



Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

NEWS RELEASE

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Lutheran Social Services of Illinois Helps to Prevent Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

July is Elder Abuse Awareness Month. In Illinois last year, more than 7,000 older adults experienced abuse, often at the hand of their loved ones, the people they trust most in the world.

Intouch Services of Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) provides services to individuals experiencing abuse. Contracted through the Illinois Department of Aging and Northern Illinois Area on Aging, LSSI administers the Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation program to individuals residing in Whiteside, Lee, Ogle and Carroll Counties.

“Abuse can come in the form of financial exploitation, or physical and emotional abuse, or neglect,” says Sarah Karras, program director for LSSI’s Intouch Services.

It is estimated that there are at least 10 cases of elder abuse for every one that is reported. “This means that the vast majority of victims are suffering, often for years, because no one knows or cares to report the problem,” says Karras.

“The very thought of abuse of our elders conflicts with our notion of who we are and what we stand for,” says Charles D. Johnson, director of the Illinois Department on Aging.

“All of us in our wonderfully diverse state have one vision in common,” he says. “We want to believe that there is respect for our parents and assurance of their care and protection. And when we hear that our vision is out of focus, we want to look away.”

But elder abuse cannot be ignored. According to the Illinois Department on Aging, it is all around us, in every town and in every neighborhood. Three-fourths of the victims of elder abuse in Illinois are women, with an average age of 79. About 75 percent of them are functionally impaired – either physically or mentally.

Four of five abusers are family members. Most are substance abusers. Some have snapped under the stress of caregiving, unaware that help is available.

“Their tragedy is a reflection upon all of us and the values that define us,” says Johnson.

Illinois law defines abuse to mean neglect; physical, mental or sexual injury; or financial exploitation to an adult 60 or older. When an elder cannot report for himself or herself, the law mandates the reporting of suspected abuse by service providers in an extensive list of fields, including social service, law enforcement,

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public service and medicine, including paramedics and emergency medical technicians. If these professional reporters fail to act, the law gets tough, requiring action against them.

The law also mandates “an aggressive training program” about elder abuse to public and private agencies that may encounter abuse and exploitation of older people in the state. Such a program includes the use of signs in banks and other financial institutions that notify older people about their rights in the face of fraud and financial exploitation. State law also protects residents of long-term care facilities against abuse and criminal neglect by the owner or an employee of the facility.

One of the most important amendments to the elder abuse law prevents people who are convicted of elder abuse from receiving any property or otherwise benefit after the death of the victim. This provision applies to anyone – family member or con artist – and to financial institutions as well.

“Help is out there for those experiencing abuse,” says Sarah Karras, “through service providers, such as LSSI, as well as tough state laws that protect elders.”

If you or someone you know is the victim of elder abuse, please call Intouch Services of LSSI at 815/626-7333 or the Illinois Elder Abuse and Neglect 24-Hour Hotline at 1-866-800-1409 (voice and TTY). All reports are kept confidential, and anonymous reports are accepted.

Founded in 1867, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is a statewide, not-for-profit social service agency of the three Illinois synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), as well as an agency of the United Way. LSSI serves people through an array of services at more than 89 program sites across Illinois.

For more information on LSSI’s Intouch Services, please call 815/626-7333. For more information about Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, visit www.LSSI.org.

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