

New York State Coalition on Elder Abuse News & Information Bulletin August 2020 - A tribute to Art Mason who is retiring this week

Some of you have known or worked closely with Art for many years; some attended a training or two or more; some have called or emailed him over the years for general advice or consultation on a difficult case – but everyone knows Art Mason’s name and at least some of all he has contributed to elder abuse prevention and intervention. Art has been carefully planning and preparing for his full retirement – the time for everyone else to finally accept it as reality is now – **this week!!**

Art has been **Director of Lifespan’s Elder Abuse Prevention Program (now Upstate Elder Abuse Center at Lifespan)** since **1992**. Although too numerous to include all his accomplishments, so many things we all take for granted now probably wouldn’t exist if it hadn’t been for Art’s very passionate, persistent advocacy – at times, some may have called it constant pestering. But the end result always benefited older adults and the professionals who provide such great care and service.

Art didn’t accomplish these things alone, but it’s pretty safe to say they most likely wouldn’t have happened without him. He either came up with the original ideas (often way before they became popular) and/or kept pushing to keep the momentum going to make them become a reality.

A few highlights of Art’s influence statewide & nationally:

Lifespan’s Elder Abuse Prevention Program (EAPP) began in **1986**. Art started out as an intern and in **1989** was hired as a social worker to investigate cases and support victims of elder abuse. Even after he took over as director of the growing program, he continued to carry a caseload to stay in the field and not lose touch.

In **1995**, the Scam, Fraud & Consumer Protection Program was developed to provide presentations and case intervention.

1998 was a very busy year –

- EAPP expanded to provide direct social work elder abuse intervention services in a 10-county area.
- Lifespan brought together professionals from many disciplines to form a local Elder Abuse Consortium. Communities across the state reached out to Art for guidance in forming collaborative initiatives in their own communities.
- EAPP began holding annual regional educational conferences, attracting national experts and participants from a variety of professions.

2000 & 2001 - a yearlong Sentinel Training Project and the start of S.E.A.M. (Stopping Elder Abuse & Mistreatment), an educational and rehabilitative program for abusers as an alternative approach to ending abuse.

Art was invited to participate in the **2001** National Policy Summit on Elder Abuse. Immediately after returning from Washington, DC he started talking about Lifespan convening a New York State Elder Abuse Summit, modeled after the National Summit. He didn’t stop raising the issue until it became a reality. Lifespan convened the first Summit in **2004**, the second in **2010**, and the third was ready for **2020** but those plans were paused (you will be hearing more about the new plans in future Coalition News Bulletins). Following the **2004** Summit, Lifespan established the NYS Coalition on Elder Abuse.

EAPP was awarded a federal VAWA grant in **2004** to develop a curriculum and DVD to train law enforcement and probation officers on elder abuse recognition and effective intervention techniques. **Lifespan staff and local police trainers wrote the curriculum and Art began training over 1,000 local law enforcement.** Art was then asked to join the national team of experts, developing curriculum and participating in a train-the-trainer program for a new collaborative initiative. He has continued in that role and also developed a very popular annual NYS specific training, modeled after the national training program but including all disciplines participating in the all-day, intensive training event. In **2014**, Art also started a popular series of shorter regional training programs to bring multidisciplinary, multi-county training and interactive discussion opportunities to professionals throughout the state, including many rural areas.

Art served as President of the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) from **2008-2010**.

Art has handled many very difficult and complex financial exploitation cases over the years. In **2006**, he received an award of recognition for Outstanding Service to Older Victims from the Western District U.S. Attorney's Office for **his extraordinary efforts helping to solve a case involving bank fraud, identity theft and elder abuse.** Financial exploitation cases take time and special care to work through the devastating effects on older victims. Art met with this victim weekly for many months.

Art was instrumental in securing funding for Lifespan from the NYS Children & Family Trust Fund to conduct the landmark **NYS Elder Abuse Prevalence Study.**

Art's many years of experience seeing the devastating effects of financial exploitation on older victims, including their inability to recoup lost assets and life savings, **led him to push for changes in crime victim compensation laws and the value of having a forensic accountant review records.** In **2009**, he decided to pilot the use of a forensic accountant to assist with some of EAPP's major exploitation cases. This pilot was used as the impetus for the **2013 Enhanced Multidisciplinary Team project** involving individual teams in seven counties in the Finger Lakes Region. The success of that project led to teams being established in every county throughout the state - although Art had been advocating for the concept of multidisciplinary teams in New York State long before any had actually been developed.

This is just a small sample of what 30+ years of Art Mason advocacy has meant to vulnerable older adults in New York State and beyond, as well as the very dedicated professionals who work with them and provide much needed services.