

THE crivener



Mable Elmore, Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors' Services and Long-Term Care

BC Notaries
Association



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Seniors

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RECOVERING FROM CON ARTISTS:

Seniors Share Their Stories



Jessie Sutherland

A 90-year-old woman receives a phone call from an agitated young man who identifies himself as her grandson. He is asking for her help. He needs \$10,000 to get out of jail. After she sends the money—her last \$10,000—she learns her grandson was never in jail and had not called her for assistance.

A door-to-door salesman convinces an 82-year-old man that his roof needs fixing. A few days and \$20,000 later, he discovers his roof did not need work and that in fact the “repairs” actually damaged his roof.

A 68-year-old senior applies for the part-time job she saw advertised in the paper, only to become the victim of identity theft because she provided her SIN number and driver’s licence information to the prospective employer.

The details of each story are different, but each situation resulted in the loss of money and certainly the betrayal of trust.

During a Finding Home™ dialogue called “How To Spot A Wolf In Sheep’s Clothing,” a group of seniors shared their experiences about con artists, the shame and humiliation they felt afterward and their road to recovery.

1. Ironically, the first step to trusting people again is to learn to trust yourself. Understand that in the future, if you listen to your own inner voice, you will be able to trust yourself and your choices. In almost all cases, the victims of a scam can remember having “a funny gut

feeling” or sensing warning signals—red flags, so to speak—that they ignored.

The details of each story are different, but each situation resulted in the loss of money and certainly the betrayal of trust.

2. It can be tempting to blame yourself . . . after all, you were swindled. But the blame is squarely on the con artist.

3. It is important to understand what made you vulnerable in the first place. Two risk factors are loneliness and unfulfilled dreams. Con artists may tune into your feelings and give you the impression they genuinely care about you.

4. The unpleasant occurrence of falling prey to a con artist can be an opportunity to strengthen your appreciation of yourself and expand your network of friends to include people who will genuinely value your friendship. Awareness + Action = Achievement!

5. The next step is what I call “transforming pain into purpose.” Some experiences are too painful to simply “move on” or “forgive and forget.” When I flip-flop from the distress of being a victim into fantasies of revenge, I know it is necessary to transform my pain into a positive purpose. I was a victim of fraud in 2007. From that experience, I created the “How to Spot a Wolf In Sheep’s Clothing” dialogues.

Dialogue participants share stories and generate their own strategies to help them prevent and/or recover from fraud and other scams. During one session, participants identified the top-10 red flags that indicate you may be dealing with a “wolf.”

The dialogues generate many positive comments from participants. One senior noted that it’s important to remember that you did the best you could at the time you were duped. Another offered that agonizing events can become catalysts for growth.

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Through the dialogues, seniors make new friends, learn about community resources, and create ideas for projects and programs that matter to them.

The Initiative has partnered with the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia on a regional Elders Financial Abuse Awareness Dialogue Project, funded by the Government of Canada (HRSDC New Horizons for Seniors Program).

We also are working with

- Immigrant Services Society and Afghan seniors,
- South Vancouver Neighbourhood House and Punjabi seniors, and
- the John Braithwaite Community Centre/North Shore Neighbourhood House and multicultural seniors.

To learn more about Jessie Sutherland's work to address complex social problems, including elder financial abuse, visit www.InterculturalStrategies.ca. ▲

Jessie Sutherland, MA, is the Director of Intercultural Strategies and the founder of the Finding Home Initiative (aka the Belonging Matters Framework).

About The Finding Home™ Initiative

Global changes in the economy and in the environment and an increasing senior, newcomer, and urban Indigenous population are leaving many people yearning for belonging—a sense of home.

The Initiative supports individuals and neighbourhoods to foster that sense of belonging, build inclusive communities, and increase effectiveness in responding to personal, local, and global challenges.

Our Services

- Seniors and Neighbourhood Dialogues
- Community Engagement and Diversity Training
- Keynote Addresses and Public Speaking

Results

- Seniors are learning to create security for themselves and to identify con artists.
- Youth are connecting with each other and making valuable contributions to their neighbourhoods.
- Indigenous people and newcomers are finding ways to connect and learn about each other.
- Neighbourhood Houses are learning how to engage diverse communities and foster a sense of belonging.