

Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative

AKILES A. CERON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a brief review of how the Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative used the Collective Impact concept to create and fuel an Elder Justice Coalition that ultimately led to the development of programs supporting their Elder Justice network. After twelve years of increasing successes, two innovative programs are now in place that substantially support the provision of adult protective services and the prosecution of financial crimes. The benefit to the victims of elder and dependent adult abuse materialize in the form of (1) orchestrated social and protective interventions and prosecutions through the

use of effective multidisciplinary teams and a Financial Abuse Specialist Team and (2) the provision of immediate protection through the use of Emergency Shelters following the Shelter Without Walls model. The Collective Impact concept predicates that not one agency has all the solutions. Learning from the Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative and its twelve years of experience, this paper also discusses San Francisco's comparable programs and their effectiveness and proposes to mirror Sonoma's innovations with respect to the multidisciplinary teams only.

Akiles A. Ceron, MSW, Director of Adult Protective Services, Department of Aging and Adult Services, Human Services Agency, City and County of San Francisco

Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative

AKILES A. CERON

Introduction

Providing services to older adults and adults with disabilities who are victims of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation requires substantial financial resources and well-orchestrated agencies to provide services to victims. Adult Protective Services (APS) is the local government agency tasked to assist vulnerable adult constituents that are in harm's way and incapable of protecting themselves or their property. Assisting these victims has become increasingly challenging due to an increasing number of reports and the complex nature of these cases. As San Franciscans are aging and our APS program services more victims, I set out to learn from how other counties are responding to elder and dependent adult abuse in innovative and collaborative ways. I selected Sonoma County because of their Elder Justice Initiative model that has yielded partnerships, education, training, two multidisciplinary teams, and innovative ways to provide emergency shelter to vulnerable adults who are victims of abuse.

APS is a state-mandated program of California that is administered by its 58 counties. The core program mandates are to receive and respond to reports of suspected elder and dependent adult abuse, investigate the allegations, and offer preventive and remedial services to victims who have been assessed to be in need of protection. The preventive and remedial services are to include (1) provisions for emergency shelter or in-home protection to guarantee a safe place for the elder or dependent adult to stay until the dangers at home can be resolved, and (2) the establishment of multidisciplinary teams to develop interagency treatment strategies, to ensure maximum coordination with existing community resources, to ensure maximum access on behalf of

elders and dependent adults, and to avoid duplication of efforts.¹

The provision of these preventive and remedial services is dependent upon funding available to the APS program—as determined by each county—and upon the local resources and interagency collaborations. The more financial and local community-based resources a jurisdiction has, the more preventive and remedial services the APS program in that county can offer to its constituent victims. These fiscal and resource variations amongst California's counties result in 58 different ways of providing services. Smaller counties (like Sonoma County) with less financial resources available to their APS programs often need to seek additional funding from grants and innovate strategies to meet the protective needs of their vulnerable adults who have been abused and remain at risk. Larger counties (like the City and County of San Francisco) may have more funding available to their APS programs, but must innovate to meet the increasing demand for protection as the reports increase and the rigors of intervention become more complex.

According to the 2010 census,² adults 65 and older were almost 14% of the overall US population and in possession of 40% of the wealth. Americans are living longer and the rate of complex health, mental health and cognitive challenges increases, diminishing the ability of self-care and self-protection and increasing the susceptibility to abuse, neglect and exploitation. In 2010, Californians over the age of 65 were 11.5% of the population. By 2035, this group is projected to be 22.3% of Californians and will surpass the national average of 21%. By 2060, this group is projected to become 26% of the overall population in California. Additionally, by 2035 we are projected

to have as many Californians 65 or older as children 0 to 19 years of age (10.1 million).

