



## Community can play role in ending elder abuse

Lauren Gilhula, Special to the Times  
April 28, 2010

*The elderly woman spoke to a close friend on the phone about her adult live-in son's temper. She worries it could escalate with time. He's in his 30s and doesn't work. When she doesn't give him money, he gets verbally violent. The son listens in on her conversations and he feels that he should be in control of her finances. The mother has no idea what to do.*

While the woman is fictional, this scenario was played out during a workshop dealing with elder abuse and elder rights.

Without help from grassroots organizations, elder abuse would still be a closeted problem, according to Laura Watts, guest speaker at last week's seminar at the Waterloo Regional Police Association Recreation Centre.



**Community can play role in ending elder abuse.** Laura Watts  
LAUREN GILHULA, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

"The reason why the federal government has discovered elder abuse is because of 20, 30 years of grassroots, organization, and groups just like this one," said Watts, a lawyer and national director of the Canadian Centre for Elder Law in Vancouver.

Watts said governments tend to be reactive, so when new legislation is passed, grassroots groups know they've had an impact.

According to Watts, the elder rights movement is at about the same place as the women's movement was 30 years ago.

Workshop co-ordinator Elizabeth Nieson said prevention is an integral part of dealing with abuse.

"Active aging and age-friendly communities are imperative in prevention of elder abuse. We do what we need to do to respond, but if we can prevent, we're miles ahead and that's a huge goal right now for us," said Nieson.

Nieson said Watts was a perfect fit for what organizers were hoping to accomplish with the workshop.

"She just speaks volumes about the whole movement across Canada, so we wanted that national piece," said Nieson.

Other presentations discussed legal rights for elders and preventative options for the future of the aging population.

The workshop brought social workers, police, and lawyers together to discuss and answer questions – such as red flags to look out for and what options are available for victims of elderly abuse?

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