



# Queensland Focus

The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Newsletter Edition 3, December 2004

## Walls around Communication

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

I read with interest an article about interviewing victims with communication barriers. This is an overview of the content. A very long and comprehensive article that is well worth reading for practitioners. The article written by Ramsey-Klawnsnik Ph.D., & Klawnsnik, J.D, identifies people with communication difficulties as targets for abuse.

This vulnerable group of people can be viewed by potential perpetrators as 'highly desirable victims'. The article indicates that communication barriers may impede disclosure of abuse or reduce the credibility of the victim's claim. It also states that "offenders rely on this to help insulate them from facing consequences for their abusive and often criminal actions". In situations of elder abuse those with communication difficulties are extremely vulnerable. Strokes, hearing and site impairment can inhibit the ability of an older person to understand and express what has happened to them. Cultural and language barriers can also contribute to difficulties in expression, as can cognitive disabilities when the ability for recall is damaged by Dementia or another disorder.

The writers of the article stress the importance of allowing a considerable amount of time for interviewing and challenging the investigation of incidents. Multiple interviews, special equipment and expertise in this area are essential considerations for gathering vital information from a client. Workers need to be creative when gathering information and if need be can use a range of tools such as hearing devices, communication boards and interpreters etc. Interview times need to be planned to maximise the energy level of the person eg. in the morning when well-rested. When a perpetrator has not been identified, interviewers need to be careful not to rely on information from others who have a vested interest in the situation. Concerns include interviewing staff in aged care facilities where a resident has been abused by an unknown person, or a family member/ carer is speaking on behalf of an older person.

The article also discusses legal and ethical issues and is very clear that a lack of communication in no way diminishes a persons rights to be heard and to have legal redress.

(Ramsey-Klawnsnik, Ph.D & Klawnsnik, J.D. in *Victimisation of the Elderly and Disabled – Preventing Abuse, Mistreatment, and Neglect* (Vol 7, No.4, Nov/Dec 04).

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## Who can offer 'Helping Hands'?

## Gold Coast Taskforce

The Fraser Coast Taskforce for the Prevention of Elder Abuse held a thought provoking full-day workshop for service providers, "Helping Hands for Seniors", which aimed to explore appropriate responses and referral pathways for clients experiencing elder abuse.

The workshop was adapted from the "Helping Hands" workshop developed by Laurie Lumsden et al 1999. It is a very practical approach for accelerated learning by working through a case scenario, with the participants acting in their own work roles. Following that, the participants divide into small-group discussions to reflect on the responses offered and to identify gaps, duplications and ambivalent referrals in services.

More than thirty community and hospital based workers, from the health, legal, support and advocacy sectors, took an active part in the workshop and

contributed their expertise, work experience and constructive criticism. The summary of issues and suggestions raised throughout the day will form a base for formulating future projects and initiatives undertaken by the taskforce.



This year saw the Gold Coast Prevention of Elder Abuse Taskforce reap the talents of Judy Wallace, a student on placement, who put together a project and funding bid to develop and market a local resource for the prevention of elder abuse in the Gold Coast area.

The project was successful in attracting funding from the Jupiter's Casino Community Benefit Fund and Rebecca Coleiro, a highly experienced project worker was subsequently employed. Rebecca's first day coincided with a very successful Senior Safety Forum, which the Taskforce organised at Nerang on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004 during Domestic & Family Violence Prevention Month.

The taskforce has achieved objectives including the development of resources for seniors, the general community and services to enhance the Gold Coast community's ability to identify and respond appropriately to situations of abuse.

(For more information on the Gold Coast Taskforce phone: **1300 651 192**)

## ***PSN: Rural and Remote Communication***

EAPU is undertaking a review of the peer support network. One of the first areas to be evaluated has been the online forum ([www.eapu.com.au/psn/board](http://www.eapu.com.au/psn/board)). This electronic discussion board was designed with the aim of providing a vital link for individuals and service providers to information and support on elder abuse and related issues.

The need for services to assist rural older women was highlighted in the Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect (Volume 15, No.1: 2003), which discussed the disadvantages that rural older women face with limited access to services. The article went further to suggest that while rural myths incorrectly assume that elder abuse is not a large issue in rural traditional families, the lack of services to address the issue increases problems of social isolation.

Research carried out by the unit has confirmed that peer support networks and online forums are increasingly being used worldwide to support workers in rural settings with easily accessible information, and allow them to address such issues. In order to assist in the further development of the network, a survey was conducted by the unit to understand some of the issues that are of concern to the rural and remote members of the PSN. The survey revealed that all service providers who participated, identified workload as a major time constraint to accessing further information. The full report will be made available at [www.eapu.com.au](http://www.eapu.com.au). For more details on the PSN phone (07) 3250 1956.

