

# Financial Exploitation: A Risk for Isolated Seniors

Recently at a community meeting we were sharing brief stories about the joys and challenges of aging. After initially declining to speak, a young woman told a troubling story about her elderly aunt with whom she was very close.

A few months ago she began noticing that sometimes her aunt appeared

a man from her church began volunteering to give her rides. He soon became a frequent visitor at her house. Upon meeting him, her niece noticed that he was very dismissive and abrasive towards her aunt, even in front of others. She expressed her concerns to her aunt, who refused to believe that a fellow churchgoer might have malicious motives.

Eventually the man, who lived in a neighboring state, persuaded her aunt to sell her house and move in with him. She changed her will, leaving everything to her new companion. When her niece visited, her aunt seemed very unhappy about her situation but felt there was nothing she could do. The young woman tearfully

confused about where she was. Soon her aunt's doctor diagnosed that she was in an early stage of dementia and persuaded her to stop driving. This left her isolated and unhappy as she had few friends and no way to get around. Then

asked the question, "Isn't there someone or some group out there that should have intervened before this all happened?" I had no answer, but promised to do some research.

I reached out to a clinical utable agency that could

factor for exploitation. She added that families could bring exploitation charges through the Division of Elderly Affairs or a local police department, but the outcome would be uncertain depending on the situation.

This story illustrates why we need to encourage more mutual aid efforts for seniors such as the Providence Village. These groups can provide a valuable referral service that helps its members connect with service providers, both paid and volunteer, whose backgrounds have been vetted. As the "age wave" of seniors grows, we must do more to help each other remain safely in the community.

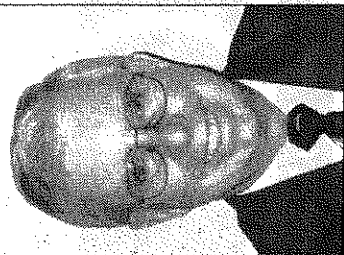
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social worker who works with adult children and their aging parents. She said this type of financial exploitation is very prevalent and a severe problem, the most common form of elderly abuse. She said that even when they have mild dementia, "many seniors' ability to discriminate about people is lousy." She added, "I hate to say this, but financial exploitation of wealthy older church mem-

have linked her to transportation services, she might not have been so vulnerable. She mentioned that low-income elders who can't afford to hire agency providers face a greater risk when hiring people "off the street" to help with tasks, unless they can find a way to screen them. She agreed that being connected to other informed neighbors can help, and that being isolated and alone is a major risk

**On the Senior Agenda**



**By William F. Flynn Jr.**