



## North Shore News Column.

### Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

## Local advocates tackle issue of elder abuse

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News June 9, 2013



*West Vancouver Police Department's Bunny Brown, victim services program manager, and Corp. Jag Johal speak on the topic of elder abuse at a recent free workshop timed with World Elder Abuse Awareness Day at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre.*

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Photograph by: photo Jane Osborne , for the NEWS

WORLD Elder Abuse Awareness Day happens each year on June 15.

It's the one day in the year when the whole world voices its opposition to the abuse and suffering that is experienced by some of our older generation.

It's estimated that somewhere between four and 10 per cent of seniors in Canada experience some form of abuse. I think those numbers are low but regardless it is clear that elder abuse is an issue that needs to be taken seriously.

Last month, the West Vancouver Seniors Action Table got a head start on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by

hosting a workshop on the topic at the West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre. I'm a member of the local Community Response Network and we assisted with the organization of the event.

Let's take a peek behind the scenes to see how this event was put together.

Elder abuse is a difficult topic. Our challenge here was to address the issue and not send everyone home depressed. Our theme was helping seniors to live in dignity. We decided to hold a free workshop for the public on a weekday afternoon at a central and accessible location in West Vancouver.

Our target audience was older, vulnerable seniors and we wanted to be in and out in two hours or less. We framed the workshop around three questions. What is elder abuse and what can you do about it? How do you recognize and avoid scams? Who can you call if you are concerned about someone you know?

Financial abuse is thought to be the most common form of elder abuse. How can you tell if you are dealing with a con artist? In 2010 a group of seniors from the John Braithwaite Community Centre produced a video for seniors titled, How to Spot a Wolf.

Iara Gilbertson, who appears in the video, was on hand to take questions from the audience about scams.

Melanie Parkinson is a member of the Community Response Network and an adult protection consultant and designated responder co-ordinator - North Shore with Vancouver Coastal Health. I asked her what a person should do if they believe a senior is subject to abuse, neglect or self-neglect.

"Different situations require different interventions," she said. "It is important that the adult have an opportunity to tell their story in a safe way, free of judgment. If it is appropriate to have a conversation with the adult about their experience and their wishes, that is the best place to start. If the adult is able to follow up on their own, you can provide them contact numbers for local community resources. If you are concerned that the adult may not be able to seek support and assistance on their own, you may contact the local health authority to report abuse, neglect or self-neglect of a vulnerable adult."

For the North Shore, contact Parkinson at 604-904-6200, ext. 4124 to discuss your concerns or make a report.

Finally, Corp. Jag Johal, of the West Vancouver Police Department, engaged with the audience about some of the more recent and typical scams in the community. Elder financial abuse is tough to combat, in part because it often goes unreported. Many elderly victims are often too confused, fearful or embarrassed by the crime to report it.

Johal's message was that we can all protect ourselves and our loved ones from financial elder abuse by becoming familiar with the most common scams and reporting suspicious activities to the police.

Looking at the research it's clear that what makes people vulnerable to predators and elder abuse is loneliness, feeling under appreciated and lack of social support. By staying active and involved with people and activities, you are less likely to find yourself in an abusive relationship.

Tom Carney is the executive director of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604985-3852 or send an email to lions\_view@telus.net.