

**NEIGHBORHOOD SELF HELP BY OLDER PERSONS PROJECT, INC.**  
**953 SOUTHERN BOULEVARD**  
**BRONX, NEW YORK 10459**  
**(718) 542-0006 fax (718) 542-0944**  
**Evelyn Laureano, PhD, LMSW, Executive Director**

---

**NEIGHBORHOOD SHOPP**  
**ELDER ABUSE & CRIME VICTIMS ASSISTANCE**  
**VIOLENCE INTERVENTION & PREVENTION "VIP" PROGRAM**  
**FACT SHEET**

---

***Why Do We Need The SHOPP VIP Program?***

Elder Abuse is the physical, emotional, psychological mistreatment or financial exploitation of someone over age sixty by a caregiver, family member, or person known to the victim. A form of domestic violence, elder abuse victims are particularly vulnerable because they tend to "suffer in silence". In fact, the New York City Department for the Aging reports that although one of twenty older adults is a victim of abuse, most cases go unreported. Lack of awareness of what constitutes abuse, beliefs about invading the privacy of the family, or fear of retaliation or creating conflict within the family all contribute to this "suffering in silence" phenomenon. Lack of personal resources and knowledge of community resources, traditional cultural norms, guilt, isolation, and fear serve as factors that lead to this population being under-served.

The Bronx elderly reflect the trends found for most inner city minority elderly. There is a strong indication that while minority elderly appear to be most vulnerable to victimization, they are least likely to seek remedial services. Numerous studies document the underutilization of community services by the minority aged. Furthermore, the elderly tend not to report incidents of crime to the police as noted in a study comparing rates of police reporting by elderly in 1970 and 1990 (Growing Older in New York City in the 1990's).

Violence against older adults is not limited to elder abuse. Property crime rates for older adults are also a major issue of concern. According to the Justice Department Bureau of Statistics (Press Release, 1/9/00) elderly minority urban dwellers and those who rent their homes experience the highest rates of property crime. When compared to other age groups, the elderly are disproportionately affected by property crimes. More than 9 in 10 crimes against the elderly were property crimes compared with less than 4 in 10 for persons 24 years and younger. In a report titled "Growing Older in New York City in the 1990's", researchers found that among older persons, slightly one half of the elderly surveyed had at some point been a victim of one or more of the personal property crimes identified in the survey ( i.e., mugged or attacked, purse or wallet snatched, mailbox break-in, or apartment/home robbed).

***What Does SHOPP Do? Agency Overview***

Established in 1980, Neighborhood Self Help by Older Persons Project (SHOPP) is a Bronx-wide non-profit multi-service agency serving older adults. The people we serve are primarily Hispanic, African-American, and Caribbean /West Indian women, age 60 +. SHOPP's mission of empowerment is based on the philosophy of self help and mutual assistance. We believe that older people are capable of helping themselves and help others improve their capacity to deal with the physical, emotional, social, and financial challenges they face as they age. SHOPP's philosophy of self help and mutual assistance is translated into programs which empower older persons to maintain and restore their capacity for a viable, creative and productive life in their community. With SHOPP involvement, older adults are provided with opportunities to achieve their potential by strengthening their social support systems, improve their quality of life and become stakeholders in their own communities.

Since its inception, SHOPP has been providing a variety of services to older adults living in the Bronx. In partnership with the people we serve, SHOPP has developed several program components which include the Senior Network Group Work Program, Casa Boricua Senior Center, SHOPP CMP Case Management Program, the SNAP Case Assistance Program, Wellness Project, Transportation Services and the **VIP** (Violence Intervention and Prevention) Program which assists elder abuse and older crime victims.

## **SHOPP VIP FACT SHEET --page 2**

SHOPP provides services at a central location, the agency office (located on the border of Community Boards 2 and 3), where older persons can access services such as counseling, benefit and entitlement assistance and information and referral. SHOPP's services are also decentralized through a network of client-selected community-based locations in almost every Community Board district throughout the Bronx. Educational, recreational, and health promotion services are provided at local program sites located in senior housing buildings, churches, housing complexes, and NYCHA community centers. Case work staff also conducts home visits when indicated for assessment and outreach purposes. The provision of services in locations where SHOPP participants live encourages the development of peer relationships and increases opportunities for involvement of activities that many older persons may not otherwise have access due to functional limitations or cultural/linguistic barriers.

### ***Background: How SHOPP Got into the VIP "Business"***

Since its inception, SHOPP provides case assistance services at the agency in which older adults can access a wide variety of benefits and entitlements as well as information and referral assistance to other appropriate services. In the early 1990's, the agency recognized a pattern of increasing violence against the elderly among its client base. Originally viewed as an issue for grandparents-as-parents, older adults were coming forward with stories of financial exploitation, threatening behavior, and physical violence by their teenage wards and/or the adult children who had given up their children to be raised by the grandparent. Recognizing that this problem was broader than Skipped Generation Parenting concerns, SHOPP pursued funding for elder abuse intervention and prevention services.

In 1995, the New York City Community Development Agency (CDA) awarded a three year grant to develop SHOPP's VIP pilot project. During this period, the agency provided assistance to 223 victims or at-risk older adults. Funding priorities for CDA changed in 1998 - their focus became youth violence intervention -- and their funding for services to older persons was terminated. The loss of this funding occurred at a critical time when official recognition of the problem of elder abuse was just beginning to take place. Public Hearings held by the City Council and the New York State Committee on Aging on the issue of elder abuse provided SHOPP with an opportunity to inform others of the growing need for targeted services for this vulnerable population.

