

'It was predatory behaviour': Elder abuse rises



Tom Gillespie | 29th Jun 2017 5:00 AM



Mrs Pat Martin was ripped off by a finance advisor. TASC acted on her behalf and the situation was eventually resolved. June 2017

Bev Lacey

PAT Martin's predator was someone she trusted - a man who claimed he was looking out for her best interests.

He promised to sort out her finances while she cared for her late husband Brian during the final stages of his life.

But Mrs Martin nearly lost tens of thousands of dollars to an advisor through a dodgy annuity fund, and in doing so became yet another victim of elder abuse in Toowoomba.

"I felt it was predatory behaviour and he did try to make the most out of us," she said.

Elder abuse, which involves the physical, verbal, emotional or financial control or mistreatment of a senior citizen, has continued to climb in the Garden City and across Queensland.

The latest State Government statistics revealed reports of elder abuse increased by nearly 25 per cent in 2015-16 in the Darling Downs, while The Advocacy and Support Centre spoke with nearly 400 victims during that time.

Mrs Martin's problems began when she was convinced to sign a new annuity agreement by an advisor to help manage her funds as Mr Martin's health deteriorated.

"Somehow, he'd talked us into having an annuity and so I thought we'd need it - he assured me it was the best he could do," she said.

"But it turned out, when I did some figures that we'd invested \$75,000 and were only getting \$73,000 back over time.

"I confronted him and he wasn't very happy about it."

On top of the threat of losing \$25,000 if she pulled out of the agreement, Mrs Martin found out the advisor was taking hundreds of dollars out of the account a year without telling her.

"When I confronted him, he said, 'don't tell me you don't trust me' - that was the treatment I got. There was an element of bullying," she said.

A call to the Elder Abuse Helpline put her in touch with TASC, which helped recover the money and saved Mrs Martin from paying interest on it.

Social service coordinator Terri-ann Dwyer said the organisation dealt with hundreds of cases every year, with all types of abuse reported.



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TASC advocacy and social service co-ordinator Terri-Ann Dwyer talks about elder abuse instances in Toowoomba, Wednesday, June 21, 2017.

Kevin Farmer

She said elderly people were particularly vulnerable, especially when the perpetrator was their own family member.

"There are a number of aspects to elder abuse, including psychological, verbal abuse and financial control," Mrs Dwyer said.

"There are decreased opportunities for socialisation (for seniors) and decreased mobility, and it means we have a group of

people who don't have a level of transparency," Mrs Dwyer said.

"There is a huge under-reporting, and the number of people that TASC sees where elder abuse is increasing, but they are more concerned with keeping the relationship."



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Elder abuse stats not good enough: TASC advocacy and social service co-ordinator Terri-Ann Dwyer says our community can do better when it comes to elder abuse in Toowoomba.

"There was one situation where a gentleman's wife had just passed away," she said.

"The step-daughter was the couple's EPOA and demanded that he go straight into a nursing home just outside Toowoomba.

"He was admitted to a nursing home without money or identification.

"TASC came in, and we found out he had no access to substantial financial assets - she had taken control of everything.

"We hear people tell us for the first time that they have been raped, that they've been physically assaulted."

If you or someone you know might be experiencing elder abuse, you can call TASC on [4616 9700](tel:46169700) or the Elder Abuse Helpline on [1300 651 192](tel:1300651192).

The Chronicle

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