



Report for Fort Simpson on Creating Safe Communities for Older Adults

The event took place on Nov. 9th and 10th, 2020 at the community hall. It was organized by Roslyn Firth, Community Wellness coordinator for the Lidlii Kue First Nation (LKFN) and facilitated by Suzette Montreuil. The workshop was attended by 5 elders, the community facilitator for Working Together with Elders, the mental health nurse, the community counsellor, and the community social worker. Chief Gerald Antoine attended the whole workshop. Snacks, beverages, and lunch were provided by the Band. RCMP Billie Gardner presented on the second day.



Dehcho River near Fort Simpson

First Day

The event started with an opening prayer by Margaret Cli. Roundtable introductions were then completed.

Roxanne reviewed the housekeeping issues for the group. Suzette reviewed the agenda for the first day. She explained that participants were able to keep resources and non-medical masks. She then offered a short introduction on the *NWT Seniors' Society* and the *NWT Network to Prevent the Abuse of Older Adults*. A short questionnaire was explained, and participants were asked to complete the questionnaire prior to workshop.

Elder Abuse in Fort Simpson

The group was subdivided into three subgroups to discuss what elder abuse looks like in Fort Simpson. Their responses are presented below.

- Elders lack of food or money for food
- Lack of care/respect/support
- Stealing money/financial insecurity
- Being taken advantage of using their place to party, sleep. Elders can't say no. They want company.
- Physical, verbal abuse
- Exposure to substances, people living with them who drink, do drugs
- Pensions come in and younger people take elders shopping and take money.
- Take elders to the bank and then get money. Pin numbers are shared.
- Verbal abuse leads to physical abuse.
- Psychological abuse. Elders feel threatened (most often family). How can we address this?



- Power of attorney is recommended using guidelines developed or public trustee.
- Important to make a will.

Housing

- Housing shortage
- Living with elders and using resources
- Should be for everyone, it is a form of abuse to not help those who need it, especially with housing
- Housing in disrepair



Small group discussion

Financial abuse

- Taking money for own use
- Stealing money
- Broken promises about paying bill and doing work for money
- Using elder's resources

Verbal abuse

- Swearing
- Putting down

Mental abuse

- Not visiting/not respecting
- Emotional abuse
- Withdrawing emotional support

Physical abuse

- Sexual abuse – No one wants to think about but it's there and hidden
- Using resources
- Eating all their food
- Brining bed bugs
- Cleanliness – not making sure your elders have help keeping clean
- Assault – major one



Neighbours, Friends and Families – It's Not Right

Suzette then presented the *It's Not Right- Neighbours, Friends and Family* materials. This material covers the role of ageism, warning signs of abuse, types of abuse, obstacles to getting involved, and the three steps that bystanders can take: See it, Name It and Check It. It also discusses two aspects to consider when approaching an elder, namely safety and respect. The main goal is to keep the door open for communication with the elder and decrease their sense of isolation.

Scenarios of Elder Abuse

The group viewed a scenario on abuse showing a grandson taking money from his grandmother. The group discussed the signs of abuse and how the grandmother felt.

- Took money – control
- Influence – power
- Privacy
- Under the influence
- Intimidation
- Wasn't respectful
- His tone of voice was threatening
- He had signs of addiction (sniffing)
- No manners
- Threatening body language
- Overbearing
- Hurtful
- Demanding money
- Aggressive behaviour when she did not comply with demand
- Manipulating appeal to her emotions with “trying to help out a friend”
- Keeping track of her finances in order to take it



Small group discussion

How Did the Grandmother Feel?

- Helpless
- Fear – alone
- Hurt – guilt
- Not heard – ignored
- Disrespected – taking all
- Shame
- Shocked
- Speechless



- Intimidated
- Fearful
- Belittled
- Scared
- Powerless
- Guilty

The whole group viewed two types of responses to the grandmother. The first response showed a visitor asking the grandmother to stop giving her grandson money and to call the RCMP if she did not know what to do. The second response showed a visitor who did not have all the answers but showed concern for the grandmother.

The group was divided into three subgroups and discussed the first visit and how the grandmother felt.

What Was Wrong with Visit?

- Aggressive
- Controlling – telling the grandmother how to respond
- Doesn't offer any help or support
- Does not check in emotionally
- Did not take into account possible mistrust with police
- Making assumptions – not listening
- Not approaching in a caring way
- Rude
- Approach was abrupt
- Undermining
- Shaming
- Verbal abuse
- Demeaning
- Belittling
- Body language
- Didn't tell grandma that she cared (ie "just a job")
- Passing the buck to cops
- Tone of voice
- No questions like how is she?
- No time to answer
- Not compassionate
- Judgemental



Reporting back



- Wasn't listening or given assistance
- Places blame

How Did the Grandmother Feel?

