



**WHAT'S WORKING WEDNESDAYS**  
**ELDER ABUSE: TRAINING STAFF TO RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND**  
**JAN PENNINGTON, CATHOLIC CHARITIES SENIOR HOUSING**  
**JUNE 25, 2014**

Catholic Charities Senior Housing believes that the entire staff team in each of its communities can play a role in recognizing and responding to elder abuse. Elder abuse not only radically affects the quality of life of the resident, but also can contribute to health issues and, ultimately, to a shortened length of life.

Abuse can take many forms: financial; verbal/ mental; physical/ sexual; and self-neglect. It can be part of a lifelong pattern between couples or family members or it can develop slowly or it can be precipitated by opportunistic or emotional response to the person's diminishing capacities. People's neglect of themselves can stem from a variety of emotional and physical sources. And, it is important to understand cultural differences in the experience and understanding of what constitutes abuse. However, research consistently shows that elder abuse is under-reported.

Therefore, the general rule at Catholic Charities Senior Housing is, "if you see something, say something." Training on elder abuse issues is done formally once a year at each community and the message is reinforced regularly in a variety of ways. All of the staff team is involved in the training at each community. The training, which takes about an hour or a little more, consists of:

- Distributing a handout that explains the various types of elder abuse and some basic information
- Showing the video "An Age of Justice" (available from NCOA and on YouTube)
- Review and discussion which focuses on:
  - The process of reporting abuse and some tips for that
  - An understanding that staff does not have to diagnose the situation or know for sure that some type of abuse is going on, they just need to share what they have noticed
  - Questions and experiences the staff members have related to elder abuse
  - Talking through various scenarios and options for individual circumstances

Ms. Pennington shared that June 15<sup>th</sup> is World Abuse Awareness Day, so that provides a good opportunity to raise awareness in each community among both staff and residents. She discussed some of the ways Property Managers and Service Coordinators might handle situations of suspected abuse. These include: involving a physician; having staff spend some time alone with the person and away from the perpetrator; reducing isolation; alerting a social worker at adult day services; etc. Suspected abuse is reported to Adult Protective Services.

In discussion with others on the call, concern was raised that the response from Adult Protective Services varies by jurisdiction. While there is no simple solution to that, sometimes involving AERS or a physician or discussing with the resident and/or family can help to identify a path forward.