

By Joy Solomon and Daniel A. Reingold

Creating an **Elder Abuse Shelter:** A **Best-Practice Model** for Nonprofit **Nursing Homes**

Nursing homes can be a safe haven for victims of elder abuse, and embracing this idea can be an effective response to the current elder abuse crisis.

Along last, the epidemic of elder abuse is beginning to receive the public attention it desperately needs. Forty years after child abuse and domestic violence first entered mainstream public awareness, elder abuse, which attacks all demographic, geographic, and

Elder abuse is now far more prevalent than we realized.

economic cohorts, is now recognized as far more prevalent than ever was known.

In 2004, the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, a nonprofit, non-sectarian geriatric service organization in New York City, and a community partner of the Pace Women's Justice Center (PWJC), a boutique legal advocacy program, acted on a pioneering premise that existing facilities and services

could be adapted and leveraged to provide direct intervention in elder abuse cases. Using the Hebrew Home's nursing facility, geriatric expertise, its round-the-clock availability, and the PWJC's legal services, the partners created The Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention.

The Center, which included at its core an emergency elder abuse shelter, was designed with an inherent flexibility to ensure robust replication as a best-practice model.

Nonprofit nursing homes bring to the elder abuse equation a specialized understanding of the needs of physically frail and vulnerable older adults; these facilities have an ongoing round-the-clock operation and an environment that is specially designed for those with dementia as well

as for elders with minimal support needs. Further, they possess a tax-exempt status that permits them to be eligible for government grants, which will enhance the success of the model program; this type of program also supports the organization's 501(c)(3) status and its mission. Equally important, nursing homes have developed expertise in addressing elder abuse, as they have been required by legislation and regulation to engage in mandatory reporting and investigation for more than twenty years.


Embracing a Life-Saving Model

Since The Weinberg Center was established, it has assisted seven other nonprofit organizations throughout the United States to replicate the model. These facilities, each with an

elder abuse shelter, include The Jewish Home for the Elderly, Fairfield, Connecticut; North-east Health—The Eddy, Albany, New York; St. Elizabeth's, Providence, Rhode Island; Crest

community-based services, and training and community awareness. The goal is to provide the right care, at the right time, and in the right place for victims of elder abuse.

care—that can occasionally be accessed to provide a payment source for victims who come to the shelter.

As with many other programs and services in the elder abuse arena, The Weinberg Center at the Hebrew Home and our colleagues are in the early stages of developing the model. With our replication partners, we have the benefit of sharing experiences, suggestions, and critiques. There are no right answers—only best practices. 

Nonprofit nursing homes have a specialized understanding of the needs of physically frail and vulnerable elders.

View Senior Communities, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Wesley Woods, Atlanta, Georgia; and LifeSpan/Jewish Home of Rochester, Rochester, New York. Each organization has adapted the model based upon their facility and community, drawing upon its unique collaborative relationships, and on any existing systems that address elder abuse. All the replication sites have enthusiastically adopted the program model as part of their mission, and have reported cases where the existence of a shelter was responsible for saving the lives of elder abuse victims.

The notion of the nursing home as a safe haven for victims of elder abuse must be embraced in order to effectively respond to the current elder abuse crisis. Nursing home facilities are already in place, so there is no need for bricks and mortar. Their programs and services have advanced dramatically over the past decades, and culture-change initiatives have created resident-centered environments. Professionals in the field of elder abuse have observed that “often nursing home placement resulted in dramatic improvement in quality of life that was apparent to all observers...” (Lachs, 2002).

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Collaboration for the Right Kind of Care

The Weinberg model is not limited to emergency shelter services. The model helps build collaborative partnerships not only for direct service, but also for training and outreach, with law enforcement, community-based service providers, and academia. It emphasizes non-duplicative community affiliations, coordinated crisis intervention, residential and

Best Practices Are the Bright Hope

The ability of a nonprofit nursing home in any community to launch an elder abuse shelter is expeditious and should be done ubiquitously. There is no need for marketing or feasibility studies or focus groups. The beds already exist, and there is even a funding source—Medicaid or Medi-