

sponsors. The central message is to take time to reach out and help one another. The list of people who can do this includes: a neighbor who offers to do an errand; a paper carrier who tells someone when the papers are not being picked up; a utility service person who notices a problem; a bank teller who takes time to explain; an apartment superintendent who changes a light bulb; a store clerk who listens.⁶⁴

Some witnesses mentioned the Gatekeeper program in place in several states in the United States as an example of positive action on the part of the corporate sector. Podnieks noted that: "Gatekeepers are people in the community who have contact with older people such as the postman, the hydro man, bank clerks. All these people are in a prime position to pick up on elder abuse."⁶⁵ The Gatekeepers help open the gates between vulnerable older people and the social service or health agencies in the community. They have been described as the "eyes and ears" of community services agencies.

Pearl McKenzie argued that "we have to train the gatekeepers so that anybody who comes in contact with an elderly person has to be alert to the potential or the possibility of abuse. If we do that kind of education, then we can start identifying the abuse that's happening. We can put the whole community on guard to protect and support older people."⁶⁶ Gatekeepers learn to recognize certain danger signals such as isolation, confusion, disability, neglect of personal appearance or of property indicating that an older person may need assistance. By making a phone call to a central agency, they obtain assistance from someone able to assess the needs of the older person and arrange for required help.

The original Gatekeeper program was formalized by Puget Sound Power and Light Company in Washington State, USA as a response to utility service workers who saw vulnerable elderly people in need of assistance but who felt inadequate to deal with the situation. This has now been adopted by other utilities including

⁶⁴ David Moorcroft, Vice-President, Public Affairs, Royal Bank of Canada, Presentation to Sub-Committee, March 30, 1993.

⁶⁵ Podnieks, 3:11.

⁶⁶ McKenzie, 8:12.