



Former Adelaide Public Trustee employee jailed over deceased estate thefts

By court reporter Rebecca Opie
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A woman who stole from deceased estates while she worked at the Public Trustee office in Adelaide has been jailed over the theft of cars, cash and jewellery.

Alana Marie Bartels, 38, pleaded guilty to eight counts of abuse of public office in September last year.

The District Court heard the woman was motivated by greed and maintaining her ice addiction when she helped herself to valuable items from deceased estates over several years, dating back to 2013.

She was arrested in May 2016.

It was only during court proceedings that the extent of her offending was uncovered.

As an estate manager she stole about \$30,000 of goods including three cars, jewels, money and random items including a wooden plant stand which police found in her home at the time of her arrest.

The court heard Bartels falsified records to try and cover her tracks.

She also developed an elaborate scheme with an associate to falsely claim that some items meant for auction did not belong to the deceased estate.

One auction house paid her associate a total of \$2,446.

Bartels also used a disabled parking permit from one deceased estate to allow her to park closer to her workplace because she was always running late.

'Gross breach of trust'

In the dock, she wiped tears away as Judge Geraldine Davison handed down the sentence of more than five years' jail with a non-parole term of two-and-a-half years.

"Offending in this way represents a gross breach of trust," the judge told Bartels.

"It is not only a breach of trust against each of the estates but also against your employer Public Trustee and the public generally.

"Your offending was not just opportunistic but, on occasions, calculated and premeditated."

Judge Davison said the woman took advantage of her employer's trust and public confidence in the Public Trustee office had been undermined.

"You committed these offences knowing that, because of the trust that had been placed in you, there was a significant chance your offending would be undetected as it was for many years," she said.

"You exploited those that you were there to assist.

"You ignored the trust and acted for your own selfish benefit."

At an earlier hearing, Bartels apologised for her offending and said she was ready to be held accountable for her crimes.

Judge Davison said a suspended sentence or home detention could not be considered in the circumstances.

"It is important that sentences for offences such as this deter other people in similar positions to yourself who may be inclined to abuse their position," she said.

"It is also important the public recognise that conduct such as yours will be dealt with severely."

Bartels was ordered to pay \$24,684 in restitution, and it was noted she had already paid back \$5,000.

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PHOTO: Alana Bartels (L) was motivated by greed and fed her drug habit, the judge said.
(ABC News: Candice Prosser)

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