

Clarissa¹, in her 80s and living alone, had relied on a male friend for advice on property repairs and maintenance work around her home. After her friend passed away she had to cope with managing her home by herself.

So it seemed to be a stroke of luck when two men knocked at her door offering to take care of a problem on her roof. Over the next three and a half years they developed a trusting relationship – the two men coming back repeatedly to undertake repairs or improvement work they said needed doing to Clarissa's bungalow.

The price each job got progressively more expensive, until one day Clarissa's building society questioned why she wanted to withdraw £32,000 from her account. When she told them it was to pay workmen for replacing her guttering the building society manager called Trading Standards. By that time the two men had charged Clarissa just under £95,000 for work around her home, but she was absolutely adamant they could be trusted completely.

Trading Standards Officers spent time with Clarissa, gently bringing her round to the idea that the two men she had considered to be like sons might in fact be taking advantage of her financially. Trading Standards employed an expert building surveyor to check whether the work had in fact needed doing, how well it had been carried out and how much it was actually worth. The surveyor concluded no more than £14,000 of valuable work had been carried out. Trading Standards tracked the men down and obtained a Court Order restraining their bank accounts, preventing either of them from spending Clarissa's money.

Warwickshire Trading Standards charged both men with fraud offences and they were sent to prison. As part of the prosecution case Trading Standards ensured Clarissa and two other victims were fully refunded with all the money they had paid.

After they came out of prison, the investigating officer delivered a letter to Clarissa written by one of the men ensuring her the experience had taught him about the effect his crime had on others. He apologised for breaking her trust, saying he "felt like the lowest of the low". Trading Standards Officers worked with both men, giving them practical advice and assistance on how to go straight.

Although this incident undoubtedly shook her confidence at the time, with the right support Clarissa has been able to put it behind her. She continues to live independently in her own home.

¹ Name has been changed