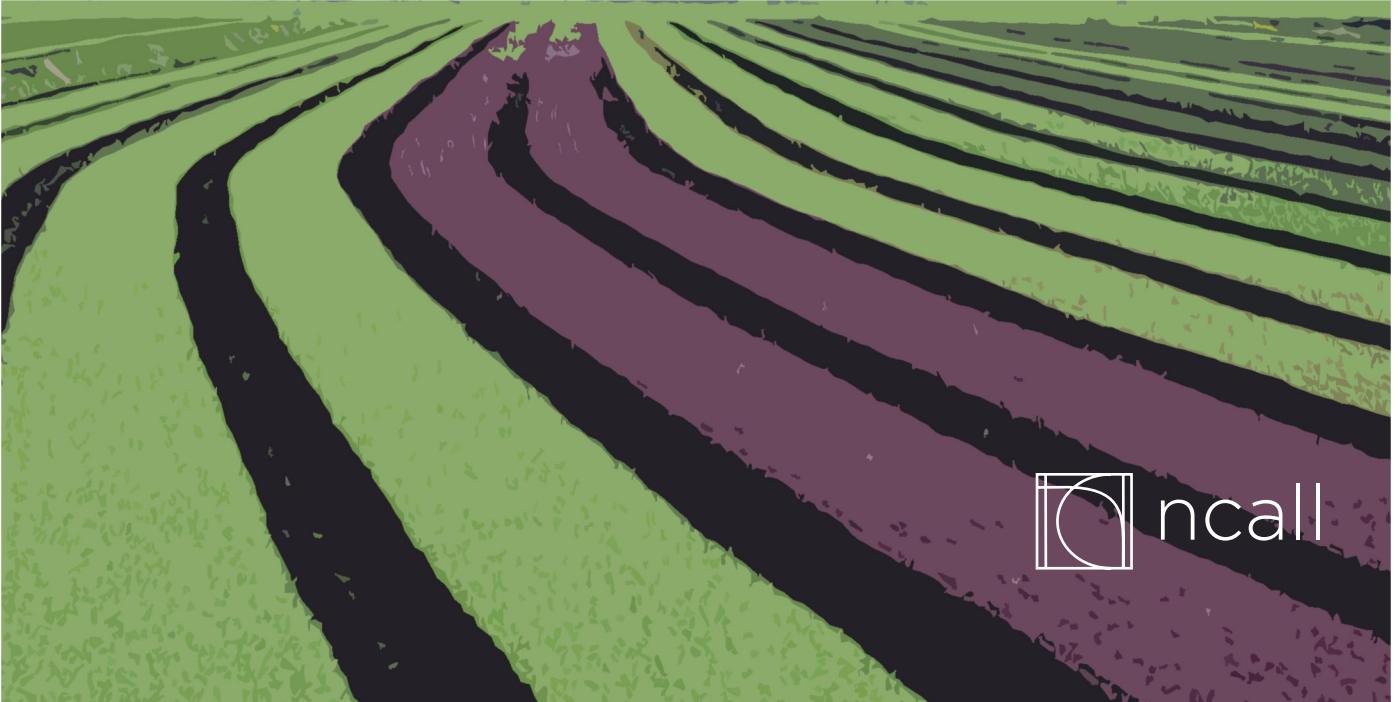
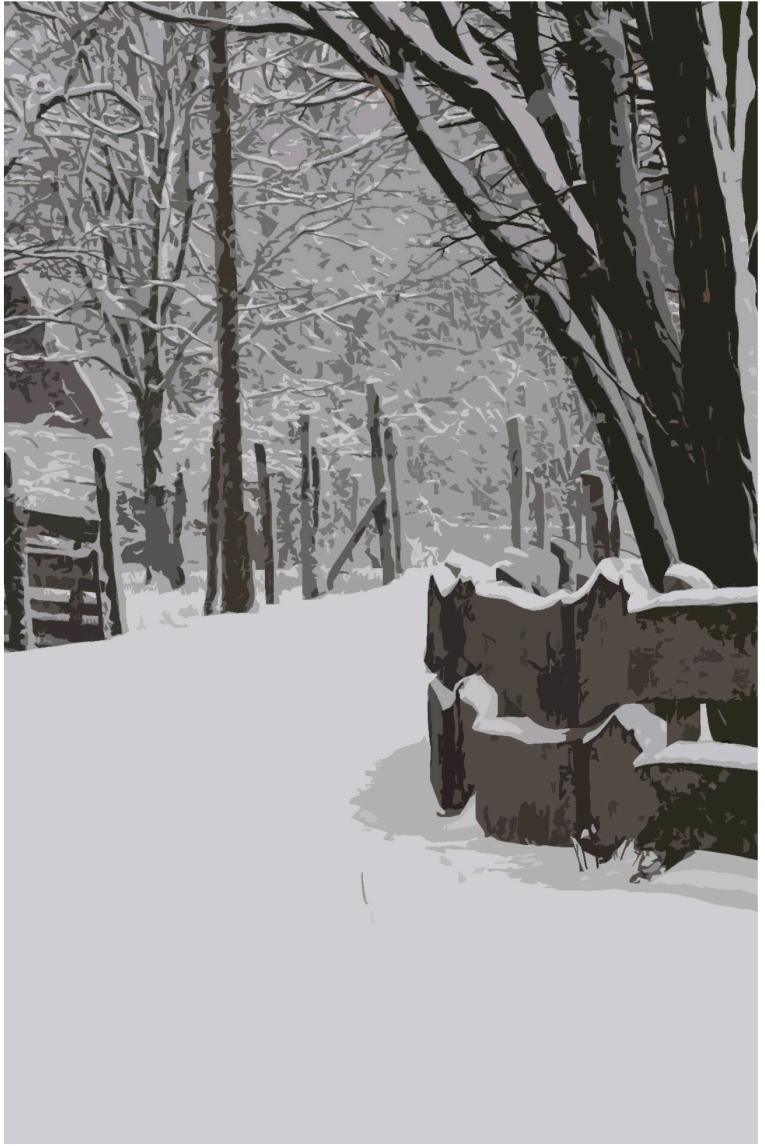


**Rural Domestic and Sexual Abuse Program Advocates:
Making a Difference
in the Lives of Older
Survivors of Abuse**



Rural Domestic and Sexual Abuse Program Advocates: Making a Difference in the Lives of Older Survivors of Abuse

Written by Ann Turner

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Introduction

Betty, age 68, lived in a rural community in North Carolina. She was physically, emotionally, and psychologically abused. After 13 years, Betty reached out to the local domestic abuse service program for help. In spite of her limited resources, an income of only \$83 a month and very few household items of her own, she decided to end her marriage. The program provided resources and support as Betty started a life without her abusive husband. When recounting her recovery, Betty recognized the importance of the support she received from the advocates and participants in the abuse in later life support group. She recalled how, partly as a result of this support, she learned to like herself and to appreciate her own company. Betty now lives in a home she can call her own and feels like she has her life back.

Rural domestic and sexual abuse service programs can play a crucial role in providing older victims, like Betty, the advocacy and services they need to be safe and to heal from the trauma of abuse. Elder abuse is a hidden yet growing problem that impacts millions of older individuals of all races, cultures, sexual orientations, social classes, geographic areas, faith communities, mental capacities, and physical abilities. Research estimates that approximately one in ten older adults living in their homes in the United States experience elder abuse each year, often resulting in devastating outcomes for victims, their loved ones, and society as a whole (Acierno et al., 2010; Beach et al., 2010). Yet studies suggest that cases of elder abuse are significantly underreported (Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011). Sadly, many of the cases that are actually reported or identified slip through the cracks due to a lack of coordination among service providers (Brandl et al., 2007; Connolly, 2010; Lifespan of Greater Rochester, 2011).

