
Promising Practices Issue Brief: Respecting Diversity

NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE

Reaching Out Through Local Elder Abuse Networks

Introduction

Every year, untold numbers of vulnerable elders in America are abused, neglected, exploited or otherwise mistreated, often at the hands of their own family members or trusted caregivers who should be protecting them¹. Contrary to what many may believe, the victims come from all walks of life and all cultures, and they represent the full spectrum of America's diversity².

Fortunately, communities around the country have begun to coalesce around elder abuse prevention, and there is a growing commitment to work together for solutions.

Local partnerships in prevention take different forms. Although some groups still are in the fledgling stage, others have evolved into formal prevention networks. No matter how large, all are working diligently to raise public and professional awareness of elder abuse and its victims, and, in many cases, have successfully advocated for laws that strengthen reporting and prosecution. There is no question local leadership is essential.

In 2004 the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), through its partner the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA), launched a multi-year Local Elder Abuse Prevention Network Development Initiative to support Area Agency on Aging leadership efforts nationwide³.

As part of this initiative, a National Teleconference on "Reaching Special Populations through Local Elder Abuse Prevention Networks" was held in September 2004. The meeting's goal was to identify barriers to reaching and serving special populations and encourage exchange of expertise and strategies. The meeting was facilitated by NCPEA Board Member Mary Lynn Kasunic, President and CEO, Area Agency on Aging, Region One in Phoenix, Arizona.

Following are highlights from the discussion.

¹ National Association of State Units on Aging (2005). "Fact Sheet on Elder Abuse Prevalence and Incidence." Washington, DC: National Center on Elder Abuse www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/publication/FinalStatistics050331.pdf

² For purposes here, the terms "diversity" and "special populations," are defined broadly to encompass older adults with disabilities; rural elders; ethnic and racial minority elders; older refugees, immigrants; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) elders.

³ The NCEA Elder Abuse Prevention Network Development Initiative involved a three-pronged approach of information gathering and knowledge sharing: literature review; survey of local elder abuse networks; and best practice teleconference. For more information this study, see page 4.

Highlights & Recommendations

Reaching Out to Special Populations Through Local Elder Abuse Networks

The teleconference offered a variety of perspectives on the difficulties and challenges of helping victims of elder abuse from diverse cultures and mobilizing communities to take action. The following is a brief summary of the issues of concern that were raised, as well as recommendations.

The Challenges

Structural and Systemic

- State and local resources already stretched to the limit.
- Too few bilingual professionals or interpreters.
- Inadequate APS staffing levels; multiple law enforcement priorities.
- Limited understanding of ethnic and cultural differences.
- Inadequate laws; state legislators faced with competing demands.

Society and Individual

- Fear and reluctance to report abuse, particularly if the abuser is a family member or a caregiver.
- High levels of denial that abuse can happen in all different cultures.
- Questioning from “outsiders” breeds suspicion and distrust. Attitudes of “we take care of our own” ultimately lead to crisis response.
- Social isolation, especially in rural areas.
- Language isolation.

Strategies for Communities

Capacity-Building

- Make sure your service system is prepared to handle new referrals uncovered through targeted outreach.
- Figure out where service gaps are, especially in rural areas.
- Decide how to deal with referrals that are not appropriate for APS, yet which may need intensive assistance.
- Encourage the creation of specialized units in law enforcement to investigate cases and prosecute offenders.
- Recruit qualified bilingual, culturally sensitive APS and law enforcement staff to provide needed services.
- Partner with higher education to attract linguistically and cultural diverse students into the social services, victim advocacy, and criminal justice fields. Strategies to stimulate interest include stipends, scholarships, and internships.

Partnership and Collaboration

- Encourage the development of collaborative efforts.
- Mobilize and collaborate with law enforcement, victim assistance and domestic/family violence networks, legal services providers, emergency medical teams (EMT), financial institutions, religious organizations, and other community gatekeepers.
- Engage all community stakeholders. Network and build relationships with culturally diverse individuals and their communities and/or tribes. Invite participation in coalitions and task forces.
- Form a cultural diversity advisory council or sub-committee.
- Develop expertise. Offer training and technical assistance to assist diverse stakeholder groups.
- Support best practices knowledge sharing.

Outreach/Education

- Make sustained outreach a priority.
- To connect across cultures, make sure outreach materials are available in as many languages as possible, are culturally sensitive, and easily understood.
- Include community libraries in your outreach.

State Public Policy Advocacy

- Convene a local, county, multi-county, regional, or state summit to address issues about elder abuse prevention and intervention and resource requirements for programs.
- Make your priorities and needs known to state legislatures.

