

Over 15,000 seek information on child sexual exploitation during awareness campaign



Minister for Children and Young People Aileen Campbell has announced that more than 15,000 people have sought information on child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the first weeks of a multi media campaign to tackle the issue.

The announcement was made on National CSE Awareness Day during a visit to Barnardo's Scotland, which is receiving funding to expand services for those at risk.

Ms Campbell said: "Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse and some young people may not be aware that they are at risk of harm.

"The first step in tackling this abhorrent crime is understanding it can happen to anyone. It can take many forms – online, through social media or on phones, or in person through exploitative and damaging relationships.

"We launched the first TV campaign in the UK to raise awareness of how it can happen, and giving parents and young people access to the information they need to prevent it.

"This Government takes child protection seriously – that's why last month we launched comprehensive review of the child protection system in Scotland, to strengthen the steps taken when children have experienced, or are at risk from harm.

"Today we have published an update of the range of actions we are taking forward now and in the future with partners including police, local government and the third sector to address this abhorrent form of child abuse. We have made great

progress and will continue to strive to protect our young people and keep them safe from harm.”

The campaign, the first of its kind in the UK, highlights how to spot the warning signs of CSE.

It is one of a range of actions the Scottish Government and partners are taking forward including:

- Funding for the Moira Anderson Foundation to increase the support for young people who have experienced child sexual abuse
- Expansion of peer education programmes to equip young people with skills to identify abusive and violent behaviours
- Action to strengthen the response to CSE, including a new framework for Child Protection Committees and guidance on identification and risk assessment
- Funding to Barnardo’s Scotland to deliver 150 community events to raise awareness of the issue
- Ensuring consistent information collection across Child Protection Committee areas
- Work to improve understanding of the scale of CSE through a new police intelligence toolkit
- Specialist support to child abuse investigations through Police Scotland’s National Child Abuse Investigation Unit – child sexual exploitation accounted for 33 per cent of the Unit’s resource hours between April 2015 and February 2016.

Martin Crewe, director, Barnardo’s Scotland said: “Today, on National Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness day, it is worth remembering that this type of sexual abuse, especially when it takes place online, can happen to any child or young person, regardless of their upbringing or home environment.

“The funding from the Scottish Government will help us develop our services for young people in Glasgow, Edinburgh and

Dundee, as well as our nationwide research and policy development programme. This work is designed to fit into the overall direction of travel set out in the updated National Action Plan on CSE, which will help make sure that there is a concerted national effort to end this form of abuse in Scotland.”

Assistant Chief Constable Malcolm Graham, Police Scotland’s Public Protection lead, said: “Child sexual exploitation is happening in Scotland and it’s happening now. Recognising the signs of exploitation early, sharing information and taking action will ensure that children are protected. This update of the CSE Action Plan comes at a crucial time as our knowledge and understanding of CSE continues to evolve.

“Young people often don’t recognise that they are being sexually exploited nor do their families or communities. And as they increasingly keep in touch with friends and organise their lives through social media and chatrooms, the online threat cannot be underestimated.

“It is imperative that we educate children, their families and communities about CSE and staying safe online. We must also share information and intelligence that will lead to the early identification of perpetrators and prevent this abuse.

“We have worked closely with Scottish Government to develop the national CSE Action Plan. We are committed to working with partners and across communities to deliver it and to reduce the risk posed by those who sexually exploit children by continually developing tactics that assist the detection and disruption of offending behaviour, in particular the continued threat posed online, in order to protect children and young people from harm.”

Children in Scotland chief executive Jackie Brock said : “This action plan shows the determination of all agencies to get to the heart of the real scale and nature of child sexual

exploitation in Scotland. If the commitments by all partners are all followed through, there will no longer be a question of avoiding the challenge or claiming child sexual exploitation couldn't happen in any of our communities.

"In addition, the plan shows a welcome commitment to investing in stronger local responses to support children, young people, their families, communities and practitioners. It can do this by preventing the underlying causes of child sexual exploitation, acting quickly when concerns emerge and tackling the behaviour and potential offending of those grooming or colluding to cause harm to children."