

Catherine, an 85 year old lady living with dementia, lived alone. She received support from her son and daughter-in-law, who regularly called in to visit her.

Her family gradually became aware of the extent to which she was responding to scam mail. Her house was full of scam letters – letters telling her she'd won a prize, letters telling her she'd won a massive sum of money, letters from "clairvoyants" telling her they could cure all her problems... all of which just required her to send an admin or processing fee to claim whatever it was the scammers were offering. And Catherine was responding to them – sending hundreds of pounds each month together with more personal information about herself. Scammers buy and sell customer details. Because Catherine had filled out her phone number on some of the "prize draw" entry forms, she was also being contacted by scammers over the telephone.

Catherine's family were at their wits' end. Her daughter-in-law had removed 27 sacks of scam mail from the house but didn't know how to stop the scammers taking payments, much less whether any of the money could be reclaimed.

Warwickshire Trading Standards worked with Catherine and her daughter-in-law to immediately stop further payments being made to scammers, as well as medium term solutions to keep Catherine safe from further financial exploitation. Measures put in place included redirecting Catherine's post to her son and daughter-in-law, registering a Lasting Power of Attorney and installing a nuisance call blocker that allowed only calls from trusted telephone numbers to get through to Catherine.

Warwickshire Trading Standards sorted the vast pile of scam mail taken from Catherine's house. In some cases Trading Standards Officers were able to persuade companies to refund money taken from Catherine for inappropriate purchases. For example she had been persuaded to buy numerous "health supplements". Not only were they overpriced and of questionable value to Catherine's health, but the vast quantity supplied couldn't possibly have been used before their expiry date. Trading Standards secured a £1,200 refund from the company concerned. Many of the scams were clearly operating from abroad, so these were referred to enforcement agencies in the Netherlands. This international cooperation resulted in the closure of 178 Dutch PO Boxes which had been used to scam millions of pounds from UK victims.

Catherine's age and health condition inevitably led to her needing a greater level of care. However, giving her the right support to protect her from financial abuse enabled her to live independently in her own home for as long as possible.