, we'll see you next month. We have Kate, who works with first responders in New York, and I training them on how to work with people with disabilities. So, if that sounds interesting, you can register at our website. All right, thanks, everyone.