Unfortunately, as 77 million baby boomers age, the problem is only expected to worsen. Within the next 40 years, the number of individuals 65 and older is projected to more than double so that in 2050, they will account for over 20% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Populations in rural areas are also changing. In the 2010 Census, 19% of the U.S. population lived in rural areas compared to 21% in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, 17% of rural populations were persons 65 and older, as compared to 13% living in urban areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Many baby boomers moved to rural areas during the 1990's and are now beginning to retire in rural communities. At the same time, young people are moving out of rural areas and into more urban environments in search of work and education (USDA Economic Research Service, 2007).

Elder abuse is a complex and deeply personal issue, posing several unique challenges that must be handled by knowledgeable service providers through a collaborative approach. Additional challenges may arise when the abuse occurs in rural areas. Thus, it is increasingly imperative for

service providers in rural areas to gain a better understanding of this devastating issue so that advocates are better able to assist older survivors.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide rural domestic and sexual abuse service programs with possible resources and tools to effectively respond to abuse in later life, an issue that lies at the nexus between domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse. The first section provides an overview of abuse in later life and the unique challenges it poses for older victims and service providers. The remainder of the booklet provides ideas and perspectives for serving older victims, including suggestions on tailoring services in domestic and sexual violence programs to better meet the needs of this population and a discussion on how communities can work together to respond to abuse in later life.

An Overview of Abuse in Later Life

Elder abuse is a broad term that applies to abuse, neglect, and exploitation of an older individual in a trusting relationship with the offender. Elder abuse also includes harm that occurs because an older person is targeted based on age or disability (U.S. DOJ, 2013), such as in contractor scams. In many jurisdictions, elder abuse may also include self-neglect. Abuse of vulnerable, dependent, or at-risk adults generally refers to harm of persons 18 or older who are unable to protect themselves or report the abuse.

Abuse in later life is the segment of elder abuse that focuses specifically on those cases where the abuse is perpetrated by someone in an ongoing relationship (e.g., spouse, partner, family member, or caregiver) with the victim. As such, the term abuse in later life—used by the Office on Violence Against Women, the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, and a number of domestic violence and sexual assault programs throughout the country—calls attention to the nexus between domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse. Older persons who fit the statutory definition in their jurisdiction of vulnerable adults and are in a relationship with their abuser may also be victims of abuse in later life. Power and control dynamics, similar to those seen in domestic violence and sexual assault cases involving younger victims, are often present in abuse in later life situations. Older victims may benefit from services provided by domestic and sexual violence programs.

Dynamics of Abuse in Later Life

To formulate an appropriate response to cases of abuse in later life, it is critical to understand the dynamics present. Perpetrators will often strive to exert their power and control over victims so they can coerce or manipulate some benefit for themselves, such as money, a place to stay, access to prescription medication, or sexual gratification (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2007). These abusers are often greedy and feel entitled to do whatever necessary to get what they want. They may financially exploit an older adult, feeling entitled to take a Social Security check or empty a bank account. In order to maintain power and control, these abusers typically use various coercive tactics including physical and psychological abuse and isolation. Abusers may intimidate their victims and prevent them from reporting the exploitation or abuse out of fear of retaliation. They may also lie and manipulate family members, friends, and professionals in order to hide or justify their behavior (Bancroft, 2002; Stark, 2007).

In addition to cases of abuse in later life, older adults may be harmed even if power and control dynamics or greed are not present. Domestic and sexual violence advocates may have a role to play in these situations as well. For example, sometimes an older adult is harmed by a well-intended caregiver who provides inadequate or inappropriate care. In other cases, an older adult is harmed by a person with an organic medical or mental health condition who is unable to control his or her behavior. In these situations, often the older individual experiences fear and trauma. Many of these older adults who have been harmed can benefit from remedies offered by domestic or sexual violence programs, such as safety planning, emergency housing, or legal advocacy.

Additional factors may be present, further complicating abuse in later life cases. If the abuser is an adult child, victims often protect their child rather than focusing on their own personal safety. Older victims may feel shame, guilt, and embarrassment because they are being abused by their child. Some victims have physical or cognitive limitations that abusers can target to manipulate them through the breaking of assistive devices, the denying of health care or comfort measures, and threats to place them in a nursing home.

Forms of Abuse in Later Life

Abuse in later life includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Harassment and stalking may also be included. Often forms of abuse co-occur in cases involving abuse in later life.

While many state statutes include **self-neglect** as a form of elder abuse, cases of self-neglect do not fall within the definition of abuse in later life. The phrase abuse in later life was created to acknowledge that older victims generally know and are in a relationship with their abuser. Since

there are no offenders when self-neglect occurs, these cases are outside the scope of abuse in later life. Domestic violence and sexual assault victim advocates and criminal justice professionals are less likely to be involved in cases of self-neglect, which typically involve responses by adult protective services, social services agency workers, and health care providers.

Relationship between Victim and Abuser

Older victims may be abused by intimate partners, adult children, grandchildren, or other family members, caregivers, or persons in positions of authority. Society expects that these relationships are based on trust and care. In the majority of abuse in later life cases the perpetrator is the victim's family member or intimate partner (Acierno et al., 2010; Lifespan of Greater Rochester et al., 2011). Intimate partner violence may have been present for the entire duration of the relationship or it may emerge later in life as the couple ages. Abuse can occur in heterosexual, lesbian, or gay relationships.

Victim Gender

Females, males, and those who don't identify with a specific gender identity may be victims of abuse in later life. The majority of older victims of intimate partner violence and sexual abuse in later life are women (Acierno, 2013; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013).

Victim Age

When defining elder abuse, most states, tribes, and organizations use a minimum age threshold that ranges from 50 to 70. The term abuse in later life applies to victims who are age 50 and older for the following reasons:

- By age 50 there is a significant decrease in the number of victims accessing services from domestic violence and sexual assault programs. This is partly because many services for domestic and sexual assault victims focus on meeting the needs of younger women and their children. Most domestic and sexual violence programs do not have programming tailored to meet the unique needs of victims of abuse in later life, such as financial planning for persons who do not yet qualify for Social Security or support groups exclusively for older women.
- Victims who are age 50 and older may need economic assistance to obtain safe housing and live independently if they choose to leave their abuser. However, victims who are age 50 to 62 may be ineligible for financial assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program because they may not be parenting children under the age of 18. They also may be ineligible for Social Security and aging network services because they are too young. Few options exist to assist victims in this age group who want to become independent from their abuser but do not have the financial resources to do so.

- Age 50 includes older victims who have a shorter life expectancy because they experienced trauma, lived in poverty, or lacked access to health care.

Where Abuse Happens

Abuse in later life can take place in any setting (e.g., a house, apartment, residential health care setting, a doctor's office, or in a public place, such as at work or in a courthouse). Most often, it occurs where the victim resides.

