

Sonoma County's Elder Justice Initiative:

A Collective Impact Approach

Allison Yant

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The identification, prevention and treatment of abuse in the most vulnerable of populations are shared visions in Sonoma County. To further these visions, county and community agencies are utilizing the Collective Impact model to formalize an effort known as the Elder Justice Initiative. Through Sonoma County's commitment and shared agenda, efforts are underway to continue communication, strengthen backbone agencies, collaborate on mutually reinforcing activities and advocate for shared measurement methods. Leveraging funding through the county budget, as well as through grant funding, has increased victim services, as well as enhanced community involvement through the hiring of an Elder Justice Coordinator. Similar efforts are occurring throughout the State of California and the nation. There are challenges to every effort; however, learning from Sonoma County's experience creates an opportunity to develop an Elder Justice Initiative unique to Monterey County.

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Introduction

Since 2010, California has seen a 28.2% rise in the 60+ population (CDA, 2015). Sonoma County has experienced a 3% increase in the 65+ population since 2010, while Monterey County experienced a 5% increase in the 65+ population. Such trends, known as the “silver tsunami,” result in an increasing number of individuals requiring specialized care and protection.

County-operated Adult Protective Services (APS) programs are mandated to investigate reports of abuse and neglect for elder and dependent adult victims. Statewide APS data supports the correlation between the increasing numbers of vulnerable adults to the increasing numbers of abuse reports. For example, the total number of APS reports across the state was 9,962 in January 2011. The total number of reports jumped to 14,128 in January 2016, a 42% increase! Sonoma County mirrors the statewide trends, with a 70% increase in reports to APS since 2010 (Fontenot, 2015). Per the statewide reporting tool, Monterey County received 383 reports in 2010 and, by 2015 that number increased to 1,141 reports, a 300% increase!¹

Elder justice, however, is more than investigating reports of abuse. Elder justice is “a long unrecognized human and civil rights issue that raises fundamental questions about how we value life and view suffering in old age” (Connolly, 2012). The Sonoma County Human Services

¹ Monterey County improved its data collection in 2012, which may account for such a drastic increase. It is important to note, however, that reports to Monterey County are steadily increasing.

Department (HSD) utilizes the evidence-based “Collective Impact” model, which indicates, “large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations” (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Monterey County has an excellent APS program with a dedicated staff that is passionate about the issue; however, it is necessary to evaluate the current system and create a more proactive plan around the issue of elder justice. While many elder justice activities are in place, there are identified gaps within the areas of community engagement, training and enhanced care coordination. In addition, collaboration with local law enforcement and the District Attorney’s Office needs strengthening. It is the hope that, by learning about Sonoma County’s Elder Justice Initiative and the use of the Collective Impact model, Monterey County can develop its own elder justice strategy unique to its community.

History of Elder Justice

Elder Justice has its roots dating back to 1935 when the Social Security Act was passed. Further efforts recognizing the special needs of the elder and dependent population included, but were not limited to:

- Older Americans Act in 1965
- Older Californian’s Act in 1980
- Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.Older Californians Act in 1980
- Elder Justice Coordinating Council at the Administration on Aging
- National Adult Protective Services Association
- California Elder Justice Coalition

In addition, the Elder Justice Act, enacted in 2010 as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, sparked funding for innovative prevention and response approaches to elder abuse and increased fiscal support to the Crime Victims Fund.

Competing priorities and budgetary challenges result in the need for counties to address elder justice issues at the community level while influencing those who can address systemic barriers. Sonoma County's efforts to create awareness, mobilize the community and influence decision makers began in 2010, and over the past seven years, developed into a strategic, measured Collective Impact approach known as the Elder Justice Initiative.

The Collective Impact Model and Elder Justice

“There has been a growing recognition in Human Services that there needs to be a different approach to many forms of social injustice, including elder abuse” (Fontenot, 2015). Sonoma County's Elder Justice Initiative is rooted in the Foundation Strategy Group's Collective Impact model, a concept first appearing in the 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review. Sonoma County's Elder Justice efforts meet the conditions of a successful Collective Impact initiative and are explained below.

