

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Looking Out for Vulnerable People

Number 17 in a series of notes on important issues.

Fraud – there is a lot of it about according to official sources and not all of it gets reported. One of the reasons for this is that fraudsters prefer to target vulnerable members of our society, who may not even realise that they are victims. Criminals compile ‘suckers’ lists of potential victims who are elderly, perhaps live alone, may be easily intimidated, may suffer from mild dementia or otherwise give indications that they may fall for a well-planned scam. Any one of us could fall into that category at some stage in our lives and we have a duty to look out for our vulnerable, friends, relatives and neighbours.

In July 2017, police received a call from a bank to say an elderly customer was at the counter, trying to transfer all their money into another account, after receiving a call – supposedly from their bank. The story they had been told was that the bank was being investigated and that their account was in danger. They needed to move all their funds into a protected account (of which the caller gave details) as soon as possible. Fortunately, the bank staff were immediately suspicious and did not transfer the money.

This is not an isolated example of this type of fraud. If a victim can be persuaded to believe that he or she has won a major prize in a lottery (they have never heard of), is entitled to an inheritance (from a non-existent overseas relative) or will receive a massive share in a mythical pot of gold, then he or she will be asked to pay a fee for ‘taxes’, ‘clearance’ or legal formalities. Then there will be another such request – and another. When the victim realises that the worst has happened, another nice fraudster will be in touch to offer to recover the losses – for a small fee of course. And so it goes on.

The police advise us to look out for warning signs that will indicate that a friend, relative or neighbour is a possible victim. Unusually large quantities of mail (particularly if concealed), clutter around the house, regular trips to the post office and the purchase of lots of stamps, lots of scam telephone calls, the sudden appearance of lots of cheap ‘free gifts’ and a reluctance to discuss these things are all indications that the fraudsters may be at work.

There are things that can be done. Telephone numbers can be changed and made ex-directory. Incoming calls can be restricted to known numbers, blocked or filtered by a ‘caller display’ system. If the level of vulnerability justifies such steps, mail can be re-directed, bank accounts can be changed and even managed or supervised by next-of-kin or under a formal power of attorney. It is also possible to alert local money transfer outlets (Western Union, MoneyGram) so that they will not serve a vulnerable person.

We should all be doing what we can to stop criminals from identifying and robbing vulnerable people in our neighbourhood.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall