

Towards Respect Together

**A program to empower individuals
and develop protective factors**

Report by

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June 2011

Towards Respect Together Program

Respect as a protective factor

The promotion of respect has been identified as being of primary importance in responding to both ageism and abuse of the elderly (WHO/INPEA, 2002). Research undertaken by the Respect for Seniors Project by Rosic (2010), Fernandez (2010) has further considered various concepts of respect. Fernandez (2011) considers mutual respect, the “respectful treatment of others as well as oneself” as providing the foundation for the development of protective factors to counter ageism and abuse. Lane (2009) recommended the development of a two-level approach to increase community awareness of ageism and abuse of the elderly, and programs to empower individuals through the development of protective factors that counter potential risk factors for abuse.

The Context

The Toward Respect Together Program is a resource in the development of identified protective factors to counter potential and existing abuse of the elderly (Fernandez, 2011). The program aims to raise awareness of interpersonal interactions through the consideration of ways in which individuals give and receive respect. Consequently, the sessions have relevance to both potential and existing victims and abusers, and reflect the underlying vision of the project, which is attitudinal and behavioural change.

These sessions aim to counter identified risk factors for abuse (Lane, 2009 and Budd, 2010) through the development of increased awareness of capacity and preferred ways of relating, increased self-image, confidence, resilience, assertiveness, coping skills, and the lessening of social isolation (FERNANDEZ, 2011).

Aspects of the Towards Respect Together Program have the potential to be integrated into a training module to address ageism and abuse of the elderly

among future aged care workers and has the flexibility to be integrated into, and to complement existing initiatives.

The need for the Towards Respect Together Program

“It is recommended that pilot workshops be developed and trialled as a primary intervention based on (these) protective factors as identified in the research document “Just a number...an exploration of ageing” (Budd, 2010).

Towards Respect Together is a primary prevention program based on an empowerment model. The aim is to assist the day to day self-determination of the elderly through the reduction of risk factors that may lead to abuse, including social isolation, dependency and financial abuse (Fernandez, 2011). Such a model empowers the elderly by working “with not for” individuals to develop awareness of protective factors and to “provide the resources to both potential victim and abuser by reducing their respective risk factors” (Lane, 2009, cited in Fernandez, 2011).

The sessions reflect Budd’s recommendation for a program that reinforces factors such as “positive self-image of ageing, identity, self-efficacy, self-respect, coping skills, a sense of personal control, resilience, assertive communication, conscious ageing, a sense of belonging, recognition of benevolent ageism, respectful relationships and life long learning.” (Budd, 2010; 23-4) Lane (2009), in consideration of declining self-image in ageing, states “It is reasonable to expect that exposure to programmes that encourage reinforcement of self-image, identity and self-esteem would reduce the level to which stereotypes are interiorised in the re-enforcement of self-image in older people” (p. 12)

Fernandez (2011) also considers that societal change in attitudes and expressions of respect has involved a shift from an automatic respect for elders to reciprocal respect. She states that “Discussion and activities in the program that explore these different interpretations can lead to more mutually respectful relationships through enhanced understanding and assist in reducing the generational gap.”(p5)

Fernandez (2011), citing research by Orth, Trzesniewski, Robbins, (2010) which identified declining self esteem in those over 60 years of age, and by Reitzes and Mutran (2006) which associated positive self- esteem with lower levels of depression, and closer and more supportive relationships (Andrews & Brown, 1995) considers addressing declining self-esteem in the Toward Respect Together program as a core preventative factor for ageism and abuse.

The development of assertive communication skills within the Towards Respect Together Program is considered important to counter ageist attitudes that are reflected in patronising communications between seniors and others, particularly in health care. Patronising communications with seniors has been recognised (Bouchard Ryan et al, 2006, cited in Fernandez, 2011) as "...dependency-inducing, especially in health care, where the consequences for an older person can be reduced self-worth." Further studies with seniors by Bouchard Ryan et al, 2006 (cited in Fernandez, 2011) considered that assertiveness may be used to counter patronising communications.

The ability to appropriately communicate needs and feelings may "assist the gradual shift from independence to interdependence." (Fernandez 2011: 5) Fernandez considers that the development of assertive communication skills through the program may assist in the improvement of existing relationships and promote socialisation.

'Social isolation and absence of social support are risk factors for abuse victims." (Fernandez, 2011: 7) The Towards Respect Together program promotes social attachments and connection of seniors in the community to reduce the negative effects of loneliness, which include depression, low self-esteem and substance abuse (Fisher & Regan, 2006, cited in Fernandez, 2011) and higher mortality, poor sleep, systolic hypertension, heart disease and cognitive decline (Luanaigh & Lawlor, 2008, cited in Fernandez, 2011).

