



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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National Experts Lead Justice Center Forensic Interview Training for Vulnerable Populations

As part of its ongoing efforts to provide local law enforcement officers and prosecutors with a broader understanding of victims and witnesses with special needs and disabilities, the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center) recently conducted a multi-day training course entitled *Forensic Interviewing Best Practices for Vulnerable Populations*. Personnel from police agencies and District Attorney's offices in the City of New York, Nassau and Suffolk counties recently attended this groundbreaking training program held in Queens.

"In two years of prosecuting allegations of abuse and neglect involving people with special needs here at the Justice Center, it has become clear that information from the victim or a witness, so often critical to an investigation, often goes uncovered as many first responders have limited experience dealing with persons with disabilities or other vulnerable populations," said Patricia E. Gunning, Justice Center Special Prosecutor/Inspector General. "This training provides investigators and prosecutors with best practices for gathering credible, reliable information in the most non-traumatic way possible that will stand up to judicial scrutiny if the investigation leads to a criminal prosecution."

The training was developed by Justice Center prosecutors, in collaboration with state and nationally recognized experts. Dr. Scott Modell is widely known for his work in the area of disability abuse and interview techniques for individuals with developmental disabilities and Dr. Eileen Treacy, an expert in child sexual abuse is perhaps the state's best known instructor on child abuse and forensic interviewing.

Drs. Modell and Treacy presented information about the developmental and emotional needs of adults and children with intellectual or developmental disabilities; mental health diagnoses or substance abuse disorders; the abuse dynamics of vulnerable persons; and research-based strategies for forensic interviewing. The training culminated in practical sessions where participants interviewed trained Justice Center staff who portrayed individuals with diverse backgrounds and diagnoses based on real cases. The role plays were critiqued by prosecutors, law enforcement officers and others with multiple years of experience in forensic interviewing.

Since the establishment of the Justice Center in June of 2013, cases involving the abuse of vulnerable persons that might have gone unreported in the past are now reported to and

investigated by the Justice Center and local law enforcement agencies. The Justice Center will be making this training available to all New York State law enforcement agencies and District Attorney's Offices on a limited basis throughout the year. For more information about the Justice Center's *Forensic Interviewing Best Practices for Vulnerable Populations* training, please contact the Office of the Special Prosecutor/Inspector General at ic.sm.SPIG@justicecenter.ny.gov.

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Dr. Scott Modell