

# THE EXPOSITOR

Brantford Expositor (ON)  
Extra!, Saturday, February 26, 2005, p. A10 / FRONT

## Voices Against Elder Abuse becoming national concern

Voices Against Elder Abuse is ready to go national. The founders of the group now have an office, a toll-free phone number and Web site.

Lesley Anthony, Jean Bowen and Heather Haw will travel to the nation's capital in March to speak at an elder abuse conference hosted by Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa.

And last week, when he was visiting the Stedman Community Hospice, they appealed to provincial Health Minister George Smitherman to set up a meeting with them.

Bowen and Anthony prepared a letter to Smitherman and, as the health minister prepared to pull out of the hospice parking lot, Anthony knocked on his window.

"I said, 'We still have thousands of hours of videotape and W-5 was the tip of the iceberg -- can we talk?' " Anthony says. Smitherman gave no indication whether his people would try to arrange a meeting.

By going to the top, the group is expressing its frustration with speed of change in politics, policing and the long-term care industry.

"We were hoping to see something bigger," admits Bowen.

"We thought that if everyone could see what we saw on those tapes, it would change the legislation, but we still don't see the changes we were promised." Plenty of people are talking more freely about elder abuse these days, but Bowen says others simply want to wipe the W-Five tapes from their memories.

"We're still being accused of doctoring the tapes or of W-Five doctoring them. But we still have hours and hours of tapes. The show only touched on them briefly."

With a group of "gung ho" volunteers meeting monthly, Voices has done the work to establish itself.

Developers King and Benton donated office space at 44 Elgin St., and free furniture was provided by The Paris Star. A group member purchased a photocopier earlier this year and money raised at a local fundraiser has gone toward development of educational pamphlets. A computer and printer are still needed.

The community has been wonderful in its support, Anthony says.

Voices plans to hold an open house in May. The women want to hear from those willing to help combat elder abuse; those who have experienced abuse and want to

talk about their situation; family members who have been affected by abuse; and workers in facilities who see or experience abuse and need to talk.

Confidentiality is a critical rule of the group.

"We're hoping that with a telephone and office set up, people won't be scared and think they have to handle things alone," Bowen says.

Anthony, Bowen and Haw can be contacted by phone at 751-3331 or through the Web site [www.voicesagainstelderabuse.com](http://www.voicesagainstelderabuse.com)

"With more voices," said Bowen, "it can make a difference."

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