Participant List

The following individuals participated in the NCEA teleconference on “Reaching Special Populations Through Local Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.”

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About the Study

“Reaching Special Populations Through Local Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.”

In 2004, the National Center on Elder Abuse commissioned a survey by Area Agency on Aging, One in Phoenix, Arizona to identify promising practices of local elder abuse prevention coalitions for reaching special populations.

A total of 117 coalitions were sent the “reaching out” survey. The response rate was 48.7%. Respondents were located in 19 states and one Indian Reservation.

All survey respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of their elder abuse prevention networks. Two of the responding networks chose not to self-rank.

Of the remaining sample, nearly half gave themselves a high rating. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to specify the ingredients needed for success

The respondents’ self ranking of success also influenced selection of a sub-sample of networks to participate in a “promising practices” teleconference call conducted on August 31, 2004. The primary aim of the meeting was to obtain additional input with respect to understanding what makes coalitions effective.

In all, 15 representative elder abuse prevention networks were invited to take part in the focus group conference call. Informants from 10 networks were able to participate.

Reaching Out Through Local Elder Abuse Networks

Strategies from the Field

- Engage all community stakeholders.
- Network and build relationships with culturally diverse groups. Invite participation in coalitions, task forces, and multidisciplinary teams.
- Offer training and technical assistance to assist diverse stakeholder groups.
- Recruit qualified, bilingual, culturally sensitive staff to provide needed services.

Capacity-Building Partnerships: Ideas for Action

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

MARY LYNN KASUNIC – FACILITATOR

Many elder abuse prevention networks have developed strategies for reaching members of special populations who may be victims of elder abuse. What activities do you believe are most pertinent to your network's effectiveness?

G. TARBUTTON, OR: For people with disabilities, a growing faith that investigations actually lead to successful prosecutions has been a key factor. There's still a significant issue with those folks because of their fear of losing their independence, but successful prosecutions have really made a difference. For people who are Hispanic, we've set up training and have special volunteers in the community, but we still have a great deal of difficulty in getting people to report, either from the Latino community or the Asian community. I think the success we've had has been from the law enforcement officers who are bilingual and from our bilingual staff who are available to them.

G. KASPER, NY: There are two coalitions here in Erie County: The Multidisciplinary Coordinating Council on Elder Abuse and the Erie County Coalition Against Family Violence. We try to make sure that they're as diverse as possible. The Coalition Against Family Violence has a specific cultural diversity committee. They actually do quite a bit of work in bringing issues about domestic violence (including elder abuse) into the Hispanic community.

D. SHEPARD, IA: Networking with other professionals, especially the home health folks; community outreach; joint assessments with our Adult Protective Services and Department of Elder Affairs; our case management program; and the trainings that we do – all have worked towards bringing elders at risk into our program.

R. LYONS, VIRGINIA: We have bilingual staff, and we're doing a lot of outreach right now to try to get our message out into the community that we're here and we're available to serve seniors. We're working with police departments, and have close relationships with them to bring in the populations that generally do not contact us for services.

Elder Abuse Prevention in Rural America

Strategies from the Field

- Form a task force to identify gaps in support and ways to address those gaps.
- Educate front line responders and community gatekeepers.
- Develop memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with local law enforcement
- Conduct educational outreach to tribal communities.

Rural Community Outreach: Ideas for Action

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

MARY LYNN KASUNIC – FACILITATOR

What about those of you who are in rural areas? Are there any particular strategies for having the voice of rural elderly at network meetings or in terms of your outreach and` education?

K. INOSHITA, OH: In southern Appalachia, all of our elderly are considered rural. We have developed county task forces to help with service gaps for at risk older adults who may be abused, neglected, or exploited. We have educated first responders, people who may be going into an elder's home, as well as homebound elders who are way out in the hollers. We educate police officers and the sheriff's department; emergency medical teams (EMT); workers from the telephone company—any type of person who we think may be going out to the home. Case managers are providing a lot of information about elder abuse. We're also planning an educational event about advance directives.

D. SHEPARD, IA: The counties we serve are primarily rural. We do a lot of education and awareness-raising for law enforcement and the public. Half of our project is to bolster that. What's nice in Iowa is that our mandatory reporters have to be trained every five years. A lot of these people are our best allies in assisting our elderly.

G. KASPER, NY: Erie County Department of Social Services' Adult Protection Unit is working now with the Seneca Nation and Alleghany Reservation, and is developing a better partnership between county services and the services offered on the reservation.