Additional Resources on Abuse in Later Life

- **[Abuse in Later Life Power & Control Wheel](http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/ALL-Wheel_2011_0.pdf)** – This power and control wheel was specifically designed by NCALL with the help of advocates and older survivors attending support groups throughout the United States.
http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/ALL-Wheel_2011_0.pdf
- **[Power and Control: Understanding Domestic Abuse in Later Life](http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Power-and-Control-Understanding-DA-Later-Life.pdf)** – Generations, the Quarterly Journal of the American Society on Aging, Summer 2000, XXIV, 2, 39-45. By Bonnie Brandl. <http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Power-and-Control-Understanding-DA-Later-Life.pdf>
- **[Preventing and Responding to Domestic & Sexual Violence in Later Life](http://www.vawnet.org/special-collections/summary.php?doc_id=2565&find_type=web_desc_SC)** – (July 2010, Updated June 2013) by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) in collaboration with the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV) for VAWnet, the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. This Special Collection brings together selected materials related to preventing and responding to elder abuse, specifically domestic and sexual violence.
http://www.vawnet.org/special-collections/summary.php?doc_id=2565&find_type=web_desc_SC
- **[Sexual Abuse in Later Life](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/SAR1206-SA2-SexualAbuseLaterinLife.pdf)** – Sexual Assault Report, 12, 6. July/August 2009. By Holly Ramsey-Klawnsnik, Ph.D. and Bonnie Brandl, MSW, 2009.
<http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/SAR1206-SA2-SexualAbuseLaterinLife.pdf>

Unique Challenges in Abuse in Later Life Cases

Older victims often experience unique barriers that prevent them from seeking help.

Understanding older victims, abuser tactics, and existing systemic barriers is critical when developing effective responses to abuse in later life cases. It is also important to understand the ways in which these challenges may be more prevalent or significant when the older victim lives in a rural area.

Understanding Victims

As with younger victims, older victims of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation want the abuse to stop, but may be reluctant to report for many reasons. Some of these reasons are addressed below. When working with an older victim, always remember to consider these powerful influences.

- **Values:** Older victims may be reluctant to report abuse because of their love for the perpetrator or the belief that the perpetrator will change his or her behavior, especially with help. This sentiment may be influenced by generational, cultural, and/or spiritual values that stress the importance of commitment to family, particularly to spouses or partners (Brandl et al, 2007). In rural areas, traditional male and female roles and expectations are widely accepted (Teaster et al, 2006) and often times there is an unspoken rule of privacy to keep family matters within the family. (Few, A.L. 2005; Teaster et al. 2006). These values can also contribute to a sense of guilt, self-blame, or embarrassment on behalf of older victims, which may further discourage them from disclosing the abuse.
- **Relationship with Abuser:** Older victims may feel a sense of protectiveness for the abuser and worry about him or her having to go to prison or live on the streets if the abuse is reported, especially if he or she is an adult child or grandchild (Beaulaurier et al., 2012). Within tribal and rural communities relationships are significant. The abuser may be a person of prominence or in a position of authority within the community or have access to a person in authority. Abusers in positions of authority or with powerful allies can blame the victim and discount reports of abuse. Too often professionals align themselves with the abuser. As a result, the perpetrator may not be arrested and older victims may find that some professionals do not respond to their requests for help.

- **Fear:** Older victims may fear being killed or seriously injured if they try to leave. They may also fear being alone or losing independence (e.g., being placed in a residential care facility, such as a nursing home, or having decisions made for them by family members) if they reach out for help.
- **Hopelessness:** When abuse has occurred throughout the duration of a relationship, the patterns of abuse and victimization have likely become well established, making change seem virtually unimaginable for the victim (Beaulaurier et al., 2012). Furthermore, victims may be reluctant to reach out if prior experience wasn't helpful (Beaulaurier et al., 2007).
- **Economic Concerns:** Some older adults are unable to work due to age or disability while others may lack the job skills necessary for finding employment. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families is only an option if minor children are in the home and Social Security income may be limited, especially for women who never worked outside the home or had low wage employment. Older individuals living in rural areas experience higher poverty rates than their urban counterparts (Rogers, 2002), and may lack the financial means to live independently, separate from their abuser. In contrast to individuals living in urban areas, older rural Americans often have less income and a higher dependence on Social Security. A shortage of affordable or transitional housing for older adults compounds this problem.
- **Health Issues:** The rural elderly often have poorer health than urban elderly, increasing the need for health care resources in areas where those services are often limited or located long distances from where the elder lives (Rogers, 2002). Some older victims may need more time to heal physically and emotionally. Older adults may be more likely to have vision, hearing, or mobility limitations that can impact safety planning or limit options to live independently. Victims who have dementia may be at increased risk for future abuse (Wiglesworth et al., 2010).

Elsie

“The worst part was knowing my son, who I raised from a baby could treat me like that. I was scared of him. He about beat several people to death but nobody would show up in court to testify. I guess I had to do it, somebody had to put a stop to it before he did kill somebody. I don’t like knowing he’s in jail.”

Abuser Tactics

While it is common in abuse in later life cases to find many of the same abuser tactics used by perpetrators to prevent younger victims from seeking help or reporting abuse (e.g. intimidation, stalking), it is important to identify the unique abuser tactics used against older victims.

- **Target Vulnerabilities:** When perpetrators target victim vulnerabilities, they deny access to supports vital for daily living. Examples include: breaking or hiding glasses, dentures or hearing aids, moving a walker or wheelchair out of reach, or refusing to translate material written in English to the victim's native language.
- **Isolation:** Perpetrators may isolate victims from family members, friends, or others in the community so that they have less knowledge of what is occurring in the relationship and to minimize the victims' opportunities to disclose the abuse. Isolation may be achieved by preventing victims from using the phone, driving a vehicle, or participating in traditional faith or tribal activities and ceremonies. Forced isolation can often be more easily accomplished with older adults living in rural and tribal areas because they may already have a smaller social circle, due to a lack of mobility or transportation options and because many of their friends and/or family members may have moved to urban areas or already passed away.
- **Manipulation:** Perpetrators may use psychological or emotional abuse to manipulate older victims into thinking that they have less mental capacity than they actually do. This may be accomplished by name-calling or playing mental tricks on the victim (e.g. moving or hiding items so that the victim begins to doubt his or her own memory and judgment). Playing to a common fear among older adults of losing their home or independence, perpetrators may also scare victims into thinking they will be unable to make it on their own and that their only alternative to the current, abusive situation is a nursing facility.

Anne

“...he would monitor my calls, stand in the one hall to make sure I didn't tell them anything...”

Systemic Barriers

Service organizations and agencies can unknowingly create additional barriers for older victims reporting abuse or continuing with services.

- **Ageism:** In this youth-orientated society, ageism permeates our views about older adults, often resulting in inadequate service delivery to older victims. Service providers may wrongly assume older victims are incompetent or helpless and treat them accordingly. For example, a service provider may speak to an older victim in a loud, baby voice when the victim's hearing is just fine or he or she may assume the role of "protector," rather than treating the victim as a person capable of self-determination. This treatment can be humiliating and insulting to older victims and may cause them to withdraw from services.
- **Inaccessibility and Lack of Tailored Services:** Older victims often have less information about services and resources than younger people and also have less access to them (Wilke & Vinton, 2005). Some victims may feel shut out from services because they require special accommodations they assume are not available such as: a means of transportation, interpretation services, assistance with reading or writing, Deaf services and assistive devices (e.g., communication boards). Older victims may also feel that the services do not meet their needs (e.g., support groups that focus discussions on finding a job or child custody that may not be relevant for older victims). In rural areas, low population density and limited funding may result in fewer service options for victims to choose from.
- **Silos:** In seeking services, the victim may come into contact with a number of community organizations or agencies. A lack of system awareness and multidisciplinary collaboration can lead to an abuse in later life case falling between the cracks, which can ultimately result in a devastating outcome for the victim. In rural areas, limited staff covering large geographical areas can add additional barriers to a collaborative community response, especially if a service agency has one staff person providing services to several counties.

