

Home Helpers stepping up advocacy for elder abuse awareness

By JEFF WEBER • STAFF WRITER • June 1, 2010

HILLSBOROUGH — Here in Central Jersey and across the nation, abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults is a problem that largely is ignored — even though 1 million to 2 million seniors citizens have been mistreated by a caregiver, according to the National Center on Elder Abuse.

Home Helpers of Hillsborough — a home health-care agency servicing Somerset, Hunterdon and Mercer counties — wants to change that, one client at a time.

Armed with 50 caregivers who are licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants or registered nurses, Home Helpers has the resources, but there is not enough advocacy out there yet to achieve maximum effectiveness.

The group — led by managing partner Tom Finley, director Karen Chabari and client coordinator Susan Chipps — hopes to change that on June 8 when they host an information session from 2 to 6 p.m. at the Hillsborough Pathmark as a build-up to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15.

"Our mission is to provide the best quality care and companionship for those in need and educate the community on issues that may affect their loved ones," said Chabari, who started Home Helpers' Hillsborough branch — there are 12 across New Jersey, including one in Metuchen that services Middlesex County — two years ago. "We provide services to people of all ages, but there is a necessary focus on the elderly, since many of them cannot completely care for themselves."

They also cannot fend for themselves, in many cases, and a number of situations put the elderly at risk of violence.

According to the World Health Organization, strained family relationships can worsen from stress and frustration as an older person becomes more dependent. A caregiver's dependence on an older person for accommodation or financial support also can be a source of conflict.

But social isolation is one of the biggest risk factors for elder abuse, and that comes from several cultural and socioeconomic factors, including:

- The depiction of older people as frail, weak and dependent.
- Erosion of the bonds between generations of a family.
- Restructuring of the basic support networks for the elderly.
- Systems of inheritance and land rights, affecting the distribution of power and material goods within families.
- Migration of young couples to other areas, leaving elderly parents alone.

The World Health Organization estimates that between 4 percent and 6 percent of the elderly have experienced some form of abuse, either at home or in hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Home Helpers aims to eliminate any of those concerns, offering flexible care plans to meet needs and budgets. Some of the services Home Helpers offers include companionship, grocery shopping, meal preparation, bathing and dressing assistance, medication reminders, local transportation and housekeeping.

"Some of our caregivers are at home 24 hours a day," Chipps said, "while others only need to give three hours. It's different for every person." More information is available by calling 908-281-5300 or by visiting

www.HomeHelpers.CC.