

INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Friends of Millers Point

Name:

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Partially
Confidential



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The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Email: GPSC2@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Madam / Sir

Please find attached a submission to the Legislative Council's 'Inquiry into elder abuse in New South Wales' on behalf of Friends of Millers Point. A short screed about Friends of Millers Point is included at the end of our submission.

Friends of Millers Point draws the Standing Committee's attention to the decision of the NSW Government to sell its social housing stock in Millers Point.

Our submission looks at the forced relocation of the residents of Millers Point. It details our concerns about what is occurring in Millers Point. The process of forced relocation of residents, including older residents, people with disability and those with long links to Millers Point, continues unabated despite Hon Brad Hazzard, the Minister for Social Housing, saying he is considering alternatives. My organisation believes what is happening to the older residents of Millers Point amounts to a systemic form of elder abuse.

We ask that the final report of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2. include a recommendation that the NSW Government allow the remaining older residents of Millers Point to age in place in their current housing.

My organisation is happy to meet with Members of the Standing Committee to discuss our concerns. I may be contacted at _____ or _____ or _____

I look forward to your reply.

Yours faithfully

Kelli Haynes
Convenor,
Friends of Millers Point,

Case study in elder abuse: The forced relocation of older residents of Millers Point

1. Terms of reference

This submission addresses Terms 1 and 2 of the Terms of Reference. These read:

1. The prevalence of abuse (including but not limited to financial abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect) experienced by persons aged 50 years or older in New South Wales
2. The most common forms of abuse experienced by older persons and the most common relationships or settings in which abuse occurs

The World Health Organisation's definition of elder abuse at: http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/elder_abuse/en/ and http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/toronto_declaration/en/ covers the psychological abuse being endured by older tenants of Millers Point.

Elder abuse is generally seen as occurring between two individuals of unequal power where there is an expectation of trust. Systemic forms of abuse are recognised (<http://www.disabilityhotline.net.au/what-is-abuse-and-neglect/formal-definitions-of-abuse-and-neglect/>) so it is reasonable to extend this to the relationship that exists between government (and its delegated authorities) and individuals (and groups of individuals) because elder abuse is often part of a systemic problem, perpetrated by government through its policies and actions.

We also base our submission on following definitions of types of abuse :

'Psychological or emotional abuse: Verbal assaults, threats of maltreatment, harassment, humiliation or intimidation, or failure to interact with a person or to acknowledge that person's existence. This may also include denying cultural or religious needs and preferences.

Legal or civil abuse: Denial of access to justice or legal systems that are available to other citizens.

Systemic abuse: Failure to recognise, provide or attempt to provide adequate or appropriate services, including services that are appropriate to that person's age, gender, culture, needs or preferences.

<http://www.disabilityhotline.net.au/what-is-abuse-and-neglect/formal-definitions-of-abuse-and-neglect/>

2. One explanation for why systemic abuse occurs

Bagshaw, Wendt, and Zannettino state that 'the causes of abuse of older people are complex and multifaceted, and may encompass physical, psychological, social, medical, legal and environmental factors and multiple systems.

https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCcQFjACahUKEwjz2KPetZLJAhWjq6YKHTITDEI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.adfvc.unsw.edu.au%2FRTF%2520Files%2FStakeholderpaper_7.rtf&usg=AFQjCNEIXg40nTgjWHoj_QntIVxWbEpIgA

While it does not apply to every case, we recognise that abuse is often the result of societal devaluation of particular groups.

In his article 'The Systematic Stripping of Valued Roles from People' Wolf Wolfensberger gives an explanation according to Social Role Valorization (SRV) theory which asserts that people perceived by others as holding positively valued roles are likely to be afforded by them the "good things of life" (Wolfensberger, Thomas & Caruso, 1996), but that these good things tend to be withheld or withdrawn from people seen as holding negatively valued social roles (see Wolfensberger, 1998, 2000).

Even beyond any withholding, outright bad things are apt to be done to people seen in devalued roles. For instance, people in devalued roles are very likely to get rejected, segregated and congregated with other devalued people, made and kept poor, as well as impoverished in experience by being denied the opportunities in life that valued people aspire to, even violated and brutalized. All these and other common "wounds" (18 altogether) of devalued people are detailed in SRV teaching, and in Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 12-24).'

http://www.socialrolevalorization.com/images/documents/Articles-resources/Wolfensberger2011stripping_of_roles.pdf

'The "wounding" process as described in Social Role Valorisation Theory (Wolfensberger, 1995) applies equally to older people. Attaining a particular age (such as the notional age of 65 years in Australia) does not in itself trigger the wounding process but events such as retirement, ill health or the onset of disability can be the first step. Any deviation from the characteristics that society values that is viewed negatively can lead to devaluation, which in turn can lead a group to be treated differently and negatively by society.

There are many aspects of the wounding process that may be experienced by older people living in the community, such as rejection or branding and labelling.'

http://www.socialrolevalorization.com/images/documents/Articles-resources/Schultz--SRV_Special_Edition_Int._Journal_of_Disability_Community_Rehabilitation.pdf

The process of devaluation leading to wounds and abuse can occur at the individual, group and even societal level. It can be perpetrated by Government.