Designing Specialized Services for Older Victims

Elder abuse and abuse in later life affect older adults regardless of ability, race, culture, sexual orientation, or gender. Providing inclusive services for older victims can be challenging, especially in rural areas. In this section we will examine how domestic and sexual abuse programs can tailor current services to better meet the needs of older victims.

Examining Existing Policy and Practice

Domestic and sexual abuse programs have typically designed services to meet the needs of younger victims with small children and therefore may need to examine how accessible their policies and practices are for older victims. For example, programs may provide materials on financial resources for families with children but not on Social Security. Programs may also limit services to only intimate partner violence cases, leaving out victims who are being abused by adult children or other trusted individuals in their lives. Additionally, a policy of having victims make first contact with a program does not always prove helpful for older victims, especially those of earlier generations where family matters were considered private and asking for help improper. Advocates may need to accept referrals from other agencies and make the first contact with the victim.

Lova

“...Human Options had to call me because I probably would not have called them.”

Lova describing her initial contact with Human Options, a domestic violence program with specialized services for older victims, after a referral by adult protective services.

For More Information

- **[Analyzing Domestic Violence Programs' Response to Older Victims](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Service%20Delivery%205-10-11.pdf)** – This handout was created for domestic violence advocates to create a framework for critical analysis of their organization's responsiveness to older victims. The tool can be used by an individual or as part of a staff meeting discussion.
<http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Service%20Delivery%205-10-11.pdf>
- **[It's Our Responsibility](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Its%20Our%20Responsibility%20NCA%20LL.pdf)** – An article written by Bonnie Brandl of NCALL encouraging domestic violence service providers to meet the needs of older victims.
<http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Its%20Our%20Responsibility%20NCA%20LL.pdf>
- **[Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape \(PCAR\)](http://www.pcar.org/)** – PCAR's website has a section with information on elder sexual abuse. <http://www.pcar.org/>
- **[Praxis International, Rural Program](http://praxisinternational.org/praxis_rural_technical_assistance_home.aspx)** – Praxis International provides technical assistance and training to rural domestic and sexual violence programs.
http://praxisinternational.org/praxis_rural_technical_assistance_home.aspx
- **[Sexual Violence in Later Life: A Technical Assistance Guide for Advocates](http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications/sexual-violence-later-life-technical-assistance-guide-advocates)** – This guide created by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) and Holly Ramsey-Klawnsnik thoroughly investigates the complexity of the topic of sexual violence in later life and includes information on signs and symptoms, special issues facing older victims, and primary prevention techniques. <http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications/sexual-violence-later-life-technical-assistance-guide-advocates>

Providing Accessible Services for Older Victims from Traditionally Marginalized Communities

Many factors can impact how an older victim may experience and respond to the services offered by agencies including age, culture, community, and family traditions. A victim's life experience may determine who or what he or she turns to in times of need. What may be considered by some as history is an actual lived experience for elders in a community or the elders' parents. Many communities of color have experienced trauma because of oppressive policies in the United States or their country of origin and may not trust the service providers offering help. Individuals from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community (LGBT) may fear programs will not understand or protect their confidentiality. Immigrant communities may fear deportation of themselves or other family members. Conservative beliefs and practices in rural communities may intensify the lack of trust.

Additionally, tribal communities are often located in rural and remote areas. Many are federally recognized tribes, self-governing sovereign Nations, which have created criminal and civil courts within the tribal government. Some have developed elder abuse, domestic violence, and sexual violence codes; however, determining jurisdiction over a particular crime can involve a complicated relationship between federal, state, and tribal governments. Various factors are considered to determine which court has jurisdiction, including the type of crime, where the crime took place, and whether or not the victim and perpetrator are tribal members. These jurisdictional issues can create additional barriers for providing safety for victims living in tribal communities and holding offenders accountable. Many tribal communities also provide services to victims. When working with tribal communities, it is beneficial for non-tribal service providers to trust and respect the integrity of the tribal response.

Service providers should be proactive by taking steps to learn who lives in their community and begin to build relationships with traditionally marginalized groups, recognizing efforts must begin with building trust.

Strategies to Consider

- Learn who lives in your community.
- Learn more about the history, cultural beliefs, and cultural practices of various communities.
- Learn about and respect tribal sovereignty, history, traditions, and culture.

- Reach out to community leaders, service providers, and community groups in traditionally marginalized communities to discuss your services.
- Enlist an Elder to speak to elders about the topic. Using someone who does not have the experience of age can be seen as disrespectful. In Elder gatherings, create room for Elders to speak in small groups and share what was discussed with presenters.
- Learn what culturally specific resources are available to community elders and how to access them.
- Hire individuals to work for your program who come from traditionally marginalized groups. For example, consider hiring older adults, persons from diverse racial and ethnic communities, or individuals from the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) community.

For More Information

- **[Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence \(APIIDV\)](http://www.apiidv.org/)** – Provides information on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. <http://www.apiidv.org/>
- **[Casa de Esperanza](https://www.casadeesperanza.org/)** – Provides information and resources on domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking, elder abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence in Latina@ communities. <https://www.casadeesperanza.org/>
- **[Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community](http://www.dvinstitute.org/)** – Provides information on issues related to domestic violence - including intimate partner violence, child abuse, elder maltreatment, and community violence in the African American Community. <http://www.dvinstitute.org/>
- **[LGBT \(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender\) Aging Center](http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/index.cfm)** – Provides multiple resources to assist programs in recognizing the needs of the LGBT community and providing inclusive services. <http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/index.cfm>
- **[National Center for State Courts: Tribal Courts Resource Guide](http://www.ncsc.org/Topics/Special-Jurisdiction/Tribal-Courts/Resource-Guide.aspx)** – Provides information and resources for understanding tribal jurisdictional issues and working with tribal courts. <http://www.ncsc.org/Topics/Special-Jurisdiction/Tribal-Courts/Resource-Guide.aspx>
- **[National Council on Hispanic Aging](http://www.nhcoa.org/)** – Provides information and resources on Hispanic older adults, their families and their caregivers. <http://www.nhcoa.org/>

- **National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project** (NIWAP, pronounced new-app) – A project of the American University Washington College of Law addresses the needs of immigrant women, immigrant children and immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes by advocating for reforms in law, policy and practice. <http://www.wcl.american.edu/niwap/>
- **National Indian Council on Aging** – Provides information and resources on issues affecting American Indian and Alaska Native Elders. <http://nicoa.org/>
- **National Resource Center on Native American Aging (NRCNAA)** – Provides information on Native elder health and social issues. <http://www.nrcnaa.org/>
- **Southwest Center For Law And Policy** – Provides legal training and technical assistance on domestic and sexual violence, elder abuse, and other topics to tribal communities and to organizations and agencies serving Native people. <http://www.swclap.org/>
- **U.S. Census Quick Facts** – Webpage provides a searchable database with demographic information for all states, counties and for cities and towns with more than 5,000 people. <http://www.swclap.org/>

Providing Accessible Services for Older Victims with a Physical or Cognitive Disability

When working with older victims, service providers may come in contact with victims who have a physical disability or who have limitations in mental capacity. The disability may be the result of a disease or a condition that recently developed or it may be a condition the victim has lived with for many years or their entire lives. Cognitive disabilities can include dementia, mental illness, brain injury trauma, or a developmental disability. Keep in mind that some older victims may appear to have limited capacity but may have temporary symptoms that are a result of trauma, inappropriate medications, or lack of sleep, food or fluids. A thorough medical exam may be required to determine if cognitive capacity is an issue. Furthermore, recognize that older persons with a cognitive disability may be able to provide information about what has happened to them and what they need. Help the victim by discussing options and issues the victim can address. If necessary, consider working with a trusted family member or friend on safety planning and decision making.