In terms of the population in San Francisco, our older adult age group is steadily increasing. In 2010, 14% of San Franciscans were 65 and over (110,673 seniors). Last year, the portion was 17% (148,374 seniors). And it is projected that in 2060 29% of San Franciscans will be 65 and over (347,523 seniors).³ In FY 18-19, San Francisco APS received over 7,700 reports of abuse (representing 6,000 unduplicated victims) and 4,400 vulnerable adults were confirmed to be in need of protection. This is in keeping with a trend of increasing reports of abuse year over year. The increase in reports of abuse is likely attributable to demographic shifts in San Francisco as the population ages. Half of the reports allege self-neglect, with one fourth alleging financial abuse.⁴ The remaining reports primarily allege neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse. Because of these trends, San Francisco APS must seek innovative ways to develop our network of service options and to more effectively coordinate these through multidisciplinary teams.

Sonoma County's Elder Justice Coalition has been able to orchestrate agencies that support the APS mission despite substantial fiscal and resource constraints. Through their Elder Justice Coalition efforts and skilled grant writing by the APS leadership, Sonoma County APS is now able to provide emergency shelter for their victims, use effective multidisciplinary teams to coordinate interventions and services, strengthen the County's responsiveness to victims, provide public awareness and education, and facilitate training for mandated reporters and first responders.

I. Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative—History⁵

In 2006, the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) formed a coalition composed of their Human Services Department (HSD—who administers the APS program), Council on Aging, Senior Advocacy Services, Legal Aid of Sonoma County, West County Community Services, Petaluma

People Services Center, and their District Attorney (DA) and Sheriff's Offices. The coalition brought the Collective Impact concept to their Elder Justice Initiative, and focused first on elder abuse prevention. In 2009, the Family Justice Center (FJC) in Sonoma County opened with an elder abuse advocate from the Council on Aging. In 2011, the FJC Executive Director and AAA met and combined efforts with FJC volunteers and AAA volunteers to re-energize the Elder Protection Workgroup with a speaker's bureau. With leveraged funding from HSD, the DA created the Elder Protection Unit with two Deputy DAs assigned to elder abuse cases, a DA Investigator, and two DA advocates for elder abuse. In 2012, the DA and HSD applied for and received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) for Abuse in Later Life to train law enforcement on elder abuse investigations. At the same time, victim services were enhanced by developing contracts with Sonoma County's Legal Aid for an elder law attorney and with the Council on Aging (COA) for a care coordinator.

In 2012, APS received increased state and local funding that almost doubled the number of APS investigators in the program, while simultaneously adding a non-case carrying Community Liaison. This Community Liaison re-invigorated the Sonoma County Elder and Dependent Adult Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT), increasing participation from fewer than 10 members (and 5 agencies) to more than 50 members (and 25-30 agencies). It also added an MDT in Petaluma, which in the southern part of Sonoma County. In 2014, Sonoma County collaborated with Napa and Marin counties to hold a North Bay Elder Justice Summit where more than 200 attendees came to hear experts in elder abuse discuss what Sonoma County could do to improve. In 2015, Sonoma County developed a Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST), mirroring the Marin County model presented at the Elder Justice Summit.

In 2016, the HSD applied for and received a California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) grant for elder abuse victims through VOCA funding that

allowed them to expand the enhanced victim services from the OVW grant, which had expired. The grant also increased legal services as well as funding for the COA elder advocate and care coordinator. In 2018, Sonoma County applied for and received another CalOES grant for emergency housing for elder abuse victims, which they implemented in June 2018.

The above timeline illustrates the outcome of the *collective impact* that the Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative had by forming its coalition. In more detail, this is what collective impact entails:

Common Agenda. Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed-upon actions.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities. Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

Continuous Communication. Developing trust among nonprofits and government agencies. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Backbone Support Organizations. Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why

it fails. The support goes to the Backbone Agencies in Sonoma County, which are the Sonoma County Human Services Department (directly benefitted by the MDT) and the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office—including the Family Justice Center (directly benefitted by the FAST).

Shared Measurement Systems. Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

In sum, the Sonoma County Justice Initiative has three main components. (1) **The Coalition**—Partner, Agreements, Communication Protocols, Elder Abuse Awareness, and Website & Resources. (2) **Training**—Community Presentations, Elder Abuse for Law Enforcement, Briefings for Police/Fire, Mandated Reporter Training, and Elder Justice Summit. (3) **Services**—Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs), Victim Advocate & Care Coordination, Elder Legal Services, APS/Ombudsman Abuse Investigations, and Emergency Shelter.

