



BEYOND REPORTING

A PREVENTION APPROACH TO ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT

As U.S. demographics shift toward an older population, the issue of elder abuse is becoming increasingly important. Abuse of elders can take many forms – physical, emotional, sexual – and also encompasses neglect, abandonment, and financial exploitation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 10 percent of Americans aged 60 and older who live at home have experienced elder abuse at some point in their lives – a figure that likely underestimates the problem, according to the CDC, because many elders do not report their abuse out of fear or shame.¹ (It's worth noting that the conditions of "elder abuse" can also affect younger adults with disabilities; the term "adult abuse" captures this reality.)

For that reason, precise statistics about the prevalence of elder abuse are difficult to derive – as noted by the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), "...we simply do not know for certain how many people are suffering from elder abuse and neglect."² Nevertheless, the CDC describes elder abuse as a "significant health problem" that, if left unchecked, will only worsen as the U.S. population ages.

The fastest-growing segment of the population is aged 85 and older³; and as Americans grow older

and more vulnerable, the risk for abuse, neglect, and exploitation grows in kind. The negative health effects of elder abuse have been well documented: NCEA reports that elders who experience abuse are more likely to die sooner, experience psychological trauma, and require hospitalization.⁴ The need for a solution to the elder-abuse problem is becoming ever more urgent.

Unfortunately, too often the response to elder abuse is punitive in nature. During his opening remarks at the 2015 White House Conference on Aging, President Obama said his administration would work to "train more prosecutors in how to combat elder abuse."⁵ His remarks highlighted the urgency of the problem but also reflected the conventional "prosecutorial" approach to fighting elder abuse: report elder abuse when it occurs, investigate abuse cases and trends as thoroughly as possible, and impose strict penalties on people who commit abuse.

While reducing elder abuse will require an array of interventions, we believe that preventing abuse before it happens is the key. Existing strategies that focus on increasing awareness of abuse and ageism are useful, but do not help people

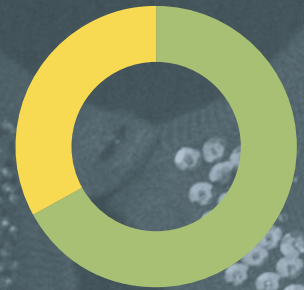
DID YOU KNOW?



10%
OF AMERICANS OLDER
THAN 60 EXPERIENCE ABUSE
IN A 12-MONTH PERIOD



50%
OF PEOPLE
WITH DEMENTIA
EXPERIENCE ABUSE



67%
OF ALL ADULT WOMEN WITH
DISABILITIES REPORT EXPERIENCING
ABUSE IN THEIR LIFETIMES

stop abuse before it happens.

PHI, consequently, has pioneered a new training approach that “builds skills to prevent abuse.” The goal of the training is to equip anyone with direct access to vulnerable adults with relational skills designed to reduce abuse and neglect. This case study examines the roll-out of this approach to people who work or volunteer in home and community-based services programs across Michigan.

“TRAINING TO PREVENT ADULT ABUSE AND NEGLECT (TPAAN)”

PHI Michigan Manager Hollis Turnham remarks: “Many acts of abuse are committed by people who do not know how to cope with the stresses of caring for elders while balancing the other complications of life and work. All of us are potential abusers.” Though research shows that most elder abuse is committed by family members, abuse can also occur at the hands of paid caregivers. For example, a study by the Georgia Long-Term Care Ombudsman office published in 2000 found that of 2,000 nursing home residents surveyed, 44 percent reported abuse and 95 percent reported either being neglected or seeing another resident neglected.⁶

To address elder abuse, PHI developed the **Training to Prevent Adult Abuse and Neglect (TPAAN) program.**⁷ The TPAAN training is designed for direct-care staff and others who work directly with elders and adults with disabilities – and/or have access to their financial information. It teaches learners to recognize in real time, and to be prepared for, situations that could potentially lead to abuse. This training program evolved from an earlier curriculum jointly developed by BEAM (Bringing the Eden Alternative to Michigan), the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, and PHI, with funding from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

In early 2015, PHI’s Midwest office received funding from Michigan’s Prevent Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse, Exploitation, Neglect Today (PREVNT) program to launch a statewide TPAAN

training for providers of home and community-based services serving older adults. The goal of the project was to recruit a cadre of trainers, train them to deliver the TPAAN curriculum, and provide the training to 1,000 direct-access staff across the state.

