

## **Community Response Networks: Addressing Adult Abuse and Neglect in BC Backgrounder**

It is estimated that 1 in 12 active seniors in BC experience some form of financial abuse (Spencer, 1997). 5% of older British Columbians living in private dwellings experience one or more forms of abuse at the hands of family members (Podnieks et al., 1990). It is also estimated that 70% of women with disabilities have experienced some form of abuse (Stimpson & Best, 1991).

### **What is a Community Response Network, or CRN?**

A CRN is a diverse group of concerned community members who come together to create a coordinated community response to adult abuse, neglect and self-neglect.

### **What are BC's Community Response Networks Doing?**

Here are just a few stories about what Community Response Networks (CRNs) all over BC are doing to address adult abuse, neglect and self-neglect:

- CRNs in **Victoria, Castlegar, Grand Forks, Revelstoke, Mission, Hope**, and others instituted a Gatekeeper Program so that concerned members of the community will know who can help if they meet an adult who may be abused or neglected.
- In **Parksville/Qualicum**, a seaside community on Vancouver Island's east coast, the CRN joined forces with a local financial institution and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Together they sponsored a lunch and showing of the video Money Matters for Seniors, depicting how seniors can protect themselves from financial abuse and how staff of financial institutions can assist.
- In **Powell River**, a seaside community on the Sunshine Coast, the CRN organized "Breakfast with Bankers" where members met with staff of local financial institutions to share solutions for prevention of financial abuse.
- **Burnaby/New Westminster**, two communities working together in the Lower Mainland, raised awareness of what it might be like to be a person living with a mental health diagnosis. The devaluing of one another as a result of only being seen as our labels was identified as one of the factors that puts us all at greater risk of being abused or neglected.
- **Abbotsford, Kaslo and White Rock** are communities with very innovative citizens who have written and performed short plays on behalf of, or in conjunction with local CRNs about adult abuse, and how people are hurt by ageist and other attitudes that devalue
- **North Vancouver, Quesnel**, a northern Cariboo town, and **Prince Rupert**, a community on the northwest coast, identified needed programs of benefit to adults who may be abused and neglected— a single point of entry for adults in complex situations, a grocery delivery program, and a volunteer bureau - and have been instrumental in them coming to fruition.

## **What are BC's CRN Members Learning as They Work Together?**

As a result of working together on these CRN activities, guided by the community development principles of inclusion, meaningful participation, power-sharing and building capacity, members have said:

- “Legislation alone doesn’t keep people safe. Communities keep people safe.”
- “The work is as much about the process of working together as it is about the outcomes.”
- “We need to change our thinking about who can make changes happen – it’s not just highly placed people.”
- “We have to listen harder, and pay attention differently. We need to see things as a series of circles, not boxes.”
- “We must be prepared to have the difficult discussions, to risk conflict. Trust is built when we find positive ways to address conflict or different experiences and perspectives.”
- “We try to create an environment where power-sharing and power equity for all members is a reality, rather than an ideal.”

## **The Background - BC's New Adult Guardianship Laws**

On February 28, 2000, a selective package of new adult guardianship legislation came into force in British Columbia, Canada. One part of these new laws, Part 3 of the Adult Guardianship Act is about supporting adults who are abused, neglected or self-neglecting.

Part 3 largely reflects the best practice of offering support to adults who are abused or neglected; that is, in a way they can accept it, respecting their right to make their own decisions, and presuming they are mentally capable of doing so. For adults who are unable to seek support and assistance on their own, the legislation provides some new legal tools including new ways of gaining access when access has been denied, restraining orders, and in extreme circumstances, court orders to provide needed supports. These new legal tools are accessible only to agencies designated under the Act. These agencies, the five regional health authorities and the new provincial community living authority, Community Living BC (CLBC) have a legislated mandate to look into all reports of abuse or neglect they receive.

## **A Coordinated Community Response – Community Response Networks (CRNs)**

Very early on, it was recognized that offering support to adults who are abused or neglected, and having access to some new legal tools, is only part of what will make a difference in peoples' lives. As well, there is a need for increased coordination at the community level, not only of responses to individuals who are abused or neglected, but also coordination in terms of working towards prevention over time. Community Response Networks are the vehicles for achieving increased coordination of community responses to abuse and neglect. Today, CRNs are established or under development all over BC.

## **Support for CRNs**

CRNs were initially supported by the Public Guardian and Trustee of BC with funding, provincial, community and regional workshops, networking, a provincial website, telephone consultation, print materials, and advice from a provincial planning group.

These support functions are now being provided by a new association, the BC Association of Community Response Networks.

## **For More Information...contact**

Alison Leaney – Executive Director  
BC Association of Community Response Networks  
E-mail: [edcrns@telus.net](mailto:edcrns@telus.net)

**Telephone:** 1 (604) 865-0776  
**Website:** [www.bccrns.ca](http://www.bccrns.ca)