



WORLD ELDERLY ABUSE AWARENESS DAY - 15 JUNE 2017

Speech by Governor Lisa Phillips

"I am glad to be here today to highlight the issue of elder abuse.

"Is this a problem on St Helena? The answer is - I'm not sure I know. There are no statistics. Incidents are not often reported. If it exists, it is a hidden crime.

"But if we think about the awareness nowadays of child abuse, child neglect, and domestic violence on St Helena, and the work that happens to prevent it and address it, I cannot believe that such abuse stops when a person reaches a certain age. It does not.

"Let's look at what we know from around the world. We know that elsewhere most cases of elder abuse go undetected, even though there are clear warning signs, for example unexplained bruises, sudden changes in finances and accounts, unexplained changes of alertness, and malnutrition or dehydration.

"We know we cannot assume the victims will report what is happening to them. They may not speak up for fear of reprisals - or to protect family members from criminal prosecution. They may not be fully aware that what is happening to them constitutes abuse, or they may lack the means or be capable of reporting it.

"In thinking about what to say today, I read some of the accounts in the press releases from elderly residents of the Island. I have also talked to many older people on St Helena since I've been here at my tea parties and at other occasions. They tell me that they do not feel old inside, many are fiercely independent. I hear of people like Beattie Stroud who still brings her produce into town and sells it. There are many like her. But there are also those who are vulnerable. These are the people most likely to be at risk of elder abuse. It is those that we need to protect.

"I also thought about how we treat older people and how they are viewed by society....the stereotypes on TV and the often unkind jokes about age. I love my mum, who is 85 years old, but sometimes how slowly she drives and how she can't always hear what I say, is annoying. I wonder therefore if, in my own life, I apply those prejudices and stereotypes.

"This is important because we know that such prejudice influences the way in which abuse and violence is perceived, recognised, and reported.

"The older generation on St Helena also tell me that they feel young people do not respect them. Some have talked about this in the context of elder abuse. However, I believe it is too simplistic to turn this into an inter-generational issue. In fact, we know

from elsewhere that the biggest risk to older people is actually much closer to home....it is within their own homes. It is difficult to accept that our families are not always a safe haven.

“I believe this all adds to the weight of our collective responsibility to act, and to speak up for older persons when they are unable or unwilling to speak for themselves. All of us can and must be prepared to be advocates for older people, if abuse is ever to be prevented and stopped.

“On this World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I urge anyone who suspects any form of elder abuse, including financial abuse, to report their concerns.”

Governor Lisa Phillips
15 June 2017