

DISCUSSION RESOURCE

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PROJECT OF  
5TH NATIONAL ELDER  
ABUSE CONFERENCE

HOSTED BY SENIORS  
RIGHTS SERVICE



# ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES (SYDNEY)

BARBARA O'NEIL





## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In February 2018, Seniors Rights Service hosted the 5th National Elder Abuse Conference, which brought together more than 500 delegates from a broad range of backgrounds. The conference culminated in an announcement by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Hon Christian Porter MP, that a “National Plan” would be developed to ensure the protection of older people in Australian society.

To further the conversations generated by the conference, Seniors Rights Service engaged Ellen Fanning to conduct a series of interviews with experts who attended the conference. These videos, along with a discussion sheet for each video, are freely available to community members, professionals and students of all sectors, to enable engagement with the content using suggested discussion questions and to follow up with further reading.

### IMPORTANT! READ THIS BEFORE HOLDING A DISCUSSION GROUP

Many people will share and benefit from participating in study and discussion on the topics.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics, however, group leaders should ensure they are prepared to support individuals to find qualified assistance in a timely manner, should a topic generate personal concerns or issues for individuals.

As a minimum, group leaders should have available information sheets and phone numbers from the relevant seniors' legal rights service and/or elder abuse prevention service in your state or territory (on page 4 and current as of 2018).

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

### SHORT DESCRIPTION

Ms O'Neill discusses the historical colonial context of elder abuse, where poverty and racism continue to keep Indigenous Australians from participating fully in the economy. This, in turn, leads to further poverty and trauma. The cycle of cradle-to-grave institutionalisation amongst Indigenous Australians, she argues, leads to vulnerability to elder abuse. Ms O'Neill argues that strategies must involve Indigenous communities and take their specific needs into account.

### FOCUS AREA

Elder abuse prevention and Aboriginal communities (Sydney)

### RELATED TOPICS

Elder abuse prevention, elder abuse intervention, diversity, trauma, colonisation, poverty, unemployment, mental health, intergenerational trauma

### AUDIENCES

Community members, aged-care workers, health workers, police officers, researchers, students, advocates, policy officers

### MATERIALS FOR FURTHER READING

Grieves, V. (2009), *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, The Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, Discussion Paper No. 9, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, Darwin. Accessed from [www.lowitja.org.au](http://www.lowitja.org.au) June, 2018

Walter, M. (2007), 'Aboriginal Poverty and Health – Exploring Connections', Chapter 5 in Anderson, I., Baum, F. & Bentley, M. (eds) (2007), *Beyond Band-aids: Exploring the Underlying Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health*. Papers from the Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health Workshop, Adelaide, July 2004, CRC for Aboriginal Health, Darwin. Accessed from [www.lowitja.org.au](http://www.lowitja.org.au) June, 2018

### SUGGESTED AGENCIES

The Lowitja Institute, [www.lowitja.org.au](http://www.lowitja.org.au)



## BARBARA O'NEIL

ABORIGINAL SUPPORT  
WORKER, JUNCTION  
NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE  
(MAROUBRA, SYDNEY)

## BIOGRAPHY

Barbara O'Neill is a Dughutti woman born on the Gadigal Country of the Eora Nation. She is currently working as an Aboriginal support worker at the Junction Neighbourhood Centre (Maroubra). Ms O'Neill has worked for many years with Aboriginal communities. She holds a post-graduate certificate in Indigenous trauma recovery and practice from Wollongong University and is currently completing a Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge at Southern Cross University.

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*How does Ms O'Neill describe her approach to trauma counselling with the Aboriginal women she works with?*

Her approach is interactive, feminist and empowering. Together they explore the structures of poverty and racism in a historical colonial context. Participants come to "own" their own history and trauma, and place their current trauma in a broader historical context. Over 10 weeks, they discover that, perversely, the history of Australia and the survival of Aboriginal people enables them to feel empowered and optimistic.

*What examples does Ms O'Neill give of complex intergenerational trauma being involved in elder abuse?*

Ms O'Neill talks about the assumption governments make that grandmothers can take the children in situations where the parents of the children are struggling (often from the mental health effects of unemployment and poverty, and/or addictions). The grandmother may get a fostering allowance or family payment. The adult child might assume that money is theirs, as it used to be what they lived on. The grandmother knows her adult child (the parent) can't live on NewStart allowance, so she may give her adult child some of the child support money. The grandmother will go into poverty and hunger in order to feed the grandchildren and may feel pressured to help support her own adult child (parent). So, this elder abuse is not from greed but from mental health problems, caused by deep, historical, impacting traumas.

*What strategies does Ms O'Neill suggest for addressing elder abuse in urban Indigenous communities in NSW?*

Ms O'Neill says any strategy must be specifically Indigenous in focus and developed from the grass roots. She believes strategies should start with self-governance within Aboriginal communities. Then they should involve training community members to be aware of the triggers for elder abuse and the behaviours that might constitute elder abuse. She says community members should be engaged in a "yarn up". Also, strategies should be unique to each community. Strategies must lead to communities themselves asking, "How are we going to deal with it?" In communities Ms O'Neill works with, community members will step in if there is violence or mistreatment, and report it to the authorities. Aboriginal communities are all about respecting elders, but, Ms O'Neill says, "we have to have spiritually and emotionally strong communities" to support mental health. This, in turn, is preventative of elder abuse.



STATE/TERRITORY	AGENCY CONTACT	CONTACT
<b>AUSTRALIA-WIDE</b>	<b>Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)</b>	1800 700 600 Connects you with aged-care advocacy services in your state or territory
<b>NEW SOUTH WALES</b>	<b>Seniors Rights Service</b>	1800 424 079
	<b>NSW Elder Abuse Helpline</b>	1800 628 221
<b>AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY</b>	<b>Older Persons Abuse Prevention Referral and Information Line (APRIL)</b>	(02) 6205 3535
	<b>A.C.T. Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS)</b>	02 6242 5060
<b>NORTHERN TERRITORY</b>	<b>Elder Abuse Information Line</b>	1800 037 072
	<b>Seniors and Disability Rights Service of Darwin Community Legal Service</b>	1800 812 953
<b>QUEENSLAND</b>	<b>Elder Abuse Prevention Unit</b>	1300 651 192
	<b>Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia)</b>	1800 818 338
	<b>Caxton Legal Centre</b>	(07) 3214 6333
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>Aged Rights Advocacy Service</b>	(08) 8232 5377 (Adelaide)
	<b>Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse</b>	1800 700 600 (rural)
	<b>Legal Services Commission of South Australia</b>	1300 366 424 (08) 8111 5555
<b>TASMANIA</b>	<b>Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline</b>	1800 441 169
	<b>Advocacy Tasmania Inc. (ATI)</b>	(03) 6224 2240
	<b>Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania</b>	1300 366 611 (03) 6236 3800
<b>VICTORIA</b>	<b>Seniors Rights, Victoria</b>	1300 368 821
	<b>Elder Rights Advocacy (ERA)</b>	(03) 9602 3066 1800 700 600 (rural)
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>Advocare Inc.</b>	1300 724 679 (Perth) 1800 655 566 (rural)
	<b>Older Persons Rights Service, Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre</b>	(08) 9440 1663 (Mirrabooka) (08) 9301 4413 (Joondalup)

## DISCLAIMER

This is information only, not legal advice. If you have a legal problem, call our service directly or see your lawyer. The views expressed in the video are the views of the individual making them, not those of Seniors Rights Service Inc.