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***News Release***

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**Gift Aid fraudster spent more than £76k cruising the world**

A charity treasurer who tried to steal more than £330,000 in a Gift Aid repayment fraud has been jailed for three years.

Dale Hicks, 35, of Cheadle, Stoke-on-Trent, abused his position at a Staffordshire based ex-offenders charity by lodging a string of false claims, an HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) investigation found.

The claims were made on behalf of the Life Keys (LK) charity, which was set up inside a Midland prison in 2009 to rehabilitate ex-offenders.

Hicks, who is unemployed, made the claims between 2014 and 2016. He diverted the money into his own bank account, spending some of the proceeds on luxury holidays.

The innocent charity was unaware of Hicks’ activity and only became suspicious when large sums started arriving into the accounts, before they were moved on. Hicks lied about the payments but was asked to step down from his voluntary role in March 2016.

Hicks claimed more than £270,000 but the remaining £62,000 was withheld whilst investigations were carried out. Hicks spent at least £76,000 on cruises and other holidays.

He posted about many of the trips on social media and uploaded a video diary of his far-flung travels, which included virtual video tours of Presidential Suites, access to exclusive lounges and meals at the Captain’s table.

He spent £24,854 on just one cruise after booking himself and seven other people into the Presidential Suite on a ten-day tour in October 2016. Earlier in the same year he also spent nearly £6,000 on a tour of China and nearly £1,500 on an exclusive lodge at Center Parcs.

Nick Stone, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“This was not a momentary lapse. This was persistent, it was calculated and it was despicable. He betrayed the trust of colleagues at a genuine charity that was trying to help criminals turn their lives around.

“Dale Hicks spent this stolen money on himself and booked a string of luxury holidays that most hardworking people could only dream of. The taxpayer paid for these extravagant holidays, and he posted about them on social media.

“I urge anybody who knows of anyone committing any type of tax fraud to report them to HMRC [online](https://www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business), or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

HMRC launched an investigation in 2017 and discovered the amount falsely claimed would have required £1.3 million in legitimate donations. But the charity’s bank accounts showed nowhere near those amounts had been deposited.

Hicks even made false claims in the name of the charity’s chief executive, which were 30 times higher than the donations that had actually been made.

When the banking access was removed, he made two attempts to change the charity’s nominated bank account into an account under his control.

During interviews, Hicks claimed he had spent the money on good causes, including £10,000 handed to a local church and £8,000 for humanitarian aid in Romania. He also claimed that he spent the money taking “stressed out people” for dinner and on holidays.

Checks on his bank accounts proved that he spent £76,872 with just one travel firm. There was also further payments made directly to airlines and cruise companies.

Hicks was jailed for three years on 31 May 2019 at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court. He pleaded guilty to one charge of fraud by false representation and two charges of producing false documents at the same court hearing.

In jailing him for three years, the Honorary Recorder of Stoke-on-Trent, Judge Paul Glenn, said:

“You were very generous with money that was not yours to spend. You fobbed people off and you lied to cover your tracks.

“You continue to paint yourself as a latter day Robin Hood kind of figure. I reject the contention that you received no monetary benefit. This is a very significant breach of trust and it’s blindingly obvious that significant amounts related to holidays.

“The victims here are taxpayers and a number of deserving causes have been potentially deprived of funds because of your actions.”

Information about any type of tax fraud can be reported to HMRC online at [www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business](https://www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business).

**Notes for editors**

1. Dale James Hicks (DOB 21/12/1983) of Tape Street, Cheadle, Stoke-on-Trent ST10 admitted fraud on 31 May, 2019. He was sentenced at Stoke-on-Trent Crown Court. Hicks pleaded guilty to one charge of fraud by false representation, contrary to the Fraud Act (2006) between July 2014 and December 2016. He also pleaded guilty to two charges of using a false instrument with intent it be accepted as genuine, contrary to the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act (1981).
2. Gift Aid allows a charity to claim back 25p for every £1 received in donations. The main requirements are that the donor must make either a written or online Gift Aid declaration authorising the donation and must have paid at least as much in Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax in the tax year the Gift Aid claim is made in. Taxpayers can declare any charitable donations either directly to HMRC or on their Income Tax Self-Assessment returns to enable them to claim tax relief on the higher or additional rate of tax.
3. Follow HMRC’s press office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice

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