



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

Elder abuse is inherently unjust. Summed into one definition, it is the lack of appropriate care or a repeated abusive act which causes harm or distress to an elderly person. These abusive acts may include financial exploitation, or physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Our elders deserve our veneration, gratitude, and protection from such exploitation.

Living in Maine, which has the oldest population in the nation, a large population of people looking to take advantage of our elders exists as well. As someone who comes from a very large and extended family, I have been very close with my grandparents, great-grandparents, great aunts and uncles, and even some of their elderly friends. I have learned many great things from all these people, and many have grown very close to my heart.

During my time spent volunteering at the local community center teaching elderly folks how to create and use social media and email profiles, and as someone who has served meals to our elderly veterans at the local rotary club, I have witnessed firsthand the excitement and thankfulness that they exude when shown some patience and compassion. At times, when an elder would say thank you for spending time with them, they would follow up with a sad revelation that their own children or loved ones would not have done the same.

This issue matters to me and it should matter to everybody. It is absolutely heartbreaking to think that someone could leave their parents or grandparents to age alone, without visits or contact, completely neglecting them and their care. For too many taking from the elderly comes as easily as taking from a child, playing off their inexperience with new technology and constantly changing world. Our elders are often targeted and exploited through channels they tend to be less experienced in: with email and phone call scams, or on social media platforms. Our elders did not grow up with the massive amount of technology that someone my age has, and they are unaware of what types of suspicious activity exist with scams becoming more and more realistic every day. To aid in this issue, I would propose increasing the number of informative courses at local community/healthcare centers to teach elders what scams they can look out for, and how to check their financial and banking information online to make sure any funds aren't going away suspiciously.

Elder abuse is unfair, heartless and cruel. I am lucky enough to be a part of a caring family and community, where I have had little exposure to this issue. But is undeniable that it can happen to anybody anywhere behind closed doors. We should all check in on our elderly friends and family, maybe to lend a helping hand, or maybe just for some company on a rainy afternoon. You never know what situation they might be in, and any one of us could be their beacon of hope.