

WEAAD in Victoria, Australia

In 2011, Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) adopted an ambitious program to deliver on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. And it was a success - raising awareness about elder abuse amongst service providers and agencies, engaging with the community, providing practical learnings to the legal sector, celebrating the contribution seniors make to the community and recognising their right to live in safety and dignity. As well some novelty ways were used to promote WEAAD including banners on a tourist tram and a WEAAD Quilt.



Melbourne

WEAAD Full Day Workshop

SRV hosted its 3rd annual full-day WEAAD Workshop for workers in health, aged care, family violence and community sectors. One hundred plus people were in attendance at Victoria University's City Convention Centre to hear presentations and to workshop case studies on aspects of elder abuse.

The keynote speaker at the Opening Plenary was Professor Simon Biggs, who is Professor of Gerontology and Social Policy at the University of Melbourne and is also a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Ageing Societies and a special adviser to INPEA. Professor Biggs' address on Elder Mistreatment, International Prevalence and Social Ageism gave an overview of the international research into both prevalence of elder abuse and public perceptions of abuse. He then focussed on how the stereotyping of older people as 'different' lets age discrimination be taken for granted and abuse to occur. He looked at the aspects of elder abuse that make it a particularly complex problem and argued that we need to understand the problem much better if we are to find sustainable solutions to it.

Accessing and Supporting Older Clients in Abusive Situations, one of two concurrent morning sessions, looked at how community workers can respond to the situation of an older person who lives with, or is being deliberately isolated by, a violent family member. Participants learned about the Victoria Police's Code of Practice on Family Violence and how the police can help, from Sgt Diane Ashwell, a Family Violence Advisor with the police in metropolitan Melbourne. SRV advocates Hazel Ingram and Philippa Campbell, assisted by Philippa Bailey from the Domestic Violence Resource Centre, then gave a presentation which asked aged care and health service workers to consider issues of ageism, empowerment, older people's rights and family violence approaches to elder abuse when working with their older clients. The participants then broke up into small groups to workshop a case study about an older woman living with a violent son; they were asked to consider what actions they would take to support the older woman, and then to develop a safety plan for her. These safety plans were then shared across the session, and Seniors Rights Victoria hopes to use the feedback and ideas collected to develop an approach to safety planning for older people which we can share with other services.

In the other morning session, on *Protecting Older People's Rights*, Phil Grano of Victoria's Office of the Public Advocate explained to participants how Enduring Powers of Attorney and guardianship work, while Rachel Ball of the Human Rights Law Resource Centre, explained the responsibilities service agencies can have to respect and uphold clients' human rights under Victoria's relatively new Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The group then worked through a couple of case studies to explore what health or hospital workers could or should have done in those scenarios to protect the rights of the older person involved.

In the afternoon, participants also had a choice of two sessions. In *Supporting the Caring Relationship to Prevent Elder Abuse*, Dr Briony Dow of the National Ageing Research Institute and Anne Muldowney of Carers Victoria tackled the difficult issue of abuse of an older person in a caring relationship. Their presentation covered the research into risk factors and effective responses, and the Victorian Charter for Supporting People in Care Relationships, and was followed by workshopping of two case studies – in one the abused older person was the carer and in the other the care recipient.

In the other afternoon session, Victoria University presented the Professional Education materials it has been contracted to develop for the health and community sector as part of the Victorian Government's Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy, and explained how these can be tailored to meet



Janet Wood (President COTA Victoria) Minister David Davis and Jenny Blakey (Manager of Seniors Rights Victoria)

individual agencies' training needs. A new protocol for responding to elder abuse that health and community services are being encouraged to adopt was also presented during this session.

And for the first time at this annual workshop, the State Government Minister responsible for the Office of Senior Victorians, the Honorable David Davis, attended and spoke to those in attendance.

WEAAD Legal Seminar

In addition to the WEAAD Workshop, Seniors Rights Victoria in partnership with the Public Interest Legal Clearing House (PILCH), hosted a legal seminar on Family Agreements. *A Collision Between Love and the Law*, was presented by Mr. Brian Herd from Carne, Reidy and Herd Lawyers, Brisbane. Mr Herd practices in Elder Law and law relating to older people. He has written widely and presented to a broad cross section of audiences in Australia and overseas. He is Chair of the Queensland Law Society's Elder Law Committee and an international member of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys of America.

