

Respect for Seniors Project

Report on the first three years - July 2011



Wisdom



Spirit



Strength



Choice



Inspired Care... Enriching Lives... Together



St Ives Uniting Church



***Respect for Seniors* is a grassroots campaign that empowers individuals and communities to share the vision of a more respectful society**

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The Respect for Seniors Project also received funding from the NSW Government for the production and launch of the elder abuse prevention resource kit "As Life Goes On."

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¹ Accessed July 2011. <http://www.cotansw.com.au/>

² Accessed July 2011. <http://www.tars.com.au/>

Executive Summary

This final report on the first three years of the Respect for Seniors Project provides an overview of research and initiatives for the prevention of elder abuse. Respect for Seniors is a grassroots initiative conceived and developed by a small group in one church – St Ives Uniting Church. The underlying strategy of the project is based on a two tiered approach of general social education and the development of more targeted programs for older people in the community.

The first phase of the Respect for Seniors Project has been established as a community awareness raising campaign through a broad social education program. The Respect for Seniors Website, Wear Purple Day and “As Life Goes On” resource kit and DVD initiatives have been established as part of an ongoing community awareness campaign. The aim is to promote attitudinal and behavioural change in the community through the development of a culture of respect, in order to help prevent abuse of older people.

Approximately 150 members of the NSW Parliament, the NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing (MACA)³ and all NSW Local Councils have received copies of the As Life Goes On resource kit, for use in the community. Wear Purple Day was widely promoted in 2010 and 2011 through Uniting Church congregations and UnitingCare Ageing Residential Facilities and Community Services to further raise awareness of valuing Seniors.

The second phase reflects the more individual focus of the project. The Towards Respect Together initiative is a preventative group work program that aims to develop protective factors against ageism and abuse. The documented concept and program is available at www.respectforseniors.org.

Family Conversations is a developing initiative based on restorative practices that aims to empower individuals in the community to maintain respectful relationships. This initiative has the potential to help prevent and address abusive situations that involve older people, while maintaining relationships important to them.

³ Accessed July 2011. <http://www.maca.nsw.gov.au/>

Section 1: Research

Key Findings from Research Reviews

- Fernandez (2011) identified Towards Respect Together as a primary prevention program that addresses many interconnected protective factors against abuse of the elderly. The intergenerational and community building approach of the program should provide benefits for the wider community through the promotion of a range of personal skills, and the encouragement of awareness and empowerment to improve unhealthy relationships.
- Taylor (2011) identified “group work” as essential when working with the elderly in order to alleviate loneliness and social isolation, which are risk factors for depression and low-self esteem. Discussion of shared experiences and different coping strategies in a group context was identified as beneficial to the promotion of more productive personal behaviours, and less tolerance of abuse and ageist behaviours.
- Jay’s (2011) research, “Family Conversations: Intervention through Restorative Practices in Cases of Elder Abuse” identified the value of applying restorative practice interventions to existing and potential abusive situations involving older people. Family Conversations, as a restorative practice approach, has the potential to address significant underreporting of elder abuse in important relationships, due to the fundamental aims of relationship rehabilitation and a dialogue of respect, while minimising harm in the relationship.

Summary of Research Recommendations

The elder abuse prevention resource kit has received a high level of interest from community organisations interested in raising the awareness of this hidden problem. Here, we put forward a range of strategies which could be effective in further raising awareness of elder abuse along with some approaches for prevention. These ideas could be developed into proposals for program trials or further research.

- i. Commission a sequel to the initial DVD “As Life Goes On” to illustrate how Family Conversations could provide assistance in the first two scenarios. This resource would encourage older people currently involved in abusive relationships to consider utilising Family Conversations as a method to enable them to take action to stop the abuse and improve the relationship.
- ii. Scope and implement a pilot study of Family Conversations as a restorative practices response to elder abuse in the community. This pilot may be seen as a community initiative with the focus being on prevention and individual responsibility. A pilot of Family Conversations would include training for participants and a robust evaluation of effectiveness to inform on the benefits of integrating the approach into care.
- iii. Incorporate information about the life stories component of Towards Respect Together into aged care training courses. Other human services industry courses such as TAFE welfare courses, University social work courses, and high school curriculums, may benefit from the life stories modules to help to counter ageist attitudes through the development of intergenerational understanding through engagement, and promote a culture of respect in the community.
- iv. Continue to promote and expand the Respect for Seniors Campaign and Wear Purple Day as primary prevention measures against ageism and abuse of the elderly; and promote mutual respect in the community.

