



Dignity and Debt Pilot Project

Background

This project has been developed by the Financial and Consumer Rights Council (FCRC) and is funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust. The project responds to an increasing need of older Victorians seeking financial counselling services.

The needs of the ageing population are specific. Individuals have worked and raised families, been engaged in communities and a myriad of activities and may have decreasing or impaired function at some level, driving them to seek care support. At this time there is little consideration for the financial situation that ensues or the pressures that are placed on families in the quest to find and establish appropriate aged care services (either within the family home, or within a residential care option).

There is frequently a presumption that older people will have money and need investment advice; many publications for seniors include advice about assets and savings etc., but the truth is that many older people do not have spare money; they may own their house but have no spare cash; they may in fact have a mortgage or be renting at market prices. Rental prices are frequently taking over 60% of the income of people. When the lessee is an aged pensioner, this leaves nothing much for food and bills, let alone social activity or family interaction.

A survey of financial counsellors in Victoria revealed that 60% of financial counsellors were seeing an increase in clients in receipt of the aged pension in financial difficulty.

Financial counsellors provide information, support and advocacy to people in financial difficulty and are focussed on identifying systemic issues where community education may assist to prevent further financial difficulty.

Project aims:

1. To give options through the provision of financial counselling casework to individuals struggling with financial difficulty where this may prevent choices about appropriate care options
2. To give information about financial hardship protections for people entering the aged care sector- either in a community care setting or in a residential care setting
3. To educate aged care staff about the hardship protections in the Aged Care Act and also in the Credit and Consumer Law
4. To engage in research throughout the project to establish the challenges for older people in both community and residential care settings – this will provide a basis for funding into the future

Project Partners:

Goulburn Valley Community Health and Mansfield Shire Council are key partners in this project providing direct casework. FCRC specifically sought partnerships with agencies that had forward thinking about aged care and a working understanding of financial counselling. Both organisations have a financial counsellor employed, both of whom also worked in an aged care program in the organisation. One financial counsellor is a division 1 registered nurse at Goulburn Valley Health and the other financial counsellor works in a Home and Community Care program at Mansfield Shire Council. This gives the project the ability to work across both community based home care packages and Home and Community Care (HACC) services, identifying challenges and extending the client base, highlighting emerging issues and having exposure to a diversity of staff.

Out third project partner is Eldercare Legal, a department of Hutchinson Legal which has considerable expertise around older consumers and legal matters. Eldercare Legal has experts who are able to provide pro bono casework advice and education as needed for the financial counsellors and others involved in the project.

For more information on the project, to make referrals, or to make an appointment with Mansfield Shire Council's Financial Counsellor, please contact Michele Padbury on 5775 8569.

