

AGE CONCERN KINGSTON – ELDER ABUSE OFFICER

The Official Launch of the new Age Concern Kingston Elder Abuse Project took place in Kingston on the 11th March 2003.

The aim of this valuable project is to raise the awareness of elder abuse to all paid and unpaid workers and carers, volunteers and health and social care professionals in contact with older people through providing specialist training, advice and information. Where abuse is suspected and/or identified there will be support and advocacy for the older person. Up until now, there has been no specialised service provision within the borough of Kingston to specifically address the issues around the abuse of older people.

Elder abuse is a very complex subject and is not generally recognised as an issue throughout our society. Older people are particularly vulnerable to abuse, because of problems that arise due to disability, illness, mental health, frailty and isolation. However currently there is little help available, legal or otherwise, to those who are either suffering from abuse or at risk. Research has estimated that 1 in 20 people over the age of 60 are subjected to some form of abuse. Abuse can happen anywhere, in hospitals, day centres, private homes, sheltered housing, residential and nursing homes. Abusers can be anybody.

In order to be able to prevent elder abuse there needs to be an understanding of what abuse is and how to identify it. The term 'abuse' is very wide and can play down the serious nature of some situation and over react to others. Once it is identified that abuse may be taking place, in order to be able to provide the correct help, it needs to be established what type of abuse is happening. It may be that more than one type of abuse is happening. It is acknowledged that abuse takes different forms, however there is a general consensus on the types of abuse that occur. The general categories used to identify abuse are :

- physical (includes threats of physical abuse)
- sexual
- financial
- neglect or acts of omission
- emotional/verbal or psychological
- discriminatory

There are also indicators that can identify the possibility that abuse has, or is, taking place, however indicators should only be the starting point for looking deeper and investigating the situation, they do not establish that abuse is or has been present.

The training that will be given by the Age Concern Elder Abuse Officer will help those in contact with older people to be aware of possible abuse and the indicators that may give need to question, and to have the confidence to act if they have concerns. It deals with the difficulties around issues of consent and confidentiality, and looks at the factors that can lead to abuse so that prevention can be worked towards.

The telephone advice and information will be available to all to answer queries confidentially, give advice on procedures and policies, give up to date information on legislation and remedies, and be able to help give guidance and support if there is a possibility that abuse is occurring.

The project will also work with older people to offer support and advocacy where there is need, and empower older people to make choices and take control of an abusive or potentially abusive situation, so that they can live their lives free safely or away from the fear of harm.

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