Section 2: Project Initiatives

- Respect for Seniors Campaign and “Wear Purple Day” were launched in July, 2009 at St Ives Uniting Church. This ongoing congregational initiative will be promoted annually by St Ives Uniting Church, UnitingCare NSW.ACT and UnitingCare Ageing Regional Coordinating Chaplains.
- Seniors sessions *Toward Respect Together* have been piloted as a preventative education resource to promote greater quality of life for seniors through the development of protective factors against existing or potential abuse.
- The inaugural elders interview, “This is Your Life,” in 2010 to promote positive attitudes towards older people and combat ageism, has developed into a number of intergenerational initiatives in collaboration with a local schools program. The Life Stories component of the Towards Respect Together sessions is an example of this. The 2011 Wear Purple Day was celebrated through 30-40 events in Uniting Church congregations in NSW. The events celebrate the value of seniors and coincide with World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.
- “As Life Goes On” DVD is an educational resource developed for use with seniors, organisations, and in the community. The DVD was launched in July, 2011 by the NSW Minister for Ageing and Minister for Disability Services, the Hon Andrew Constance, and the Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister for Women, the Hon Pru Goward.
- A resource kit, including the DVD, has been developed for use in community forums. State-wide distribution of 500 kits has included two Uniting Church presbyteries, 153 local councils, 150 members of NSW Parliament, a small number of government committees, and various professionals working in the aged care and community services sector.
- Community forums have been trialled as a method of raising awareness of issues affecting the quality of life of seniors.

- Initial research (www.respectforseniors.org) has identified the potential for Family Conversations, based on restorative practice principles, to be an effective initiative in the prevention of elder abuse.
- The establishment of The Respect for Seniors Website: www.respectforseniors.org as an education and information resource on aspects of the Respect for Seniors Project.
- The Respect for Seniors Project team has also participated throughout the project duration in local events to promote the Project and direct enquiries toward the website, including: Carers Week 2008; Ku-ring-gai Council Seniors Festival March 2011; Seniors Week activities March 2010 and 2011 including an Information Session for the congregation and guests of St Ives Uniting Church conducted by The Aged Rights Service; and participation in the Seniors Week Expo at St Ives. The team has also conducted extensive liaison with local community networks and working parties, Seniors community groups and educational institutions conducting research in the field of ageing.

These initiatives offer support to individuals at the grassroots level.

Section 3: Future Expansion of the Respect for Seniors Project

(i) Overview

The vision of the Respect for Seniors Project is for attitudinal and behavioural change through community engagement. The aim and goals of the project are to promote a culture of respect for seniors through a social awareness campaign, in conjunction with more targeted programs that help to prevent abuse and combat ageism in the community.

An action research process has allowed for the identification of areas of concern that are not otherwise being addressed. The needs identified by project research have subsequently led to the development of initiatives based on prevention rather than reaction to existing abuse.

The first phase of the Respect for Seniors Project has been established as a community awareness raising campaign through a broad social education program. The Respect for Seniors Website, Wear Purple Day and the DVD “As Life Goes On” are major initiatives that have been established as part of this ongoing community process with potential for significant expansion.

The second phase of the project has continued to build on the original project vision and strategy through the development of a more individual focus. The Towards Respect Together initiative is a preventative group work program that aims to develop identified protective factors against ageism and abuse. The documented concept and program are available through www.respectforseniors.org

Family Conversations is a developing initiative based on restorative practices that aims to empower individuals in the community to maintain respectful relationships. Through the training and promotion of Family Conversation Specialists as independent specialists in restorative practices, the purpose of the initiative is to provide appropriate intervention strategies to help prevent

abuse against the elderly while maintaining relationships that are important to them. The ongoing process of research and development of initiatives reflects the “grassroots” nature of the project as a social awareness campaign to provide social education on an identified need within the community, in order to develop a community response to that need.

(ii) Recommendations

It is recommended that the following strategies be considered for raising awareness of the hidden problem of elder abuse in the community. A range of practical programs, if adequately resourced, would build on the initial work of the Project to raise awareness and allow avenues for seniors in our community to build resilience and restore relationships.

- Further development of the Family Conversations and Towards Respect Together initiatives.
- Continued promotion and expansion of the Respect for Seniors Campaign and Wear Purple Day as primary prevention measures against ageism and abuse of older people, and to promote mutual respect in the community.
- Publicity to support and motivate the grassroots initiative, Campaign Champions. There is potential for this initiative to promote and extend the campaign into regional NSW through community forums. A regional launch is occurred at Wagga Wagga in August 2011.
- Life stories component of Towards Respect Together be promoted as a module in aged care training courses, in TAFE welfare courses and recommended in social work courses at university and in high school curriculums. This would help to counter ageist attitudes and promote a culture of respect and understanding in the community through intergenerational engagement.
- The development of a group work program for victims of elder abuse. An application could be submitted to the Victims Compensation Grants scheme for program funding.
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and other groups with diverse needs, have been identified as a future focus of attention for the project. These groups provide the potential for future partnerships to extend and develop the campaign into the wider community.