Lane (2009), Cacioppo & Patrick (cited in Lane, 2009), and Stanley, Moyle, Ballentyne, Jaworski & Corlis et al, 2010 (cited in Fernandez, 2011), have

shown that the elderly regard isolation as a potential risk factor for abuse and lack of self-worth.

Respectful relationships underpin the program content and process. The "Circle of Respect" concept is used as a social education tool to promote awareness of respectful relationships and promote mutual respect as a balance of respect for self with respect for others. An outcome of such an awareness and understanding of different views and opinions may help to reduce relationship conflicts (Fernandez, 2010 cited in Fernandez, 2011).

Older people may be more reliant on passive or avoidant intrapersonal forms of coping (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley & Novacek, 1987, cited in Fernandez, 2011) that may result in lower physical and psychological health. The Towards Respect Together program uses a strength-based approach of nostalgic reflection over the life-span to identify and strengthen inherent resilience in older individuals. Hildon et al., (2008), cited in Fernandez (2011) considers this approach as important for sustaining identity and meaning making to promote resilience.

Experiential learning and problem solving activities within the program assist in the development of inter and intra-personal skills leading to enhanced self efficacy and mastery. This supports and encourages a greater sense of self and engagement with others and contributes to psychological resilience, considered important for physical and psychological health (Fernandez, 2011).

"Reflecting on roles and responsibilities throughout the lifespan assists in consolidating an individual's life experiences and sense of identity."
(Fernandez, 2011:10)

The program includes a session on life review and the consideration of self. This is undertaken in a context of sharing feelings and mutual understanding, which Lundgren, (2010) (cited in Fernandez 2011) considers this a most beneficial way for one's identity. Fernandez considers that the sessions may provide a counter to a generational resistance to the acknowledgement of death and resultant death anxiety that Lane, (2009) noted. Life review, with a

sense of self and spiritual peace, has been identified by seniors as preferred end of life experiences (Schrader, Nelson and Eidsness, 2009, cited in Fernandez, 2011).

The Towards Respect Together program utilises life review in an intergenerational context to promote benefits for the whole community, rather than as “reminiscence” purely for the benefit of the elderly themselves (Fernandez, 2011). McCabe et al, (2010) consider that there is a need in the Australian context to connect older and younger generations in order to challenge intergenerational stereotypes that help to foster ageism in the community, particularly amongst the young.

The participation of school students in the program activities with the seniors contributes to a more mature classroom dynamic, and allows the seniors to become mentors. The life stories segment, in particular, helps students to more fully understand life experiences that they may otherwise only read about in textbooks. Students experience a more positive attitude towards seniors after the program (Fernandez, 2011). This sense of contribution to younger generations through positive interactions, and the acceptance and integration of one’s lifetime of various roles and responsibilities, may also be seen as an essential life task for ageing well. Erikson uses the term “generativity” to describe this life task. (Erikson, 1968 cited in Monte and Sollard, 2003)

The program may be considered different to “reminiscence” programs as the underlying theme of Towards Respect Together is the development of protective factors to combat ageism and abuse of the elderly, and the promotion of strong intergenerational links to benefit the whole community.

Fernandez, (2011) considers the Towards Respect Together program “encourages awareness of unhealthy relationships and empowers seniors to address these situations through speaking up and seeking assistance” (p.12) through the development of skills to assist in daily life and particularly with stressful situations.

Target audience

The purpose of the Towards Respect Together program may be considered to be based on community building. Behavioural and attitudinal change is encouraged through awareness and the empowerment of individuals. Through the acknowledgement of the purpose and value of life across the whole of the life-span people are allowed to age with dignity and respect.

The program content, processes and flexibility have an intergenerational approach to address existing and potential victims and abusers. Therefore, involvement in the program may be considered to be beneficial for those who interact with seniors such as aged care workers, family members and younger generations.

The involvement of aged-care staff provides an opportunity for rapport building with clients. The life stories component is a tool to reduce risks associated with ageism and abuse through more personal connection between staff and older people.

Involvement of spouses and adult children in the program, and other age groups within the wider community would reflect the goal of the project for attitudinal and behavioural change through developing understanding of how to give and receive respect. Potential and existing victims in all age groups may benefit through strengthening bonds between generations (McCabe et al. 2011).