G. TARBUTTON, OR: Washington County sheriffs patrol the rural areas. The Department of Disability, Aging, and Veteran Services has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with rural law enforcement agencies, Sheriff's Office, and District Attorney's Office. All parties to this MOU have access to the law enforcement database that gives us access to police reports [involving] people 65+. Cases are referred to us or our Multi-Disciplinary team (MDT). Over time, the MDT has given law enforcement and prosecutors an understanding of the role that social service and protective service agencies play in dealing with these situations; when they found out we could do those things for them, it automatically generated the referrals.

B. STRATTON, IA: Our teams have been meeting for a number of years. We've been able to foster some partnerships with other agencies, so that we are able to contact many of the elders in our community. We

have a Hispanic population here in our county, and have bilingual staff available. We are also able to access rural areas, because we have a very good relationship with our law enforcement agencies.

Understanding the Barriers That Hinder Service

Cultural Differences and Building Trust

- Fear and reluctance to report abuse (particularly if the abuser is a family member).
- Denial that abuse can happen in all cultures.
- Suspicion and distrust of “outsiders.”
- Social isolation, especially in rural areas.
- Language isolation

Language and Cultural Barriers

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

MARY LYNN KASUNIC – FACILITATOR

What are some of the barriers to serving ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse populations in your area?

B. STRATTON, IA: With regard to Hispanics, our biggest barrier is the “we take care of our own” view. Families tend to want to keep their elders in their homes – until things happen that necessitate our intervention. Some of those situations are very difficult. We’d much rather intervene, gain their trust, and give people the option of additional services to keep the elder in the home [if appropriate in the situation].

D. SHEPARD, IA: Among our smaller ethnic groups, problems tend to stay within the group. I think the rural isolation of elders still living on the farmstead or in small towns contributes to the fact that we don’t usually hear of anyone at risk or who’s been abused until a major crisis occurs. Then we’re going in and putting out fires, instead of trying to be proactive. We’re trying to fix things that may no longer be fixable.

H. LEDESMA, CA: In San Mateo County, we run into language barriers. We’ve got a lot of Hispanic and Asian populations. You have to be aware of different dialects in trying to get your point across.

M. EDGAR-HERRERA, NY: We have the same barriers with language, although we do have a lot of bilingual staff. Of course with these populations, especially with migrants, a lot of people come from countries where officials and the government are not to be trusted and the police are corrupt. So, that’s a big barrier. Many times, it’s the children who are doing the abuse to the elders. This is their child they’re talking about. How can they report their child for the abuse? We need to overcome that, too, to make them see that if they’re being abused it’s a crime and they need to be in a safe situation.

R. LYONS: I agree. We are by no means “rural.” We are a highly urban area located in the Washington, DC metro area. The language barrier is our biggest problem in getting the word out to the various populations about available services.

System-Level Challenges

- State and local resources already stretched to the limit.
- Too few bilingual professionals or interpreters.
- Inadequate APS staffing levels; multiple law enforcement priorities.
- Limited understanding of ethnic and cultural differences.
- Inadequate laws.

G. TARBUTTON, OR: We only have four APS workers. We have one Spanish-speaking worker, which means, how do we serve the Koreans, the Chinese, the Vietnamese? We borrow some of our other staff members who are bicultural to help in those situations. But still, four APS workers in a community our size is not adequate.

H. LEDESMA, CA: We have bi-cultural staff, but they're not always available to help out. We borrow staff from other programs as much as we can. We can't just rely upon ourselves to educate those various populations. We're hoping to provide more aid and outreach to the people who are out in the community every day interacting with people from different cultures, like the postal workers, the bankers, and so on, who can help get that communication and education out there. A lot of the time they're able to connect through their own language and culture in a way that we aren't able to do.

G. KASPER, NY: Resources oftentimes just cannot meet the demand of what all the communities really deserve. We don't have *one* Spanish-speaking person on our staff (and there are 119 folks here). I think a huge part of the city is underserved as a result. Are attempts being made to network with diverse community groups? Yes, there really are. But do we have the resources to really be able to serve them? That's a concern.

M. EDGAR-HERRERA, NY: We work with Hispanics, Asians, Koreans, and with organizations already in place to bring the information to them. We also provide a lot of outreach in the libraries. We have resources out in English, Spanish, and other languages in our libraries. That's another way we get the information out.

G. TARBUTTON, OR: In Washington County, there are about 600 police officers. To them, what we do is a specialty. It's a barrier in the sense that they have a whole lot going on about child abuse, domestic violence, and other crimes, in addition to the laws they have to know and understand in order to write their police reports. It can be an opportunity to help them resolve the service side of it. But it really is a constant challenge to keep them informed. Years ago, when we started working on APS issues, the older Anglo folks weren't reporting either, for almost the same reasons as minority groups. It wasn't until we really built the infrastructure within law enforcement, social services, and prosecution that those things really started to flow. People don't usually enter voluntarily into this sort of system.

