The Arc of PA’s Disability Awareness Services Works with Law Enforcement on How to Engage with People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The Arc of Pennsylvania, PA’s largest disability advocacy organization, supports the full inclusion of all Pennsylvanians with disabilities in their communities. No longer are persons with disabilities housed in large congregate facilities – segregated from the general community. Citizens with disabilities seek to be full participants in their community. They attend regular schools, work in local businesses and pay taxes, and most importantly, seek to be active and contributing community members. The Arc of PA and its network of 33 local chapters can provide much needed expertise in ensuring safety and equality as law enforcement officers serve these members of the community. The Arc of PA has developed programs to include children and adults with disabilities in school (Include Me Program), work (ADEPT program) settings.

The Arc of Pennsylvania was started 69 years ago by parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, when society’s expectation that their children be sent to state institutions. Thanks to their work, and the movement they created, it is for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families is far better than it was in the early 1950s. In affiliation with The Arc of the United States, The Arc of PA is part of the largest nationwide advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc of Pennsylvania and its local chapters represent over 8,000 members. The Arc of PA state office in Hershey coordinates strategic, grassroots advocacy efforts; provides policy analysis and trainings and implements the statewide include Me and the Arc Discovery Employment Transitions (AD EPT) programs that serve children and adults. The Arc of PA focuses on systems advocacy and governmental affairs to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the same opportunities to learn, work, live, and experience the world as all others. The Arc of Pennsylvania has chapters in every county in the state.

The Arc of Pennsylvania is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that provides advocacy services to individuals with disabilities and their families. The organization is dedicated to ensuring that everyone with a disability has access to the services they need to live full and independent lives. It provides services such as advocacy, education, training, and recreation. The Arc of Pennsylvania’s mission is to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to the same opportunities as everyone else and that they are treated with dignity and respect. The organization works to eliminate barriers to full participation in society and promotes equal rights for all people with disabilities.

Crimes committed against people with disabilities are often labeled as abuse and neglect rather than assault, rape, or murder. This fact alone undermines the seriousness of the victimization problem. Many victims may not report crimes because of their dependence on the abuser for basic survival needs.

**What is an autism spectrum disorder?**

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder, refers to a range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication, as well as unique strengths and differences. We now know that there is not one autism but many types, caused by different combinations of genetic and environmental influences. Some individuals with autism can have intellectual disabilities, while others with autism may have typical or above average IQs. Individuals with autism can have difficulty understanding others’ feelings and reactions and be unsure of what to do in social situations. Frequently seen behavior of those who have autism includes hand flapping, body rocking, insistence on sameness (rituals), and in some cases aggression and self-harm. Some individuals with autism may be non-verbal but have a normal physical appearance. Individuals with average or high IQs with autism may have a “hidden disability,” meaning they present themselves as intelligent; they can talk, their physical appearance gives no clue about a disability, and they may appear to understand what an officer is saying to them. These individuals may have poor understanding of situations, especially social situations and emergency situations. They may be unable to understand the situation and could become disoriented or confused about the proper way to react.

**Disability Data and Statistics at a Glance**

According to the Centers for Disease Control:

- About 1 in 65 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- About 1 in 100 children occur in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.
- ASD is about 4.5 times more common in boys.
- About 1 in 5 children in the United States has a developmental disability, ranging from mild disabilities as speech and language impairments to significant developmental disabilities.

**The prevalence of autism has increased by 259.5% over the past 12 years.**

**What is the impact of having an intellectual and developmental disability, including autism?**

The impact varies considerably. Children may take longer to learn to speak, walk, and take care of their personal needs, such as dressing or eating. It may take longer to learn in school.

As adults, some people can lead independent lives in the community with or without paid or natural supports (family, friends). A small percentage

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will have serious, lifelong limitations in functioning. However, with early intervention, an appropriate education, and supports as an adult to find and maintain employment, all can lead satisfying lives in the community.

**How can the needs of someone with an intellectual and developmental disability, including autism, be met appropriately?**

Education and training is vital if individuals with ID/DD and autism are going to receive equal justice. Children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities must learn about the possibility of meeting a police officer. The law enforcement community can benefit by partnering with a disability advocacy and service provider like The Arc of PA to also receive training on how to engage constructively with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Arc of PA and its network of local chapters can assist law enforcement in several ways:

- Serve as an information bridge between law enforcement and the person with a disability.
- Identify successful strategies for interacting and communicating with people with disabilities, their families, and the systems that support them.
- Identify local connections and resources to support individuals with disabilities based on their individual needs and legal circumstance.
- Coordinate cross training between the disability community and law enforcement entities to encourage a well-informed partnership.

More children and adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities are living, being educated, and working in our communities. This underscores the need for more specialized health, education, social services and law enforcement/protection services for these citizens. The Arc of PA welcomes the opportunity to work with the law enforcement community to develop information, training and support programs to address the needs of individuals with disabilities.

**How to contact The Arc of PA**

To learn more about the resources that are available through The Arc of PA or to ask questions, please contact:

Maureen Cronin, Executive Director, The Arc of PA at 717-234-2621 or mcronin@thearcpa.org or Sharon Jones, Include Me at 484-854-1355 or sjones@includeme.org. For additional information about The Arc of PA and all the services it provides, visit www.thearcpa.org or contact info@thearcpa.org.