Group Work

The Institute of Group Leaders considers that groups consist of individuals with their own goals and interests, and that these individuals “develop by recognising what they want to gain from the group and by supporting others in their achievements. Often incidental learning occurs where they gain something that they never initially recognised as important from the other participants.” (www.igl.org.au, 2011)

Taylor (2011) believes that group work is essential when working with the elderly as it alleviates loneliness, social isolation and may normalise feelings. Corey and Corey, (2002) cited in Taylor, (2011) consider that group work allows for a sense of community, minimises isolation and may provide hope to participants to actively improve their own lives.

Corey and Corey, (2002) cited in Taylor, (2011) believe that the group work process allows participants an insight into interpersonal interactions of themselves and others. This insight allows for the development of new social skills to help break down social barriers and assist in building relationships. There is also the opportunity to trial new behaviours in a supportive environment before possibly implementing them in a wider context.

The group setting allows for the open discussion of shared experiences that may not be possible otherwise, and the different coping strategies that individuals employ. Those experiencing abuse may also be encouraged to cease to tolerate the abuse (Taylor, 2011). Group work ultimately fulfils the need for older people to be heard. This forum reduces the sense of isolation and loneliness which in turn may lead to depression and low self-esteem among the elderly (Corey and Corey, 2002 cited in Taylor, 2011).

Towards Respect Together is a psycho-educational program to raise awareness that encourages attitudinal and behavioural change. Lane, (2009) identified psycho-educational groups that develop coping strategies as most relevant for this program. The aim of all programs targeting seniors would be to "increase self-esteem and quality of life for participants" (p. 14), and these programs and activities should be based on empowerment theory to address "power dynamics" at the personal, group and community level. Lane refers to the benefit of a group work program as the development of a group consciousness to reduce the sense of aloneness in experiences and challenges.

The Towards Respect Together program is designed to allow individuals to explore ways of giving and receiving respect and to develop protective factors against abuse in a safe environment. The program is strengths based, with the focus on validation of each participant through many aspects of the program

including the life story component. Empowerment of the individual is developed through interactive group work which allows participants access to new perspectives and viewpoints, particularly around power and equality. Consequently, this may allow for a deeper consideration of self and preferred ways of relating that enhance individual dignity, respect and capability thereby reducing the risk factors for abuse of dependency, social isolation and financial exploitation. (Budd, 2010)

While emphasising the need for individual empowerment, Budd (2010) also recognises that empowerment is an active process that involves "... the respect for freedom and choice..." and considers as important the need to respect an older person's existing relationships when developing interventions to address potential or existing abuse. The consideration of new interventions based on principles of restorative practices was recommended by Budd (2010) "as a potentially effective and respectful intervention particularly in cases which involve emotional and psychological abuse." (p.24)

"Family Conversations" was recommended by Budd (2010) as an approach that could be developed to "support all parties involved in situations of elder abuse."(p. 24) Out of respect for the complexity of important relationships, and with the participation and support of all involved, individual approaches could be identified "which would maintain the respect, dignity and relationship that older people in our community value so highly." (p.25)

The Towards Respect Together Program employs a "with not for" approach that Budd (2010) considers empowers individuals by helping them to develop awareness of protective factors against abuse. This group work program may also be regarded as complementing, and being complemented by, Family Conversations and the "As Life Goes On" DVD initiative of the Respect for Seniors Project.

Where the program can be used

The program is ideal for use in residential aged care facilities by chaplains and pastoral care teams and aged care workers. In retirement villages, nursing

homes and hostels the sessions could be facilitated by recreational officers and other aged care personnel. Other venues in the community that would benefit are day care and respite groups, carers' groups, including Carers NSW, Health and Community Care facilities, neighbourhood centres, and seniors' groups.

Who may benefit from the program?

Apart from previously mentioned benefits to older participants, others involved in the process may also benefit. Participation in a program and writing a life story for a senior as a component of training for future aged care staff would allow for an experience of personal connection with seniors as individuals. This experience is likely to significantly reduce the potential for ageist attitudes and the risk of stereotyping of older people which can be a precursor to elder abuse.

The integration of life stories into welfare courses at university, TAFE and private colleges would broaden the program as an awareness raising and educational tool to address ageism in the community. An English studies assignment in secondary schools would be an intergenerational initiative to provide strong validation for seniors and learning for students. There are many possibilities for incorporation into visual and other tertiary courses. A section on the website www.respectforseniors.org provides further ideas for developing these intergenerational connections.

Ethical practices when working with older people is presently a module in most aged care courses. The courses would benefit from the inclusion of a life stories component as a practical example of the need to consider older people with respect. Incorporating some form of life story into medical and nursing training may help to overcome a tendency to patronising communication as a form of discrimination in the medical professions.

