
Promising Practices Issue Brief: Elder Abuse Coalitions

NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE

Communities Make a Difference

Local Elder Abuse Coalitions at Work

In 2004, the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA), through its partner the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA), launched a multi-year Local Elder Abuse Prevention Network Development Initiative to support Area Agency on Aging leadership efforts nationwide.

Across the country, collaborative efforts are being launched to address the issue of elder abuse. Although some of the partnerships are still a fledgling effort, others have evolved into formal prevention networks. No matter the size, all are dedicated to raising public and professional awareness of elder abuse and its victims, and, in many cases, have served as a coalescing force for laws that strengthen reporting and prosecution. There is no question local leadership is essential.

To increase understanding of partnership approaches, NCEA conducted a survey of 117 local elder abuse coalitions which have formed in recent years. The survey was led by NCPEA Board Member Mary Lynn Kasunic, President and CEO, Area Agency on Aging, Region One in Phoenix, Arizona.

The response rate to the survey was 48.7%. Respondents were located in 19 states and one Indian Reservation. All survey respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of their elder abuse prevention networks. Two of the responding networks chose not to self rank. Of the remaining sample, nearly half gave themselves a high rating. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to specify the ingredients needed for success.

Following are some brief highlights from the survey.

What Makes Coalitions Effective?

In the words of one law enforcement member, a key ingredient to coalition success is to “find individuals who actually care and let their spirit spread.”

Not surprisingly, the NCEA survey also reveals that a collaborative spirit is critical. In addition, effective coalitions are likely to have strong area agency on aging leadership and support and place a premium on involving the local law enforcement and legal communities.

Respondents identified a number of factors that can make a real difference in a coalition’s success. Here’s what they told us:

- A strong and resourceful lead agency.
- Shared vision and goals.

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- Strong commitment to purpose.
 - Results-oriented accountability.
 - Expansive, inclusive membership, with a solid core membership base.
 - Clear structures (formalized procedures; regularly scheduled meetings).
 - Commitment to the principle of shared-decision making; a willingness to openly share ideas and plans.
 - Assigned responsibility for projects.
 - Innovative, culturally appropriate outreach, driven by community need.

Strategies from the Field

Below are just a few examples of the types of different activities local elder abuse networks are undertaking:

Support of Elder Abuse Victims

- The *Elder Abuse Prevention Network of San Angelo, Texas* created an Adult Protective Services "Bridge Room" so that workers have access to necessary items during weekends, holidays, and after hours. Emergency supplies include such items as non-perishable foodstuffs, adult briefs, cooking utensils, fans, heaters, and blankets.
- In **Arizona**, the *Maricopa Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance (MEAPA) and Area Agency on Aging, Region One in Phoenix* established four weekly support groups for victims of elder abuse and late-life domestic violence. Other initiatives include an emergency shelter program for victims of elder abuse and late life domestic violence. In addition, MEAPA supported the area agency's purchase of a 19-unit apartment complex to provide transitional housing, on-site case management, and support services for older victims of abuse.
- *Oneida County Elder Abuse Coalition* in Utica, **New York**, through its relationship with the Office of Mental Health, was instrumental in establishing a support group for seniors at risk or who have been or are being abused.

State Legislative Advocacy

- In **Kansas**, the *Elder Abuse Committee of Johnson County, Community Violence Action Council*, partnered with the District Attorney's Office to support improvements to the Kansas adult abuse statute, adding community law enforcement and financial institutions officers to the list of mandatory reporters. In addition, the network successfully advocated for changes in the sentencing law related to mistreatment of an adult.

Education and Public Awareness

- The *Abuse Task Force of Mifflin and Juniata Counties, Pennsylvania* helped establish protocols with local hospitals and county coroners.
- The *East Tennessee Elder Abuse Coalition* in Knoxville uses the Internet for informing partner agencies about elder abuse issues. The expansion of outreach through e-mail and Internet Web sites is a new approach reported by several networks.

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- **Iowa** launched a statewide *Elder Abuse Initiative partnership* with area agencies on aging, the Department of Human Services, and other stakeholders in the community. The network in Des Moines contacts hairdressers, barbers, clergy, mail and newspaper carriers, utility workers, and American Legions to arrange presentations for them about elder abuse.
 - In **California**, the *San Mateo County Adult Abuse Prevention Collaborative* was responsible for the development of an intergenerational drama therapy troupe. A video of the performance with a facilitated workshop is available to community groups.

There are, of course, many more possibilities. For example, coalitions have been instrumental in helping communities to form elder abuse fatality review teams, multidisciplinary elder abuse prevention teams, specialized law enforcement units, and AARP Money Management Programs, among other strategies.

Do Coalitions Really Make a Difference?

The answer is an unqualified “yes.” By uniting around a common cause, local elder abuse prevention coalitions can and really do make a difference.

Stanislaus Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance in Modesto, **California**, to cite just one example, reported a 25 percent increase in referrals to Adult Protective Services brought about as a result of the collaboration. *Broome County Elder Abuse Outreach Program* in Binghamton, **New York** reported very similar increases.

An equally powerful testament of the value of collaboration comes from *Washington County, Oregon*. In 1999, according to figures from Washington County Department of Disability, Aging & Veteran Services, only one reported case of elder abuse was prosecuted. Since then, as a result of collaborative efforts, the number of prosecuted cases has increased to 60 or more each year.

In coming years as the baby boom generation ages the risk of elder abuse is expected to rise exponentially. Collaboration will become ever more important. To protect vulnerable people from harm, the contributions of local elder abuse prevention networks will be especially crucial.

Additional Information

- Promising Practices Issue Brief: Respecting Diversity. Reaching Out Through Local Elder Abuse Networks
<HYPERLINK FORTHCOMING>
- NCEA Elder Abuse Prevention Community Outreach Toolkit
www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=outreachkit1.cfm
- NCEA Directory of Elder Abuse Coalitions & Task Forces
www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=coalitionsandtaskforces.cfm
- NCEA Promising Practices Database
www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=toolsresources.cfm
- NCEA Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly: Multidisciplinary and Collaborative Approaches in Responding to Elder Abuse
www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=CANE_MultidisciplinaryAndCollaborativeApproaches.cfm

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- **Community Sentinels: Reaching Hidden Victims**
www.elderabusecenter.org/pdf/sentinel0205.pdf
 - **Elder Abuse in Indian Country**
www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=nativeamericans.cfm
 - **Faith-Based Outreach and Education (PPT)**
www.elderabusecenter.org/default.cfm?p=faithleadersrespond.cfm
 - **Maricopa Elder Abuse Prevention Alliance**
www.aaaphx.org/main/meapa/

THE NATIONAL CENTER ON ELDER ABUSE (NCEA) serves as a national resource for elder rights and adult protective services advocates, law enforcement and legal professionals, health care professionals, public policy leaders, researchers, educators, and concerned citizens. It is the mission of NCEA to promote understanding, knowledge sharing, and action on elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The NCEA is administered under the auspices of the National Association of State Units on Aging.

NCEA Partners

- National Association of State Units on Aging
- American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging
- Clearinghouse on Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly, University of Delaware
- National Adult Protective Services Association
- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

Major funding for the National Center on Elder Abuse comes from the U.S. Administration on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services, Grant No. 90-AM-2792. The views stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Administration on Aging or partner organizations.

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National Association of State Units on Aging, Washington, DC

Contact Us

National Center on Elder Abuse
National Association of State
Units on Aging
1201 15th Street, NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20005
202.898.2586 / Fax 202.898.2538
ncea@nasua.org
www.elderabusecenter.org