

WOMAN WHO TRAFFICKED VULNERABLE LITHUANIAN IMMIGRANTS TO UK BEFORE MAKING THEM WORK ILLEGALLY FOR HER CHARITY BUSINESS IS JAILED FOR THREE YEARS ("DAILYMAIL.CO.UK", 19-06-2014)

- **Mother-of-one Jurate Grigelyte, 53, trafficked Lithuanian nationals to the UK**
- **Workers spoke little or no English and forced to live in cramped conditions**
- **Were put to work collecting donations for Dreams Come True charity - which had no knowledge the scam and says it it 'appalled'**
- **Grigelyte charged £50 a week for a shared room in a house she also lived in**

A woman who exploited vulnerable immigrants to work door-to-door collecting for charity has been jailed for three years.

Mother-of-one Jurate Grigelyte, 53, trafficked Lithuanian nationals to the UK with the promise of work and accommodation. Many of the workers spoke little or no English and were forced to live in cramped and squalid conditions at various addresses in inner city Bristol. They went to work illegally for Grigelyte's business collecting donations from members of the public across the south west of England for the Dreams Comes True charity - being paid as little as £25 for a day's work. The charity, which helps terminally ill children, had outsourced the distribution and collection of bags to subcontractors who then used Grigelyte.

Prosecutor Rupert Lowe told Bristol Crown Court: 'Between August 2009 and November 2013 Grigelyte made a profitable business out of coaxing vulnerable Lithuanian adults over to the UK with an offer of work in the charity bag business.

'The offer to work included a certain rate of pay which seems quite reasonable by local Lithuanian standards but was well below the national minimum wage in the UK. 'She told them she would provide accommodation and would pay the cost of their travel from Lithuania. Some victims were told these costs would later be deducted from their wages while others were not told until they arrived.'

Mr Lowe said the 11 victims - two women and nine men - felt 'totally dependent' on Grigelyte for accommodation, work and food. 'They had no idea how to interact with the UK authorities and this put them in a position where she could exploit them quite ruthlessly,' he said. The court heard that Grigelyte charged them £50 a week rent for a shared room in a house she also lived in, with people working six or seven days a week.

She would also not give them keys to their accommodation and often locked them in, so if they wanted to leave they had to climb through a window. Some of the workers were alcoholics and were fined if Grigelyte caught them drinking.

'The defendant took it upon herself to impose what she called "fines" on the exploited workers of a further £50 - two full days' earnings - if for any reason they did not work on a particular day,' Mr Lowe said.

'After the deductions for travel costs, rent and fines the workers were still theoretically owed money but Grigelyte rarely paid them, save for usually inadequate amounts said to be for food. 'Many of them were reduced to attending soup kitchens for meals. Promises to pay tomorrow or next week were not kept. 'If they demanded the money owed to them they were often threatened with eviction or indeed evicted - without the money having been paid.'

Workers were forced to hand out and collect 1,000 clothing bags for the charity Dreams Come True. One victim, Vitalijus Kazilionis, told police he was owed £3,000 by Grigelyte for work he had done for her.

'Vitalijus spoke no English and so felt totally dependent on the defendant,' Mr Lowe said. 'She was the boss, controlling the house, the money and the work. On one occasion she threatened to run him over for disobeying her, adding that she didn't care about anything as she had been to prison before.'

Nicholas Clough, defending, said that Grigelyte had herself been trafficked into the UK from Lithuania to work collecting charity bags for £30 a day in Cambridgeshire before moving to Bristol. 'She accepts entirely that she had a central role and that she was responsible for those under her control,' he said.

'If there was loads of money to be made, she didn't see it and there were others above her in the chain. 'She is remorseful. An aggravating feature is that it was purely for financial gain.' Passing sentence, Judge Martin Picton told her: 'The evidence reveals a depressing picture of vulnerable people coming from Lithuania in the hope of a better life and getting nothing like it.

The charity helps terminally ill children and had outsourced the distribution of bags to subcontractors 'Once here, they were trapped, certainly economically trapped, and within the context of the belief they had when they came here.

'They were in a position where it was difficult for them to move on and that made them easy to control, and made it easy for you to profit from their labours. 'They weren't prisoners, as sometimes features in cases of this kind, but they were certainly isolated in our society and working and living in a way that civilised people should not be required to do.'

Grigelyte, who will be subjected to the Proceeds of Crime Act, was also issued with a Serious Crime Prevention Order indefinitely preventing her from running an unlawful charity bag business. Other victims included mother-of-one Ausra Aleksandravuciene, 29, Vitalijus Kirjanovas, and 32-year-old Olesa Jasinskiene.

At an earlier hearing, Grigelyte, of Easton, Bristol, admitted 10 charges of facilitating entry into the UK with a view to exploiting labour, 10 charges of trafficking around the UK and one count of forced labour. Peter Newman, chief executive of the Dreams Come True charity, told The Guardian: 'We are appalled by the crimes for which Ms Grigelyte has been convicted, which we were made aware of a few weeks ago.

'Ms Grigelyte was for a time a subcontractor of our contractor, Byronswell Ltd, to whom we outsource our bag collections.'

Tara Brady

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