The involvement of families can be very beneficial in helping to create life stories, providing validation and respect that older people greatly value. The awareness of changing needs and responsibilities as people age may allow for

a greater consideration of family interactions and the development of mutually respectful relationships.

In a palliative care context the sharing of life stories may allow for healing, and ease the process of saying goodbye and letting go. An opportunity is provided for those who are close to share what is often left unsaid until the funeral, and becomes, in effect, a Living Eulogy.

How the program can be used

Towards Respect Together is primarily designed as a complete twenty hour psycho-educational program to encourage attitudinal and behavioural change. There is flexibility, however, to use elements as stand alone components that may be adapted and incorporated into a diversity of contexts.

As a complete program of, ideally, ten two-hour sessions over ten weeks, the program activities aim to create an experience of building a community of safety and trust that enables appropriate disclosure. Life reflection allows for validation of capacity and resilience that enables participants to maintain dignity, safety and respect as a preventative approach to address ageism and abuse.

As an adjunct to existing programs of reminiscence work, such as those developed by Elizabeth MacKinlay at www.centreforageing.org.au the recognition and development of protective factors may allow for wider application of these programs. The circle of respect concept has potential to address power imbalance in relationships and function as a preventative approach to potentially abusive situations.

Towards Respect Together is designed to be an interactive process that engages participants in a process to explore particular topics. It is not an information resource. If information is requested on aspects of interest to a particular group then it is anticipated that appropriate organisations would be contacted to provide information sessions.

Participants will explore topics to the depth that they are comfortable with and will engage in content to the depth that timeframes permit.

Individuals will only disclose what they are ready to in a group environment and this will more readily occur if the process is respectful and a sense of safety has been developed. The process is not a therapeutic approach and probing questions are not appropriate in this program.

Aspects of the program may be used to sew the seeds of awareness or to support an individual through a process that provides an opportunity for change.

The intergenerational component of creating stories may be beneficial if the opportunity arises to work with local students. It is ideal when able to fit in with the curriculum.

Some key concepts that inform all aspects of the program and are vital to its delivery are:

- Empowering participants to have a voice and own the process
- Creating a sense of safety and respect within the group
- Encouraging the development of self confidence
- Developing trust within the group
- A non judgemental approach
- Being attentive to body language
- Including fun activities
- Flexibility is vital to adapt program content to meet individual situations and tailor activities to the groups needs

- Allow conversations to “flow”
- Acknowledge that wellbeing, respect and dignity are key contributors to quality of life
- An informal approach assists in encouraging participation
- Inclusion of all participants is vital and creative flexibility is a key to engaging all participants regardless of their range of capacities
- Reflective listening provides validation and can be modelled by the group facilitator and encouraged among the participants. Often a facilitator may start the conversation with some personal involvement but their key role is as a facilitative listener.

Activities and informal group chats can be a way of obtaining information without the formality of interviews and other official approaches. This can be a more respectful approach to data collection which may often be experienced as a depersonalising process for older people. This is particularly relevant when the activities are in someone’s home environment such as a residential care facility.

Activities such as a brainstorm on the concept of “home” can generate fond memories, identify commonalities among participants, and assist in defining key elements that give a sense of home. This last aspect may help to create a stronger identification with a residential community as home.

Discussions in pairs can build connections and bonds, and provide an opportunity to explore topics with a greater level of privacy. Validation through reciprocal listening and actively sharing what resonated provides an experience of being heard unconditionally.

Various activities that prompt memories such as using photos, music, aromas, or trinkets can provide opportunities to validate differences of opinion, memory and point of view.

With the goal of developing protective factors for seniors in the community and aged care facilities the less restricted the cognitive capacity of participants, the greater the potential for the program to generate attitudinal and behavioural change. However there is also potential benefit for those with dementia, particularly through participation in the program by relatives.

The Towards Respect Together program aims to develop increased awareness, coping strategies, self-confidence, resilience, assertive communication skills, reduce social isolation and strengthen individual capacity for mutually respectful relationships. Depending on individual group dynamics there is the possibility for the experience to provide a safe space and opportunity for burdensome secrets to be shared. This may lead to a more peaceful acceptance of the end of life.

Conclusion

Towards Respect Together is a flexible program designed to increase awareness of ageism and abuse of the elderly, and to empower individuals through the development of protective factors that counter potential risk factors for abuse. By developing an awareness of interpersonal interactions through the consideration of ways in which individuals give and receive respect, the program is relevant to both potential and existing victims and abusers. This reflects the underlying vision of the Respect for Seniors Project, which is attitudinal and behavioural change.

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