II. Projects and Programs⁶

The CalOES (VOCA XE) grant is for Coordinated Community Response (CCR). It funds the Elder Justice Coordinator—through the nonprofit Senior Advocacy Services—that manages the MDTs and the FAST. It also funds the elder advocacy and the Mobile Elder Law Attorney. The challenge is that this is a three-year grant that ends in December 2019, although the coalition will seek an 18-month extension.

The Elder Justice Coordinator is focused on identifying system gaps in the Elder Justice Network in Sonoma County. The position also manages and co-chairs the two multidisciplinary teams (MDTs,

and the Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST), facilitates meetings and training, and coordinates follow-up by emailing only those involved in next steps. As a community-based organization force, it encourages community solutions, not exclusively APS solutions, to bridge gaps in services to victims of elder and dependent adult abuse.

The APS Community Liaison was created in late 2012 and is a non-case carrying civil service APS Worker. This position has the primary role of providing coordination support for mandated reporter trainings and co-chairing the two MDTs and the FAST. It also trains FAST volunteers and orients new volunteers on their role and scope, on confidentiality, and the length of commitment. A primary focus is to provide Mandated Reporter training and represent APS on Elder Justice Coalition operational meetings.

The MDTs meet in both Santa Rosa monthly and in Petaluma bi-monthly. The Santa Rosa meeting has about 40 attendees representing approximately 15 agencies. Half of the attendees are APS workers, and often also includes two DAs, one local law enforcement, and representatives of agencies in legal aid, home care, Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO), Community Care Licensing (CCL), and hospital social workers. MDTs are “APS heavy” but not exclusively; many cases come from the LTCO and other community partners. In Petaluma—referred to as South County—there are about 15 attendees representing approximately 5 agencies.

MDT members are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement. Cases are discussed openly and members partner up in providing and coordinating services. Outcomes data is collected through (1) the number of Confidentiality Agreements signed, (2) number of attendees to each meeting, (3) number of cases discussed, and (4) number of educational presentations. Reportedly, it was difficult at first to have participants attend and department or agency administrators had to commit staff to attend regularly. Now participants show up regularly because they find value in the training offered and in gaining insight on each program’s scope and operations.

Also, there is follow-up on cases so that these are not forgotten in between meetings. They also like the process of arriving at community consensus on tough cases.

The FAST meets monthly, but only in North County (Santa Rosa). Sonoma County has nine cities with police departments and the Sheriff’s Office services the unincorporated areas. Petaluma and Santa Rosa are the largest cities. The FAST has been in operation for less than three years. The focus is on criminal exploitation and the primary goal is to prosecute cases. Only law enforcement and APS can refer cases to the team. Most cases come from detectives and not from APS. The members are: APS, local law enforcement, DAs, LTCO, Legal Aid of Sonoma County, and community professionals who volunteer their time and expertise by doing pro-bono work for police, the Sheriff’s Office, and the DA’s Office.

The expertise of the volunteers is on Estate Law, Probate and Trusteeships, Investments, Mortgage, Property/Title, and Family Law. These are the “Worker-Bees,” who are Sonoma County unpaid employees, in a similar fashion that Sonoma County employs Search and Rescue volunteers who have been vetted through the Human Resources system of the county. A case brought by law enforcement requires one to three expert volunteers to be available to review documents and, as County employees, act as expert witness to support prosecution. Hence the effectiveness, success, and thriving force of the FAST, whose members also sign confidentiality agreements. The outcomes data gathered is the same as it is for the MDT. However, the FAST does not collect data on prosecutions, charges, and funds saved or protected.

