

## PREVENTING SCAMS AIMED AT ELDERS

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The elderly have always been the target of scam artists and the current recession seems to have exacerbated the situation. Recently, a resident in a CALA member community fell victim to one of these scams. The resident received a phone call from a young man posing as her grandson. He told her that he was in Canada, that he had gotten into trouble with the law there due to a mix up, and was in jail. He asked if she could wire him money so that he could post bond and clear up the matter. She wired him a significant amount of money. Of course it turned out that the call was not from her grandson, who was neither in trouble nor in Canada.

When I told a friend about the above incident, his response was, "How could anyone fall for this? How could she not recognize that the voice was not that of her grandson?" Unfortunately, it is way too easy to pull off this sort of a scam. These calls are often made late at night to a person who is elderly and whose hearing may be somewhat compromised. She has been awakened from a deep sleep, is still groggy and the reception is a bit fuzzy. Then maybe add in the possibility of mild cognitive impairment. She answers the phone and the voice on the other end simply says, "Grandma?" Her natural response is, "Is that you Justin? What's the matter?" At this point she's hooked. "Grandma, I'm in jail in Canada. There's been a mix-up." Now, you can add shock to her hearing impairment, grogginess and MCI, and he's reeling her in. "What do you need me to do?" "I need \$2000 so that I can post bond and get out of jail."

The fact is that this is the sort of scam that virtually anyone can fall for, and the frail elderly are particularly vulnerable. A few years ago there was a different and less costly scam, but one that was even easier to fall for. A voice mail message would be left saying "Your son had an accident. He's in the hospital." And then it would leave a phone number to call. When the person called the number, the person answering did not speak English and they would be put on hold and passed around to various other people who spoke little or no English. By the time the victim gave up in frustration they had unknowingly wracked up hundreds of dollars in long distance call charges to an off shore phone company.

If you learn that one of your residents has been a victim of this type of scam, you must report it to the police and the ombudsman as suspected elder abuse. You must also report it to DSS on the unusual incident reporting form. Just as importantly, when this sort of incident occurs, you should take steps to protect other residents. It is important to have systems in place to notify your residents of what has transpired and also to notify resident families. In addition,

it would be helpful to notify CALA so that it can spread the word to other providers.

Finally, you may wish to consider taking a proactive approach. Many local police departments have programs designed to alert people to current scams and provide general advise on red flags. A number of providers have brought these programs to their communities and have reported that they have been well-received by residents and family members, as well as staff. Scam victims are by no means confined to the elderly.

### Are You Receiving CALA's Updates?

In an effort to streamline communications and not overload your inbox, CALA has begun a bi-weekly CALA Update. Look for it every other Wednesday. If you've been receiving CALA Alerts, you'll now receive the Update. If you've not been receiving the Alerts, send your email address to Haty Pietrasz at hap@CAassistedliving.org.



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