

First ever Keep Safe Awareness Day – #WeSupportKeepSafe

Police Scotland and charity I Am Me Scotland are today) celebrating the first ever Keep Safe Awareness Day and showing #WeSupportKeepSafe.

Designed to highlight the efforts underway across Scotland to create safe, supportive communities for everyone, the day also aims to encourage more premises to become Keep Safe places – safe havens in villages, towns and cities for disabled or vulnerable people who may occasionally need assistance.



Since 2014, Police Scotland has been working in partnership with award winning community charity, I Am Me Scotland, to establish a network of Keep Safe places across the country.

The initiative works with businesses and community resource locations, like cafes, shops, libraries, museums or local authority premises and was designed in conjunction with disabled people who highlighted that sometimes they may feel lost, scared or vulnerable when out in the community.

All prospective Keep Safe places have to complete a criteria form which is checked and approved by Police Scotland. Staff then receive Keep Safe Awareness training and display the Keep Safe window sticker to make it clear they're part of the network. Anyone who enters the premises as a Keep Safe place, will be offered help and support, if necessary.

Despite the initial intended use of Keep Safe places, many people now say they give them the confidence to participate in community life. People may use a Keep Safe shop or a Keep Safe café and never need to ask for help, however, they report feeling safe knowing staff can provide support, if needed.

Keep Safe places and Keep Safe cards are available for anyone to use, and can be particularly useful for people living with dementia, people who have hidden disabilities, or specific communication requirements, such as being non-verbal, or being deaf and using lip reading or sign language. The cards carry information about the holder's health conditions, communication requirements and emergency contact details.

All Keep Safe places can be mapped out on the Keep Safe Scotland App. This free app enables people to plan journeys in advance, highlighting Keep Safe places en-route. Contact details and opening hours are available for all Keep Safe places, however, not all locations will be accessible as a result of the current coronavirus restrictions.

The App also provides a direct link to report non-emergency hate crimes to Police Scotland.

Assistant Chief Constable Gary Ritchie (Partnerships, Preventions and Community Wellbeing) said: "As Police

Scotland's Champion for Keep Safe it's phenomenal to see such a meaningful project being celebrated across the country. The number of sites registered is testament to the spirit within our communities and people's willingness to help others.

"Keep Safe encourages publicly accessible premises to take the lead in joining the initiative, an action which can make a big difference to someone's life by providing that safe space if and when it's needed, and I encourage anyone thinking about becoming involved to do so.

"Police Scotland's work with I Am Me Scotland also serves to educate people on disability hate crime, with a particular focus on working with young people through the Keep Safe Ambassadors and Supporters programmes.

"Police Scotland and I Am Me Scotland have also worked with 15 partners to create the Understanding Disability booklet. It carries information about a range of disabilities and conditions and can be used to support staff in Keep Safe places to deliver their services."

Jonathan Attenborough is a visually impaired guide dog user from Perth who is also a disability campaigner. He said: "The Keep Safe initiative is a fantastic scheme and will be especially useful for disabled people post lockdown. Sometimes when I've been out and about I could really do with somewhere to go to take some time out and gather my thoughts. It's great having a reassurance of a Keep Safe place to go if needed."

I Am Me charity founder Carol Burt-Wilson MBE stated that "There are now nearly 900 Keep Safe places across Scotland and each of these public buildings, businesses and community groups are making a fantastic contribution to helping people feel safe and supported within their communities. Most people will never need to ask for support or assistance, but knowing there are places they can get help can give them the confidence to go out on their own and can help tackle social

isolation. The partnership with Police Scotland has been incredibly effective in enabling the nationwide approach as this helps facilitate independent and safe travel across local authority boundaries. We will be working with British Transport Police in 2021 to extend the initiative across the rail network helping to encourage independent travel across Scotland, as and when coronavirus restrictions allow.

“COVID-19 has demonstrated the true value of community spirit across Scotland, with many Keep Safe partners diversifying and responding to offer support to local communities. Restrictions have also seen many temporary closures of Keep Safe places, so we are looking forward to doing everything we can to support these groups and businesses to recover, re-energise and continue their fantastic work to make their communities safer.”

Eileen Maclean, I Am Me Scotland Board of Trustees Chair, said: “The charity’s close collaboration with Police Scotland has ensured the benefits of the Keep Safe initiative are available across Scotland. We are very hopeful that this Awareness day will encourage others to get involved so that many more disabled and vulnerable people can feel that Keep Safe support is there in their communities if they need it.”