A Common Agenda

Creating a successful Collective Impact initiative requires organizations to develop a shared vision and an agreed upon, joint approach to the initiative. Supported by data and HSD leadership, elder protection and elder justice became a shared agenda item by Sonoma County's Area Agency on Aging, Family Justice Center, Board of Supervisors and District Attorney's (DA) Office.

Backbone Organizations

In response to increasing reports, the APS program has grown significantly since 2010. APS has grown to four units with a total of 27 Social Workers, three Public Health Nurses, two Behavioral Health Clinicians, and a Community Liaison Social Worker. The need for additional specialized criminal prosecution resulted in the creation of an Elder Abuse Unit at the DA's Office. This unit consists of two Prosecutors, an Investigator and two Victim Advocates. This collaborative, mutually supportive relationship resulted in HSD and the DA becoming the backbone organizations supporting the Elder Justice Initiative.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

In 2012, the DA, in conjunction with HSD, received a \$400,000 grant from the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) known as the "Enhanced Training and Services to End Violence Against and Abuse of Women Later in Life Program." The first two years focused on training law enforcement. Challenges existed around the involvement of all eleven law enforcement jurisdictions; however, by 2014, half of the officers in Sonoma County had completed this training. Additional training and outreach occurred at the 2014 North Bay Elder Justice Summit.

During the second two years of the OVW grant, victim services were enhanced through the introduction of a mobile team comprised of a Care Coordinator and a part-time Elder Law Attorney. In addition to these positions, elder justice partners began working together on a Community Coordinated Response (CCR) team. Agencies involved in the CCR included APS, the DA's Office, local and state faith-based organizations, the FJC, Legal Aid, law enforcement and other senior services providers.

Although the OVW grant period ended in 2016, HSD was fortunate to be awarded a \$500,000 grant funded through the California Office of Emergency Services from Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA) funding. Through VOCA funding, HSD could sustain and enhance the work accomplished through the OVW grant. The elder law attorney became a full-time employee at Legal Aid and a part-time legal assistant was also hired. The Care Coordinator role continues to be funded, as does the victim advocate at the FJC. Although these roles have been funded through grant opportunities, there is a commitment by the elder justice partners to continue funding these efforts upon completion of the grant period.

Continuous Communication

To keep communication alive, monthly Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings create a venue to share challenging cases that often touch multiple agencies in the community. In 2015, a Financial Abuse Specialist Team (FAST) was formed to address the unique issues related to elder financial abuse. This team is comprised of volunteers from the fields of banking, real estate and financial/estate planning, as well as HSD and the DA.

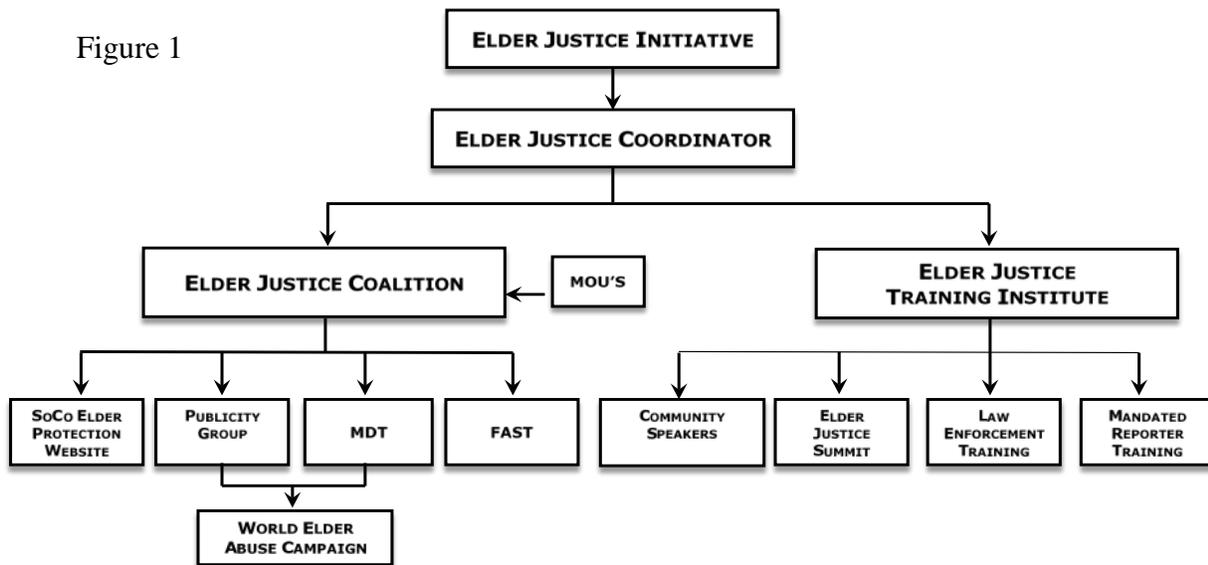
Further communication occurs because of the Elder Protection Workgroup, which includes volunteers from the AAA, Family Justice Center and other senior services organizations. These volunteers work together to impact the community at large through outreach and advocacy efforts. Their efforts can be seen in the publicity around World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), occurring each June.