Strategies to Consider

- Provide staff training on the topic of disabilities and how they may impact a victim's life.
- Review agency policies and building structures to better meet the needs of victims with a disability.
- Provide basic materials in large print and in an auditory form for individuals who have limited sight or are blind.
- Reach out to aging services, health care, and mental health professionals to determine an agreement on how to obtain a thorough medical and psychological evaluation to assist a victim who may have a cognitive disability.
- Learn where you can access assistive living devices to help a victim who may not have access to these items because of abuse.
- Consider how you store and distribute prescription medications if you work in a shelter program.
- Be prepared to accept service animals.

- Contact a Center for Independent Living to provide expertise and referrals for providing accessible services to victims with a physical disability. Some programs in rural communities have requested onsite visits and the centers have provided ideas on what programs can do to improve accessibility. To find a Center for Independent Living for your area visit the Independent Living Research Utilization (ILRU) website at: www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html

For More Information

- **[A Practical Guide for Creating Trauma-Informed Disability, Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Organizations](#)** – This booklet, created by Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), highlights and explores effective trauma-informed conditions or core values that people with disabilities find essential for safety and healing. <http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Trauma-Informed-Guide.pdf>
- **[Creating Safety by Asking What Makes People Vulnerable](#)** – This resource, created by Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), is designed to guide service providers in the understanding about the vulnerability inherent in the “culture of compliance” that exists for people with disabilities by examining how it is inadvertently maintained and how it can be replaced by creating and fostering safety and assertiveness. <http://www.disabilityrightswi.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Creating-Safety.pdf>
- **[Forging New Collaborations: A Guide for Rape Crisis, Domestic Violence, and Disability Organizations](#)** – The report, created by the Vera Institute of Justice, provides recommendations for steps in building effective collaboration and practical strategies for overcoming common obstacles. <http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Collaboration-pub-v4-corrected.pdf>
- **[Intimate and Caregiver Violence Against Women with Disabilities](#)** – This article, created by the Battered Women’s Justice Project and Trish Erwin, focuses on domestic violence and caregiver violence against women with disabilities and includes recommendations for programs. http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Intimate_Caregiver_Violence_against_Women_with_Disabilities.pdf

- **[Promising Practices for Serving Crime Victims with Disabilities Toolkit](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/ServingVictimsWithDisabilities_toolkit/welcome.html)** – This toolkit, provided by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), identifies and addresses the issues and obstacles encountered by people with disabilities who have been victimized or abused.
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/ServingVictimsWithDisabilities_toolkit/welcome.html

Providing Language Interpretation for Older Victims

Providing effective services to older victims of abuse requires an advocate and victim to communicate on sensitive and difficult issues. Victims need to be able to speak in the language they are most comfortable with and clearly understand their options. Often older victims who are Deaf or for whom English is not their first language have used their children or other family members as interpreters. This can be dangerous, not only for the victim but for the family member as well. Perpetrators may manipulate or threaten family members to alter the victim's account or disclose confidential information. Additionally, the victim may be ashamed or uncomfortable giving details of abuse to their adult child or family member. Language interpretation is a trained skill; bilingual speakers who are untrained in interpretation should not serve as interpreters.

Programs also need to be prepared to communicate with victims who are Deaf. Not all Deaf victims use American Sign Language (ASL) so programs need to learn more about alternative methods of communication.

Rural communities may not have qualified interpreters located close by to provide immediate crisis intervention to victims for whom English is not their first language or for victims who are Deaf, so adequate planning is essential. In-person language interpretation is preferred for a victim traumatized by abuse, however, if this service is not available for your community or too far away in a crisis situation, consider off-site services. Whenever possible, advocates should work with victims when selecting an appropriate interpreter to ensure victim safety and confidentiality is not compromised.

Strategies to Consider

- Research what in-person and off-site interpretation services are available.
- Consider what languages would be most practical to provide and seek out interpreters to work with your program before you need them.
- Include a line-item in each annual budget to pay for interpreters.
- Seek out qualified, professional interpreters before you need them and provide cross-trainings so that interpreters and domestic and sexual violence program staff can learn how to work together and ensure safety and confidentiality when working with victims.

More Information

- **[Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Services \(ADWAS\)](http://www.adwas.org/)** – ADWAS partners with The National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) to provide this service for Deaf callers nationwide. Deaf advocates answer videophone calls, instant messages and emails Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM. The 24 hour TTY line is answered 24 hours by hearing advocates. <http://www.adwas.org/>
- **[Limited English Proficiency Resource Document: Tips and Tools from the Field](http://www.lep.gov/resources/tips_and_tools-9-21-04.htm#i)** – This document from the U.S. Department of Justice provides information on language accessibility and ideas from other nonprofits, social service providers and the justice system regarding the provision of language assistance to limited English proficient (LEP) individuals. http://www.lep.gov/resources/tips_and_tools-9-21-04.htm#i
- **[National Domestic Violence Hotline](http://www.thehotline.org/)** – The hotline works with the ATT language line to assist with interpretation for victims of abuse. Advocates can contact them by phone at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY). <http://www.thehotline.org/>
- **[National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, VAWNet Special Collection: Violence in the Lives of Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](http://snow.vawnet.org/special-collections/Deaf.php)** – VAWnet is a resource provided by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV). This “special collection” includes information on providing inclusive services and a state by state directory of organizations providing services to Deaf victims/survivors. <http://snow.vawnet.org/special-collections/Deaf.php>
- **[Resource Guide for Advocates & Attorneys on Interpretation Services for Domestic Violence Victims](http://www.apiidv.org/files/Interpretation.Resource.Guide-APIIDV-7.2010.pdf)** – This guide, written by the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, focuses on court interpretation for domestic and sexual violence victims with limited English proficiency and provides information on how advocacy, interpretation, and language access can be integrated. <http://www.apiidv.org/files/Interpretation.Resource.Guide-APIIDV-7.2010.pdf>

Confidentiality and Privacy in Rural Settings

Confidentiality and privacy can be challenging when working with older victims, especially in a rural service area. Outreach and public speaking events make it common for community members to know the staff who work with victim service agencies. Victims and their families may personally know the first responders, health care workers, social workers, and advocates who may provide help. Workers must do everything possible to assure privacy of a victim of abuse. News will travel fast if victims believe a service program cannot be trusted to respect privacy.