In addition to these advocacy efforts, SHOPP sought alternative funding and was awarded several small grants including New York State Crime Victims Board monies and City Council Discretionary funds to continue the program. Through this funding, the agency has been able to assist over 600 older adults since 1998 who meet the criteria for services under the VIP Program. In 2002, the New York City Department for Aging awarded SHOPP a grant to expand the services currently provided. In December 2008, Mayor Bloomberg ordered that the DFTA funding for this program be eliminated as part of his financial plan to address the budget deficit.

### ***SHOPP's VIP Program***

The principal mission and purpose of SHOPP's VIP Program is to alleviate the effects of domestic violence and crime on older Bronx residents and to help prevent victimization of the elderly. The specific goals and objectives for the VIP Program are to identify, engage and assist older Bronx residents (age 60 and older) who have been victims of crime or elder abuse. In partnership with the VIP staff, anticipated outcomes for VIP clients are:

- Older adults should have recovered from a crisis situation
- Older adults should be in a safe environment
- Older adults should demonstrate the ability to recognize and deal appropriately with threatening situations in a manner that minimizes risk to themselves
- Older adults should have information about where to turn to for help

The VIP Program is currently staffed by a VIP Program Director, two Case workers, and a social work student intern. The staff is fully bilingual (English and Spanish). Services are provided at the agency and for home-bound individuals, in their homes.

The scope of services within the VIP Program includes:

**Outreach:** This involves contacting local Police Precincts, DFTA's Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center, other senior centers and services, community-based organizations, and other victim services and providing them with information about the VIP Program and services available. Educational workshop presentations focusing on elder abuse and crime prevention are provided to local community groups, Senior Centers, Precinct Advisory Councils,

### **SHOPP VIP FACT SHEET --page 3**

Community Boards meetings and Interagency Councils. Our outreach efforts have led to the establishment of referral liaisons with such entities as the 41<sup>st</sup> Precinct, Bronx District Attorney's Office, Bronx County Supreme Court and Housing Court, NYC Department for the Aging, Bronx Court Dispute Referral Center and New York City Council Members from the Bronx. Information is further disseminated through the distribution of the SHOPP VIP Program brochure. All referrals received are screened.

**Screening:** Once individuals are identified, they are contacted by a member of the VIP Team and arrangements are made for a face-to-face meeting. Information about resources, services, and opportunities for senior citizens is provided. At this time an intake interview and assessment is conducted to determine the individual's situation and needs, identify the nature of the abuse or crime, engage the individual in a helping relationship, and determine a preliminary intervention plan. Home visits are conducted for each referred individual as part of the assessment. Individuals who are not eligible for services under the VIP Program criteria (i.e. - not a victim of a crime or elder abuse) are provided with information and/or a referral to the agency's SNAP Case Assistance Unit or another appropriate agency.

**Intervention:** Eligible individuals are provided with assistance and services related to benefit and entitlements appropriate to their situation and needs. Crisis or threatening situations in which an individual is at risk require urgent intervention and these situations are addressed immediately. This may entail arranging for hospitalization; providing emergency monies for food, clothing, transportation, rent or temporary shelter; arranging for repairs/ installation of broken doors, security devices, windows or locks for victims of forced entry; obtaining orders of protection; or intervening in eviction proceedings. VIP Team case workers inform individuals about Crime Victims Board Compensation program and assist in completing and processing compensation claim applications. Assistance in accessing concrete services such as home care services, lost check/document replacements, reinstating income entitlements, is provided as well. Counseling is provided to deal with the emotional and psychological impact of victimization. Most intervention activities take place in the client's home; the VIP team makes home visits on a regular basis. Advocacy for needed services, escort and accompaniment to health care providers, courts and other legal services, follow-up and telephone reassurance are ongoing activities aimed at improving security, safety and positive resolution of the problems at hand.

### ***VIP PROGRAM CHALLENGES***

The older adults that have been provided with assistance from SHOPP's VIP Program tend to be reluctant to admit to being victimized and in order to access services, sustained outreach and engagement over longer periods are often necessary. Financial exploitation and emotional abuse seem to be the major issues for most of the VIP clients. Many are also reporting harassment from neighbors and landlords. Since housing for seniors is limited, many older adults find themselves sharing their small apartments with adult children and grandchildren. These living arrangements place much stress on the family system, often resulting in elder abuse. Substance abuse among adult children or grandchildren creates problems for older adults, especially when they may be the only family member with a steady monthly income. VIP caseworkers are busy around the first of the month when the Social Security check arrives and seniors are particularly vulnerable.

While there are many services now available to assist crime victims, access and knowledge of the availability of these services is limited. Services to address the problem of elder abuse in the Bronx are also inadequate. Adult Protective Services (APS) is the primary governmental agency delivering services to elder abuse victims, but the Bronx Borough Office of APS is extremely understaffed and unable to provide the quality of services needed to identify, engage and assist individuals in this situation. Small community-based organizations and senior centers offering multi-services lack the expertise and resources needed to be effective in elder abuse situations. Under-staffing in senior centers creates a need for outside referrals to assist clients and many VIP clients are identified through this mechanism. Exacerbating this situation is the tendency towards underutilization of formal services and institutional resources by minority older adults based on lack of information and language barriers.

There is a great need for elder abuse victims assistance services for older adults, particularly, low-income minority elderly. The services provided by SHOPP's VIP Program, in which caseworkers are trained in the dynamics of elder abuse and skillful in culturally-appropriate interventions -- is successfully meeting this need.

**For further information, contact:  
Dr. Evelyn Laureano, Executive Director, Neighborhood SHOPP (718) 542-0006**