

>> Then we have Charles Coleman who's a Senior Social Worker with Adult Protective Services, so the role of Adult Protective Services and how they come in and help older adults in our community.

>> Hello, my name is Charles Coleman, Social Worker with Butte County Adult Protective Services. I've worked in that capacity for a number of years, at least from the beginning when Butte County became a part of the state effort to have a response for reporting elder, dependent adult abuse.

And California defines older adults 65 and over, dependent adults 18 to 64 years old. So every county, all 58 counties, are legally required to respond to allegations of suspicion of elder, dependent adult abuse, or if there's actually evidence of some form of abuse. And the idea or the goal is for us to, once we receive a confidential report (and all reports that come into our agency are held in confidential status), we do not disclose the source of the reporting party, and that is a question that some of our clients or victims have when we make contact with them, if we respond to a particular allegation of abuse. But the reporting party is protected. We are not allowed to, by law, to disclose the source of the reporting party. So when we get the report that's been filed through our agency in one of the various categories, and I have some brochures in the back if you'd like to take a look at the brochure. Feel free to take one. Various categories of abuse, self-neglect, neglect, isolation, abandonment, physical care deficiencies. Either a caregiver is not responsible in making sure that an older adult or a dependent adult's needs are being met, that the activities of daily living are coming up short, or if it's on the person's, individual's, lack of ability to manage their affairs or to take care of themselves.

And, of course, there's a category of financial abuse, which has been discussed this morning. Someone is willingly taking advantage of that dependent adult or elder through various schemes, methods, and strategies, or if the client has some sort of impairment, possibly a cognitive impairment of some kind, so they're not able to manage their own finances. And they might need help, or obviously they do need help, and so we try to work through that to make sure that they are protected, their finances are protected.

A couple things we have to keep in mind as Adult Protective Services social workers. Number one, it's a voluntary program, meaning that we have to have the consent of the individual with our involvement. We follow up if the call rises to the level and meets the criteria of Adult Protective Services intervention, so we attempt to make contact with that individual and to address whatever the category of abuse or the allegation of abuse might be. Our goal is to prevent abuse or to minimize or reduce the abuse or to eliminate the abuse. And when we make contact with that individual and it is determined that there is some risk involved, and we've been able to identify what that risk is, if it's a form of neglect, mistreatment, or there's an area of financial abuse, discrepancies with their resources or what have you, we get the cooperation of the individual. We work with them to be involved to help deal with that situation, as I said, to either minimize that abuse or to eliminate it. We gather as much evidence as we can, as social workers, in a process, all the tangible evidence that that person might have because what we're going to do with that information is to pass it on to law enforcement jurisdiction so that they can do an investigation to determine if a crime has been committed.

And, just to take that a little further, if it is determined that a crime has been committed, then the law enforcement agency will give it over to the District Attorney's office. Like the gentleman, Bruce, here would then run with that case at that point to see that the perpetrator is prosecuted for committing a crime. So we have to have, from the very onset of our contact with that individual, the ability to establish with them that we're wanting to work with them to address this issue of neglect or abuse. We want to connect them with support services if that might be a part of the process. We want to stay with them so that we can be of support in order to bring about some type of resolution. This is all with the cooperation of the individual.

Now, if we determine in the process that there's some deficiencies on the part of that person, like some type of cognitive impairment, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, or something that's preventing them from being able to make sound decisions, their judgment is impaired, or they lack the insight to understand the risk that they've placed themselves in or someone else, then we have to look at other options in keeping that person safe. And that's when we have contact with our partner agency, which is the Public Guardian's office that Ethyl was explaining their process to you earlier. The goal here is to protect that individual, and so since they lack the ability to protect themselves and there's no one else around to do that job, to form that barrier or that form of protection, then we are obligated as social workers to put that process in place.