Confidentiality and privacy can also be compromised by elder abuse mandatory reporting requirements. Some state statutes may require domestic and sexual assault program staff to make an elder abuse report. Many advocates find mandatory reporting of elder abuse complicated, feeling it will affect the advocate's relationship with a victim. Domestic and sexual violence service programs need to clearly understand the mandatory reporting requirements in their state and how it may impact services offered to older victims.

Strategies to Consider

- Create an internal policy and practice regarding victim privacy and confidentiality that both respects the need for victim support and recognizes privacy challenges.
- If mandatory reporting is required in your state, create a policy on making reports of elder abuse. Include information on notifying victims of requirements before interviews. Consider providing the option for victims to self-report.
- Provide training for all agency staff on elder abuse mandatory reporting laws in your state.
- Help victims understand how mandatory reporting may affect confidentiality and privacy, and what an investigation may entail and plan accordingly for victim safety.
- Create a policy that identifies how staff and victims will respond in situations that may impact victim privacy such as court room appearances, emergency room visits, or just seeing a victim at the grocery store, church, or school function. Discuss the policy with victims.

For More Information

- **[Confidentiality: An Advocate's Guide](http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Confidentiality_Advocates_Guide.pdf)** – This guide, created by The Battered Women’s Justice Project, does not speak specifically to abuse in later life, but does address confidentiality laws and policies and may familiarize advocates with a variety of laws, policies, requirements, and best practices on the topic of confidentiality.
http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Confidentiality_Advocates_Guide.pdf
- **[Confidentiality and Technology Toolkit](http://tools.nnedv.org/faq/faq-flc)** – The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) created a toolkit which provides an overview on U.S. Federal Laws on confidentiality. <http://tools.nnedv.org/faq/faq-flc>
- **[Mandatory Reporting of Elder Abuse for Victim Service Providers](http://ncall.us/content/mr)** – A 6-Part Series of Information Sheets for sexual violence program advocates on mandatory reporting co-authored by Jessica Mindlin from the Victim’s Rights Law Center (VRLC) and Bonnie Brandl from the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL).
<http://ncall.us/content/mr>
- **[Mandatory Reporting of Elder Abuse: Implications for Domestic Violence Advocates](http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/MR%20Paper%20REV%202011.pdf)** – This manual, written by Bonnie Brandl from the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), provides a series of questions for domestic violence program advocates to consider related to the mandatory reporting of elder abuse.
<http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/MR%20Paper%20REV%202011.pdf>
- **[Technology and Confidentiality Toolkit](http://tools.nnedv.org/)** – This toolkit was created by the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) to assist non-profit victim service organizations and programs, co-located partnerships of victims service programs, coordinated community response teams, and/or innovative partnerships of victim service providers working to address domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
<http://tools.nnedv.org/>

Patsy

“I went to the Priest...I had my hand on the door but couldn’t turn the handle because I knew he would find out...and then what would he do to me?”

Patsy describing the fear she has of her husband learning that she had shared her experience with her priest.

Advocacy with Older Victims

Many rural programs have limited staff, requiring advocates to wear multiple hats; however, it is crucial for advocates to consider additional advocacy needs for older victims seeking their services. Many programs have legal advocates to help maneuver the legal system or child advocates to help children and their mother identify needs and provide support during a child abuse investigation. Older victims often have unique needs and could benefit from working with an advocate who specializes in abuse in later life. Elder abuse cases can be complicated and many different systems may be involved in a specific case, sometimes against the victim's wishes. A well-trained advocate can assist a victim by providing emotional support while helping to navigate and balance the demands and requirements of the system and the needs of the victim.

Strategies to Consider

- A victim may need an advocate during a law enforcement or adult protective services elder abuse investigation to provide expertise on victim safety and emotional support.
- A victim may need help in navigating Social Security or other financial systems if his or her funds have been stolen by an abuser.
- A victim may need help with additional legal issues such as with a Power of Attorney (POA) or Guardianship/Conservatorship order. These documents may be a simple agreement between two individuals or a court order based on a victim's mental capacity designed with the intent to help the victim with financial, health, and end of life decisions. While these documents are beneficial when used appropriately, abusers can use these tools to maintain control over a victim's assets and communications with others.

“Well, it wasn't easy but it had to be done. At least he wasn't in the courtroom. I had a whole parade of people on my side, was just glad they were there to support me.”

Elsie

Elsie describing her experience going through the court process after being abused by her adult son. A law enforcement detective, APS worker, 2 DV advocates and the administrator of the assisted living facility attended criminal court with her.

For More Information

- **[Consumers' Guide to Legal Help](http://apps.americanbar.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/home.cfm?gnav=global_publicresources_findlegalhelp)** – The American Bar Associations website provides a list of legal resources for each state.
http://apps.americanbar.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/home.cfm?gnav=global_publicresources_findlegalhelp
- **[Restraining Orders — A Powerful Tool to Protect Elders](http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Restraining%20Orders%20August%202011.pdf)** – This article written by Linda Dawson from the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) discusses how the use of a restraining order may prove helpful in cases of abuse, harassment, and financial exploitation.
<http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Restraining%20Orders%20August%202011.pdf>
- **[Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence Coalition Chronicles: Advocacy for Survivors of Abuse in Later Life](http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/CoalitionChronicles_Oct2010%5b1%5d.pdf)** – This edition of the Coalition Chronicles created by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV) examines abuse in later life, how to identify it, effective interventions and strategies for keeping elder victims safe.
http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/CoalitionChronicles_Oct2010%5b1%5d.pdf

Anne

“...he had drawn up a petition, how he did it, I don't know....to have me declared incompetent and put into a home and forged my signature on it.”

Safety Planning with Older Victims

Safety planning is a process in which an advocate and a victim work together to create a plan to enhance victim safety. Advocates provide support and guidance to design a safety plan based on how the victim defines risk in his or her current situation. Safety planning recognizes that not all victims are going to want to report what is happening or they may not benefit from the criminal or civil court process. It also recognizes not all victims want to leave their perpetrators.

Abuse in later life victims can benefit from many of the same safety planning methods used to assist younger victims; however, advocates may need to consider additional factors such as the health of the victim and the perpetrator. Is either the victim or the perpetrator providing caregiving services? The relationship between victim and perpetrator may also be a factor when safety planning. For example, is it reasonable to expect no contact if the perpetrator is an adult child or grandchild? Safety measures commonly used with younger victims, such as using a cell phone to get help may not be an option for an older victim who is not comfortable with the technology. In addition, in rural areas cell phone reception can be limited and unreliable. Seeking support from a neighbor may not be an option because close neighbors may not exist. Calling 911 when a limited number of law enforcement officers cover large geographical areas may make a timely law enforcement response unlikely.

Strategies to Consider

- Secure the victim's home by reinforcing doors and windows to slow forced entry by a perpetrator while a victim waits for law enforcement to respond.
- Plan for escape, especially if the victim is still living with the perpetrator. A hidden set of car keys and necessary items like a purse and coat and a small amount of cash near the door may make it easier for a victim to leave quickly.
- Find places to hide in the home or on the property when leaving is not an option.
- Set up a code word. Help the victim explore who in the family, neighborhood, or community could be a trusted friend. Encourage the victim to include this trusted friend in his or her safety plan by setting up a code word so a phone conversation could bring help.
- Create a visual cue that could signal the need for help.

