

By Robert B. Blancato

Elder Abuse and the Elder Justice Movement

Achieving justice for elders requires dedicated and sustained advocacy.

The Summer 2000 issue of *Generations* focused solely on the problem of elder abuse, but since then, much has evolved in this area of concern. Now there is a movement to broaden the focus from elder abuse prevention to the promotion of elder justice—a term first introduced in the Elder Justice Act, which became law in 2010. The term “elder justice” is defined by law to mean: “From a societal perspective, efforts to prevent, detect, treat, intervene in, and prosecute elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and protect elders with

light aspects of a range of topics—from XinQi Dong’s article on elder abuse in diverse communities (page 40) and an ombudsman’s perspective by Mark Miller on abuse prevention in long-term-care facilities (page 60), to Laura Rath’s description of how a California-based initiative is taking powerful steps to end elder abuse and neglect (page 100).

I am honored to be joined by Kathy Greenlee in introducing this issue of *Generations* (see page 6). As the Administrator of the Administration for Community Living, Greenlee is a fervent

elder justice champion within the Obama Administration: she succeeded in securing the first official White

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diminished capacity while maximizing their autonomy; and from an individual perspective, the recognition of an elder’s rights, including the right to be free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation” (U.S. Congress, 2009).

I am proud to present this issue of *Generations* that focuses on elder abuse and elder justice as a measured response to abuse. Three sections contain an array of articles that reflect the multi-disciplinary nature of the elder justice field. The longer feature articles speak to the wide breadth of the emerging field of elder justice, while a series of shorter articles spot-

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A New Look at Elder Abuse— and the Elder Justice Response

This issue of *Generations* comprises three sections that examine current aspects of elder abuse in our nation, the actions that are now being taken against this widespread abuse, and an overview of the challenges and opportunities



faced by the emerging Elder Justice Movement. We begin with an overview article on the nature and scope of elder abuse (page 12) by Georgia Anetzberger, a legend in the field of elder abuse study. Immediately following, Jeannie Jennings Beidler tells a dramatic, tragic—and true—story of her struggle to protect her grandparents from their son’s neglect and abuse (page 21). This editorial dynamic—presentation and support of facts and data complemented by personal stories of elder exploitation and abuse—is, I believe, a compelling quality of this issue of *Generations*: it is truly through story that the tragedy of and challenges presented by elder abuse hit home.

Sheri Gibson and Sara Honn Qualls offer a family systems perspective on elder financial abuse (page 26), and attorney Kerry Peck highlights some “infamous” cases of the financial exploitation and abuse of some high-profile

persons (page 30). Bonnie Brandl and Jane Raymond follow with their feature article that seeks to debunk the notion that caregiver stress is a primary cause of elder abuse (page 32).

Section two explores how elder justice advocates and practitioners are taking action against elder abuse, and offers seven articles, starting with an excellent narrative from Marie-Therese Connolly and colleagues (page 43) on sexuality and aging—and how a refusal to acknowledge an older person’s need for physical intimacy and closeness can endanger well-being and lead to abuse. Also included is a crucial discussion on Adult Protective Services (APS) and the importance of the Elder Justice Act to APS, presented by Kathleen Quinn and my longtime colleague William Benson (page 66).

Recognizing that solutions to elder abuse are local in nature is the focus of the feature article co-written by two experienced leaders in the field, Bonnie Brandl and Page Ulrey (page 73). Another component of elder abuse is sexual abuse in care facilities, the subject of another feature article by two nationally recognized authorities, Holly Ramsey-Klawnsnik and Pamela Teaster (page 53).

Actual stories of elder exploitation and abuse underscore the tragedy—and challenges—of elder abuse.

In section three, six articles focus on the Elder Justice Movement and the opportunities and challenges of this emerging field of advocacy. The discussion about the interrelated topics of elder abuse and the criminal justice response that were covered in the 2000 issue of *Generations* is updated in an opening feature article by renowned expert Candace Heisler (page 83). Immediately following is an article, co-authored by Lisa Nerenberg, Molly Davies, and Adria Navarro, on the importance of coalition-building in elder justice—especially at the

state level (page 89). Finally, wrapping up this issue of *Generations* is another “call to arms”: an examination of the federal role in taking action against elder abuse is addressed


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by three congressional champions on elder justice, Senators Herb Kohl, Bernie Sanders, and Richard Blumenthal (page 106).

Conclusion

Great progress has been made in recent years in enhancing the federal response to elder abuse. A landmark law on elder justice has been enacted and is now being implemented and provided with initial funding. We have a first-time, federally funded National Adult Protective Services Resource Center, and an updated National Center on Elder Abuse. The Department of Justice has a new elder abuse roadmap project and agencies such as the Federal Trade

Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission are working to combat elder financial abuse.

In order for elder justice to be achieved, it requires the kind of sustained advocacy that the nonpartisan Elder Justice Coalition has been engaged in for the past decade. We offer this issue of *Generations* as a document to both educate and motivate people to seek expanded policies and practices that will promote elder justice and prevent elder abuse in America. 

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References

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