The National Center on Elder Abuse defines elder abuse as intentional or neglectful acts by a caregiver or a “trusted individual” that harm, or may harm, a vulnerable senior. Abuse and neglect of seniors occurs in every community across the Commonwealth. As the protective services agency for 17 local towns and cities, Springwell has been at the forefront of elder protection and abuse prevention for nearly four decades. Core to Springwell’s mission is the belief that every senior is entitled to live independently in a safe environment. Our Protective Services Team is in place to work toward that goal.

Elder abuse takes many forms and can include financial exploitation, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, and even self-neglect. As often as 90% of the time, abuse comes not from a stranger but from a family member or close friend. Seniors frequently refuse to report abuse or neglect because of feelings of shame or embarrassment. They may fear retaliation, causing harm to their abuser (who is often a loved one), or losing their independence. An educated community can help. Anyone who is concerned for a senior can contact Protective Services confidentially to report abuse or neglect. “Springwell’s top priority is to respect the rights of seniors while helping them live safely in the least restrictive setting,” explains Springwell’s Protective Services Program Manager, April Evans, “We work together with the senior, the family, and other community resources to assess the situation and offer a range of service options such as homecare, counseling, financial management, or legal assistance.”

Springwell has seen increased reports of elder abuse and expects to respond to more than 1,500 in 2015. Despite this growth, the National Center on Elder Abuse estimates that only one in five cases, and possibly as few as one in fourteen, are actually reported. In recent years, Springwell has been involved in a number of initiatives and partnerships that respond to the problem of elder abuse. Several of them are outlined in this newsletter. When concerned friends, neighbors, or citizens report a concern to Springwell’s Protective Services, they become a part of the coordinated community solution to this problem.
Complicated issues such as elder abuse require a coordinated community response, but often there are barriers. Building relationships, communicating with all the key players, and determining the services that will be most helpful take time and resources. Springwell is pleased to be a partner organization in a three-year project funded by the federal Office of Violence Against Women. This project is creating a model for a coordinated community response to elder abuse in the city of Waltham.

Led by REACH Beyond Domestic Violence and joined by Springwell, the Waltham Police Department, the Middlesex District Attorney, and the Newton Wellesley Hospital Domestic Violence Program, the three-year project will:

- provide law enforcement and the judiciary with specialized training about abuse in later life;
- identify and train community-service providers about elder abuse (i.e. social service staff members, faith leaders, health-care providers);
- create a coordinated response team consisting of trained professionals for future community needs to assist and advise on complex elder abuse cases;
- create direct services based on a needs assessment of seniors, the general community, caregivers, and community-service providers to best address current needs.

The community collaboration has already helped more cases of elder abuse to be recognized and addressed swiftly and appropriately. As the grant continues, the partners will focus on the formation of the response team and the creation of more direct services for victims of abuse.

A Community Response

Mrs. Smith lived in her South Waltham home for 37 years, but when her husband died, she became worried about managing her home’s upkeep. With her children living out of state, she turned to an acquaintance who had befriended her at the hospital before her husband’s death. Soon, her friend had moved into her home “to help out.” When the help turned to abuse, Mrs. Smith was too embarrassed to seek assistance. Her pastor, who had attended a recent community training on elder abuse, became suspicious when Mrs. Smith arrived at services with a limp and bruises on her arms. After speaking to Mrs. Smith, he made a report to Springwell’s Protective Services Program. With the help of Waltham law enforcement and the support and guidance of Protective Services, Mrs. Smith was able to have the acquaintance removed from her home. The work of the Protective Services team did not stop there. They connected Ms. Smith to the in-home services and other community resources she needs to live comfortably and independently.
FAST Teams: A New Approach to Addressing Elder Financial Abuse

Scam artists, fraudulent telemarketers, and even family members have become more sophisticated in targeting and defrauding seniors of more than $2.5 billion annually. Both Massachusetts and Springwell are at the forefront of developing innovative ways to respond to the complicated problem of financial abuse of seniors.

Springwell is the lead agency for the greater Boston Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST). A special commission created by the legislature developed the idea of these teams to improve the Elder Protective Services Program in Massachusetts. FAST will consist of volunteer experts from legal and financial services as well as social service and law enforcement. They will provide targeted guidance and consultation to regional Protective Services workers on difficult financial exploitation cases and assist them in understanding account statements and transactions as well as financial products and legal instruments.

“We are experts in protective services, not high finance. The insight of a financial expert can help…”

Springwell’s Protective Services Manager, April Evans, who will chair the FAST Team, has seen first-hand the benefits of having access to the expertise the Team can offer. “We’re experts in protective services, not high finance. The insight of a financial expert can help us understand the details of the abuse so that we can put an appropriate plan in place.”

The greater Boston FAST team expects to be up and running by the fall, and is recruiting volunteers with the necessary expertise in finance and law. Volunteers will receive special training, will meet quarterly, and should be occasionally available for emergency case consultations by phone. If you or someone you know might be interested in learning more, please contact Springwell’s Protective Services Program Manager, April Evans, at aevans@springwell.com for more details.
Meet Officer Jon Bailey

In his 22 years of service on the Waltham Police Department, Officer Jon Bailey has received commendations and awards from a wide array of groups and organizations including the Waltham City Council, the Massachusetts State Senate, and the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.

He is the kind of ally that Springwell’s Protective Services Program is thrilled to have in planning a comprehensive approach to addressing elder abuse.

Officer Bailey, the Waltham Police Department’s expert on elder affairs, takes his role very seriously. With his comprehensive knowledge of the laws and statutes that relate to elder abuse, he is a resource for Protective Service staff. Officer Bailey is always willing to do what is needed to help elderly victims of abuse: coming along on a home visit to help with safety and access to a residence, sharing information where possible, and making himself available to meet with Springwell staff to strategize on particularly difficult cases.

“He is the kind of ally that Springwell’s Protective Services Program is thrilled to have...”

Protective Services works best when there is coordination and communication, especially between our team and law enforcement. Jon Bailey exemplifies the kind of officer that makes this important relationship work so well.

Solutions for Seniors, Individuals With Disabilities & Those Who Provide Care

Springwell is the federally designated Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and the state-designated Aging Services Access Point (ASAP) for the communities of Belmont, Brookline, Needham, Newton, Waltham, Watertown, Wellesley and Weston. Services are made possible in part by contracts with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and MassHealth. Additional services are made possible through contracts with insurance and health care providers as well as through the generosity of individuals, corporations, foundations and communities of faith that provide critical dollars.

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