



Statewide Essay Contest Winner
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What is Elder Abuse and Why Does It Matter To You?

Today in America, an estimated 5 million older adults or 1 in 10 older Americans experience physical, mental, and financial elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation each year. How can this still be happening in America?

I come from a unique upbringing which gave me a firsthand view of what elder abuse really means. My family runs a home for the elderly with cognitive deficits. I was raised in the same home they call home. I knew at an early age they were my equal and should be treated that way. I also, have several members of my family that have been diagnosed with dementia and have lost their lives to this horrible disease.

My junior year of high school I wanted to make a difference and took the CNA course and passed my state exam. I now have the privilege of working at our local nursing home a few hours a week providing one on one care to so many residents. The people I work for only want to be respected and cared for. They love to talk about their past and their families. They love it when you take the time to listen to them.

Why am I telling you all this? It is because these are some of the most vulnerable humans in our society. These are the ones that we should be protecting. But yet they are being mistreated, abused and finding themselves financially broke because of family members and people they trusted. How can we make sure this does not continue to happen?

Caring for those who once cared for us is a privilege. I've had several conversations on how to fix this pandemic of abuse. One of my ideas is to give the caregivers their own caregivers, someone that will be able to relieve them when they need to get out, rest or have some free time. My mother is a mental health therapist and the therapists in her office are always making sure that each and every one of them are taking care of themselves, self-care, self-love and time to refresh their own spirit. You can't provide care to another from an empty cup. Another idea is that our direct care workers are some of the lowest paid workers in America yet they are caring for our most vulnerable. We need to provide these workers with rate increases and incentives. Another idea is more senior centers where they can talk to therapists, counselors, sex educators, lawyers, accountants, and any other profession for free advice.