- Respect for Seniors Website to be developed as an interactive resource. Access to reports, background documents, resource kits, ongoing up-date of activities, Campaign Champions and links to local council sources of community grants would provide an invaluable resource for the extension and development of the campaign.
- Additional funding for the production and incorporation of additional expert interviews into the existing DVD “As Life Goes On” to enhance the effectiveness of the DVD as a community awareness raising resource and as a training tool in the aged care sector.

(iii) Project Development

Towards Respect Together

The second phase of the project continues to utilise an action research method of continuous development of social education initiatives in response to identified need in the community. As a result of their research, Lane (2009) and Budd (2010) recommended the development of programs that foster protective factors, identified by Lane (2009), to counter potential risk factors for abuse. Fernandez (2010) considers mutual respect in relationships, “respectful treatment of others as well as oneself,” as the foundation for the development of protective factors to counter ageism and abuse (Fernandez 2010, cited in Needs 2011).

The Towards Respect Together initiative has been developed and trialled as a primary prevention group-work program, based on an empowerment model. Taylor (2011) considers that group work is essential when working with the elderly as it alleviates loneliness, social isolation, may help to normalise feelings, and fulfils the need of the older person to be heard. The program aim is to raise awareness of interpersonal interactions through the consideration of ways in which individuals give and receive respect, and therefore has relevance to both potential and existing victims and abusers (Needs, 2011).

Through increased awareness of capacity and preferred ways of relating, increased self-image, confidence, resilience, assertiveness, coping skills, and the lessening of social isolation, the program aims to enhance self-esteem in the elderly, which is a core protective factor against ageism and abuse. (Fernandez, et al. 2011, cited in Needs, 2011)

The use of experiential learning and problem solving activities assist in the development of a greater sense of self and provides engagement with others. This contributes to psychological resilience, which underpins physical and psychological health. (Fernandez, et al. 2011, cited in Needs, 2011)

The *circle of respect* concept is used as an educational tool to raise awareness and understanding of different views and changing attitudes and expressions of respect. This process may help to reduce relationship conflicts and reduce the generational gap. (Fernandez, 2010 cited in Fernandez, et. al. 2011).

The strengths based approach of “nostalgic reflection” in the life stories component aims to identify and strengthen inherent resilience and strengthen identity. The intergenerational context of the program encourages participation of all generations and differs from “reminiscence” as purely for the benefit of the elderly (Fernandez, et al. 2011). This connection between generations is considered necessary in the Australian context in order to challenge intergenerational stereotypes that help foster ageism in the community, particularly amongst the young. (McCabe, et al. 2010)

The purpose of the Towards Respect Together program is to encourage attitudinal and behavioural change of individuals through awareness and empowerment, and the acknowledgement of the purpose and value of life across the whole of the life-span. (Needs, 2011) The flexible intergenerational approach aims to be of benefit to all those who interact with seniors, including potential or existing abusers.

Needs (2011) considers this psycho-educational group work program as being suitable for use in residential aged care facilities, retirement villages, nursing homes and hostels, with trained chaplains, pastoral care teams and aged care workers as facilitators. The program has the flexibility to be adapted and incorporated into existing initiatives in the community. Organisations such as Carers NSW, Health and Community Care facilities, day and respite groups, seniors groups and neighbourhood centres are an ideal avenue to promote the program.

Inclusion of the program into aged care training courses would promote the acknowledgement of seniors as individuals to be respected. The Life Stories

component could be incorporated as a component into an ethical practices module in aged care training courses.

The future extension of this component into TAFE welfare courses, university social work courses and high school curriculums would help to counter ageist attitudes through the development of intergenerational understanding through engagement and promote a culture of respect in the community. With the involvement of families in a palliative care context, Life stories could become a Living Eulogy, an acknowledgement, validation, respect and support for those who are dying (Needs, 2011).

