



Practice Note 37

See Off Scams

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Topic Areas: Home Safety, Personal Safety

Project Background and Aims

‘See Off Scams’ is an ongoing awareness-raising intervention led by Dundee Community Safety Partnership which was launched in August 2010. Scams may include cold calling or rogue traders who target older people charging outrageous prices for shoddy work (or no work at all); scam mail attempting to trick recipients into sending money or bank details to claim a prize or lift a curse/bring good luck; and telephone scams requesting bank or personal details, or payment for an unpaid bill.

The initiative aimed to raise awareness of the issue of scams/bogus callers to professionals working in the community, volunteers working in the community and the general public. See Off Scams also sought to highlight the choices of reporting any such incidences, and equip people to protect themselves from such scam/bogus callers.

Actual recorded incidences of people being victims of scams are low in Dundee, although anecdotal evidence suggests that it is an increasing concern. Complaints of scams had been received through Tayside Police, Community Safety Wardens and the local press and, in addition, disclosure during Community Safety events suggested it was a local problem. It was therefore decided that Dundee would hold a seminar to raise awareness.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Further details on the initiative are available from the Community Safety Worker or Home Safety Officer at Dundee Community Safety Partnership.

Outcomes

National 9: 'We live our lives free from crime, disorder and danger'.
Local 7: 'Our communities will be safe and feel safe'.

Resources

Funding: Dundee Community Safety Partnership
Partners: Dundee City Council's: Home Safety Officer (Environment Department), Community Safety Team, Trading Standards Team, Handy Persons Service, Adult protection team, Anti Social Behaviour Team along with Tayside Police, Victim Support, Claverhouse Group, Crimestoppers, Celebrate Age Network, Age Concern.

Activities

Early on it was decided to carry out a survey of vulnerable people within Dundee and therefore gain greater insight into the nature and extent of scams within the local authority area. A questionnaire was designed (see Appendix), requesting information on the extent to which people had been a victim of scams/doorstop crime, how it affected their lives and if the scam was reported to Police. The questionnaire also sought to identify the most appropriate means of prevention.

The survey was piloted in September 2010, with 20 questionnaires distributed at an older people's safety event. Subsequent changes were made to its design as a result of feedback given and the final questionnaire was distributed to six over-50 clubs and safety events. 191 questionnaires were completed and returned, with responses indicating that scams were an area of concern and further information was required. Follow-up one-to-one interviews and a focus group were also carried out with a small number of respondents, exploring in more depth the impacts of scams.

The survey findings indicated that there is a problem with scams, doorstep caller and rogue traders around Dundee. Many respondents indicated that they had in one way or another been approached by someone trying to do some work or sell them something on the doorstep. Other reported scams included a phone call informing the recipient that they had won a prize.

The survey findings also indicated that scams were more commonplace than official statistics suggest, yet are reported very infrequently perhaps because people often do not realise they have been a victim of crime. Information on scams was a key requirement for respondents – even though this material already existed from a variety of sources such as the Office of Fair Trading.

Based on these findings Dundee Community Safety Partnership decided to hold separate seminars for professionals/volunteers and members of the public.

Existing documentation on scams was perused, with key points collated to produce information leaflets explaining how to identify possible scams and how to obtain further information. The leaflets included additional information unavailable in existing publications - adding, for example, local information and key contacts for advice. The leaflets were printed by the Community Safety Team with funding from the CSP.

The seminar for professionals/volunteers was hosted at the Marryat Hall in Dundee on the morning of 25th October 2010. This included presentations from Trading Standards, Tayside Police, Crimestoppers and Victim Support. Later on in the afternoon a condensed version of the morning session was presented to members of the public. Tayside Police and Victim Support adapted their presentations to suit the audience. For example, tips to avoid scams were explored such as getting written quotes for jobs to ensure that final payment is in keeping with the actual work carried out.