K. INOSHITA, OH: In the southern Appalachian Ohio region, what I see as barriers are: lack of medical care; lack of mental health services; and lack of resources. We have maybe one APS staff per county. An APS worker in the Department of Child and Family Services may wear several different hats and have a lot of other responsibilities. As I see it, the major problem in our area is lack of resources.

B. STRATTON, IA: There are a lot of barriers. We don't actually have an elder abuse law. It's a dependent adult abuse law. There are a lot of gray areas, and depending on what county you're in, different interpretations, which leads to a lot of confusion.

G. TARBUTTON, OR: It is important that laws and legislation be reviewed by every community. A couple of years ago, we held an elder abuse summit and ended up identifying our own issues here, which is where we should have started anyway. We wrote down the issues that were really important to our community, issues that our local prosecutors and advocates would support and really go to bat for. We ended up making recommendations for changing some state laws, and were pretty successful in doing that.

J. JOHNSON, IA: Following up on Iowa's Dependent Adult Abuse law, the Department of Human Services has a hard time because it has to meet the definition of "dependent" as stipulated by Iowa Code. There has to be an allegation of abuse, and there has to be a caretaker. The whole setup of our law makes it very gray and very complicated. That's why our initiative came about: to help when they can't accept a case because those criteria aren't met. Then we can jump in. It's very rural out here. The little towns have that same mentality in that they kind of "take care of each other." So we're just not getting the calls that we should be getting.

Working Together on Many Fronts

Strategies from the Field

- Make sure your service system is prepared to respond to new referrals uncovered through targeted outreach.
- Figure out where the service gaps are, especially in rural areas.
- Decide how to deal with referrals that are not appropriate for APS, yet which may need intensive assistance.
- Mobilize and collaborate with law enforcement, victim assistance and domestic/family violence networks, legal services providers, emergency medical teams (EMT), financial institutions, religious organizations, and other community gatekeepers.
- Encourage the creation of specialized units in law enforcement to investigate cases and prosecute offenders.
- Develop expertise. Offer training and technical assistance to assist diverse stakeholder groups.

Strategies from the Field

- Recruit bi-lingual, culturally sensitive APS and law enforcement staff to provide needed services.
- Make sure primary outreach materials are available in as many languages as possible, are culturally sensitive, and easily understood.
- Include community libraries in your outreach.
- Partner with higher education to attract linguistically and culturally diverse students into the social services, victim advocacy, and criminal justice fields. Promote and encourage stipends, scholarships, and internships.
- Support best practices knowledge sharing.
- Convene a local, county, multi-county, regional, or state summit to address issues of elder abuse prevention, intervention, and resource requirements.
- Make priorities and needs known to state legislatures.

Moving Toward Solutions

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

MARY LYNN KASUNIC – FACILITATOR

I would like you to do a bit of dreaming. If money were no object, if you had adequate staffing and the freedom to do whatever you want or could, what would you do differently? What kinds of solutions would help us to overcome the barriers just discussed?

G. KASPER, NY: I definitely think that community awareness and education programs are extremely important, not only for the service providers, but also for the seniors.

G. TARBUTTON, OR: I would like to have *special units within law enforcement* that focus specifically on elder abuse. Just like there are for child abuse. In addition, APS needs more workers. Bilingual, bicultural staff members are critical to our success. We need *models, best practices, and draft legislation*. Our communities are very new at dealing with these issues. *Public education* also is very important. Another solution is partnership with the Department of Justice [Oregon Attorney General's Office], Crime Victims' Assistance, state police, and private attorneys. Attorneys have a big stake in this. They see a lot of financial exploitation, which never gets reported or addressed. Financial folks, as well, need to have special knowledge and training.

G. MANG, AZ: Phoenix Police Department created a Vulnerable Adult Crimes Squad, although it's not an elder abuse unit exclusively. Three detectives are assigned to investigate crimes against vulnerable adults. It's a step in the right direction. The County Attorney's Office has an attorney assigned to prosecute elder abuse, but she has child abuse and domestic violence responsibilities as well, so it doesn't get her full

attention. From my perspective, we not only need specialized law enforcement units to investigate cases. We need to make sure the cases get prosecuted.

R. LYONS, VA: [More publicity efforts] would bring more public attention to the problem. Saturate the market. It would probably result in hundreds of calls. Whether we can respond to the increased volume, I don't know. But at least I'd like to get it out there. I think public education is the key.

