

New Elder Abuse Coalition Is Created in Augusta County

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Elder abuse is an increasingly prevalent but hidden problem that exists in every community throughout the world. The public at large and even professionals serving vulnerable adults often are unaware of the problems or how to respond. Research shows that only about one in every five cases of abuse is reported nationwide. Abuse can be physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, financial exploitation, or neglectful behavior. In 2009, Augusta County had 486 reports of abuse, which was the 5th highest number of reports received in the Commonwealth. Only urban areas in Richmond, Fairfax, and Virginia Beach received more reports. The need for community education to increase awareness and detection of abuse and strategies for intervention is undeniable.

Because of this need, the Administration on Aging recently awarded a grant to Blue Ridge Legal Services to establish the Greater Augusta Coalition Against Adult Abuse (GACAAA) in Augusta County. The GACAAA is currently comprised of nearly 60 participating groups including law enforcement, Shenandoah Valley Dept of Social Services, Valley Program for Aging Services, nursing homes, home health care providers, banks, local prosecutors, and elder care attorneys. The purpose of the Coalition is to increase the public's awareness and recognition of elder abuse and encourage anonymous reporting to the proper authorities.

GACAAA will soon embark on a series of events to help achieve this goal. The Coalition will also organize training for local law enforcement officers and prosecutors by national and regional experts in order to help with the successful prosecution and investigation of elder abuse cases in our community. This is a critical step in the process to ensure perpetrators are held responsible for their crimes and are not allowed to exploit other vulnerable adults.

In the next issue of Seasons Plus we will go into more detail about what constitutes elder abuse and when it is time to report concerns. If you, or someone you know, is being exploited or abused please call the Adult Abuse Hotline at 1-888-83-ADULT. If someone is in immediate danger, always call 911.