TRAIN-THE-TRAINER STRUCTURE

In April 2015, PHI led train-the-trainer sessions for a diverse group of people interested in preventing abuse. These sessions focused on honing the necessary teaching skills – along with developing familiarity with the TPAAN curriculum – to allow more than two dozen trainees to present the highly interactive seven-hour training throughout the state. “The set-up was brilliant,” says Susan Steinke, who coordinated PHI’s TPAAN training effort in Michigan. On the first day of training, she explains, the educators underwent the TPAAN training, and then during the next two days, they learned how to teach the training to others.

The people recruited for these train-the-trainer sessions encompassed an intentionally broad range of stakeholders in Michigan’s home and community-based services system. Among the participants were directors of agencies, supports coordinators, staff from area agencies on aging and county commissions on aging, and direct care workers providing in-home services to older adults.

NEW SKILLS TO DE-ESCALATE CONFLICT AND PREVENT ABUSE

During the training process, participants were taught how to identify the root causes of elder abuse and neglect, which is the first step in preventing abuse. One of the primary causes of abuse is stress. Caring for elders, whether professionally or as a “family caregiver,” takes a significant emotional, physical, and mental toll on anyone in a caregiving role. When combined with the daily external pressures everyone faces

(family issues, financial uncertainty, etc.), caregiving can create a situation in which stress festers and evolves into anger – and the potential for abuse grows. Everyone feels stress, the TPAAN curriculum emphasizes; therefore, the potential for abuse can exist for anyone who provides care on a daily basis. “TPAAN teaches participants to

“When someone comes to work day in and day out and feels they can’t speak up, we are risking more abuse and neglect.”

KELLY COOLEY, *Hillsdale County Senior Services Center*

identify and deal with stressful situations before they result in abuse,” says PHI Organizational Change Consultant Cean Eppelheimer, who led the development of the TPAAN curriculum and co-facilitated the train-the-trainer sessions with her colleague Anna Ortigara.

TPAAN promotes several skills that not only help to de-escalate stressful situations, but promote respectful relationships that underlie quality care. *Active listening* encourages attentive, distraction-free engagement. It’s a skill that both validates the person speaking and can go a long way toward de-escalating emotional encounters. The TPAAN curriculum emphasizes that *active listening* does not come naturally to most people – as with other skills, it requires practice and a conscious effort to master. When paired with a separate self-management skill known as *pull back*, active listening can be an invaluable tool for preventing abusive behaviors.

Pull back refers to a conscious effort to set aside feelings when a moment has triggered an emotional reaction. Learners are taught to consciously notice their reactions, temporarily set them aside, and refocus their attention on what the other person is saying or expressing. This often leads to a constructive interaction that is more helpful to both parties.

Jumping to hasty conclusions, acting defensively, externalizing blame – these are natural human

responses to triggering moments, but they can also lead to reactions, statements, and behaviors that can escalate tensions, and even evolve into abuse. *Pull back* discourages those split-second emotional responses and replaces them with a more constructive approach: actively listening, communicating clearly, and compromising. Many of the participants have noted that they found skills such as *active listening* and *pull back* so useful, they began to use them in their everyday lives. “The joke always was, you can go home and use *pull back* at Thanksgiving dinner,” Steinke, the program coordinator, says.