Family Conversations

The Family Conversation initiative is a developing response to a recommendation by Budd (2010) for interventions to address potential or existing abuse. Such interventions should reflect empowerment as a process that recognises the importance of freedom and choice for older people. Family Conversations, based on principles of restorative practices, was recommended by Budd as a means of respecting the complexity of important relationships and to “support all parties involved in elder abuse.” (p.24)

The Family Conversations initiative aims to maintain and develop healthy relationships by supporting older people involved in challenging relationships that impact on their wellbeing, dignity and quality of life. Although valued by the older person, these challenging relationships may have the potential to escalate and present a risk of emotional, physical, financial and/or psychological abuse. (Jay, 2011)

The initiative is underpinned by a restorative practice philosophy that considers “effecting change and providing support for individuals and relationships is best achieved by engaging with, rather than acting for or to people” (Watchel and McCold 2000, cited in Jay, 2011, p3).

Abuse of the elderly is largely underreported (WHO/INPEA, 2002). Primary reasons for the reluctance to report abuse by older people are considered to be a lack of faith-based support to resolve conflict (Brennan and Heiser, 2004, cited in Budd, 2010); and shame of disclosing (Moon, 2002; The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit, 2006, cited in Hewson, 2010). Other considerations that may effect the reporting of abuse are the relationship to the abuser as a family member (Kurrie 2004, cited in Carter, 2010), the importance of such relationships for older people, and the distrust of protective services. (Nerenberg, 2008, cited in Carter, 2010)

The aim of the Family Conversation initiative is to present an alternative approach, through Family Conversation specialists in the local community, to those who would not normally access counselling or formal interventions in response to existing or potential abuse. The vision is to offer an informal, non-judgemental and flexible resource, as an “olive branch” to empower family members to choose assistance and commit to behavioural change without the fear of repercussions and stigma.

Family Conversations: Concept Proposal

A social education program reflects the philosophy of the Respect for Seniors Project. The proposed sequel to the initial DVD could provide an educational resource to enable those experiencing abuse, or in potentially abusive situations, to see how their situation could be improved by a Family Conversation. The focus will be on how to stop existing abuse and restore the relationship, or how to avoid the development of an abusive relationship. The Family Conversations are based in dialogue to help individuals value what is good and explore what could be improved in their relationships.

A comprehensive pilot, will involve a flexible range of services offered along the continuum, from conversations with individuals to full conferences, depending on the needs of those involved. A key aspect of the process would be a philosophical shift of empowering families through inclusion of all those

affected by abuse, victims and perpetrators, to take responsibility to choose different behaviours and find mutually suitable solutions.

Important in the further development in the program is a continuity of input from the creative leaders.

Family Conversations: Evaluation

The second phase would scope a robust evaluation of the Family Conversations process based in qualitative research. Trials of the process could then be implemented and evaluated in order to inform whether a broader roll out would be recommended. Extensive training in the community would be required.

A rigorous, structured qualitative research project to scope and pilot the Family Conversations initiative would be required to validate its potential. The research project would need to meet government funding and contract requirements. The project research would be based on an academic partnership, for example with Macquarie University. .UnitingCare Ageing, as the industry partner, could combine with a restorative practices specialist as lead partner.

Section 4: Future Directions of the Respect for Seniors Project

A joint planning session between UnitingCare NSW.ACT Communications and Marketing, St. Ives Uniting Church and UnitingCare Ageing Northern Sydney Region representatives was held in March 2011. A range of representatives from NSW Presbyteries and visitors were invited to explore options to continue the initiatives of the *Respect for Seniors* campaign to raise awareness of the issues of elder abuse.

There was strong agreement amongst the workshop participants about the importance of the issue of elder abuse and its hidden nature. A commitment was given by UnitingCare and Uniting Church representatives to continue marketing, promotion and support for elder abuse prevention activities within the resources of the organisation, particularly for Wear Purple Day.

The evolution and extension of the *Towards Respect Together* sessions into existing programs in the community and aged care environment is in line with the underlying philosophy of the project. This concept reflects the purpose of the Respect for Seniors Campaign as a social awareness campaign providing education on an identified need in order to develop community responses to that need.

The development of an interactive website would provide an invaluable resource for continued support and expansion of the campaign. The *As Life Goes On* resource information and DVD order form can be downloaded from the Respect for Seniors website: www.respectforseniors.org.

The development and pilot of “Family Conversations” may be considered as reflecting the project vision of attitudinal and behavioural change through community engagement to help develop a culture of respect. This statewide initiative would provide opportunities “for older adults to seek support within an environment they can trust and feel comfortable with” (Budd, 2010).

The Respect for Seniors Project has been an ongoing process of research and development of initiatives. This process reflects the “grassroots” nature of the project as a social awareness campaign to provide social education on an identified need within the community, in order to develop a community response to that need.

There is scope for the project to continue in the same way.

References

A number of these reviews of academic literature on elder abuse and related topics were undertaken by university students on behalf of the Respect for Seniors Project. Full copies of these papers can be found at www.respectforseniors.org.

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