

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 Bereavement

Number 26 in a series of notes on important issues.

The loss of a loved one is sometimes a topic for writers and poets. Feelings of grief or loss, perhaps mixed with regret, guilt or even anger, can be all pervasive and persist for a very long time – far longer than friends, neighbours and relatives realise. The most stable and world-wise individual can be thrown off balance by bereavement even if it is not sudden or unexpected. This introduces vulnerability. Criminals know this is the case, read newspaper announcements of recent deaths and seek to profit from them.

In the late summer of 2017, a lady received a telephone call from ‘Sergeant Woodleigh of New Scotland Yard, Fraud Department’, who told her that her bank account had been compromised and was being used by criminal gangs. She fell for this ploy and was totally taken in. She was told to protect her savings by withdrawing all her cash. A courier would collect it so that it could be placed into a protected police account. She withdrew £6,000 from her bank and handed it over to a motorbike courier sent by ‘Sergeant Woodleigh’.

The lady’s husband had died two weeks before the incident. She was at a particularly low point in her life. Her grief had served to mask the instincts that might otherwise have alerted her to the scam. Of course, she had given her address for the courier to collect the cash. The criminals had her address and, knowing that she was vulnerable, widowed and alone, possibly (we cannot be sure) visited her home one evening a few days later. Certainly, a car pulled up outside her house, three men got out and approached the door. Fortunately, a neighbour was outside watching. The men realised they were being observed, got back into the car and drove off at speed.

It was then that the lady realised that something was not quite right. She made enquiries and found that ‘Sergeant Woodleigh of New Scotland Yard Fraud Department’ did not exist. The police, her children and her bank were alerted. When she made the original withdrawal, the bank had asked her about it since it was unusual and a large sum for her to withdraw. It appears that the criminals told her to say that it was to pay for her late husband’s funeral expenses!

Here is another victim of heartless crime, who could so easily be us, one of our relatives or somebody that we know or lives near us. The story may differ because the criminals are very clever and can come up with many different scams. The point for us to remember is that bereavement can have the effect of creating vulnerability where there was no vulnerability before. All of us have a duty to look out for vulnerable people.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall