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Spotting and Stopping Elder Fraud and Abuse

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Victims are often isolated and, even with anonymous tips, police may be unable to gain access. Successful intervention generally happens when there is a 911 call. Plus, knowledge that a family member or caregiver is not behaving as usual may also make some reluctant to reach out for relief. In the cases he has investigated, Haggard has noticed that those harming elders would never normally behave in an abusive manner, but are often being driven by an addiction to alcohol or drugs.

And even when police do connect, the person in trouble may still refuse to take action. "Many elders are unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement because they're afraid that the alternative means being separated from their families and placed in nursing homes," he says. This

hesitancy is particularly frustrating because there are trustworthy resources available to help. Contra Costa County operates several hotlines, including the Senior Fraud Fighter Bureau, Senior Legal Services and Seniors Against Investment Fraud.

"If we can get them into the system and work with Adult Protective Services and provide a pathway to sobriety – or maybe even skills in handling finances," Haggard explains, families can turn challenging situations around. "The object is certainly not to punish. It's to try to stop it and repair it – and heal the family."

The point of all this, reads the Adult Protective Services website, is to keep seniors independent and in their homes as long as possible. "One thing APS cannot do is take an elder or dependent

adult out of the home and place them in 'protective custody.' All services provided by APS are voluntary and can be declined by the elder or dependent adult." If need be, the reporting party's identity can be kept confidential.

"If you see a recurrent pattern, it warrants an investigation," urges Haggard. "The problem needs to end. It's a serious and severe crime."

To learn more about how you can keep the seniors in your life safe, call Orinda police at: (925) 254-6820, or visit the State Bar of California: www.calbar.ca.gov/Public/Pamphlets/ElderAbuse.aspx. To contact Adult Protective Services in Contra Costa County, call: (925) 646-2854, or visit: www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=914.

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