The afternoon seminar was advertised by placing posters\leaflets in local community centres and libraries, leaflets sent to older people groups and emails to contact lists\department heads to disseminate. Local press ran an article about the issues with scams which also highlighted the event. An article and picture ran in the paper after the event.

Delegate packs were distributed at the event, which included a selection of leaflets including materials from See Off Scams and the Office of Fair Trading - and 'Beware of Doorstep Callers' window stickers. The information packs are distributed during Home Safety visits by Tayside Fire and Rescue and supplies are held at all Tayside Police stations. The packs are also available for issue at talks, presentations and events by various organisations involved in community safety.

Impact

The morning seminar was attended by 45 professionals, although over 80 people had originally booked and reminder emails were sent out a week prior to the event. Attendees were drawn from a diverse range of agencies including police, social work, carers, community representatives, nurses, voluntary sector and sheltered housing staff. 120 members of the public attended the afternoon drop-in session.

Over 3000 packs have subsequently been distributed so far by Tayside Fire and Rescue and Tayside Police. Awareness has thus been raised amongst professionals, volunteers and members of the general public.

Scams and bogus callers issues are now included in personal safety and home safety presentations by the Community Safety Team and Home Safety Officer. Moreover, the Anti Social Behaviour Team has agreed to extend their helpline to allow the public to report scams and bogus caller incidents.

An information sharing protocol has been implemented to enable intelligence gathered regarding scams and bogus callers to be imparted to the public by the following day via Tayside Police, Community Safety Wardens, Sheltered Housing Wardens, Housing Staff, Communities Staff and Social Work Staff who provide services to people in their homes.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

Perhaps the most significant finding from the survey was the impact of scams on the victim of crime. Scams were attributed as causing diminished confidence, anxiety, depression and feelings of inadequacy and it was noted that one-to-one interviews and focus group provided a degree of comfort to victims of scams. **This** need for support underlines the importance in scams being reported and followed up on by appropriate services.

Continued reinforcement of scams and bogus caller issues will be provided through peer education to older adults in the community, with the utilisation of role play and drama presentations.

See Off Scam packs are also issued at Council and private sheltered housing complexes by partner agencies including Tayside Fire and Rescue and Celebrate Age Network. Materials are annually updated during 'Scamnesty Month', which takes place in February each year.

Also, a Healthy Home Check scheme is under discussion between partners to produce a generic checklist to reduce the number of staff visiting members of the public. It is envisaged that the See off Scams packs will be included in this generic checklist.

Summary

See Off Scams is an awareness-raising initiative led by Dundee Community Safety Partnership. The project was launched at all-day event for practitioners and the public in 2010. See Off Scams information packs are distributed through a variety of avenues: Tayside Fire and Rescue carrying out Home Safety Checks, display in Tayside Police stations and presentations by members of the Dundee City Council Community Safety Team.

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**APPENDIX
SEE OFF SCAMS SURVEY**

1. Do you ever feel worried about opening your door to someone you don't know?

No Yes - Sometimes Yes - All the Time

2. When you are at home and someone comes to your door would you?

- a. Just open the door
- b. Use a peep hole
- c. Use a chain
- d. Other _____

3. Have you or anyone you know experienced someone trying to trick their way into the home in the last 12 months?

- No - Don't know anyone
- Yes - Myself
- Yes - Someone I know

If yes were they:

- a. Offering to do some work/a job
- b. Trying to sell something on the doorstep
- c. Phoning to say you've won something
- d. Asking for money e.g. bus fare
- e. other _____

Was this reported this to the police?

Yes No Don't Know

4. How many advertisement/charity/prize winning letters/emails etc do you receive in a week?

0-5 6-10 10+

5. Have you ever sent money to:

- a. Claim a prize
- b. A lottery win
- c. A clairvoyant, etc.
- d. To pay a fake bill

6. Would you like more information on safer door step behaviour\bogus callers etc?

NO

YES

How would you like this information?

leaflet email local community event

other\suggestion _____

Please provide contact details:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email address _____

Anything else you would like to say on the subject of bogus callers/scam mail etc
