

Police launch #StopItNow campaign



Nearly 1600 crimes where an individual communicated with a child for sexual purposes, were recorded by Police Scotland between April 2018 and February 2019.

Police Scotland investigations resulted in nearly 70 per cent of these offences being detected and the perpetrator being arrested and charged. Of these 1600 offences, 98 were reports of grooming or attempting to groom children for sexual purposes, 90 per cent of which (86) were detected.

Police Scotland's new campaign, #StopItNow, pulls no punches, speaking directly to perpetrators to make it clear that if they attempt to engage with kids online for sexual purposes, they will be caught and they will face the consequences.

Working with Stop It Now! Scotland, Police Scotland has developed a campaign that taps into the biggest fear of perpetrators, that their families will find out and that they will face public exposure for their offences.

Assistant Chief Constable Gillian MacDonald, lead for Crime and Protection, Police Scotland, said, "Perpetrators of online

child abuse are single minded, targeting children using messaging apps. This includes crimes of grooming children for sexual purposes, indecently communicating with children and causing children to participate in sexual activity.

“Offenders come from all walks of life, all age groups and are predominantly men. Their motivations vary. Some may not see children as victims, they may not see themselves as abusers. Most don’t believe they will get caught.

“We use a range of techniques to identify perpetrators. As our figures show, the vast majority of those who engage with children for sexual purposes, who groom or attempt to groom will be caught. They will face the consequences of their actions, their families will find out and they will face public exposure.

“Our message to offenders or people who think they might offend is get help. Support is out there, Stop It Now! can provide help and advice if you are in danger of offending, or if you have offended. What you are doing is wrong, you will be caught and you risk losing everything.”

Stuart Allardyce, National Manager – Stop It Now! Scotland, said, “This campaign seeks to drive home the message that the online grooming of children and young people is illegal and causes huge harm to the victims. There are no grey areas whether it is sexual conversations with young people online, an attempt to solicit sexual images from them or trying to meet up – all of these things are illegal.

“Our work with men who have committed online offences tells us that many knew what they were doing was wrong – but that they didn’t know how to stop.

“Our message is clear – get help. Whether you are already doing these things, or are having thoughts about it. Stop It Now! Scotland is here to help. The long lasting hurt caused to the families of offenders is often underestimated. We often

work with wives and children of offenders who are devastated by the actions of their loved one.

“Stop It Now! Scotland offers help and advice to people who want to change their behaviour to stop their offending, or to prevent themselves from offending in the first place. When calling Stop It Now! Scotland there is no need to give a name or any personal details – you will be treated with respect regardless of any crimes committed. Confidential and anonymous help is only a phone call away.”

The #StopItNow campaign, which cost £30,000, will run for four weeks in total from 18 March. It will include adverts across social media channels including Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Google and outdoor ads on telephone kiosks. Last year’s campaign saw a significant increase in traffic through to the Stop It Now! Scotland webpage from 607 before the campaign to 4385 in the three months after the campaign launched.