

Project Wisdom: Background and Context

Traditionally elder abuse has been an issue for health care providers and professionals and has been approached from a paternalistic perspective, i.e. the professional knows best. However, there is growing acknowledgement that an effective response to elder abuse must be predicated on a philosophy of self direction and empowerment. Working with ethnocultural communities, this becomes increasingly difficult given language barriers, lack of knowledge/understanding/sensitivity to cultural norms and beliefs, particularly in a new home country.

Since 2001 agencies and seniors groups in Guelph/Wellington have collaborated to create a service model that reflects a “community owned” approach to elder abuse; a collaborative effort in which no one agency is singularly responsible for addressing the issue. The goal of this model is to enhance collaboration and build response capacity across the service system. While health care professionals and community organizations serving seniors have established strong internal networks, the growing population of immigrants has highlighted both the importance of working closely with ethnocultural communities and the need to build capacity and collaboration between agencies providing settlement services/cultural expertise and agencies providing health/social services to older adults.

The issue of elder abuse and the need to reach out to diverse communities was identified in a 2007 Environmental Scan conducted by the Waterloo Wellington Geriatric Service Network. That process provided an opportunity to create new partnerships, particularly in Guelph Wellington where a well developed elder abuse response network was looking to reach out to its ethnocultural community. As a result of discussions between Immigrant Services Guelph Wellington and the Wellington Seniors Service Network, service providers eagerly embraced the opportunity to work more closely with settlement services. On behalf of this new collaboration, Trellis Mental Health and Developmental Services submitted a proposal to the Government of Canada’s New Horizons for Seniors Program in 2009 and Project Wisdom became reality in spring 2010.

The goal of Project Wisdom was to raise awareness of elder abuse within ethnocultural communities while also building the capacity of seniors’ service networks to provide appropriate services to culturally and linguistically diverse older adults. The goal was to create an “intercultural elder abuse toolkit and training model” with resources for both older adults and the formal service network. By welcoming input from both older adults in the community and professional service partners, Project Wisdom has produced an “intercultural elder abuse toolkit and training model” which includes resources for both older adults/families and service providers;

- A resource guide for community members designed to build awareness of elder abuse and to improve access and understanding of services available to support seniors/ families. (click here to read more)
- Training workshops and educational resources for the broad cross section of service providers serving older adults. These resources have been consolidated into a “toolkit” which includes a training manual for service providers and additional resources to enhance understanding and strategies for communicating and building relationships through interpreters. (click here to read more)

We are extremely proud of all that we have accomplished to date in Project Wisdom and are looking forward to continuing to build on this foundation to support the safety and wellbeing of older adults in our communities. Elder abuse exists irrespective of culture or language. Efforts to respond to elder abuse are happening across the country in various ways and with varying levels of success. It is our sincere hope that the resources created under Project Wisdom will encourage and support others to launch similar initiatives elsewhere. By working together and sharing ideas and experiences, we can eliminate elder abuse, one person and one community at a time.