As with all of PHI’s curricula, TPAAN incorporates adult learner-centered principles. This approach emphasizes interactive engagement in classrooms. The TPAAN training relies on teaching techniques that encourage active participation such as role-playing, creative exercises, and small-group discussions; these techniques allow learners to practice de-escalation and other prevention skills. “All of us have sat through too many lectures or films on how to identify and report abuse. Too few of us have practiced the skills needed to prevent the yelling, throwing, cursing, pulling, and rough care that can often become elder abuse and neglect,” Turnham says. “We wanted to do something very different to prevent those actions and reactions.”

DISSEMINATION

After the “train-the-trainer” sessions were completed, the newly trained TPAAN educators began disseminating the prevention curriculum throughout the state’s home and community-based services network. They conducted dozens of daylong trainings for staff with direct access to elders and adults with disabilities, including home care aides, social workers, nurses, meals-on-wheels drivers, and more. Conducting workshops was an eye-opening experience for the trainers, many of whom had no previous training experience.

Kelly Cooley of the Hillsdale County Senior Services Center says that she has learned something

new every time she has led a TPAAN training. She says, “It’s important to empower our staff and let them know they have choices. When someone comes to work day in and day out and feels they can’t speak up, we are risking more abuse and neglect.”

Jenna Lindholm of the Northeast Michigan Community Services Agency, a combination Area Agency on Aging and community action agency, says that during her trainings, “We had some ‘a-ha moments’ even among our more seasoned staff about communications and person-centeredness.”

Pamela Niebrzydowski, owner of Random Acts of Advocacy, an organization that supports family caregivers, describes one such moment, which occurred in the first training she conducted. One of the learners in her session, a retired nurse who now volunteers for a meals-on-wheels program, came into the training with a closed mind. According to Niebrzydowski, the former nurse didn’t think there was anything new she could learn; she “had a bit of an edge to her and was slow to participate at first,” Niebrzydowski says. But by the end of the training, she had changed her perspective.

Niebrzydowski goes on to say that during the concluding “learning circle” exercise, the former nurse told everyone, “I came here today with an

95 percent of participants reported that they learned new ways to handle stressful situations.

attitude, but this training [had] a perspective I’ve never been offered in a training about abuse.” The prevention-first approach to reducing abuse of elders and other vulnerable adults struck her as radically different yet logical, she said, and she found herself interested and engaged the whole time. Indeed, the emphasis on prevention earned plaudits from many of the participants in the train-the-trainer sessions, with Nancy DeBarr, administrator of the Midland County Council on Aging, hailing it as “scathingly brilliant.”

OUTCOMES

By the end of September 2015, TPAAN trainers had conducted trainings for more than 850 Michigan direct-access staff; more than half were direct care workers. Our evaluations indicate overwhelmingly positive reactions to the training program, with 95 percent of the learners reporting that they learned new ways to handle stressful situations, and 98 percent indicating that all their questions about reporting abuse and neglect were answered. In addition, learners expressed high levels of satisfaction with the training approach, including the opportunity to role play and practice new skills.

Many of the post-training comments indicated that participants felt the full-day training was worthwhile, providing them with the opportunity to examine the causes of abuse and neglect and to develop new skills. One trainee said she appreciated learning that stress is something everyone experiences; she said that the training gave her “the tools to do her job and...the strength to keep doing it well.” Another participant said, “It was truly the most enjoyable and beneficial continuing education experience I have had in my career! You definitely accomplished your goal of it being a day for us to reflect, relax, and look inside ourselves so that we may better understand the issue of adult abuse and some of its causes.” Finally, many participants reported being better able to identify abuse situations; in two cases, abusive situations were reported to authorities and remedied.

MORE INFORMATION

Michigan trainers are continuing to deliver the TPAAN training to new audiences across the state. In addition, PHI can tailor the curriculum to other state leaders, as well as for other long-term care settings and other populations relying on long-term supports and services. For more information on how you can bring TPAAN to your state, visit www.phinational.org/elderabuse.

SOURCES

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7. Information on the TPAAN curriculum can be found at: <http://phinational.org/consulting/services/training-prevent-abuse-and-neglect-tpaan>



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