

March 26, 2015

[Richard Eisenberg](#) , Contributor

At a Senate Special Committee on Aging hearing last month on ways to [attack the scourge of elder financial abuse](#), Page Ulrey of the King County Prosecutor's Office in Seattle, Wash., urged more prosecutors, detectives and victim advocates specializing in elder abuse to work together. "Only a small fraction of [elder financial exploitation] crimes are properly investigated and prosecuted," she said.

Today, I heard about a novel, new program doing what Ulrey recommended.

### **A Unique Elder Abuse Partnership**

The [Elder Financial Safety Center](#), based in Dallas, Texas, opened in May 2014. And based on what I heard from the six women whose employers partner on it, speaking at a panel at the [Aging in America Conference](#) of the American Society on Aging in Chicago, I'm hoping other elder abuse victim advocates around the country create local replicas.

One reason it's been so hard to [curb elder financial abuse](#) — what Kathleen Quinn, executive director of the National Adult Protective Services Association, described at the Senate hearing as "rampant, largely invisible, expensive and lethal" — is the silo factor. The police, Adult Protective Services departments, DAs, courts and consumer advocates tend to deal with the problem independent of each other.

The 13-person Elder Financial Safety Center, funded by a \$4 million, five-year grant from the W.W. Caruth Jr. Foundation at Communities Foundation of Texas, has three key Dallas County players with shared goals working together: The Senior Source, a Dallas nonprofit for aging services; the Dallas County Probate Courts and the District Attorney's Office.

### **Dealing With The 3 Ps of Elder Abuse**

By partnering and using a shared database, they team up on the three Ps of elder financial abuse: Prevention, Protection and Prosecution.

The Center offers victims financial, benefits and insurance counseling; money-management services; employment services and debt management through the Consumer Credit Counseling Services; it helps find appropriate [guardians](#); gets cases investigated by the DA through a new elder abuse unit there and trains law enforcement.

(**MORE:** [Protecting Seniors Against Financial Scams](#))

"[Financial security](#) is the gateway to public safety for older adults," said Molly Bogen, President and CEO of The Senior Source at the panel. "Older adults whose financial security is compromised are more likely to succumb to safety challenges, such as home safety, housing neglect and scams."

Added Amy Croft, assistant district attorney for the County of Dallas: "We are changing the way of dealing with elderly victims of crime."

The collaboration is already showing impressive results. According to Katie Dickinson, the Elder Financial Safety Center's chief administrative officer, in its first eight months:

- Clients using the center's prevention services are now seeing a \$275 monthly increase in their income, on average. And those who secured employment from using the Center's services increased their income by \$12,493 a year, on average.
- 99% of incapacitated individuals over 50 in Dallas County now have guardians.
- There has been an 18% increase in the number of local indictments involving elder financial abuse and a 250% increase in the number of first- and second-degree felonies referred to the DA that have been investigated by enforcement.
- There's been a 66% increase in the number of elder financial abuse complaints investigated by the DA's office. (Thanks to the Center's grant, the DA now has one staffer working full-time on elder financial abuse cases.)
- And 100% of seniors involved in prosecution services have been referred to the Center for assessment and intervention, when that was appropriate.

As you might have heard, the 2015 [White House Conference on Aging](#) has made "elder justice" one of its four tracks. I'm hoping it'll shine a spotlight on the Elder Financial Safety Center and spearhead a movement to produce similar centers across the country.

It's time.

*Richard Eisenberg is the senior Web editor of the Money & Security and Work & Purpose channels of [Next Avenue](#) and Assistant Managing Editor for the site and a contributor to [Forbes](#). Follow him on Twitter [@richeis315](#).*