So then we refer that individual to the Public Guardian's office. Now, that's the conservative last resort. That's if there is no other way that the worker can address the situation through intervening for a positive outcome for this individual. Now, sometimes people have resources where they can maybe have a private conservator step in to be the person responsible for managing their affairs and managing their finances. If that's the case, there might be a family member that we've identified in the process of case management that would be willing to work with us, and because they might not feel like, it could be an offspring, or it could be another relative where they feel like they cannot directly be the go-to person or the responsible party for managing that person's affairs. We look at a private conservator. There's a couple or three [inaudible] in Butte County that we could make a call to as Adult Protective Services workers and have them contact that person and go through the process of seeing that they might be that responsible party as a conservator. But if that's not an option, if the resources or the family does not see that as an option or there is no family, there is no other entity that can step in to be a bridge or to fill the gap for that person to protect their interests, then we will definitely look at the Public Guardian's office as that entity that will protect that older adult or dependent adult's situation.

Usually APS's jurisdiction is the community at large. We are charged with investigating allegations or suspicion of abuse in neighborhoods. Sometimes we go into board and care facilities. We go into, sometimes we can go into a skilled nursing facility if there's like a transitional type thing that's occurring, meaning that a person left the hospital, went into a skilled nursing facility, but the goal is that they're going to be returning home. And if there's some concerns about possible risk or abuse, the facility will contact Adult Protective Services to get us involved so that we can address whatever that risk might be.

But if a person is residing in a long-time care facility and that's their permanent resident, and there is some type of abuse or neglect or mistreatment that occurs, that usually falls under the jurisdiction of the ombudsman. So they're the licensed agency that investigates allegations of neglect or abuse, but everything else pretty much falls in the lap of Adult Protective Services.

We, as I said, work very closely with law enforcement on many of our cases because if we have a confirmed outcome of our investigation of neglect or abuse, we pass all of our evidence, documentation, over to law enforcement so that they can continue the investigation to see if a crime has been committed so that the perpetrator or perpetrators can be convicted, or they can at least be brought before the court for the alleged crime.

We have also with us in Adult Protective Services public health nurses. Well, we have one public health nurse right now, but this is very good because many of our cases with the older adults, particularly their medical issues and health issues that are very present, and so we work closely with the public health nurse. That person can really do some strong intervention to help, as I said, minimize or reduce risk in the area of contacting maybe physicians, trying to deal with medications if that's an issue, going out on immediate-type response. Sometimes our older adults are reluctant to go into the hospital, or they don't like seeing doctors for various reasons, and at least if we have a public health nurse that can respond with us on a call, we can have the nurse immediately look at that situation and then begin to do some intervention, make some phone calls. And, again, if this older adult is willing to allow our agency to be involved, we can try to set up an appointment to address whatever those medical issues are for that older adult or dependent adult.

And we are pretty busy in Butte County. We have a lot of referrals that have to do with neglect on both sides of the ledger, self-neglect and neglect that's perpetrated by others, and I would think second to that would be financial abuse. And as it has been said this morning, it's sometimes a situation where caregivers have taken extra liberties to cozy themselves up to our clients and have access or try to gain access to the client's resources by way of their, maybe, checking accounts or being able to monitor their mail, their credit cards, and things like that.

We have received reports from some banks. Some local banks will call us, and if they observe or notice discrepancies or irregularities in that customer's banking activities, they will let us know. We also get calls from, as Ethyl said, from the corporate office of some of the major banks where the local bank attendants or tellers will not call, but I guess they are directed or instructed to pass that information on to their corporate office. So we'll get phone calls from San Francisco and Portland, Oregon, from some of the major banks where they'll be reporting allegations of financial abuse in the town of Magalia or the town of Palermo, and I'm thinking, "Oh, you mean Palermo and Magalia," okay. And we, you know, again, we follow through. We receive those reports at our agency. We go out and make contact with the client. What we find often, I have to say, on a percentage basis most older adults do not admit to or want to have Adult Protective Services involved with addressing a financial abuse issue. Most of the time, and often it's family members that are involved, they let it go. They say that, "Well, I'll talk to him or her about it," or, "They're no longer involved. We've taken care of it." And sometimes there's a little

bit of embarrassment. A social worker shows up unannounced to your home, and immediately after we, you know, sort of explain why we're there and who we are, we start talking about the issue that was reported to our agency, and it's pretty detailed. So it's a revelation for that individual to know that someone knows about their business in this way, and some people feel very guarded and protected about, even though they might have had misjudgment, or they might have been abused or taken advantage of this one time or maybe two or three times, they really don't care for the idea of a government agency involved with trying to give them information, letting them know that, "If you have been a victim of this situation, we can take it further." And the possibility of getting the law enforcement involved so that the investigation can occur, no, no. People generally don't want to go that far.