- More fearful x2
- More shame or/and guilt x2
- Unsupported, doubt herself and action
- Ashamed x2
- Embarrassed
- Would suffer in silence from then on
- Belittled
- Hurt
- No choices/options
- Fear of losing her grandson/family

The groups then discussed the second visit and answered the questions below.

What Did You Like About the Visit?

- More caring
- She made herself available as an emotional support
- Concerned for her well-being
- There to listen
- Calmer, nicer, sweet
- Concerned, directive
- Acknowledged feelings and validated grandma's concern for grandson
- Stated her concern for grandma
- Asked questions – to check what she saw
- Open ended questions to let grandma talk if she wanted to
- She didn't sound like she knew everything in her field of work.
- She has limitations but she told grandma that she cared about her
- Took her jacket off
- Took time and made time to hear grandma
- Body language more approachable – She seemed more understanding and willing to listen
- She was supportive instead of shaming
- Grandma was more approachable in the end – looked like was going to cry (hopeful)

How Did the Grandmother Feel?

- Emotional



- Relieved x2
- Respected
- Supported
- Understood
- Heard
- Surprised that someone wanted to talk to her
- Burden lifted

Day one ended with a sharing circle.

Day Two

Day Two started with an opening prayer by Chief Gerald Antoine.

Suzette reviewed the information from Day 1. The points covered included:

- Warning signs and types of abuse
- Three steps: See It, Name It, Check It
- How to approach an elder and what types of questions to ask
- What stops us from getting involved

RCMP Visit

Cpl Billie Gardner came the second morning. She reported that most times elders do not want to report abuse as it is usually family. They often just want us to know about abuse. They don't want to go through the courts. The RCMP will talk to the abuser and show evidence. This often stops it for awhile. There are varying degrees of abuse from borrowing car to the theft of \$10,000 by a caregiver (there was a charge laid for this incident).

Restorative justice is an option that can be offered when the victim does not want to go to court. If criminal act if reported, they investigate. If with children, they are obliged to let Social Services know.

One of the participants was on the local Justice committee. Robert Firth is responsible for restorative circles in Fort Simpson.

There was a question about run around from one agency to another? You talk to Social Services, they tell you to talk to RCMP but when you talk to RCMP, they tell you to talk to Social Services. The RCMP officer suggested explaining what was happening to both agencies. Suzette explained that it would help if a local group asked both agencies to come and talk together.



One elder spoke about the loss of trust between her people and the RCMP. Her people reported being

We want to work with you, not against you. If trust is broken, we want to rebuild it.

Elder participant

harassed and that harassment turns us into retaliation. She mentioned a few examples of this. She noted that the RCMP represented the signing of the Treaty and that Treaty 11 was the last treaty signed in “turtle island”. She recommended they do more work to introduce themselves to the community. The LKFN has a newsletter and local officers could be introduced using this tool. Proper introductions are very important. Let the court system deal with cases, do not harass the people. Using the Justice committee would be good as we need to deal with this and build up trust again. Getting involved in the community is also a good thing. Mingling and getting to know each other is important. She offered her services for translation and stated she does not take payment for this because it is helping her people.

We care enough to share this.

Elder participant

The RCMP officer responded that she agreed. We have a lot of work to do. She noted it was a good idea to use the local newsletter.

Financial Abuse

The group then discussed more options to prevent financial abuse. Their suggestions were:

- More education on what is financial abuse is needed. When does giving money become financial abuse?
- Committee is a safe place to go to discuss elder abuse.
- Talk to manager at Northern store about elders’ accounts.
- Setting up an account at Northern store for elder but with limits and safety elements: unusual purchases for an elder, limit people who can use account.
- Talk to bank about automatic deductions for payments
- Require co-signature by a trusted person to pay bills
- Keep a paper trail



Video: Hidden

The group then watched a 10-minute video produced by the Native Counselling Services of Alberta that shows a story of elder abuse and part of a restorative circle. They broke into 3 groups and discussed the following.

New Ideas about Elder Abuse?

