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CONNECTION IS THE ANSWER!

How do we stop Elder Abuse is the Question!

Why do we have World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD)?

The day came about because of United Nations Resolution 66/127. The UN aims to raise awareness of elder abuse and prevent it, on **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day**, communities run events and highlight the danger of elder abuse and what can be done to prevent it and what to do if it is spotted.

Elder abuse is global and comes in many forms including: physical, emotional, sexual, financial and neglect. Age Concern recognises that the majority of older people are relatively fine, well supported and well-connected within their communities. However, there is a large minority of older people who are far from 'fine', and who struggle to overcome the challenges they face and, in many cases, can only do so with external help and assistance.

To quote from Melbourne physician, Dr Karen Hitchcock, lack of empathy for older people itself is a remarkable feat of denial. We need to recognise that the last few years of life are the end of the arc of life and we may require support in the same way we did in the first few years of our one and only life on this earth. There is, without doubt, widespread and utterly tolerated ageism in our societies and we all individually must challenge that daily. There is no 'one size fits all' we are all individuals and we require different things. Tolerance, understanding, compassion and empathy are key. It is therefore vital all the community recognise the needs of these, potentially most vulnerable, older people.

Older people are human and deserve the same dignity and respect as people of all other age groups. Some Older people are particularly vulnerable to abuse and may be unable to defend themselves and get help as fear and infirmity can be barriers to seeking and getting help. Sometimes spotting and challenging abuse in older people isn't easy, some are isolated having outlived family and friends, and some are abused in institutions and in some cases older people are not given priority by authorities in abuse matters.

Risk factors for older people at risk of elder abuse and neglect are:

Carer stress, Dependency, family conflict, isolation, medical/psychological conditions, and addictive behaviours. Abusers are usually family members and they would often, in different circumstances, be the natural support of the person being abused.

We can reduce the risk of elder abuse by putting systems in place that can prevent abuse from the start. For example, we can create community supports and services for caregivers and older people that can reduce the risk factors tied to elder abuse (such as social isolation). We can provide training for people who work in care on the prevention and detection of elder abuse. We can identify ways to empower older people through activities and programs that will reduce the harmful effects of ageism (biases against or stereotypes about aging that keep us from fully participating in our communities as we grow older).

In addition to building supports to keep our communities safe, it is also important that we recognize what abuse is and its warning signs. As this makes it possible for us to report elder abuse and stop it in its tracks.

We have experienced staff and services additional to the Elder Abuse Response service that enable us to provide advice, support and interventions to improve your situation, with your consent. If we don't provide the service, you need we usually know who to direct you to.

We are the lead agency for Auckland Elder Abuse Response Service a consortium of 5 including Vaka Tautua, Shanti Niwas and Age Concern Auckland and North Shore.

A new initiative set up last year is the MSD Elder Abuse Help Line 0800 32 668 65. We encourage you to speak out and there are different ways you can do that, you can use the help line I just mentioned or talk to us. It's OK to ask for Help!

One of the greatest risk factors is isolation. Historically no previous human societies have supported large numbers of people who lived alone, we have no historical examples to learn from, no precedents to mimic or avoid. What we do know however is loneliness is increasing and connection matters! That is why we have continued our theme of connection for WEAAD. A couple of years ago we asked at a WEAAD workshop the enablers and barriers for connection and we were told good health, transport, knowledge of services and activities and support from family and whanau enabled connection and lack of these created barriers. Our connection theme is being shown in yarn bombing (a form of street art) unveiling on Friday the 15th of June crafted by many individuals and local community groups to create an eye-catching art installation to raise awareness of Elder Abuse. We hope it will make people look and then find out more about how to prevent Elder Abuse and Neglect.

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