B. STRATTION, IA: I'd like to see more people specialize in elder abuse. That includes law enforcement as well as APS. I would also like to see laws and more public education. One new law proposed in Iowa that I thought was innovative would order services on a short-term, 30-day basis for an at-risk individual (I don't know if it will go through). A lot of people don't accept services right away, but once we've been able to intervene in the family, they find that the services are very beneficial. That would be one of my dreams. The other thing would be to share more nationally. I think if somebody has an idea on the other side of the country, I'd sure like to know about it.

K. INOSHITA, OH: I think that something that hasn't been said is that we need to educate the banking communities. Financial exploitation is a growing problem in our area, and I'm sure in all of your areas, too. The banking community needs to be informed and educated, and we are doing that in this area. If we had a lot of money, I'd like to do a lot of outreach in that area.

D. SHEPARD, IA: We do a lot of outreach to law enforcement and other groups. But lately I read that 85 percent of our county attorneys in Iowa don't realize that we have a Dependent Adult Abuse law. So, we need to get those folks educated. We need to educate our legislators, too.

H. LEDESMA, CA: I think, definitely, public education is huge. I completely agree with the training of financial institutions.

T. OLSON, AZ: There are two things I'd like to suggest. First, we don't have enough minority and bilingual criminal justice and social work staff. There may be ways universities can help, for example, in public awareness or by encouraging stipends or scholarships to social service and criminal justice majors. We could also offer internships. Second, one of the things we know about being a change agent is to connect with the informal leaders of a community. Invite their participation. Then we would have true advocates.

G. TARBUTTON, OR: Training is very much a key. Universities have a big role to play in that, not just the law enforcement cadet training. I think each of us could identify legislators in our states who need to learn more about these programs, the National Center on Elder Abuse, the proposed Elder Justice Act, and other things going on. I've found in my conversations that it's just a totally new experience for them. Until policy makers become fully informed of this issue, it's not going to move forward as fast as it could. It's the resources that are holding us back.

G. MANG, AZ: We shouldn't reinvent the wheel. We have so many great programs! The Oregon banking project, which we shamelessly borrowed, has been very successful in Arizona, at least in Maricopa County.

When we have resources and information about projects that have been successful, we should share them and not keep them close to the vest.

Additional Information

National Center on Elder Abuse Sources & Resources

Community Sentinels: Reaching Hidden Victims

www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/sentinel0205.pdf

Directory of Elder Abuse Coalitions & Task Forces

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=coalitionsandtaskforces.cfm

Elder Abuse in Indian Country

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=nativeamericans.cfm

Elder Abuse Prevention Community Outreach Toolkit

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=outreachkit1.cfm

Faith-Based Outreach and Education (PPT)

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=faithleadersrespond.cfm

NCEA Promising Practices Database

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=toolsresources.cfm

Perspectives on Diversity

Developing Linguistically and Culturally Responsive Materials for Latina Survivors of Domestic Violence, National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence

www.dvalianza.org/pdfs/r_devlinguistic.pdf

Elder Abuse Training Curriculum on Serving Victims of Elder Abuse in the Asian Pacific Islander Community for Law Enforcement, Prosecutors, and Court Personnel, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach

www.stopasianelderabuse.org/training.html

Elder Mistreatment in the African American Community, E. A. Brown, Joint Doctoral Program in Social Work and Psychology, University of Michigan

www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/prba/perspectives/springsummer2000/ebrown.pdf

Sacred Circle: National Resource Center to End Violence Against Native American Women

www.sacred-circle.com/

Related Research and References

America's Diversity: Online Study Guide, National Aging I&R Support Center, National Association of State Units on Aging

www.nasua.org/informationandreferral/diversity.cfm

Coalition Building, Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources

<http://wch.uhs.wisc.edu/01-Prevention/01-Prev-Coalition.html>

Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation in Rural Settings, Clearinghouse on Abuse & Neglect of the Elderly, CANE Bibliography

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=CANE_rural.cfm

Elder Abuse: International and Cultural Perspectives, Clearinghouse on Abuse & Neglect of the Elderly, CANE Bibliography

www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=CANE_International060614a.cfm

Limited English Proficiency Resource Document: Tips and Tools from the Field, U.S. Department of Justice

www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/lep/tips_and_tools-9-21-04.htm#2

THE NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE (NCEA) serves as a national resource for elder rights and adult protective services advocates, law enforcement and legal professionals, health care professionals, public policy leaders, researchers, educators, and concerned citizens. It is the mission of NCEA to promote understanding, knowledge sharing, and action on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The NCEA is administered under the auspices of the National Association of State Units on Aging.

NCEA Partners

- National Association of State Units on Aging
- American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging
- Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly, University of Delaware
- National Adult Protective Services Association
- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

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