Michael Kendrick states that 'It should not be assumed that older people are essentially equivalent to each other ...Notwithstanding this caveat, people in the aged category may be beset by any number of vulnerabilities normatively affecting all people of all ages, as well as many that are specifically "age-linked" even if not caused by age itself. For instance, age is no insulation from the workings of the general economy, and older people whose income is fixed, may find themselves quite disproportionately vulnerable to phenomena such as inflation that can substantially erode capital.

Additionally, elderly people may face a veritable onslaught of vulnerabilities as they age that, if cumulative in nature, may combine with damaging impacts on their well-being and overall best interests. This is most obvious with people with seemingly catastrophic and life changing illnesses, or with the significant degrees of physical, functional and psychological impairments that may come to some people with age. It also can be seen, even with the relatively healthy aged, in their greater risks of social isolation, segregation from community, increased encounters with stigmatising role perceptions and treatment, decline

in social status, comparative poverty and increased frequency of aged abuse in our modern society. This elevated vulnerability, or “at risk” status, is often recognized by governments and other bodies as is seen in their specific development of intentional safeguards designed to counter these risks. Older people are, in the general societal sense, “at risk” even if some older individuals may elude many of these dangers”.

<https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CBwQFjAAahUKEwjo5sbojpLJAhUmJaYKHxc0Cg4&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.kendrickconsulting.org%2FPublicSite%2FShared%2520Documents%2FAI%2520publications%2FSafeguardsForOlderPeople.doc&usg=AFQjCNGqC3w0gIZKpYYZI2MfUVrg-8O-Sg>

It is therefore important that Government is very conscious of it’s own actions around environment, how it supports home, family and community function and the language and stories it tells about elders. It needs to bend over backwards to mitigate elders from forces that cause abuse.

3. Need for the enquiry to investigate systemic abuse occurring in Millers Point

It's no wonder Millers Point citizens are being evicted when older people ...

... embody characteristics that western society devalues: no longer beautiful, being slow, being dependent, not seen to contribute economically, having a declining body;

... are stripped of their individual identities. They are instead seen as discards, worthless, objects of ridicule, burdens and better off dead.

Jane Sherwin, drawn from Social Role Valorization Theory

In March 2014, after several years of living with uncertainty, the State Government announced it would be selling all of the social housing in Millers Point and evicting all of the tenants, over 60% of whom are elders. This decision contradicted the advice from it's own social, urban and financial planning consultants and their own policy of allowing elderly to age in place. Recently the Government announced that they will keep a very limited selection of social housing in the area but even if some people in Millers Point get to stay, the impact of this decision has been devastating. It has cost individuals their lives and seared trauma on the memories of most of the elderly and vulnerable who have been relocated or still live here. Many are surviving by the skin of their teeth. We also remain concerned about the legacy of this process more broadly, as the government plans to do the same in other areas having just announced its plans for relocation of thousands of residents from the Ivanhoe estate next year and Redfern Waterloo areas later.

Most people believe that the role of Government is to safeguard the well being of the more vulnerable in our society but systemic abuse can occur even at the level of Government, even if unconsciously perpetuated.

The Standing Committee's enquiry provides an opportunity to reveal to the public for the first time the financial and human cost, financial waste, increased morbidity, and the loss of lives this decision and the process used to carry it out, has cost individuals, families and the state of NSW. We believe it is vital for the sake of vulnerable people elsewhere in NSW and for the sake of learning, lessening of corruption and increased government transparency.

This enquiry could investigate how systemic abuse often involves widespread, legitimised labelling and demonising a group of people so that bad treatment is more easily accepted by the public. This includes misleading and false information about elders and the possibility of conflicts of interest that has helped fuel this action.

The State Government has stated that it has relocated 3000 tenants "in recent years without any older residents dying or being hospitalised" but this seems highly unlikely given the high death rate and hospitalisation that has occurred in Millers Point with relocating just 490 tenants. Given that the Government has announced it will begin relocating thousands in the Macquarie Fields area next year and from Waterloo Redfern areas later, it is particularly important our highest decision makers reflect on what has happened at Millers Point and learn from the cost elderly people have bourn here.

Without an enquiry how many others are going to lose their lives and otherwise be harmed?

4. Specific decisions, processes, and actions that come out of systematic devaluation leading to abuse of individuals in Millers Point

A. Impacts: Staggering human costs, abuse of basic human rights and poor outcomes for elders and others

a) Abuse leading to increased morbidity and mortality

Eviction heightens the likelihood that the older citizens of Millers Point will experience ...

... a fracturing of their relationships with neighbours, acquaintances, friends; separation from places they feel connection to; loss of possessions; disruption to their usual routines; the stresses of having to find new GPs, hairdressers, and the usual community services others take for granted ...

... which are likely to lead to insecurities, health issues, anxiety, depression, lowered self esteem, feeling out of control over their own lives, and therefore even early death.

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me Sherwin, drawn from Social Role Valorization Theory