- Intergenerational trauma – “hurt people hurt”
- Difficulty in setting up trusted system
- How to support if the Elder does not want to speak
- How to reduce stigma and shame associated with reporting abuse
- Learned behaviour by Residential Abuse Survivors, goes from one generation to another
- Normalized behavior/accepting the abuse
- Elder feeling like they deserve to be abused
- Literacy/illiteracy play a part
- Importance of family involvement
- Information sharing using all avenues like Facebook, newsletter
- Identify necessary supports (outreach, Justice committee)
- Need to develop strategy on how we can assist and support the challenges of abuse issues
- Identify ways (positive) to assist and support people to share the abuse that is occurring with them and to identify safe places and people who they can trust

Response to Making Peace Circle (restorative circle)

- Whole family involved
- Justice committee
- Positive
- Community approach
- We need a support circle here to learn new ways of dealing with it
- Educate the community, have information around the community (Health Centre, DCHSS, RCMP)
- Ensure circle is maintained (never ends)
- Objective is Gathering Place for Elders to reach out to.
- Objective of Safe Place Environment (protective)
- Idea of Elders’ Support Center providing essential services
- Dedicate area in newsletter to notice/important information
- Objective to incorporate interagency type of collaboration
- Always welcoming



Community Response

The group discussed the benefits of working together rather than staying alone. They discussed several questions related to forming a support group.

What Would the Community Support Group Do?

- Asking elders is essentially important
- Practice what you preach
- Starts at home
- Ensure you are mindful of the different pronunciations due to the different ways that people speak from different areas
- Invitation of resource peoples (trauma, crisis intervention, cultural awareness)
- Visit and socialize
- Build trust and rapport, form relationships
- Share stories, laughing, crying, healing, freedom to express in a safe space
- What is said in the circle remains in the circle
- Learn new ways of knowing and doing, undoing learned behaviours



Discussing forming a community group

Who Will Be Involved?

- Elders
- Community resources
 - RCMP
 - Essential workers – counsellors – clear boundary around confidentiality
 - Chief
 - Mediator – a neutral person
 - Multiple generations
 - Different professionals or experts to share resources and education – health, social services, trauma
 - Youth to be mentored with this process



Meeting Logistics?

- Discussed monthly meeting starting in January but possibly starting bi-weekly until they are organized and trained.
- Could also call an emergency meeting if there is a crisis
- Use newsletter to let people know
- Have a different volunteer to chair each meeting and rotate chairing
- Discuss funding
- Present report of workshop and explain how the group came out of this
- Choose an accessible place with no stairs
- Community hall might be the place as it is large enough to host the number of people
- Consider developing a vision statement

The group completed the questionnaire and then formed a sharing circle to end the workshop.

Sharing Circle

Participants shared what they had learned and talked about how important elders are.

Suzette explained that the NWT Seniors' Society could be contacted if more support was required.

Results of the Evaluations:

The participants were asked to evaluate themselves on the following statements prior to the workshop and after its completion.

I know warning signs and risk factors of elder abuse

Prior to workshop average: 3.6 Post workshop average: 4.0

I can ask questions and talk to someone I think is being abused.

Prior average: 3.6 Post average: 4.4

I can encourage someone who is experiencing elder abuse to seek help in my community

Prior average: 3.9 Post average: 4.5

I see the value in working together as a group to try and decrease elder abuse

Prior average: 4.3 Post average: 4.5

The following comments were also provided:



What will you take away with you?

- Helpful information for those who need help
- A commitment to trying to form a healing circle (restorative justice)
- I will ask before assuming
- The importance of supports within the community, education around what to recognize
- Knowing what we all shared in this workshop
- Sharing circle
- The warning signs of elder abuse
- Working with community group and communication is key
- Importance of being present and known in community
- New information that we can make & create changes for our Elders

What had the greatest impact?

- When Rita Clin told the RCMP to stop harassing the people and to address themselves to the Band office because the people feel they had broken their trust
- Hearing what the elders said
- Knowing I spoke up for an Elder
- The sharing from the community members
- A collective approach is most effective which we need to advocate positively
- Be more strong for the Elders
- How to talk to an elder about how they are feeling and how I can help
- Understanding more about intergenerational trauma
- The sharing of elders
- Learned generational survivor habits from residential school that has created a total breakdown amongst generations and unhealthy way of not dealing with destructive behavior in family generational relationships

Other Comments

- I just pray things will start happening for the elders and not brush this aside.
- Very good workshop. Needed a refresher, nice to see Suzette.
- Well done, very interactive
- On group, elders' involvement essential. Next step to provide summary of this workshop with community outcome
- Remember to ask the Elders first in any community group.
- Great job Suzette! Very informative, inclusive and welcoming.



- These destructive behaviours and relationships can be broken with relationships, healing circles and adequate resources. Hope in Jesus. He will make a healing path for us as a people and generation restore us and our young.

Respectfully submitted by:

Suzette Montreuil
Executive Director, NWT Seniors' Society