

Case study

Tackling Adult Elder Abuse in Norfolk: financial abuse

In June 2020, a 47 year-old woman was given an immediate two year custodial sentence, having stolen over £80,000 from her elderly mother, who suffers from dementia.

When the allegation of financial abuse was initially reported to Norfolk's Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the victim was visited jointly by Police and Social Services.

Norfolk County Council's Adult Social Services worked with the lead agency in the case, Norfolk Constabulary, to ensure a successful prosecution of the offender.

This was a complex family situation in which very distinctive familial lines had been drawn, so it needed to be handled very sensitively. It must be very difficult for a mother to decide that her daughter is guilty of financial abuse. For the previous ten years, the accused had held Lasting Power of Attorney over her mother's finances, but the victim's son was now providing care and financial support to the victim.

The Safeguarding Practice Consultant was able to assist the locality Social Worker in supporting the victim. Mindful of not leading the interviewee to recall events and being patient enough to give her time to recall facts, they were able to help her to give her views.

Both the assessment and the social worker's professional opinion were then used to provide evidence for the prosecution in this case. Because of the complex family situation, the case required very delicate handling to ensure that safeguarding was effective for the victim.

During the sentencing, the Judge said the daughter had "perpetuated, over a number of years, a sustained, dishonest breach of trust and treated [her] mother's bank account as [her] own to spend on [her]self".

The daughter was given an immediate custodial sentence of two years.

This case highlights partnership working at its best. Norfolk County Council shared information quickly and both ensured the safeguarding of a very vulnerable adult and provided valuable evidence for the prosecution of the offender, so that a custodial sentence was secured.

The result of this case sends out a warning to those families with Lasting Power of Attorney that, should they not fulfil their duties and act in the best interests for the person they are protecting, action will be taken.

***The Norfolk Constabulary Adult Abuse Investigation Unit (AAIU) was set up in 2001 to investigate allegations of abuse against vulnerable adults and was the first of its kind in the UK. The unit works closely with local partner agencies such as social services and health providers to investigate offences and safeguard adults from abuse. The abuse can be physical, financial, sexual or even emotional.**