

A Community Forum for the “Next Step” was held at The Hills Shire Council on 8 June 2016.

The forum was organised by the India Club Inc. and was attended by members of the India Club, local organisations and services and members of the community. The Patron, Mayor Dr Michelle Byrne - The Hills Shire Council, and Mentor, Superintendent Robert Critchlow - Hills Local Area Command, were also present along with speakers who addressed those present.

Shubha and Aksheya Kumar described the role of the India Club and the aim of the “Next Step” in addressing the issues of domestic violence and elder abuse in our community. The main focus of the meeting was elder abuse acknowledging World Elder Abuse Day.

The aim of “Next Step” is to empower and educate ourselves, as members of the community, and to equip ourselves with the right tools to address the issues of domestic violence and elder abuse within our local neighbourhood and among our friends and families.

Mayor Dr Michelle Byrne declared the forum open and acknowledged the work of the India Club and in particular Shubha for her tireless efforts to build a stronger community. She said that we are living with an ageing population and that The Hills Shire Council (THSC) was committed to ensuring that all people, especially the elderly, deserve to feel that they belong. She said that THSC recognises the existence of domestic violence and elder abuse in the community and will continue to work, along with the police and the community, to address these issues.

Superintendent Robert Critchlow addressed the forum and outlined ways the public could be active in helping their friends and neighbours. He said that it was a myth that elder abuse and domestic violence doesn't happen in The Hills. It happens everywhere and is everyone's responsibility to intervene. It is not 'private business' and is better for all if situations are addressed before police intervention is required. The biggest offenders in elder abuse are sons and daughters of the abused person.

Elder abuse, as for all forms of domestic violence, is a misuse of power. It often stems from inheritance impatience – wanting their parents' money/property now or inheritance maintenance – not letting their parents spend their money on their own needs. He said that if you do nothing you are part of the crime so be aware of your elderly neighbours especially if they need assistance to seek legal advice and have language difficulties or lack confidence to take action. Do nothing and you are part of the crime. Elder Abuse Line 1800 628 221.

Mr Tom Cowen, a solicitor with the Seniors Rights Service, spoke to the forum about secrecy. He said that if you walk past and do nothing you continue the abuse. He said that abuse shortens life. He mentioned Cynthia's Story, an elderly woman who suffered horrific conditions and treatment by her daughter. No one was aware that she even lived in the home even though she had been there for eighteen months. She was taken to hospital but died. He defined Elder Abuse is any action or failure to act, when required, within a relationship of trust. He said that there is a power reversal when people grow older – children have power over their parents particularly when they have dementia or physical problems and rely on their children for support.

Tom stressed that older people should always get legal advice before signing over control of their property or finances. The solicitor would help them look at the 'what ifs' involved and take

suitable measures to protect their future. He also mentioned that the Seniors Rights Service can provide assistance to those living in retirement/aged care facilities.

Marialouise Clarke spoke about care for the carer. She said that often it is a loving relationship changed by an ageing brain. She described people who care for their parents as well as their own children as The Sandwich Generation. They are caught between their responsibilities for both and often find they have little time for themselves. She provided several examples of mothers of her friends and the different situations that caused great stress for the carer. She said that the elderly often want it done now, want to see you now and want it different from last week. Marialouise mentioned that it is important to have a support network because carers often lose sleep, lose contact with friends, suffer from depression and become angry. The depression rate for carers is very high when compared with the general population.

Nalika Padmasena, a solicitor with the Seniors Rights Service, spoke about the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. She said that the UN had set these principles as the guideline for how the elderly in our community should be treated. The first Principle states that older persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help. She said that ageing people deserve autonomy, protection and care. She mentioned, in particular, Principle 14: Older persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives.

Carmen Lalehzari spoke about empowerment and the importance of recognising the strengths in each other. She said that everyone attending the forum was here to make a change for themselves and their community. She asked us to turn and really look at the person next to us and note the strengths that we saw coming from them.

David Clarke, member of the NSW Legislative Council and the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, arrived and addressed the Forum and acknowledged Shubha and Aksheya Kumar and the work of the India Club. He thanked them for the work they are doing to address the issue of elder abuse and congratulated those attending for their community concern.

A delicious lunch, provided by the India Club, was served to all present.

The next “Next Step” forum will focus on

“Responding with Compassion when someone discloses DV or Abuse” - Interactive Workshop.

Date to be advised.