Suzy Clarke:  
Volunteer Research Assistant EAPU  
Graduate B.So.Sci (Sociology)

## Raising Awareness of the Abuse of Older People within Indigenous Communities

Increasing community awareness of elder abuse is an important objective of EAPU. Grant Sarra facilitated consultations between December 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> to raise awareness and assist in the development of a response to the abuse of older people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Backgrounds. Service providers, Elders and other interested community members participated in the one-day consultation workshops. The sessions focused on the identification of ongoing awareness raising strategies, and the general content of resources that may be used to raise community awareness of elder abuse and possibly develop individual community responses.

The workshops facilitated by Grant Sarra were held:

Cairns  
Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2004  
Sheridan Plaza Hotel  
295 Sheridan Street  
CAIRNS QLD 4870

Mackay  
Friday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2004  
Cook Lecture Theatre  
Room G.03, Building 1, CQU Mackay  
Boundary Rd, Mackay

## Training and Awareness

The EAPU sets yearly targets for its face-to-face training and awareness activities for each region. This year, training sessions were well above the combined state target of 66 with 105 sessions completed across Queensland. Additionally, 49 Community Education sessions were conducted across the state. It should be noted that staff spent a total of 35 working days (or 7 weeks) in travel time to deliver these education sessions; a large proportion of this was car travel in rural areas.



## Duty of Care: The Many Shades of Grey

Majella Baker and Cristy Dieckman from the Seniors' Advocacy, Information and Legal Service (SAILS) at the Caxton Legal Centre presented a workshop entitled "Duty of Care, the Many Shades of Grey" on 22nd October. The workshop was organised by the Multicultural Taskforce for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and targeted agencies who provide services to older people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. More than 30 workers from a wide range of services participated in the session.

The workshop focused on strategies for workers in exercising a Best Practice framework when working with their clients. Among the strategies explored was discussing concerns about abuse with the clients themselves. It was also highlighted how important it was for workers to understand the boundaries around their work and to refer clients to other agencies, legal or otherwise, when the issues were outside their area of expertise.

Workshop participants appreciated the suggestion to regard their contact with clients as 'conversations', rather than assessments or counselling sessions. Cristy spoke about the responsibility of workers to give all appropriate information about the specialist services available to the clients, like EAPU and SAILS, and to assist them to access those services, if they wished to. Majella spoke about having a strength-based practice and assisting clients in understanding their options and empowering them to use them.

Both presenters focused on the importance of informing clients of their legal rights and suggesting that they contact a legal service to explore and understand their legal options, in order to decide if and when they wish to utilise them. Knowledge of one's legal rights could give a person confidence in choosing interventions and confronting the abuser. It was hoped that the workers support clients by taking directions from them, within the boundaries of their job description, and not taking on themselves the worry of what they should do about their clients' problems.

## Gems in Sapphire

I was recently invited by Linda Drake and Chris Ellerton to provide some training to professionals in the community of Sapphire. The welcome from this small community was extensive, with media involvement and coverage in the Central Queensland News.

All of those who attended were extremely interactive, asking about the statistics provided and areas of abuse and abusive behaviour occurring within families. Questions also involved event and strategies for minimising social isolation in their region.

The feeling I got is that the Gemfields is a very welcoming community and there seems to be a lot of genuine care for the older persons in that community. Chris Ellerton a personal carer attendant (PCA) said the session outlined signs of isolation and abuse, strategies to identify it, support processes and referral processes. Chris said it was a welcomed addition to the PCA's training, as most of their training was provided through correspondence, where as this in-service session provided face to face interaction.

In closing, Chris and Linda from the Multipurpose Centre have asked me to assist in holding a Confident Living Expo Early in 2005. They have also asked me to assist them to hold a Seniors Breakfast in seniors week in 2005. It was suggested that these types of activities will be highlights for seniors in the Gemfields district.

Verna Halsey  
Elder Abuse Prevention Unit – Safe and Confident Living Program  
Central Queensland

## North Queensland 2004

The relocation of the North Queensland Project Officer position to Thursday Island enabled the trial of a Flexible Service Delivery Model, and provided a unique opportunity for the EAPU to link with services in the Torres Strait region. Auspicing costs were eliminated through the availability of a home-based position and travel expenses reduced by conducting regional training and awareness-raising sessions in blocks. Consequently, there was increased scope to travel and more intensive coverage of the North Queensland area. Some of the locations visited include Ingham, Innisfail, Townsville, Ayr, Bowen, Cairns, the Northern Peninsula Area and Thursday Island.

Establishing links with services in the Torres Strait region was an important objective for 2004. In particular, community consultation and guidance was sought in relation to the development of a culturally appropriate response to elder abuse in Torres Strait communities. Workers from Indigenous Services on the mainland were also consulted on the formation of an appropriate response to elder abuse situations in Aboriginal communities. The production of video scenarios on elder abuse for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, the development of tailored training for Indigenous service providers and the adaptation of other Elder Abuse Prevention resources were just some of the initiatives discussed. It is hoped that with ongoing consultation, the EAPU will be able to offer a more culturally informed response to elder abuse in Indigenous communities in the near future.