- Seek information about guns in the home. Ask if the alleged perpetrator has used guns to threaten or intimidate the victim or others in the community. Find out if the perpetrator routinely carries a gun or has one in his/her vehicle. Discuss with the victim how to limit gun access such as by removing guns and/or ammunition from the home, locking guns in a gun cabinet, etc. It is important to take direction from the victim as to how the abuser will react to any removal or restrictions of guns and ammunition.
- Consider other service providers. Additional eyes and ears in the home can add additional safety options for an older victim. Are there any senior services the victim may be eligible for, such as home delivered meals or home health care? Provide training to other agencies on signs of possible abuse and consider senior service providers as possible allies when safety planning with victims.
- Discuss ways to break the isolation for a rural victim of abuse. Simply offering referrals and information may not be effective when working with someone who has experienced many years of isolation and abuse. Recruit volunteers from senior centers and the faith community who could be a friend to the victim and help introduce him or her to social functions designed for seniors in a community.

“I’d had surgery on my neck and when I came home he was my caregiver...he would leave...and be gone and I would be left alone in the house. ...I wasn’t able to get up and walk around and I didn’t get fed. He would take the brace off at night and he would say ‘all I have to do is snap your neck and you’d be gone. Put you where dad is.”

Ruth

For More Information

- **[Safety Planning: A Guide for Individuals with Physical Disabilities](http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/CoalitionChronicles_Oct2010%5b1%5d.pdf)** – This safety plan created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL).
http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/CoalitionChronicles_Oct2010%5b1%5d.pdf
- **[Safety Planning: How You Can Help](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Disability%20Safety%20Plan.pdf)** – This booklet, created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), offers suggestions to caring individuals willing to help persons with cognitive disabilities who are being abused.
<http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Disability%20Safety%20Plan.pdf>
- **[Victim-Centered Safety Planning: Key Considerations for Professionals Working with Older Survivors of Abuse](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Victim%20Centered%20Safety%20Planning%205-11-11.pdf)** – This guide, created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), offers ideas and suggestions for professionals who are safety planning with older victims of abuse.
[http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Victim%20Centered%20Safety%20Plan
ning%205-11-11.pdf](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Victim%20Centered%20Safety%20Planning%205-11-11.pdf)

Emergency and Transitional Housing

Emergency and transitional housing can be crucial in helping victims live free from violence. Emergency housing, often called a shelter, is designed to provide safety and support to individuals and families that need to leave a dangerous home environment. Shelters usually have a maximum stay of 30-90 days. Emergency housing may provide housing for women and children in a communal living situation where residents share a kitchen and other living areas. Some rural programs have set up “safe houses” for emergency housing. Safe houses are provided by volunteers who offer a room in their home to temporarily house a victim for a designated period of time. These safe houses can be scattered throughout a service area giving multiple housing options. Other programs have agreements with nursing homes or senior housing agencies to provide emergency temporary shelter for victims. During an emergency housing stay, advocates offer safety planning, counseling, and legal advocacy with civil and criminal court system.

Some communities have determined transitional housing with longer stays work well with older victims. Victims can stay in transitional housing for up to two years and programs work with aging services to assure victims have what they need to live independently. Advocates are available to assist with any needs a victim may have and continue to work on safety and legal issues. They also provide emotional support in the form of support groups or counseling until victims are ready for more permanent housing.

Emergency and transitional housing programs may have policies, such as mandatory school or work requirements that are not practical when working with older victims. Programs should review their housing policies and physical structures to better meet the needs of older victims.

Strategies to Consider

- Create a quiet area with limited background noise to interview older victims.
- Broaden eligibility definitions to include victims who are abused by someone other than an intimate partner, such as victims who are abused by an adult child, other relative, or caregiver.
- Allow for a personal care attendant to provide assistance for a resident who may need additional care. Some programs have created a list of personal care attendants who are willing to help an older victim in temporary housing. The volunteers in these programs receive training on topics such as the dynamics of abuse in later life, confidentiality, and victim-centered services.

- Allow exceptions to resident school or work requirements for an individual who may be retired or unable to work.
- Explore options with the victim for care of pets and livestock if the victim is deciding to leave the family home or is concerned about the animals' safety.

For More Information

- **[Analyzing Domestic Violence Programs' Response to Older Victims](#)** – A document created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) to help your program analyze services and response to older victims.
<http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Service%20Delivery%205-10-11.pdf>
- **[Building Dignity](#)** – This website explores design strategies for domestic violence emergency housing. Thoughtful design dignifies survivors by meeting their needs for self-determination, security, and connection. The ideas here reflect a commitment to creating welcoming, accessible environments that help to empower survivors and their children. <http://buildingdignity.wscadv.org/>
- **[In Their Own Words](#)** – A DVD and [training guide](#) created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) with funding from the Office for Victims of Crime with sections on emergency housing, support groups and advocacy.
<http://www.ovc.gov/library/videoclips.html#elderabuse>
- **[Sheltering Animals and Families Together \(SAF-T\)](#)** – A national initiative guiding domestic violence shelters on how to house families together with their pets. The SAF-T Start-Up Guide sets forth three housing styles and answers questions about how to safely house pets on-site at a domestic violence shelter. SAF-T saves lives!
<http://www.animalsandfamilies.org/>

Support Groups for Older Victims of Abuse

Support groups break some of the isolation experienced by rural victims and provide an opportunity for victims to share their life stories and offer support to each other. Because older victims' challenges are often different from those faced by younger victims, older women are often not comfortable participating in groups with younger women (Vinton, L. et al. 1998). Rural communities may have additional factors to consider when planning a support group. Limited numbers of interested participants can make it a challenge to start a group. Populations in rural communities can be spread out for many miles and public transportation is often non-existent. Finding a location that is accessible for older victims can also be challenging.

Thelma

“All of a sudden I find this group...I found a big difference, a huge difference. I felt alone, I'm not alone anymore.”

Strategies to Consider

- Plan a lunch meeting with victims to pursue their interest in starting a support group. Groups do not need a large number of participants to be effective. Victims can receive support and education from 2-3 individuals who meet regularly and share their experiences. Have these small groups in several locations.
- Consider working with existing transportation services for seniors available in the community to get victims to and from support groups.
- Consider holding support groups in existing public buildings where seniors already congregate such as a hospital or senior center. Some victims may be hesitant to come to a space where they may be seen by others. Consider buildings with a private entrance to protect victim confidentiality.
- Provide gas vouchers or mileage reimbursement for victims who can drive to the group.

- Arrange ride sharing from different locations.

For More Information

- **[Golden Voices: Support Groups for Older Abused Women](#)** – A manual developed by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) to assist programs in starting a support group. It is based on interviews with older women support group facilitators from across the country.
http://ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/GOLDEN%20VOICES%20REV%202011_0.pdf
- **[In Their Own Words](#)** – This DVD and **[training guide](#)** created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) with funding from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) includes interviews with victims and service providers to provide information on emergency housing, support groups and advocacy.
 - **DVD:** <http://www.ovc.gov/library/videoclips.html#elderabuse>
 - **Training Guide:**
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/pdftxt/InTheirOwnWords.pdf>

Love

“...when you talk in the group...when I say something she knows exactly where I’m coming from and it really makes you feel good that somebody else knows where you’re coming from. Other people can’t understand it unless they’ve been there, and unless they’re a mother.”

Outreach in Rural Communities

Getting the word out about the issue of abuse in later life and the services available is critically important, especially in rural areas where local media sources can be very limited and the culture may encourage silence on the issue. The old adage “if you build it they will come” is not always effective when reaching out to older victims of abuse. Older victims often feel that domestic and sexual violence services are for younger women with children and not for them, therefore, programs are encouraged to design outreach materials that specifically address older victims of abuse.

