

Using the Seniors Mental Health Policy Lens to Develop Policies for Legal Services for Seniors

Judith Wahl

Advocacy Centre for the Elderly

Toronto

wahlj@lao.on.ca



Advocacy Centre for the Elderly

- Community legal clinic for seniors
- First legal clinic of its kind in Canada
- With development of elder law services (BC will have second legal clinic, other models in other provinces of elder law services, general legal clinic in Ontario seeking to be more responsive to seniors in their communities), need to find tool that will help guide others in development of legal clinic/ service model that is senior focused and responsive



What Drew us to the Policy Lens

- From experience with over 20 years of operation of ACE service - Policy lens reflected the values of older adults and would assist us in evaluating whether our service was having a positive impact on older adults



What Drew us to the Policy Lens

- We were seeking away to do a critical review of our own service as well as help others seeking to develop more effective legal services for older adults since these services are starting to develop across the country



Work on Elder Health Coalition Version of the Lens

- We also had the experience of working as part of the working group of the Elder Health Coalition in Ontario that adapted the lens to review elder abuse policies so was able to see how the tool can be adapted for a similar purpose and how the tool “holds up” although slightly adapted – that starting the thinking of adapting it to develop policies for legal services that focus on seniors as the client base



Process - Initial Discussions with Staff at ACE

- ACE staff used the tool in an initial review of whether it could be adapted for the purpose described
- Conclusion from our review of our own services was that it will fulfil this purpose



Initial Review at ACE

- Use of the tool as is caused the staff to engage in discussions about our approach to our own services – both operations and approaches to remedies
- Operationally - it highlighted the need to revisit how we structure the services, do intake, do outreach, use the telephone, use face to face meetings, advertise our services, make available our services, reach out to other organizations that can connect seniors to us for assistance etc.



Initial Review at ACE

- It also was very useful in looking at how we approach legal options and remedies for our clients – are we understanding the potential negative impacts of some traditional legal responses; are there alternative approaches that will have less or eliminate the negative impacts.



Initial Review at ACE

- It also may help us reflect and report on the positive outcomes of the services – how the access to the legal services impacts on the people using the legal services – for so much of our legal work, the impact is on seniors independence, self determination, on their dignity and social participation therefore the tool gives us a means of examining whether the way we practice and what we do has this impact



Next steps

- ACE will work on the adaptation of the policy lens for use by the legal community and others working with the legal community to develop legal services for older adults
- as ACE originally and always has included the seniors community as a part of the way we have developed all of our policies, this work will also be done in this way so that the adapted tool will prompt lawyers and legal workers in any legal environment to look through that lens for elder law services

