

Mickey Rooney tells Congress of abuse

Veteran actor Mickey Rooney has urged elderly victims of abuse to speak up to anyone who will listen and described to a US senate panel his own suffering at the hands of a family member.

"If elder abuse happened to me, Mickey Rooney, it can happen to anyone," the 90-year-old actor said in testimony to the Senate Special Committee on Ageing.

In court documents, Rooney accused his stepson, Christopher Aber, of intimidating and bullying him and blocking access to his mail. The documents also alleged Mr Aber deprived Rooney of medications and food.

"My money was taken and misused. When I asked for information, I was told that I couldn't have any of my own information," Rooney told the committee. "I was literally left powerless."

Rooney rose to fame as a child star in the 1930s and 1940s when he made more than a dozen Andy Hardy movies. He appeared frequently alongside Judy Garland and, in his heyday, was one of Hollywood's biggest stars, receiving a junior Oscar in 1938.

Rooney continued to work in movies and television into his late 80s, appearing in the 2006 film comedy *Night at the Museum*, among other works.

Rooney told the Senate committee he suffered in silence for years because "I couldn't muster the courage to seek the help I knew I needed".

He urged elderly victims to speak out whenever they could.

"Please, for yourself, end the cycle of abuse and do not allow yourself to be silenced any longer," he said.

Rooney eventually won a court order handing control of his affairs over to a Los Angeles attorney and obtained a restraining order against his stepson, who was ordered by the court to stay at least 100 yards from Rooney and his home.

In testimony to the Senate panel, Rooney suggested Congress enact legislation strengthening the law enforcement response to allegations of elder abuse.

A study by the US government accountability office, released at the hearing, estimated 14 per cent of elderly Americans experienced some form of abuse in 2009.

The abuse can range from financial exploitation to physical harm and neglect.

The actual level of elder abuse may be far worse than estimated because many seniors become socially isolated or feel shame about their situation, Dr Mark Lachs, who heads an elder abuse centre in New York, said in testimony to the committee.

Respect for Seniors Project

Respect for Seniors acknowledges and honours older people's individual, collective and lifelong contributions to our society in a celebration of ageing.

Respect is valued by older people

- The World Health Organisation has identified ageism and lack of respect as major factors in the mistreatment of older adults.
- Mistreatment can include the more subtle forms of abuse such as emotional, social and psychological as well as financial abuse and long term domestic violence.
- Most abuse occurs in the community and most abusers are family members.
- Respectful relationships do not tolerate abuse.
- Older adults nominate respect as a key contributor to their quality of life.
- A respectful society creates a sense of safety and being valued.
- Older people need to feel confident that if they speak up about their concerns they will be listened to and they will receive a positive response.

Create a culture of respect through raising community awareness

- Through this campaign we aim to tackle ageism which devalues and dis-empowers older people making them vulnerable to abuse.
- Promoting age friendly communities, in which abuse is not tolerated should be one of the goals in our Australian culture. A fair go for all – no matter how old.
- When a topic becomes common conversation it encourages people to speak up.
- Community awareness provides support to older people and creates social pressure on those who are abusing them.

Provide a positive alternative

- Encouraging desired behaviour is more effective than negative messages.
- This evidence-based social education program takes a strengths-based approach through its focus on respectful relationships. It mirrors aspects of the Federal Government's National Plan in response to Domestic Violence.
- The project originated from Ku-ring-gai Council's recognition of the importance of addressing domestic violence with a positive and preventive approach.

Encourage all involved to take responsibility

- It is important to communicate with everyone involved in the situation. Most cases of elder abuse involve a family member and most older people do not want to lose that relationship, they just want the abuse to end.
- Often the abuser is not aware of the consequences of their behaviour.
- Mutual respect in relationships helps all involved to recognise the impact their behaviour has on their relationships.

Respect for Seniors is a grassroots campaign

- Community engagement is a powerful process for helping to change attitudes and behaviours
- Respect for Seniors is a grassroots campaign that empowers individuals and communities to share the vision of a more respectful society.
- The community not only needs to raise awareness and support older people to speak up but also needs to have a sense of confidence that there are resources within the community to address these issues.
- We need to break down the barrier of resistance that this is too difficult a topic to discuss. Abuse is difficult but respect shouldn't be.
- Our goal is to create a safe, caring community where we can all age with dignity and respect.
- The project extends an invitation to all interested members of the community to become part of the campaign in any way that complements what they are currently doing. Share your ideas with us so we can add them to our website.

www.respectforseniors.org