The CalOES (VOCA KE) grant is for Emergency Shelter to help protect victims of elder abuse. It became operational in November 2018 and it is funded through September 2019. The coalition will seek a one-year extension to September 2020. The program uses the “shelter without walls” concept and it is modeled after the Spring Alliance Shelter Partners (of the Weinberg Center for Elder Justice),⁷

where a victim in need of immediate protection can stay at a motel, a hotel, or an apartment at an undisclosed location, or with a family that has agreed to offer a room on short notice as part of this grant. For a vulnerable adult victim of abuse who needs assisted living, the program secures a bed year-round at a flat rate at a local Residential Care Facility for the Elderly (RCFE). These are short-term options (e.g., 45-day bed at the RCFE) that keep the victim safe while the APS Worker helps the victim navigate into an alternative living arrangement that is safe and permanent.

The challenge that APS may face in some instances when needing to access the Emergency Shelter program is that the victim must be cooperative, self-directing, and have the capacity to make healthcare decisions. To access the RCFE bed, the victim must have the capacity to admit herself into the assisted living facility. These requirements may not be met by all victims.

How does it all come together? At an MDT, APS discussed the case of a developmentally disabled victim of neglect in her household. The Regional Center and Independent Living Services teamed up with APS, and facilitated the victim going into the emergency placement bed at the RCFE for 45 days. As the victim was on SSI and could not afford the rent of an apartment, the victim was assisted in obtaining a part-time job suitable to her abilities and within the safety of a local U.S. Base. This additional money did not jeopardize her SSI and she subsequently moved into an apartment that she could now afford.

III. Recommendations for the City and County of San Francisco APS Program (CCSF APS)

I have two recommendations. One—that the CCSF APS program create an MDT that works in the same manner in which Sonoma County runs their MDT. Two—that the CCSF APS program explore the possibility of recruiting expert witnesses as volunteer personnel of the city under the CCSF APS program to review complex cases of financial exploitation.

These expert volunteers would be part of our Financial Abuse Virtual Unit (FAVU) and participate in the San Francisco Forensic Center. San Francisco is already providing effective emergency shelter services to victims of elder and dependent adult abuse.

San Francisco currently has a Forensic Center that meets every other week and a multidisciplinary team (MDT) that meets every six weeks. These are coordinated by the San Francisco-based non-profit Institute on Aging, through a grant from the San Francisco Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), which administers the CCSF APS program.

The San Francisco MDT welcomes any agency or community-based organization (CBO) that wishes to attend. Names and detailed information are not shared at the MDT. Unlike the Sonoma County MDT where half of the participants are APS Workers and cases are discussed in detail and efforts orchestrated, most attendees in San Francisco are non-APS staff, and case presentations seldom lead to coordinated efforts. Attendees reportedly appreciate the educational presentations on identification and prevention of elder abuse and it is a good opportunity for networking amongst CBOs.

The San Francisco Forensic Center, however, is technically composed of local government agencies like APS, the Public Guardian, the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), the District Attorney's Office, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, a geriatrician from San Francisco General Hospital, a neuropsychologist, and an expert on insurance products and best practices. The primary goal is the prosecution of cases. However, the District Attorney's Office does not use the Forensic Center to help prosecute cases in the same way that Sonoma County uses the FAST and its expert volunteers to review and testify on behalf of the prosecution. With Sonoma's FAST, most cases are brought by local law enforcement and the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office. In contrast, all cases in the San Francisco Forensic Center are brought by APS and these revolve around the need of probate and civil interventions, self-neglect, and coordination of Capacity Declarations to pursue

conservatorships of the person and the estate. The original mission of the Forensic Center has shifted from prosecution to probate considerations.

IV. Action Steps to Implement Each Recommendation

Recommendation One—that the CCSF APS program create an MDT that works in the same manner in which Sonoma County runs their MDT. This could be achieved by increasing the number of MDTs offered but limiting the attendance to these additional MDTs to agencies and CBOs that could technically meet the definition of MDT as delineated in the CA Welfare and Institutions Code and who would actually take on roles in the coordination of services. This could include hospital social workers and representatives from home health agencies, public health, mental health, and other teams that respond to and assist our most vulnerable adult constituents.

