

Pair lied about being at mosque during terror attack

Blair Ensor14:28, Jun 28 2019

Two people lied that they were at one of the mosques during the Christchurch terror attack so they could claim a share of the millions donated to the victims.

The pair, who stood to gain \$17,000 each, escaped charges and were instead warned by police, who would not say why they chose not to prosecute them.

A Muslim community group says there are shooting victims in desperate need of financial support and it's "extremely disappointing" people tried to gain access to the money illegitimately.

About \$10.9 million was donated to a fund established by Victim Support following the March 15 attack on two Christchurch mosques, which claimed the lives of 51 people and injured dozens.



GEORGE HEARD/STUFF

A gunman fatally shot dead 51 people during the March 15 attack on two Christchurch mosques.

READ MORE:

* [Christchurch terror attack trauma for some not covered by Victim Support payments](#)

* [Drone footage shows scale of floral tributes to Christchurch shooting victims](#)

* **'Welcome, brother': A community that stressed peace is undone by violence**

Victim Support distributed the money based on an official police victim list, which carries the names of nearly 300 people. The list includes immediate family members of the dead, people who were in the confines of either mosque when the gunman was present and those who were shot at in a public place.

Members of the Muslim community have raised concerns about people trying to access the donated money illegitimately.

Police this week said they were aware of the concerns and followed up on information they were provided.

MORE FROM
BLAIR ENSOR • SENIOR JOURNALIST - INVESTIGATIONS
blair.ensor@stuff.co.nz

Two people had received written warnings for "making a false claim that they were present at the time of the shootings", a police spokeswoman said.

She did not give further details about what happened or say why the pair were not prosecuted.

"We will not be providing comment on specific charging decisions."

Police were confident they had identified everyone who was at the Masjid Al Noor on Deans Ave and the Linwood Masjid in Linwood Ave at the time of the shootings, the spokeswoman said.

She would not say how investigators confirmed people's presence at either mosque, but said "there were multiple steps taken and we are satisfied that in every case we can be certain as to whether they were there or not".



DAVID WALKER/STUFF

Zuhair Darwish's brother Kamel was killed in the March 15 terror attack in Christchurch.

Victim Support took a ratio-based approach to distributing the donated money. [The final round of payments to the victims was announced on Thursday.](#)

In total, the bereaved received \$90,000, people with gunshot wounds received \$51,000 and those who were in the confines of either mosque when the gunman was present received \$17,000.

A Victim Support spokeswoman said overwhelmingly people had acted with "honesty and integrity" when it came to trying to access the donated money.

"We've found that where concerns have been raised with us or a claim has been declined, it is generally the result of other factors, such as language barriers meaning victims can find it difficult to understand what support they can access or others are entitled to receive."

Tony Green, a spokesman for the Muslim Association of Canterbury, said it was "extremely disappointing" people had tried to access the money illegitimately.

"Money needs to go where it was intended and is most needed," he said.

Zuhair Darwish, whose brother Kamel was killed at the Masjid Al Noor, said he suspected some people might try to access the money illegitimately.

"Shame on them," Darwish said. "I think it's criminal to lie to get some money that's not for you. They need to be charged."

It is not the first time people in New Zealand have tried to illegally access donated money in the aftermath of a catastrophe.

In the wake of the Christchurch earthquakes, police prosecuted several people who [fraudulently obtained grants from a Red Cross fund](#).

Stuff