A large part of this continued communication and relationship building will now be the responsibility of the newly hired Elder Justice Coordinator. When HSD was awarded the \$500,000 VOCA grant, not only was HSD able to extend contracts for direct victim services, but

it was also able to contract for an Elder Justice Coordinator. This newly established role formalizes the Elder Justice Initiative and creates a structure for elder justice activities in Sonoma County. Because the Coordinator is not housed within the county structure, there is a learning curve when non-profit organizations and public entities engage in common activities.

The duties of the Elder Justice Coordinator are a combination of various efforts already in motion in Sonoma County and include coordination of the Elder Justice Coalition (previously known as the Community Coordinated Response team) and outreach and education will continue to be housed within the Elder Justice Training Institute (Figure 1).

Figure 1



(HSA, 2017)

Shared Measurement

Advocacy entities such as the Elder Justice Coalition will be tasked with working towards integration into the Health Action Initiative in Sonoma County. Currently, the prevention, identification and treatment of elder abuse and elder justice issues are not factored into the

Health Action Initiative despite ongoing information indicating elder justice is a growing public health concern. A policy brief stemming from the 2015 White House Conference on Aging indicates elder abuse:

- Erodes the health, financial stability and quality of life for older adults;
- Triples the risk of premature death and causes unnecessary illness, injury and suffering; and
- Results in victims being four times more likely to be admitted into a nursing home and three times more likely to be admitted to a hospital. (WHCOA, 2015).

Efforts are underway by the Sonoma County Elder Justice Coalition to advocate for the development of shared measurements so that elder justice issues are part of what makes a community “healthy.” Elders and dependent adults can share in the overall goal of the Health Action Initiative by including their unique needs with those of children and younger adults.

Recommendations

Utilizing the guidelines of the Collective Impact model, the following short and long-term recommendations can be made to Monterey County:

Collective Impact Short-Term Recommendations for APS Program Staff:

- Continuous Communication:
 - Identify additional MDT/FAST team members and encourage attendance.
 - Develop curriculum for targeted mandated reporter training. Such outreach may create an increase in reports to APS and a review of staffing levels. Increased staffing would be one of the larger financial impacts on the county.
- Mutually Reinforcing Activities:
 - Revitalize current Memorandums of Understanding to improve partnerships that have weakened over time (e.g. law enforcement).

- Discuss OVW and VOCA grant opportunities with the DA's office; identify additional partnerships and evaluate the potential to sustain the efforts created during a grant period.
- Review current direct service providers and determine gaps.
- Create an Elder Justice Coalition comprised of community stakeholders to further the Initiative's advocacy efforts.

Collective Impact Long-Term Goals for Management:

- Common Agenda:
 - Encourage high level stakeholders, such as the Board of Supervisors, non-profit Directors and County Department managers/directors, to commit to a shared vision around Elder Justice.
 - Set aside funding to hold annual Elder Justice Summits and WEAAD events.
- Backbone Organizations:
 - Encourage 1-2 stakeholder agencies (DA, Law Enforcement) to partner with the Department of Social Services to become the backbone organizations needed to support an elder justice initiative.
- Shared Measurement
 - Continue to advocate for shared measurement systems such as a Statewide APS Database and the National Abuse and Maltreatment Reporting System to create consistency in data.

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