

Elder Abuse Shelter: From Model to Movement



Rose, an 81 year old woman, lives alone on a fixed income in her home of 50 years. She invites her nephew to move in after he promises to help her around the house. The nephew is somewhat helpful at first, but then begins taking the medicine Rose has been prescribed for her back pain, eating her food and blocking her access to family and friends.

The Problem

People who experience elder abuse could actually be at risk in their own home; or are often isolated and unsupported, making them more susceptible to abuse:

- Family members are the most commonly identified perpetrators of elder abuse (Weissberger et al., 2019).
- Elder abuse is committed by someone in a caregiving or trusted relationship with the abused person (Hall, Karch, and Crosby, 2016).

Because of the nature of these relationships, the home may be an unsafe environment where older people are at risk of experiencing abuse.

When seeking out domestic violence and homeless shelters, keep in mind these programs are generally focused on other populations and often cannot accommodate older people who have unique:

- ✓ **Medical needs** (e.g. nursing, personal care assistance, care coordination)
- ✓ **Cognitive needs** (e.g. physical space, staff training and social programming tailored to stimulate memory)
- ✓ **Therapeutic needs** (e.g. rehabilitation, occupational and physical therapy)
- ✓ **Social service needs** (e.g. trauma-informed talk therapy, personal and financial case management)
- ✓ **Legal needs** (e.g. advocacy with law enforcement, representation in Housing or Family Court)

The Intervention: Elder Abuse Shelter Programs Housed within Long Term Care Communities

The Model

Clients are physically sheltered within long-term care communities, integrated among other residents based on the medical care they need. Safety and confidentiality are paramount. In addition to all the services of the community, clients receive holistic, victim centered services from a team of shelter or community-based professionals to address specific issues stemming from the abuse they have experienced.

Model Variations



Model 1: Shelter program affiliated with a single long-term care facility.



Model 2: External shelter program that coordinates placement at various housing sites.



Other Models: Shelter program design based on community needs and resources.

Shelter Movement Timeline

- **2005:** The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Justice at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale opens its doors as the first program using this model.
- **2012:** SPRiNG Alliance (Shelter Partners: Regional, National, Global) founded, with the mission to create a network of regional elder abuse shelters and other similar service models having close working relationships, shared resources and technical assistance, common standards of excellence, and a vibrant community of support.
- **2020:** 25 shelter programs in 16 states, all using the same basic model adapted to their community's unique needs.

Key Lessons for Success

✓ Find a program champion and provide appropriate housing

Shelter programs are staffed in different ways: by professionals within long-term care communities, by community-based professionals who work for aging, legal services or other agencies, or by government professionals such as Adult Protective Services. In every case, a dedicated professional “champion” with responsibility and authority over the program is critical to progress.

✓ Create access to a support services network

Elder abuse cases are complex and multi-faceted. Whether a shelter program has one dedicated professional or a whole team, strong partnerships with community-based social and other support services are critical to comprehensively addressing client needs and helping clients return safely to their homes and communities.

✓ Establish reliable funding sources

The shelter model relies on pre-existing resources to minimize capital and fixed costs. Some discrete funding is still necessary, and can be accessed in the form of government or private grants. Creation of a shelter program often allows a long-term care community to forge new philanthropic relationships with agencies and foundations interested in supporting elder justice, legal services or domestic violence initiatives.

For more information, visit theweinbergcenter.org or springalliance.org.



The Harry and Jeanette
Weinberg Center for Elder Justice
AT THE HEBREW HOME AT RIVERDALE