A Family Agreement is the formalisation of arrangements between an older person and his/her family for the provision of care and accommodation, sometimes in exchange for financial consideration or testamentary bequests. Such arrangements usually occur when an older person can no longer live fully independently in their own home and require some low-level care and support. Sometimes, the older person may come to an agreement with a relative, usually a son or daughter, to sell their

property and place the capital into the property of the relative. This may result in an extension being made to the existing relative's property or the construction of a separate dwelling on the land (usually referred to as a "retreat" or "granny flat"). In exchange for the capital provided by the older person, the relative (and his/her family) agree to provide assistance and support to their older relative. Because this involves family, such arrangements are often agreed to verbally with no protection for either party.

Family Agreements are an important tool to protect the interests of both the older person and their families and ensure that everyone's wishes are accommodated. Mr Herd's presentation looked at the history of family arrangements and compared the Australian experience with those overseas. He looked at the legal background and provided practitioners with some practical knowledge and precedents to apply in their own work. The audience was mainly solicitors working in the field.

Bendigo

Bendigo is approximately 150 kilometres north of Melbourne, Victoria's capital. It is a main provincial city located centrally in a large rural area. Formerly known as Sandhurst, Bendigo played a pivotal role in the gold rush days with some of the mines still in existence.

A Community Unites for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

On a crisp sunny morning in Bendigo, a small group of people assembled at St Andrews Uniting Church for the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) service. So began the community education program for WEAAD on June 15th. The aim of the day was to raise awareness about elder abuse, celebrate ageing and recognise the contribution that seniors make to the community. In the lead up to the day, Seniors Rights Victoria approached a number of organisations for support and received an overwhelmingly positive response.



At the church service, which was led by St Andrews new Minister, Eseta Meneilly, the church's quilting group *Uniting Threads* presented Seniors Rights Victoria with a beautifully hand-made quilt for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.



Throughout the day, the Bendigo Tourist Trams displayed World Elder Abuse Awareness Day banners on either side of one of their vintage tourist trams. Each of the three trams carried cards explaining elder abuse and promoting Seniors Rights Victoria.

The Mayor of the City of Greater Bendigo, Councillor Rod Fyffe, made a World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Proclamation at a formal event in the afternoon at Bendigo's restored Town Hall. The Proclamation recognises the contribution seniors make to the community and their right to live with respect and in safety. This was the first World Elder Abuse Awareness Day Mayoral Proclamation in Victoria.

The event was hosted by Jonathan Ridnell, of local ABC radio's breakfast program. Special guest was Noeline Brown, Australia's Ambassador for Ageing.



Tabitha O'Shea (Community Lawyer Bendigo SRV) Uncle Brien Nelson (Aboriginal Elder), Noeline Brown and Jonathan Ridnell

Ms Brown said, "Older people should be treated as valued members of our society and it is our collective responsibility to ensure older people live safely and with dignity."

She said that as a society we must work hard to eliminate any incident of abuse, neglect, mistreatment or exploitation of older people – either as individuals or as a group.

"A society that is based on mutual respect creates in older people a sense of safety and of being valued. And that is how we should regard our older citizens – as people from whom we can learn – they are our mentors and teachers," Ms Brown said.

There was considerable media coverage, including an interview with SRV's Acting Principal Lawyer, Tabitha O'Shea, on WIN TV and a radio interview with Peter Noble, the Principal Lawyer from Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre.

Overall, the community events in Bendigo on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day were successful and engaged with the community, including seniors and organisations, on a range of levels.

The WEAAD Quilt

Uniting Threads' members range in age from 19 to 92 years and they meet every Wednesday at St Andrew's. Founded in 2009, the group's mission is to make and give away quilts to various Bendigo organisations.

Historically, patchwork grew out of a desire to make do with what you had at the time. Small scraps of fabric, often left over from dressmaking, were sewn together and then quilted with a filling to provide warmth and beauty in the home.

The quilt made for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is such an example. The middle block was an 'orphan block' donated to, and then finished by the group. It is surrounded by 'log cabin' blocks, in purples and creams. Traditionally, the centre square of a log cabin block is red, representing the hearth in a home. Half of the surrounding strips are dark-coloured, and half are lighter-coloured, symbolizing the joys and sorrows present in home life. The use of purple is in keeping with the colour for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.



One of Uniting Threads' members sums it up perfectly ... 'happiness is not having everything you want, but wanting what you have and making do with what you've got.' Seeing a colourful quilt completed out of scraps gives the group great satisfaction, knowing that it will be given to someone whose life will be made a bit brighter by that gift. With their quilts, Uniting Threads hopes to pass on a little bit of their happiness to others.

For more images and further information please go to www.seniorsrights.org.au