But, on the other hand, I've had a few referrals where I've gone out, and a person was very aware of what had happened, had the insight to understand but just was manipulated, but once that person found out what the situation was, was ready to take all the necessary and available steps to rectify it and bring some resolution to how they were taken advantage of. And so I had one client that was able to gather up the evidence to show the record of the banking irregularities and had information with the forgery on the checks, and we gathered that information up, and we turned it over to the sheriff's office because it was in the jurisdiction of the county where the sheriff is responsible, Butte County Sheriff's office. So we had a detective work with that client and gather that information. The client was cooperative and willing to go through the process, so they were able to go further with it and pass the information on to the District Attorney's office and then go after the perpetrator of the crime, who happened to be a caregiver who took great liberties to, unbeknown to the client, to begin to access this person's resources, to sign up for credit cards in his name, to gain access of his bank card and make major withdrawals. And then the person left for a while. He didn't see her for a while, so when he began to review his banking records, he saw what was going on, and his son called Adult Protective Services, and then we got involved at that point.

We are 24 hours, 7 days a week. You can call us. Our normal business hours are 8 to 5. Our main office is in Oroville, but we service the entire county. We're available after hours. There's always at least one social worker available and that social worker's supervisor after hours, and if a person's considered a mandated reporter, they have to report to our agency if they suspect abuse or if they are aware of some type of abuse or mistreatment, and then they're to follow up in 2 days with a written report for our agency.

We, again, work closely with partner agencies because a lot of the community effort in trying to eliminate, prevent, or reduce elder abuse and dependent adult abuse is a community effort, with agencies that also have the vision and goal of keeping our older adults safe and making sure they can exercise their right to self-determination. Just because a person is, you know, maybe advancing a few years does not mean that they should have decisions made for them. People have the right to determine and choose how they want to live. Their lifestyle choice is important, and we support that as Adult Protective Services as long as we see that this person has insight, is capable of making good decisions, keeping themselves safe. There is not a challenge to the community standards in terms of their situation being where, say, their housing is insufficient, or they might not have running water or if

they don't have food and those kinds of things. Yes, we want to get involved at that point to see if we can help address that, but if a person is safe, adequate food, clothing, and shelter, and if they make a so-called poor decision, a person has the right to do that. So, again, we are working with that individual as they give us their consent to address whatever risk issue was reported to our agency, and we work with Passages. We work with law enforcement. We work with the adult day care center, Peg Taylor Center, and with our dependent adults we work with the Far Northern Regional Center. We work with some of the other support-type groups for Far Northern Regional like the work training center, Arc of Butte County. We work with a variety of agencies, support service and advocacy agencies in the county when it comes to trying to be that bridge of support for our older adults and dependent adults.

And just, though, on the last piece about the financial, although we might on the first attempt might not be able to, let's say, convince that older adult or, usually it's an older adult, that their situation is putting them at risk and it could jeopardize their ability to meet their living expenses by not having the resources, we don't give up the first time. We stay involved. We might get another call, or the worker might keep the case open and make contact with that person again because sometimes it's a process. It doesn't happen immediately. As I said earlier, sometimes older adults feel embarrassed about the situation that they've found themselves in, so we understand that. We try to be sensitive to that, but at the same time we try to play that tape all the way out for them to let them know that, "You need to be able to take care of yourself. You need to be able to have the resources to do that, and these are some ways that we can help you to do that." So we try to be as much of a support and help and assistance to that older adult as we can be.

Does anybody have any questions or comments? Yes.

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>> Yes.

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