

Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV) Services

- Helpline – 1300 368 821
- Will be answered by Helpline advocate.
- First point of contact with the service. Aim is to listen, engage and build rapport with the older person.
- Provide reassurance to older person that we are a free and confidential service – we are not a reporting agency.
- Receive calls from older people, family members, service providers and members of the public.
- Provide (anonymous) secondary consultations to service providers
- Use of professional interpreters not family members/friends.
- Arrange telephone advice with an SRV lawyer and advocate
- Where telephone communication is difficult arrange a face to face meeting either at home in our office or other mutually agreed location.

Advice (legal/non legal)

- SRV only gives advice to an older person – not family members (we can give information to service providers or advice if they have the consent of the older person to talk to us)
- The older person is always our client, so we are careful of conflict of interest issues. Family members' interests may be completely different to the older persons.
- We can explore the issue in more detail with the older person from their perspective.
- SRV provides both legal/non legal remedies
- Advocate and lawyers work together on files. Advocates provide reassurance and practical support and referrals as well as giving information to the older person.

Advocacy Casework

- We can work with people (usually short-term) on particular issues where there are no other support services involved (state-wide service)
- We try to link people into services that can assist to meet goals and provide longer term assistance if needed.

Legal Casework

- Lawyers may work short term or long term with the older person. SRV represents clients in courts in family violence, guardianship and administration, federal circuit court family law property and state courts to recover monies owed; and for declarations that the older person has an equitable interest and therefore a financial interest in property. Files can take up to three years to finally resolve.

Recent snapshot of service

- 77% of callers to the service were older women and 23% older men.
- 50% of callers were over 75 years of age.
- 64% of the abusers older people called us about were their adult children.
- 1 in 5 callers reported that their family member had problems with drugs/alcohol or gambling and 16% of callers reported that their family member had mental health problems.
- Consistently the main types of abuse reported by older people to our service have been Financial & Emotional – these types of abuse often go hand in hand. Many of the calls relate to what we term: "Boomerang Kids" or "Assets for care" arrangements gone wrong. Boomerang Kids are those adult children who have returned to live at home (for a variety of reasons) and become abusive towards their parents. They don't pay rent; they don't pay bills, and demand money from their parents. We also hear of property damage and threats to harm older people if they do not meet the demands for cash. Assets for care refers to those situations where family members have convinced their older parent to sell up and move in with them, with the promise of accommodation

and care for life. Older people hand over their money to pay off the family member's mortgage and then things don't work out as they all planned and the older person is at risk of homelessness.

What might prevent an older person from contacting us?

- Older people tend to be protective of family members; especially sons/daughters.
- They tell us they do not want to get their family member into trouble and they often want help for them rather than for themselves.
- They may be fearful of retribution if they get others involved.
- They may be dependent on their family member for care and support or the abuser may be dependent on them for support.
- There is a real fear among older people that they will be placed in a nursing home if they lose the support of a family member.
- And there is also a fear of losing the relationship with the family member even where there has been abuse.
- Older people tell us that they don't want to lose contact with their grandchildren and they fear this will happen if they take action against their adult children.
- An older person may have been isolated because of the abuse and therefore may not have the necessary support to navigate a complex service system.
- There may be a lack of support services – including transport.
- There may be cultural factors that may affect someone's ability to talk outside the family.
- Children "taking over" and preventing older person from being heard.

Approach in all our work

Some of this is obvious and what you already do in work with all your clients

- Work at the older person's pace - Older people will sometimes make several calls to our service over a number of years before deciding to take action (or not).
- We take account of communication needs – for people with hearing and visual impairment, physical or mental ill health and language. We will always use professional interpreters to talk to older people who speak a language other than English – no exceptions. We have a portable listening device for people with hearing impairment; provide written materials in larger font if needed.
- We try to minimise distractions and ensure we are speaking with the older person in a quiet room.
- We avoid using jargon terms and try to use every day language that is appropriate to the literacy level of the older person.
- Be mindful about the impact the abuse may have on the older person's ability to communicate with you. For example stress can impact on memory and functioning.
- Make warm referrals where the older person needs and wants this.
- Can provide information to older people about the supports available to their abusive family member.
- We provide information about a variety of options.
- Be careful not to push people into a course of action that you think is in their best interest but is not what they want.
- Be mindful of the person's health issues, you might succeed in getting a court order at the cost of your client having a stroke or some other detrimental health outcome.
- And finally we respect the rights of older people to make their own choices – even if they are ones that we don't like!