



ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

The President of the Canadian Association of Retired Teachers (ACER-CART), Helen Biales, speaking on June 6 at the annual meeting of the association in Ottawa, urged its members and the public to reflect on the needs of the abused elderly. Elder Abuse Awareness Day is held on Sunday, June 15, 2008.

“All older people have a right to be treated with dignity and respect, yet some studies have shown as many as one in twenty older people are victims of elder abuse,” she noted.

The debate about elder abuse is where the debate about child abuse was some three decades ago. Some jurisdictions have made great efforts to educate the public to the need to protect the elderly by providing adult protection toolkits of information for care agency workers, developing a definition of a “vulnerable adult,” and supporting regional conferences, road shows and workshops to enhance the understanding of this issue.

Elder abuse can occur in the person’s home or in care home facilities. It can have physical, psychological, financial, sexual or neglect aspects. The challenge is to eradicate the myths and stereotypes surrounding such abuse, and to help older people and their families to have a clear route to follow when making an allegation of abuse to a local authority. As well, providing support to those who have directly experienced abuse or whose family members have done so, is needed.

Government agencies should ensure there are telephone help lines to receive calls from people expressing concern about abuse or quality of care in homes for older people. Another step is to provide information and support on issues such as mediating, spreading awareness and know-how to those involved in the day-to-day operation of care homes, and understanding the vulnerability of the elderly with conditions like dementia and Alzheimer’s where abuse is likely to occur. Creating survivors networks to provide support should also be considered.

ACER-CART represents more than 157,000 retired teachers in provincial associations found in all of Canada’s provinces and the Yukon.