Recommendation Two—that the CCSF APS program explore the possibility of recruiting expert witnesses as volunteer personnel of the City. This would require recruiting community professionals who would be willing to volunteer their time and expertise by doing *pro-bono* work for APS, SFPD, and the DA's Office, and be willing to be vetted by our human resources process as formal volunteers to be granted access to our email system and testify on civil and criminal matters. Their expertise would be on Estate Law, Probate and Trusteeships, Investments, Mortgage, Property/Title, and Family Law. The population of Sonoma County is about 500,000, and the population of San Francisco is almost twice as many (close to 900,000). For this reason, we would need at least seven expert volunteers.

To increase the number of MDTs, and to find, train, coordinate, and keep track of the hours spent by the volunteers—and to manage their workflow—we would need staff to carry out these duties. Learning from the Sonoma County Elder Justice Initiative, in terms of the “five pillars,” we would

need a separate organization and staff to provide these services. As stated above:

Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

This could be achieved by increasing the Forensic Center grant from \$150,000 per year to \$250,000 per year, like Sonoma's grant to operate their Elder Abuse (XE) program. This way, a CBO grantee could take on these additional tasks and help the San Francisco Elder Justice network substantially increase its effectiveness. This could have a catalyst effect of restoring the long-gone Elder Abuse Unit in SFPD's Special Victim's Unit, and the Elder Abuse Prosecution Unit in the San Francisco District Attorney's (DA) Office. With planning, by March of 2020, we could have an additional \$100,000 to add to the Forensic Center grant. In the meantime, I would need to reach out to our District Attorney's Office and our SFPD colleagues to see if they would like to partner up in pursuing the Sonoma FAST model. This could also be achieved through a discussion during one of our Forensic Center's Steering Committee. If there is sufficient partner interest, then I would reach out to our agency's Human Resources division and the City's Department of Human Resources to inquire on the possibility of employing experts as unpaid City staff that would donate their time on behalf of APS, SFPD, and the DA's Office. I think that at a minimum, we could increase the number of MDTs and change our MDT model.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to the following Sonoma County Elder Justice Coalition leaders who took the time to answer my questions, provided me

with fact sheets, educational materials, and thorough explanations, and who facilitated my attendance to their multidisciplinary team meeting (MDT) and their Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST). I learned a lot, and I hope to share their expertise and successes with other Bay Area counties through this paper.

Gary Fontenot: HSD's Adult Services Section Manager, of which APS is one of the programs under his purview. He oversees the CalOES (VOCA XE) grant, and works directly with the Elder Justice Coordinator.

Nadia Woodcock: HSD's Adult Protective Services Program Manager. She oversees the CalOES (VOCA KE) grant, focused on providing emergency shelter to victims of elder abuse.

Tara Underly: HSD's Adult Protective Services Community Liaison, and whose primary focus is on providing coordination support for mandated reporter trainings, co-chairing the two MDTs and the FAST.

Donata Mikulik: Sonoma County Elder Justice Coordinator, who works for Senior Advocacy Services, a non-profit. Her position is funded through the above-mentioned VOCA XE grant and whose important role is to identify system gaps in the elder justice network of Sonoma County. She also co-chairs the two MDTs and the FAST.

References

1. California Welfare and Institutions Code 15600 et al – CA Elder and Dependent Adult Abuse Civil Protection Act (EDAACPA).
2. 2010 US Census.
3. CCSF HSA Planning Division Statistics, 2018.
4. CCSF HSA's Department of Aging and Adult Services' APS Program Statistics, 2018.
5. Informational Fact Sheets and PowerPoint presentations facilitated by the Human Services Department (HSD) of Sonoma County, and by the Elder Justice Coordinator through the Sonoma County Senior Advocacy Services, 2019.
6. Interviews of Adult Protective Services staff, of the HSD of Sonoma County, and of the Elder Justice Coordinator through the Sonoma County Senior Advocacy Services, 2019.
7. Spring Alliance Shelter Partners: The Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Center for Elder Justice—An Elder Abuse Prevention and Intervention Program for Older Adults Living in the Community. <https://theweinbergcenter.org/>