Strategies to Consider

- When developing materials about domestic abuse or sexual assault in later life, consider using a larger, easy to read font and color contrast to improve readability.
- Include diverse images of older individuals on written materials addressing domestic abuse and sexual assault.
- Use language that is comfortable for older people. Phrases such as “domestic violence,” “sexual assault,” and “elder abuse” may not resonate with older adults. Describe specific forms of abuse such as withholding medicine, refusing to let you go out with friends, putting you on an allowance, doing sexual acts that make you uncomfortable, etc.
- List phone numbers of elder services and adult protective services on resource materials.
- Include articles on abuse in later life in program newsletters.
- Create placemats to be used at meal sites and by agencies providing home delivered meals with information about abuse in later life and available services.
- Host a booth at events where older individuals gather to offer information on abuse in later life. Purchase giveaway items (e.g., pens, magnets, magnifying glasses) with contact information for APS, the domestic and sexual abuse program, victim advocacy, and aging network services phone numbers so an abuser will not get suspicious.
- Talk to audiences of older adults as if they might be victims or may know older victims. Do not focus on discussing domestic violence or sexual assault as if it might only happen to their daughters or granddaughters.

- Work with elder service agencies to organize “Safety in Your Home” sessions that cover information on fire danger, security, and falls. Include information on abuse in later life.
- Invite older survivors to participate on survivor panels or to share their story at events.

For More Information

- **[From the Front of the Room: An Advocates Guide to Help Prepare Survivors for Public Speaking](http://www.nrcdv.org/Files/From%20the%20Front%20of%20the%20Room%20-%20An%20Advocates%20Guide%20to%20Help%20Prepare%20Survivors%20for%20Public%20Speaking.pdf)** – This guide from National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV) provides a basic overview of the issues that face survivors who desire to speak publicly about their experiences.
http://vawnet.org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/NRCDV_SpeakersGuide-Advocates.pdf
- **[Outreach Strategies for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocates](http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Outreach%20Strategies%202011.pdf)** – This resource created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) provides ideas to consider when planning an outreach program for older victims and survivors of abuse.
<http://www.ncall.us/sites/ncall.us/files/resources/Outreach%20Strategies%202011.pdf>

Working Together

Cases of abuse in later life and elder abuse are often extremely complex and no one program will meet all the needs of an older victim. All too often, older victims do not receive the services they need or get caught in a referral loop, being referred from one service program to another, only to return to where they started. By working together, with a focus on victim safety and offender accountability, agencies can provide their unique perspectives to gain a more complete picture of possible options to better meet the needs of victims.

Many domestic and sexual abuse service programs already have a multidisciplinary team such as a Coordinated Community Response Team (CCR) or Sexual Abuse Response Teams (SART) to assist agencies in reviewing and planning for a community coordinated response. Communities will need to determine whether to start new or include the issue of abuse in later life and elder abuse into an existing team. Limited staff numbers in rural areas can make starting a new team challenging, since many times the same professionals are asked to attend numerous meetings.

One of the challenges of incorporating abuse in later life into an existing group is keeping the issue at the forefront of discussions. Some communities have found it useful to create an abuse in later life subgroup that meets before the regular meeting or create meeting agendas with dedicated time to focus on abuse in later life and elder abuse at each meeting. CCR and SART projects will need to be proactive to include this issue when there is limited staff working on many issues.

Strategies to Consider

- Expand existing multidisciplinary efforts to include additional partners who hold integral roles in helping older victims of abuse such as:
 - **Area Agency on Aging (AAA)** - The aging services network refers to professionals and volunteers who lend ongoing support and services to older adults. AAA provides a range of options that allow older adults to choose the home and community-based services and living arrangements that suit them best making it possible for older adults to remain in their homes and communities as long as possible. These services may include, but are not limited to: transportation assistance, in-home care, nutrition services, health services, and prevention and wellness programs. As these individuals often work with older adults on a daily or weekly basis, they may witness bruises or other injuries or hear potential victims describe their abuse, neglect, exploitation, or fear.

- **Adult Protective Services** – Adult Protective Services (APS) workers investigate allegations of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older and/or vulnerable at-risk adults. APS is typically administered by state or county human services or aging agencies. In almost all states, a broad array of professionals, including doctors, nurses, law enforcement officers, social workers, and aging and disabilities services providers are mandated to report any suspicion of elder abuse and/or vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation to APS.
- **Long-Term Care Ombudsmen** – Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board and care homes, and assisted living facilities. Under the federal Older Americans Act, every state is required to have an Ombudsman Program that addresses complaints and advocates for victims of abuse in the long-term care system.
- Invite culturally specific programs. Victims may be more comfortable turning to the resources and support offered by the organizations and programs that advocate for the communities with which they identify: persons with physical disabilities, persons who are Deaf, traditionally marginalized populations such as communities of color, immigrants, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, and tribal communities.
- Invite faith-based organizations. Faith holds a central place in the lives of many older adults and may be the first place survivors and family members turn for help.
- Allow time for abuse in later life advocates to participate in other committees in service area such as housing committees.

Ruth

“It would be nice if a social worker came with the police, because when the police take your son and they handcuff him and take him out of the house, there’s nobody there for you to put their arm around you and say it’s going to be alright. What can I do for you?”

For More Information

- [Advocacy Challenges in a CCR: Protecting Confidentiality While Promoting a Coordinated Response](http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Advocacy_Challenges_in_a_CCR.pdf) – This article by the Battered Women’s Justice Project (BWJP) examines the challenge advocates experience when balancing a victim’s right to privacy and confidentiality to the need for advocates involvement with local Community Coordinated Response Teams.
http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Advocacy_Challenges_in_a_CCR.pdf
- [Collaboration](http://ncall.us/community/collaboration) – The National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) has additional information on collaboration at its website.
<http://ncall.us/community/collaboration>
- [Forging New Collaborations: A Guide for Rape Crisis, Domestic Violence, and Disability Organizations](http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Collaboration-pub-v4-corrected.pdf) – This report, created by the Vera Institute of Justice, provides recommendations for building effective collaboration and practical strategies for overcoming common obstacles.
<http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/Collaboration-pub-v4-corrected.pdf>
- [Where Faith and Safety Meet: Faith Communities Respond to Elder Abuse](http://www.interfaithpartners.org/elderhome.html) – Together, Safe Havens and NCALL developed an Elder Abuse and Faith Toolkit intended to support service providers and advocates as they reach out to and collaborate with local faith communities. <http://www.interfaithpartners.org/elderhome.html>

Carol

“I actually have a desk at APS one day a week where I sit and work with the APS workers.”

Carol, a DV advocate, describing her experience collaborating with APS.

Conclusion

As 77 million baby boomers age, abuse in later life and elder abuse is only expected to worsen. Rural domestic and sexual violence program advocates have a clear understanding of power and control dynamics, lethality and safety and can play a critical role by providing services for older victims. Programs have found that traditional methods of providing services may not be effective when serving victims who are 50 and over and have been successful in making changes to better meet the needs and reach out to this population.

We honor and thank you for the important and sometimes difficult work you do, especially in the rural areas of the United States. We hope this booklet is helpful in your efforts to reach out to older victims in your community.

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