



Australian Government

Office of the Aged Care Commissioner

Opening of Advocare Inc New Offices

(Check Against Delivery)

Monday 21 April 2008

Rhonda Parker
Aged Care Commissioner

Hon Sue Ellery – Minister for Child Protection;
Communities; Women's Interests; Seniors and
Volunteering,
Mr David Gribble – Chair of Advocare,
Board Members,
Mr Greg Mahney – CEO,
Distinguished guests, especially those representing
funding bodies,
friends all.

Thank you for the invitation to be here today and thank
you Norm for the welcome to country.

We're here to mark and celebrate the new premises of
Advocare. While I'm sure the staff appreciate the
improved physical environment, the move to new
premises is more significantly a symbol of the maturing
of Advocare and its work right across the state.

Advocare deals with some of the most challenging
aspects of ageing that we as individuals, as a society or
our Governments have to deal with. No matter how

many roles we fill in that spectrum, I think it is helpful for us to remember the context in which we work and the ideal circumstance we hope all older people will experience.

The context for us and for Advocare is that we believe all older people should enjoy respect, dignity and quality in their later years, that the increase in lifespan is one of the most significant achievements of the last century, that the years after retirement are a bonus our grandparents didn't have, and that in recent years science has established that quality in later life is far more subject to our choices than we have previously understood.

The high bar, or the goal, in ageing is that as well as a long life, our life is one where the gap between the end of our healthspan and the end of our lifespan is short – that the so-called period of morbidity at the end of our years is short rather than long.

Consider this. The international literature on ageing agrees that, of the physical decline in later life, some 70% of that decline is not due to age.

Consider this also. Up until a few years ago researchers were excited to have proved that the 'use or lose it' principle applied to ageing. That view is now dated. It is now more accurate to say, particularly in regard to the brain, that in older people 'if you use it, you'll get more of it'.

Perhaps the most exciting area of research in ageing at present is that of research into the ageing brain.

For example, we've learnt only recently that the ageing brain continues to have the capacity to generate new neurons, a notion dismissed by neuroscientists for years. In one experiment, older mice in cages with wheels added 50% more neurons than younger mice in cages with no exercise facility. 50%! That is stunning information. The active older mice

were able to learn new tasks better than sedentary younger mice.

You'll note exercise was the key differential. We're only just beginning to understand how critical exercise is to brain function. The brain weighs 2% of the body's weight but consumes 25% of the body's oxygen. No matter what age you are, oxygen supply is critical to the continued performance of the brain. An extra dimension has also been added to this research. Scientists tested another important ingredient for a healthy life – love. Researchers found that older, exercising mice that had 'love' in the form of cuddling and petting added to their experience performed even better than those who did not have the contact.

The more researches study ageing the more we learn of the potential for quality in our later years.

However, we know that for some there are disadvantages and loss of quality that are

unacceptable in a caring society. This is unfortunately the case in our older population.

Too many of our elders suffer long periods of loss of quality of life, including poor mobility, social isolation, lack of relevance, chronic pain, depression and financial hardship. Individuals who were once bank managers, school principals, domestic engineers and goddesses managing large families, soldiers, pillars of our society, farmers, matrons of hospitals – people who have led rich, successful lives as well as those who have had continuous struggles – these are the lives and contributions our elders have had and made and which we often fail to see as we interact with elders in our community.

Enter Advocare.

Advocare originally started as part of Anglicare, and appointed its first staff, some advocates in March 1997.

It moved to “new” premises, the Kings Hotel in Hay Street Perth in November 1998.

In July 2000 Advocare became independent from Anglicare and Advocare’s first Board was constituted

In 2001 it commenced its Elder Abuse Prevention Program.

In 2003 Advocare conducted its first significant piece of research into elder abuse. The Speak Out Survey (SOS) survey involved a telephone phone in and provided the first clear indications of the nature and extent of elder abuse in Western Australia. The finding shocked and saddened many of us

2003 also saw Advocare initiate and commence the Aboriginal Advocacy Program with the goals of improving access to HACC services for Aboriginal people, and raising awareness of, and trying to reduce the incidence of abuse of older Aboriginal Australians. That program continues today.

April 2003 organised a seminar on Elder Abuse and another seminar in March 2006 in partnership with Carers WA on the issue of Elder Abuse and Carer Stress.

In February 2005 APEA: WA the Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse was formed. APEA comprises Advocare and senior bureaucrats from across the WA public sector, and seeks to develop innovative policies and a whole of government approach to the issue of Elder Abuse.

1 July 2007 Advocare started the Older People's Rights Service in partnership with the Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre.

Advocare's provides services state wide, and advocates travel throughout WA to conduct their work.

Advocare provides information, education and advocacy to people who receive Home and Community Care (HACC) Services, those in residential

aged care facilities, and also to their carers and the general community. Its Elder Abuse Programs target all older people who may be at risk of abuse. All Advocare services are free.

The SOS survey of 2003 found that around two thirds of the elder abuse victims were women. Most of the older adults who reported abuse were aged 70 years of age or over. The most common relationship between the victims and associated perpetrators of abuse was that of parent and adult son or daughter.

The most common age of perpetrators was 60 years.

Around two thirds of the cases identified through this research related to financial abuse and the majority of those cases also included some kind of physical abuse and approximately 20% involved social abuse.

With data like this, there is clearly a need for the services provided by Advocare.

While I can retell the milestones of the organisation's 11 year history in a few minutes, it would be remiss of me and all of us here if we didn't stop for a moment to reflect how difficult it is to establish a work like this, despite how valuable it is.

To those who have persisted with the vision to see this work established, we say congratulations on your achievement. It is a credit to all of you.

To those who represent funding bodies that support Advocare – the federal Department of Health and Ageing, the State Department of Health, the Department of Communities, and LotteryWest, thank you for your commitment to this work and for being here today. Minister, to you as representative of the State Government., thank you for the ongoing commitment to the work of Advocare.

The move to these new premises marks a maturing of this organisation, and for me that is the significant

symbolism today. For the staff, I'm sure the benefits are measured more practically.

To the Board, the CEO, staff and Advocare supporters, congratulations on the achievements of the last 11 years that these new premises symbolise. Older people in WA are the real beneficiaries for which I thank you.

You support those who do not have a voice, those who may have lost their strength, those who may have grown isolated from social warmth and connection, who, most sadly, may be suffering at the actions of those they should be able to trust the most. This is a work of compassion and leadership.

Congratulations.

I am honoured to be able to declare the new premises of Advocare open.