



Cruelty and neglect must be stopped

It's time to talk about a confronting subject – elder abuse. In many cases, the perpetrators are the last people you would expect.

Elder abuse comes in many forms. It may appear as harmless as “borrowing money” or devastating such as life-threatening physical assault and severe neglect. Sufferers are often too embarrassed or scared to speak up and don't know what to do. It is a sad betrayal of our precious older people.

mecwacare staff are trained to identify elder abuse, act and remove people from harmful environments. But we need your help. By supporting us to create awareness of this insidious problem, you will be saving lives.

This true story is horrific. But it is necessary to shine a spotlight on a disturbing and growing problem in our community. mecwacare takes its role as an advocate for the vulnerable very seriously. Your donation will assist us

to continue supporting and protecting people like Joan. It is upsetting reading and many of you will be outraged and perplexed that this is happening more often than any of us want to believe. Joan could be your mother, grandmother or neighbour. We all have a role to play here.

Michele Lewis
Chief Executive

Shocking case of betrayal

Wendy, one of mecwacare's dedicated direct care workers, was sobbing when she rang the office. She was so upset she could hardly speak.

She had arrived at her new client's home for a seemingly straightforward task – assisting Joan* with showering.

What she found was shocking, even for an experienced worker who had seen it all.

Joan was “living” with her son and daughter-in-law. But it wasn't care they were providing the 75-year-old retired nurse – it was cruelty and neglect.

As Wendy approached Joan's room, the stench was so strong she gagged and almost turned away.

She found Joan lying contorted in “bed” – a toddler's cot. She couldn't fit in the small space and was unable to stretch her legs. Joan spent every day there.

She stank.

She was malnourished.

She had no clean clothes.

She had no teeth; they had long rotted and fallen out.

Joan had nothing. No love or kindness, no smiles, no touch. Just the dirty cot.

Her family took all her money, including her pension. They had proper beds. They called mecwacare to shower her because they couldn't stand the smell anymore. They haggled over how much it would cost.

Joan's rare bathing until then consisted of a bucket of water.

Her son and daughter-in-law's approach to “caring” was going to work and leaving their young teenage children to check on her before and after school.

What Joan was fed and when, who knew?

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* Joan is not her real name.

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A language barrier meant Joan would have struggled to ask for help, even if someone was listening.

But Joan didn't need to say anything when Wendy saw her lying there. It was one of the worst cases of elder abuse ever witnessed by our team.

We had to intervene urgently. Because of the circumstances, we needed to immediately establish a firm legal basis to act.

We applied to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a trusted person to be appointed as Joan's financial and medical authority. This provided the legal instruments to ensure we could liberate Joan and lawfully assume responsibility for her care.

As soon as the VCAT decision was handed down, Joan was removed from the house – in a wheelchair. She couldn't walk due to her legs contorting in the cot.

She was taken to the nearest mecwacare aged care home – the experienced team there was shocked to the core by what they saw.

And they were angry – at the abuse inflicted on this helpless, ageing woman.

Joan is safe now. Every day, she enjoys the care and respect that every older person deserves.

To see her today, smiling, laughing and chatting with new friends is overwhelming for those who first met her. Wendy visits, too.

But who else out there might be suffering elder abuse like Joan?

Every case is a betrayal of the people who once cared for us. We can and must stop it now.

Please help us to continue doing this vital work. We want to be able to identify cases of elder abuse and act fast. mecwacare is not funded by the government to do this work. Your donation will assist us to save people like Joan.



To make a donation visit mecwacare.org.au, call **1800 163 292** or complete the form below and mail to:
mecwacare
1287 Malvern Road
Malvern VIC 3144

ELDER ABUSE FACTS

- Elder abuse is any behaviour that harms or denigrates an older person
- Neglect is the most common abuse. At its most extreme, abuse can involve serious criminal matters, including assault and theft.
- Abuse can start in the smallest way, such as taking ageist attitudes too far and upsetting an older person.
- Older women are more likely to suffer elder abuse.
- It is estimated that more than 500,000 elderly Australians may suffer an episode of abuse every year.
- If you, or someone you know is experiencing elder abuse, call 1300 368 821.

Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies and Seniors Rights Victoria.

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