

Dale, Coffee counties observe

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

By Michelle Mann

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Last year, the Alabama Department of Human Resources investigated more than 6,700 reports of suspected abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults, to include the elderly.

To raise public awareness of the problem, city and county officials in Dale and Coffee Counties signed proclamations declaring Monday, June 15, as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

"Because the elderly are often dependent on others for their care and may become isolated, they are vulnerable to abuse, neglect and exploitation," said Dale County Department of Human Resources Director Judy Jochen. "Sadly, victims are most often abused, neglected and exploited by individuals who are known and trusted by the elderly person."

Coffee County Department of Human Resources Director Deana Stinson said that the adult protective services workers are "strongly committed to ensuring the safety and well being of the elderly.

"No matter how difficult the challenge, with the help of our community partners, our adult protective services workers investigate reports and arrange protection," Jochen added.

Thousands of elderly persons and adults who have disabilities are abused, neglected and exploited in Alabama each year, said Coffee County DHR Attorney Jodee Thompson.

"The elderly are people who have contributed so much to our communities over the years and they do not deserve that," Thompson said crediting not only the adult protective service staff but also the local law enforcement officers and judges with success of abuse and neglect prevention programs.

"Elderly people who don't have relatives around sometimes find that they are unable to care for themselves," Thompson said. "Our judges are real good to hold everybody accountable and to make sure all resources are exhausted."

DHR is responsible for the investigation of adult abuse, neglect and exploitation reports, Stinson said.

DHR also partners with over 30 agencies as members of the Alabama Council for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, an organization that works to raise awareness of elder abuse prevention.

Mandated reporters include medical personnel and caregivers; however, anyone can make a report by contacting their county DHR office or local law enforcement agency, Stinson said.

"Elder abuse is gravely under-reported," Jochen added. "Please help us protect our vulnerable citizens who have contributed so much to our community."

Those who suspect mistreatment of an elderly person or an adult person who has disabilities, are asked to call Dale County DHR at (334) 445-4900 or the Coffee County DHR at (334) 348-2000.

"You can make a real difference in the life of a vulnerable adult by recognizing signs of maltreatment and taking action by reporting abuse," Stinson said.

Reports may also be made toll free to Adult Abuse Hotline 1-800-458-7214 and all reports are confidential.