

# Elder abuse program set for Latinos

BY AMY YENSI

**SPEAKING OUT** against abuse is difficult if you're afraid and can't find anyone to listen — especially in your own language.

A group of concerned organizations and the borough president will reach out this week to deal with the underreported scourge of elder abuse in the Latino community.

They will conduct a forum on the issue — in Spanish — Thursday at the Lincoln Medical & Mental Health Center auditorium.

The event, "Contra Viento y Marea" ("Against Wind and Tide"), is aimed at teaching seniors how to recognize abuse and seek help.

Organizations that serve the elderly in Latino communities in the Bronx said there's a driving need to reach out to a population that is underserved and uninformed, often because of language issues.

But the language barrier may not be the only thing preventing some elderly Latinos from speaking out, said Adrian Rosell, a board member at the Latino Center on Aging. Fear, shame and cultural dynamics also can be factors — especially when the abuser is a loved one, like a spouse, child or grandchild.

"Latinos, we have a very strong protection about what happens in the family. What happens in the family stays in the family," said Evelyn Laureano, executive director of Neighbor-

hood SHOPP (Self-Help by Older Persons Project).

Going outside of "la familia" is "one of the taboo things for us," agreed Mario Tapia, president and executive director of the Latino Center on Aging.

Just because elder abuse is not spoken of openly in the Latino community does not mean it isn't happening, Tapia said.

He believes senior centers can play a key role in informing the elderly of the signs of abuse, as well as how to seek help. But the lack of Latino-sensitive cultural awareness at some senior centers may make abuela (grandma) want to stay home, he said.

The forum, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., is slated to feature Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., as well as minicounseling sessions for the up to 200 Spanish-speaking seniors expected.

There also will be a short play, "El Cheque" ("The Check"), performed by actors from the Mott Haven-based Pregones Theater. The performers will bring seniors in the audience onto the stage to teach them about various forms of abuse, including the financial trickery hinted at in the play's title.

"We have a lot of Latinos who will come and benefit because it's being expressed in their native language, in a sense that they can connect with," Rosell said. "All of us are working to make a statement to really reach our community. That's what empowers us."

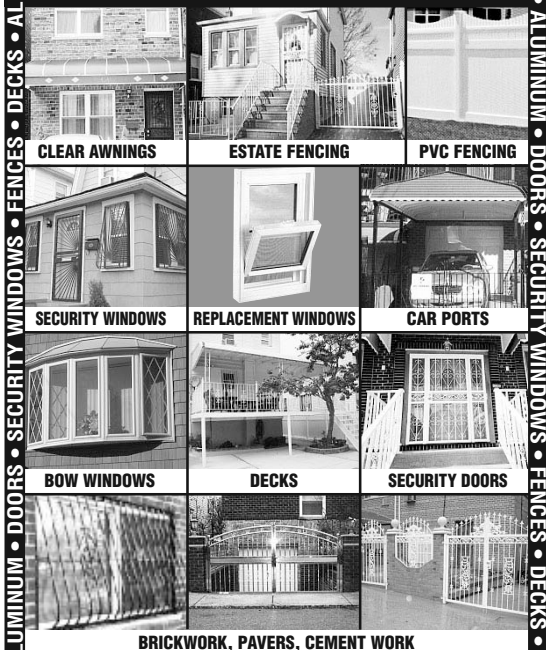
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- COMMUNITY BOARD 7 (Norwood, Bedford Park, University Heights and Fordham) meets at 6:30 p.m. today at Tracey Towers community room, 40 W. Mosholu Parkway South. Call (718) 933-5650.
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