



County is a leader in fighting elder abuse, but individuals can play role

Posted by Kate Birnbryer White | Guest writer February 16, 2009 10:37AM

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Genesee County is fortunate to have a progressive prosecutor in David Leyton. Leyton, along with the dedicated and tenacious Genesee County Sheriff's Department, recently brought charges of murder in a case of severe neglect of Katherine L. Mukdsi. Too often "gray murders" (murders involving older adults) and cases of elder abuse and neglect are ignored or determined too complex to adequately investigate.

Elder Law of Michigan applauds Genesee County and its elder death review team for bringing a murder charge in this case. Only a few counties in Michigan employ this nationally recognized best practice. Sending a clear message that abuse and neglect are serious crimes that carry significant penalties is critical for the health, safety and well-being of citizens of all ages.

According to media accounts, a postal worker reported Katherine Mukdsi's situation to the local police. That response fell short. Later this year, Elder Law of Michigan will bring training to local police to help them better identify elder abuse and understand how and when to intervene in an abuse or neglect situation. Friends, families, professionals and neighbors should continue to report neglect and elder abuse and do more than call the local police.

If you suspect that an adult is being abused or neglected, call Adult Protective Services (APS) and file a report at (800) 996-6228. APS accepts anonymous complaints and is charged with investigating right away, generally within 24 hours after the complaint is received. People age 60 and older can also call the Legal Hotline for Michigan Seniors at (800) 347-5297 for free information and advice if they are concerned about talking to authorities.

Elder abuse, neglect and financial exploitation are dramatically underreported crimes and sometimes initial reports to authorities are not taken seriously or handled properly. Research estimates that only about 4 percent to 6 percent of cases of elder abuse are reported in Michigan. When these cases are reported, as in Katherine Mukdsi's case, we need a coordinated community response involving citizens, APS and local law enforcement. This case reminds us that there are older adults among us who live in horrible conditions or are abused every day. About 14 percent of elders nationally report that they have been abused or neglected. We all need APS' number on our refrigerator door, by our phone or in our contact list to report it when we see it.

Older adults from all backgrounds and financial situations can be victims of abuse and neglect. Family and paid caregivers are often the perpetrators of these devastating crimes. Staying in regular contact with older adults you care about and probing any changes in behavior, activities or living conditions are critical to spotting a problem early. People who are isolated from friends and neighbors are particularly at risk. Instinctively, most of us know when something just isn't right. Reporting abuse, neglect or the misuse of an elder's money to APS should be our

first call.

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