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## Tackling Elder Abuse

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## **Tackling Elder Abuse**

By

Edward F. Ansello, Ph.D.

Our work addressing elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation deserves special attention. In the fall of 2006, VCoA and a capable coalition of Richmond area law enforcement agencies, Commonwealth's Attorneys Offices, and service providers received funding from the Office on Violence against Women (OVW), U.S. Department of Justice. Our project, the Central Virginia Training Alliance to Stop Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation, was one of only ten grantees nationwide selected to pilot a three-year training initiative for criminal justice professionals on elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. Historically, law enforcement officers and prosecutors have had little preparation when encountering such cases, resulting at times in missed evidence, reluctance to prosecute, and the potential for re-victimization.

During our just-completed first year, the Central Virginia Training Alliance to Stop Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation has focused on building collaboration within and across jurisdictions and launching a two-day training for law enforcement that will now be offered locally each quarter. Some of our accomplishments to date include:

We have refined and tailored the law enforcement curriculum that was developed by OVW, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, and the National Sheriff's Association to include state statutes and state and local resources. We have also modified the curriculum to make it friendlier to instructors who will implement it in a train-the-trainer model.

We have assembled a top-notch team of instructors whom we are calling upon to deliver the two-day trainings. These include three law enforcement officers, two police department domestic violence coordinators, two prosecutors, two victim service advocates, one APS investigator, and an area agency on aging care coordination manager. Six members of our team (the maximum allowed by terms of the grant) attended the OVW-sponsored train-the-trainer conference this past June.

We conducted, in September, a dry run of the law enforcement training for an audience of law enforcement and community stakeholders, who provided crucial feedback. It proved gratifying to observe our training team members as they found their stride during this practice run.

We successfully launched the law enforcement training on November 13th-14th at the Chesterfield Police Academy. The setting, the participants, and the interactions produced a most positive experience. Evaluations from the 26 participants were overwhelmingly high. One veteran officer wrote to his chief to say that this training was "one of the best" he'd ever taken in his law enforcement career.

We forged strong bonds among our peers in the project. Meetings and trainings throughout the year brought together a variety of stakeholders who generated productive discussions on how to improve our community's response to the problems of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Years two and three of the project will see more of these forums for systems change.

We have already scheduled four trainings for 2008. We have also scheduled six collaborative meetings for 2008.

We are nearing completion of a legal remedies booklet for training participants, project collaborators and other community stakeholders.

In the current year two of the project, local prosecutors will have the opportunity to attend a national prosecutors conference on elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. In addition, a national judicial workshop *Enhancing Judicial Skills in Elder Abuse Cases* has been developed especially for judges to attend. OVW, in partnership with the National Judicial Institute on Domestic Violence, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and the Family Violence Prevention Fund, is taking leadership in this focus in order to complement the enhanced expertise of law enforcement and prosecutors. Our overall intention is to improve the expertise of each component in investigating and prosecuting maltreatment against our elders.

We congratulate VCoA's Paula Kupstas for her extraordinary direction of the project and commend our many talented and committed partners.