

# Collaboration key to understanding elder abuse

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Graduate students in Algonquin College's victimology program hosted an awareness event at the college centred on elder abuse on April 21 as part of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

The event, called Respect and Dignity: Strengthening Community Responses to Elder Abuse, included discussions by a panel of representatives from the Ottawa police victim crisis, mobile crisis and elder abuse units, as well as speakers from the Community Care Access Centre, the Elder Abuse Response and Referral Service, and Elder Abuse Ontario.

The panel's keynote address was delivered by Dr. Kerry Burnight, president of Ageless Alliance in California, director of America's first elder abuse forensic center, and clinical professor of family medicine at the University of California. Burnight's research focuses on the medical forensic aspects of elder abuse and the develop-

ment of new models for understanding it.

"Elder abuse remains a hidden shame. It's private. And because the biggest perpetrator group is family members, it's complex," Burnight said.

The solution, he said, is to encourage dialogues about elder abuse and develop a model for addressing it that is as comprehensive as the issue is complex.

"There's a lot of great people doing work in different silos, but you can only address the medical, legal and ethical complexity of elder abuse by uniting people. You must have a physician, a mental health specialist, a social worker, a law enforcement officer," Burnight said. "So in terms of a model, anything that brings together multidisciplinary collaboration is going to result in better outcomes for older adults."

The symposium on April 21 served mainly to connect service providers in Ottawa that deal with elder abuse with one another to better facilitate

collaboration in the future. Members of the public were also invited to attend the panel discussion and gain valuable information about resources in Ottawa that exist to address elder abuse. Victimology student Tru Evans organized the event to promote collaboration between organizations that address elder abuse, fostering a more comprehensive city-wide network for preventing and reacting to elder abuse.

"What the victimology program is about is to put the focus on victims of crime and what their needs are, and what we can do to help them," Evans said. "And so this whole event today is to bring together partner agencies that would deal with elder abuse."

Evans organized the event in collaboration with Ottawa police, the Council on Aging of Ottawa, the Nepean, Rideau and Osgoode community resource centres, and the Canadian Justice Department, and had help on the day of the event from fellow victimology students.



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**Tru Evans, left, and Kerry Burnight both agree that the best way to prevent and address elder abuse is for experts of different disciplines to work together. Fostering collaboration between organizations that deal with elder abuse was the point of an event at Algonquin on April 21 organized by Evans and attended by Burnight.**