



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

International Day of the Older Person 2009

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The World Health Organization (WHO) designates 1 October each year as the International Day of the Older Person. As such, the University of South Africa (UNISA) Institute for Social and Health Sciences (ISHS) hosted two events – one in Eldorado Park and another in Lenasia, South Africa – to celebrate the day. Having recently developed and undertaken a safety audit of old age homes in these areas, the ISHS and Medical Research Council–University of South Africa (MRC–UNISA) Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) arranged two exciting days on 29 September 2009 and 01 October 2009 for the elderly. These occasions were infused with celebration, information dissemination, discussion and collaboration regarding their needs for safety and peace.

Injury is one of the major causes of mortality and morbidity among the elderly. Accordingly, there is growing recognition of the importance of establishing a culture of safety aimed at the elderly, and applicable to a range of contexts, including residential care facilities. Within the context of residential care facilities, risk factors associated with dwelling design and maintenance, and human behaviour and characteristics have been identified as important elements in injury causation in the elderly population.

Over a period of approximately six months prior to the events of the campaign the researchers had audited two old age homes with a view to eliciting the residents' views, opinions and concerns regarding risks to their safety in the residential facilities. Engagement over such a significant period of time allowed for the emergence of a number of themes spanning physical, relational, psychological and socio-political arenas. The themes which emerged from the audit included health care services, service delivery, and safety and security.

At each of the events, residents and stakeholders were divided into groups and more in-depth focus groups were held. These groups were facilitated by staff members of the ISHS. The focus groups served to confirm the relevance of the themes identified in the research audit, as well as to foster enhanced mechanisms of communication between residents, management and stakeholders.

Besides the elderly themselves, other important stakeholder groups were represented at the event. The departments of Health, Housing, Social Development, and Human Development represented the government. Ward and residential councillors from Eldorado Park and Lenasia were also present on these days. Additionally, members of the South African Police Service, local health care clinics, community and media stakeholders, such as the Lenasia Muslim Women's League, the Islamic Helpline, Eastwave Radio and Radio Islam, attended the event.

Entertainment in the form of a play dealing with the nature of ageing in residential facilities, as well as a motivational speech by Ashwin Singh of Eastwave Radio, was organised. Lunch was provided to all attendees.

The results of both days were certainly extremely interesting, and the inputs of stakeholders and residents alike have added an extra dimension to the findings and recommendations of the research report.

Grateful thanks are owed to all those who assisted in the organisation of these two events. Particular mention must be made of the staff of the ISHS, the Lenasia Muslim Women's League, as well as the Eldorado Park community patrol volunteers.