PROJECT REPORT

Promising Practices Project

Tess D. Ford

During 2003, a SIU Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development research team worked with the Carbondale Police Department and a community consortium to conduct a needs assessment and strategic plan to assess and improve services for victims of crime who have a disability. Funding for the project was provided by the Office for Victims of Crime in Washington D.C. through the SafePlace Foundation in Austin, Texas. The research team worked with Sgt. Don Priddy, Community Services Coordinator and Susie Toliver, Victims Advocate for the Carbondale Police Department to plan and implement the project. Data collection methods for the study included a series of key informant interviews and focus groups which included persons with disability who were victims of crime and key agency representatives who work with persons with disabilities.

Barriers identified by the respondents included accessibility issues; lack of knowledge by law enforcement and service providers in dealing with issues of persons with disability; lack of knowledge by persons with disability in areas such as police procedures, screening and hiring care attendants, etc. Safety issues were of concern as persons with disability frequently are afraid to report a crime when they are dependent upon a person emotionally, financially, or for personal care. Respondents reported fear of abandonment, reprisal, ability to locate replacement care, and embarrassment that the crime is occurring.

Communication and misperceptions between law enforcement personnel and persons with a disability is also a significant barrier. For example, someone with an unsteady gait or slurred speech may be perceived as being intoxicated or unable to provide factual information. Barriers were also found in coordination of services, limited support, lack of services available, and inadequate screening of personal care attendants. Persons with a disability usually hire their own personal care attendants and many lack knowledge of dangers in hiring someone who may perpetrate crimes against them. Transportation for meetings with the states attorney’s office, victims advocates, court hearings, or to obtain an order of protection was very limited and complicated to access.

Respondents also reported community perception as a barrier for persons with disability. Some of these barriers include stigma, misunderstanding of behaviors, the perception that a person with disability is unable to report information accurately or incapable of making their own decisions. Often the disability becomes the identifying criteria of the individual rather than the person. Recommendations provided by the participants included the use of language in the first person. For example, rather that saying a disabled person, the acceptable person first wording is “person with a disability”.

It is important in rural communities to be aware of the needs and barriers faced by persons with a disability. Whether the individual is a child or adult with developmental, physical, mental or sensory disability, in planning services it is imperative to consider the needs and supports which are necessary to provide continuity of care for persons with disability who are victims of crime.
STAFF UPDATE

Kim Sanders

Kim Sanders has recently accepted the position of Illinois Delta Network (IDN) Coordinator with CRHSSD. The IDN Coordinator oversees projects in the 16 counties of southern Illinois. The goal of the IDN Project is to develop and support efforts by local area networks to address unmet healthcare health needs, improve access to health care and improve the health care system in the Mississippi Delta Region. Kim has been employed with the CRHSSD as Education Coordinator and has assisted with the IDN Project since 2002. She has a Masters degree in Business Administration and a Bachelors degree in Community Health Education. Her professional experiences are in youth and family counseling, marketing, management, and training.