

Police support initiative to reduce harm and exploitation of people involved in prostitution



Police Scotland has renewed its support for an initiative to reduce harm and exploitation of people involved in prostitution.

Every day, hundreds of online adverts are in place with men and women being advertised for sexual services.

National Ugly Mugs (NUM) provides greater access to justice and protection for those involved in prostitution, who are often targeted by dangerous individuals but are frequently reluctant to report these incidents to the police.

Police Scotland is now in its third year of supporting the initiative in order to help encourage reporting and improve safety. NUM is part of Police Scotland's commitment to end violence against women in all its forms. Earlier this week Police Scotland's executive team, signed the pledge on White Ribbon Day and marked the start of 16 Days of Action to tackle violence against women.

Detective Superintendent Stuart Houston, Police Scotland, said, "While some people may be involved in prostitution by choice, others are not but may be victims of coercion or exploitation. Every one of those people is exposed to the risk of violence and abuse. And while prostitution affects individuals, it also affects communities across Scotland.

"National Ugly Mugs supports action across our divisions to

tackle violence against those involved in prostitution. It allows us to identify perpetrators and reduce the threat of harm at the earliest opportunity.

“Our approach to tackling prostitution remains focused on the welfare of those involved and identifying either individual perpetrators or organised crime groups who may have trafficked or be exploiting individuals. Working with partners and community representatives, we hope to identify victims who may be involved in both ‘on’ and ‘off’ street prostitution, to raise awareness of the impact of the criminality associated with their exploitation, and to reduce the threat, risk and harm to those involved.”

Dr Rosie Campbell OBE the Chair for National Ugly Mugs said, “Sex workers are disproportionately targeted by offenders through harassment, rape, robbery, stalking and murder. For many reasons the majority of sex workers do not report to the police. This is an issue for public protection, evidence shows that offenders target sex workers and become emboldened because they think they won’t be reported, or if they are sex workers won’t be taken seriously, their offending can escalate further in severity –and is indiscriminate in terms of victims.

“Sex workers have a right to public protection and access to the criminal justice system, NUM is there to support this right. NUM gives sex workers throughout Scotland an option; for reporting crimes against them and to warn other sex workers, it gets information about offenders targeting sex workers to the police, aiding investigations and allowing the prosecution of dangerous individuals.”

NUM offers a third party reporting scheme which connects local projects, individuals, forums and advertising sites to share information about individuals who commit crimes against people involved in prostitution. Warnings are sent out which allow people working in prostitution to avoid dangerous individuals

and, with the consent of the individuals involved, NUM shares information with the police.

NUM works to ensure that all people who have been victims of crime, whether they sell sexual services in the online, indoor or street based sectors have an option for reporting and access to professional support services.