

Changing The System(s) to Improve
the Response to Victims of Sexual
Assault with Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities

Background Information



The Arc NM

- State Chapter
- Guardianship
- Rep Payee
- Trust Administration
- Advocacy
- Public Policy

Pamela Stafford

- 25 years working with community inclusion programs
- Sibling of a person with I/DD
- In 2017 became a guardian coordinator for The Arc NM
- In 2018 became Director of Public Policy
- M.A. in American Studies with emphasis in Minority Group Relations

How The Arc NM Became Involved

Timing

In 2018 three things related to timing led to The Arc NM involvement:

- Me Too Movement
- New Public Policy Director with recent experience with individual victims
- New CEO interested in new programming

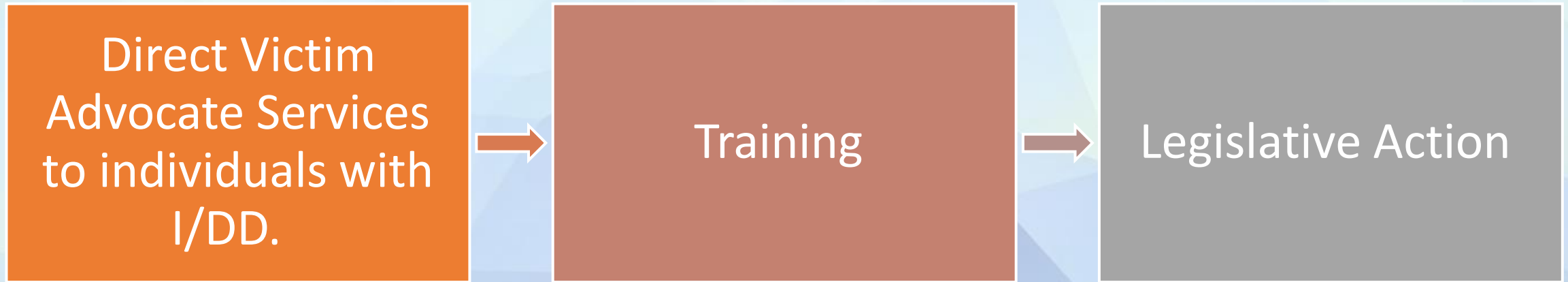
Need

- 2018 NPR series included Justice Department Statistics that individuals with I/DD were sexually assaulted at more than 7% the typical population.
- This data did not include those living in group homes or institutionalized settings where the rates could be higher

Increased Vulnerabilities

- Individuals in need of personal care needs
- Individuals with communication challenges
- Lack of sexual education
- Individuals with feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Population seen as "children" not seen as sexual
- Disability system sees sexual assault as an administrative issue instead of a crime.
- Judicial system unprepared to interview, investigate or prosecute when victims are persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities

Three Approaches





Direct Victim Services

Timing and Need meets
Opportunity

Funding Through NM Crime Victims Reparation Commission and NM Coalition of Sexual Assault Providers

- Strong Coalition of providers including providers serving "targeted", underserved populations.
- New funding available through State General Funds
- June 2018 – funding to serve six counties in New Mexico with one victim advocate
- Additional funding since added to include a part-time victim advocate
- Rather than taking the approach of training current sexual assault providers on disability issues, we decided to become trained as a sexual assault provider

Where Fools Rush In...

- One of the first if not the first developmental disability focused agency to provide direct sexual assault victim advocacy services
- You don't know what you don't know until you know
- We were not already active with justice systems in New Mexico
- Unprepared for emotional impact to this position of this work being done by a team of one
- Discover that what seemed like a small step could have big ripple effect
- "Ripple in Still Waters" Grateful Dead



Program Progress

In first year we served
25 individuals

In the first 7 months of
second year we served
26 and was at capacity

Common Services

- Restraining orders/ protective orders
- Safety Planning
- Victim compensation application
- Arrange counseling
- Access to housing, food, clothing, shelters
- Attended SANE, met with police,
- Referrals
- Eligibility status for disability services
- Social Security Status/ address changes
- Training disability providers on trauma informed services



UNDERSTANDING

Being a provider of services impacted our understanding of challenges and barriers differently than being a disability advocate

Situations

- School situations where an individual in a special education classroom might not have understood any actions, but assaulted a peer. Teacher trying to help them to learn how to get along and be friends. No good option except to keep them in the same classroom

Challenges

- Mandatory reporting as a disability agency for abuse, neglect, exploitation vs. Confidentiality of a victim advocate. What exactly is a vulnerable adult?
- Systems to report vary widely and data collection depends as to the system to which you report

Barriers

- Victim Focused services to a person with a guardian who doesn't believe the victim.
- Police Officers not interviewing the victims
- Lack of resources for persons with I/DD , not receiving disability services, needing trauma informed services
- Accessibility needs beyond physical needs in a shelter environment (routine, sensory)

A long, blue truss bridge spans a wide river under a dramatic, cloudy sky at sunset. The bridge's structure is a series of repeating triangular trusses. The water reflects the warm light of the setting sun. In the foreground, there are green trees and bushes. A dark, semi-transparent overlay covers the bottom left portion of the image, containing text.

Success

- Bridging the Disability Services Provider System and the Sexual Assault Provider Community

Intersectionality

- Keeping the issue of Sexual Assault and Trauma in fore front of Disability Provider System
- Increasing awareness of sexual assault provider community of the impact of sexual assault on persons with I/DD

Pandemic Challenges

- In March 2020 we went from being at our work capacity to having no new intakes for three months.
- From July – September (our third year) we have provided services to four persons
- We know abuse is likely to be at an all-time high, but people are finding it hard to reach out for help and there are limited oversight in DD group homes
- We have had challenges hiring during pandemic



Training

Pathways to Justice
Developmental Disabilities
101

Pathways to Justice

- NCCJD – National Center from Criminal Justice and Disability
- Pathways to Justice trains victim advocates, legal professionals and law enforcement on strategies for interactions with persons with I/DD.
- NCCJD have trained twice in New Mexico – once in 2017 and once in 2019
- Each time focus has been the metro area.
- Collaborated with The Center for Self-Advocacy who trained one full module

Opportunity

- Train the trainer – could we more locations in the state
- Virtual training
- Training more geared towards victim advocacy

Developmental Disabilities 101

- Multi- disciplinary teams
- Shelters
- Counseling Centers
- Training in the time space requested
- Customized to their needs

Training Disability Awareness as a Peer Agency

- It's a different experience to train Developmental Disabilities 101 when you come in as a sexual assault provider
- Already have relationships/ part of a team
- You speak a common language
- You understand the challenges of the provider community better
- The fact of being invited to train is a sign of increased awareness and increased trust



Legislative Action

Study on Sexual assault
of individuals with disabilities

Study on data collection and reporting

- \$150,000 funded for purpose of study to NM CVRC
- They have contracted with University of New Mexico Health Science Center
- Study is examining statues, administrative policies and actual procedures .
- Intent is to look at ways streamline reporting and data collection
- Study should encourage recommendations for legislative action on how to streamline reporting and data collection.

How it works together

Without providing the services, we would not have recognized how challenging the data collection and reporting was for this population.

With providing direct services, we would have less opportunity to train and our training might not be as effective

Legislative policy difference and training should improve the service delivery.



The Goal

To Change The System(s) to Improve the Response to Victims of Sexual Assault with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



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