

LIFE

Protect your elders

Advocates hope to lower incidence rate of abuse

By Pam Mellskog
Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — Jackie List-Warrilow looks at bruises with a suspicious eye.

As outreach program director at Longmont's Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley, she knows that perpetrators sometimes blame signs of elder abuse on the victim's age-related vulnerabilities such as physical frailty, dementia and vision and hearing impairments.

Elders do bruise more easily. A watchband adjusted too tightly can leave a mark.

"But (perpetrators) may use the aging process to explain away the signs of abuse that people might be noticing," she said.

List-Warrilow and other victim advocates hope that Elder Abuse Awareness Day, an international designation that will be recognized Monday, raises awareness and helps reduce the incidence of elder abuse — be it domestic abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Research shows that elder abuse goes largely under-identified and under-reported. Only an estimated one in six cases gets addressed, according to the National Center on Elder Abuse.

To better address the problem in women and men, whose rate of abuse rises as they age, Boulder County and five other counties nationwide recently each won a three-year, \$465,000 Elder Justice Project grant from the U.S. Justice Department.

Funds will pay for interagency elder abuse-related training and service coordination countywide

AT RISK	
Risk factors for elder abuse	crisis, call the St. Vrain Safe Shelter's hotline at 303-772-4422.
• The victim has dementia	To report suspected elder abuse, call Boulder County Adult Protective Services at 303-441-1441.
• The perpetrator and/or the victim has mental health or substance abuse issues	Same: National Center on Elder Abuse
• Social isolation	
• Poor physical health	
• For help in a domestic abuse	

LEARN MORE
What: Protecting yourself from identity theft
When: 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 17
Where: Longmont Senior Center, 910 Long Peak Ave., Longmont
Cost: Free
To register: Call 303-651-8411

— from the courts to police departments to social services and private agencies, Janet Kilby, Boulder County's project coordinator, said.

Elder abuse requires a concerted effort given the associated delicate dynamics, she said.

Studies show most perpetrators are not strangers. They are trusted caregivers or family members, which makes it difficult for elder abuse victims to consider themselves victims and get help.

"Perhaps that older son who has moved in is doing the grocery shopping, driving her places and changing the light bulbs. But he is also physically intimidating her and financially exploiting her, and how is she going to sort that out?" Kilby said.

NCEA ranks the most common form of elder abuse as neglect, which comes in three forms.

Examples of active neglect include putting a walker just out of reach, withholding food or medication, not changing an incontinent elder's soiled clothing or failing to move a bedridden person enough to prevent bedsores.

Passive neglect occurs when a caregiver mishandles medication or otherwise endangers the health and wellbeing of an elder through incompetence.

Self-neglect happens when elders can no longer care for themselves. Indicators include poor personal hygiene, signs of over- or under-medication or misuse of medication; the inability to change soiled clothing; malnutrition; and prolonged solitude that deprives the elder of stimulation and affection.

Boulder County annually reports more than 200 incidents of elder abuse, exploitation or neglect. The state reports about 4,000 cases, according to the Boulder County Aging Services Web site.

But the economic downturn recently pushed the rate of exploitation and violence "through the roof," Kilby said.

Since November, the Boulder County district attorney's office has prosecuted about 45 cases, said Karen Koblentz Peters, a deputy district attorney.

Most of her cases relate to financial exploitation, usually by a family member, she said.

Those cases and her battery cases get charged as felonies because "enhanced penalties" kick in if a victim is "at-risk." This victim category includes being age 60 or older, Peters said.

For instance, theft more than \$1,000 is a felony. But the enhancement provision lowers that amount to \$500 in elder abuse cases, she said.

Only forgery, harassment and identity theft go without this enhanced penalty provision, Peters added.

Mary Foehr, Boulder County's manager of Adult Protective Services in Longmont, encouraged elders to protect themselves by canceling or shredding credit card and sweepstakes offers and to refuse get-rich-quick investment plans.

"We've had folks send off between \$11,000 to \$250,000 over a couple of years, and it's not (due to) greed," she said. "They want to leave more."

Foehr also advised discussing life choices with family members, writing a plan and assigning a trustworthy power of attorney.

Please see **ELDERS** on D2

ELDERS: Keeping in touch helps avoid pitfalls of aging

From D1
ney.

Knowing neighbors and staying involved in church, book club and other community activities also can reduce the isolation that makes anyone more vulnerable to abuse, she said.

Foehr recounted the case of an elderly nursing home resident who, due to her profound sense of isolation, continued letting her son — a man struggling with substance abuse — take money from her every week when she got her disbursement.

"Her statement was, 'If I don't give him the money, no one will come to see me,'" Foehr said.

List-Warrilow reminded

women to remember that the local shelter is there for them if they feel endangered, though only 2.2 percent of participants annually are over age 60.

Barriers for the older generation include concerns about where to go after the short-term stay and perceptions that shelter's are for younger women and not hospitable, List-Warrilow said.

"I tell people when I talk to them on the phone that this is a warm and welcoming home environment, not a warehouse with cots. And it is fully handicap-accessible," she said.

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