Overall, 2004 was a busy, challenging yet satisfying year in North Queensland. In addition to the many meetings / teleconferences / forums attended and the countless kilometres covered delivering training and awareness-raising sessions, a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment was completed and other professional development activities squeezed into the part time hours for this position.

A big 'thank you' is extended to the Cairns EAPU Reference Group for their flexibility and ongoing support throughout the year. Members' enthusiasm and willingness to participate is much appreciated. Many thanks also to those members who represented the EAPU Reference Group at various events, and who distributed EAPU promotional material in the Cairns region. The EAPU is most grateful for your time and commitment.

May more ground be covered in North Queensland and an even greater contribution to Elder Abuse Prevention achieved in 2005.

Tracey Beasley  
Project Officer: Elder Abuse Prevention Unit

## "INPEA Snapshot"

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse was established in 1997 and now has over 600 members. Applications for membership are available on INPEA's website. [www.inpea.net](http://www.inpea.net)

INPEA Regional Representative (Oceania):  
Dr. Susan Kurrle [Skurrle@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Skurrle@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)

## LINKS

[Links to both National and International Elder Abuse Websites](#)

Elder Abuse Prevention Unit (EAPU)  
[www.eapu.com.au](http://www.eapu.com.au) (Aus)

Aged Concern New Zealand  
[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)

Aged Concern United Kingdom  
[www.ace.org.uk](http://www.ace.org.uk)

National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA)  
[www.preventelderabuse.org](http://www.preventelderabuse.org) (USA)

National Centre on Elder Abuse  
[www.elderabusecenter.org](http://www.elderabusecenter.org) (USA)

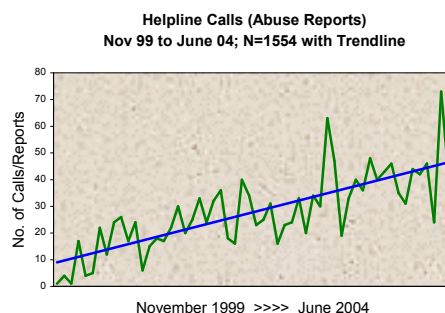
Elder Justice Coalition  
[www.elderjusticecoalition.org](http://www.elderjusticecoalition.org) (USA)

International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)  
[www.inpea.net](http://www.inpea.net) (international info)

## EAPU Statistics

### Helpline Call Rates

A significant feature of the Helpline during the reporting period of 1/7/03 to 30/6/04 was the continued steady rise of elder abuse notifications received each year. A total of 514 separate incidences of elder abuse were noted on the Helpline database during this reporting year, which represent a 28% (N=112) increase in overall elder abuse reports, compared to the same period last year. There is a strong indication that this trend will continue as the issue of elder abuse becomes better known and as the Helpline gains increased exposure.



NOTE: Helpline data refers only to reports of abuse received via the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit's Helpline and therefore caution should be used in applying to the population in general.

## EAPU in the South East

The EAPU South-East region extends from north of Bundaberg to the NSW border, and from Brisbane to west of Ipswich including all of the West Moreton region.

The Brisbane office is the base for the South-East region's programs and projects, the EAPU Helpline and the South-West regional worker. Brisbane workers are also responsible for coordinating the Peer Support Network and the Multicultural Taskforce and for supporting local coordinated responses at the Gold Coast, West-Moreton and Hervey Bay. They also provide administrative support for EAPU regional workers.

The South East corner of Qld constitutes the highest concentration of the state's population in general as well as that of the older population - from both the mainstream and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

Most of the requested EAPU training sessions were delivered closer to Brisbane but have extended to the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Fraser Coast, Beaudesert, Ipswich, Esk, Laidley and Rosewood. An effort will be made to provide educational activities in the areas west of Bundaberg and Gympie during 2005.

(A full version of the above article can be found in EAPU's 2003/04 Annual Report which will be made available online to service providers and the community)

### THANK-YOU

The EAPU hopes you have enjoyed the 3rd and final edition of "Queensland Focus" for 2004. Please contact the Unit if you would like additional information on any of the material within this publication. Updates can be found on the EAPU website at [www.eapu.com.au](http://www.eapu.com.au) and don't forget to visit the EAPU Online Discussion Forum at [www.eapu.com.au/psn/board](http://www.eapu.com.au/psn/board). Members of the public can register online. Service providers, health care workers and students are invited to join the Peer Support Network. For more information about The Peer Support Network please contact EAPU Brisbane on (07) 3250 1955. This newsletter is free to distribute though remains the intellectual property of the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit. If you wish to become an online recipient of "Queensland Focus" please email the EAPU to join the mailing list. Have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Email: [EAPU@lccq.org.au](mailto:EAPU@lccq.org.au)

[www.eapu.com.au](http://www.eapu.com.au)

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## ELDER ABUSE HELPLINE

**PHONE: 1300 651 192**

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