

Protecting children – empowering communities

October 4, 2010: A new online tool to help parents and carers protect their children from sexual abuse is being launched as more police force areas go live with the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme.

Under the scheme, launched by the Home Office in September 2008, members of the public can ask the police to check whether people who have contact with their children pose a risk. If the individuals have convictions for sexual offences against children or pose a risk of causing serious harm to the child or children concerned then the police can choose to disclose information to the parents.

The scheme rolled out to 11 more police force areas this month, joining 13 which have already started operating the scheme. The remaining services will come online by next spring.

The new website www.parentsprotect.co.uk, set up by Stop it Now! UK and Ireland and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, will complement the scheme and is designed to raise awareness of the issue of child sexual abuse, answer questions and give parents and carers the information they need to help protect children. The site holds a 30-minute learning programme which allows users to work through the issues at their own pace. The video details some of the key issues around child sexual abuse, including: what sexual abuse is, who abuses children, why people abuse children, offending behaviour, signs to look out for in children and adults, how to put in place a family safety plan to help protect children and where to go for help and advice.

As part of the drive to protect children from harm, over 1200 copies of the learning programme are being sent to Children's Centres in the 11 areas going live with the Disclosure Scheme.

Home Secretary Theresa May said:

"The further roll-out of this scheme is an important step forward for child safety in this country and will mean even more children are protected from potential harm.

"I urge anyone who has concerns to contact their local police force immediately. But it's also incredibly important that parents and carers use tools like this website to gain awareness and understanding of the issues, and learn about the steps they can take to protect their children."

ACPO Lead on the Management of Sexual and Violent Offenders, Chief Constable Paul West, said:

"One of the police service's most fundamental roles is to do whatever we can to protect people from harm. But preventing and combating child sexual abuse is not just the responsibility of the police service, it is everyone's responsibility.

"The more that parents and other carers of children can learn in order to raise awareness and understanding of the steps that can be taken to prevent child sexual abuse, the more children will be freed up to enjoy happy and fulfilling childhoods".

Donald Findlater, Director of Stop it Now! UK and Ireland and Director of Research and Development at the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, said:

“While it’s important that parents and carers go to the police with concerns, it is vital they have sound information to protect children at all times, when they have a specific concern and when they don’t. There are practical steps adults can take to protect children and this new resource helps them to do that.

“Additionally, adults need to know what to look out for in other adults. Sex offenders are mostly not the monsters commonly portrayed in the media. They are people we know, often people we love and care for. Recognising that someone close to us could pose risk to children is not easy to think about. But, if we know what to look out for and where to go for help and advice we are much better placed to protect children from harm.”

The learning programme and associated advice and support can be found at www.parentsprotect.co.uk.

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Notes to Editors

For further information and interviews please contact Deborah Denis on 01372 847160, 07540 690 315 or ddenis@lucyfaithfull.org.uk.

1. In 2008 four police force areas (Cambridgeshire, Cleveland, Hampshire and Warwickshire) took part in a 12-month pilot, which ended in September 2009. In August this year the Home Office announced the national roll-out of the scheme, existing pilot areas were then joined by West Mercia, Bedfordshire, Norfolk, North Yorkshire, Thames Valley, West Midlands, Essex and Suffolk. In September, Northamptonshire launched. This month the scheme was extended to Staffordshire, Sussex, Leicestershire, Wiltshire, Cheshire, Durham, Northumbria, Dorset, Lincolnshire, Surrey and Gloucestershire. For more information contact the Home Office Press office on 0207 0353 3535

2. Stop it Now! UK and Ireland aims to prevent child sexual abuse by increasing public awareness and empowering people to act responsibly to protect children. Stop it Now! believes that it is the responsibility of all adults to take positive action to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Stop it Now! is an alliance of leading children's charities, working with the government and child protection agencies, to promote public education and prevent child sexual abuse. The Stop it Now! helpline has been operating since 2002 and aims to prevent child abuse by encouraging abusers and potential abusers to seek help and by giving adults the information they need to protect children safely. The helpline is funded by the Ministry of Justice and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. The England campaign is supported by the Department of Children, Schools and Families. The Stop it Now! campaigns in Wales and Scotland are supported by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Scottish Government respectively. www.stopitnow.org.uk.

(3). Named after its founder, Baroness Lucy Faithfull of Wolvercote, the Foundation is a child protection charity operating UK-wide and specialising in safeguarding children from sexual abuse. The Foundation’s policy is to collaborate with individuals and agencies internationally to develop a more child sensitive and offender aware culture in our societies. The Foundation contributes to legislation and

to policy and procedure reviews concerned with safeguarding children in faith communities, in schools, in leisure facilities, on the Internet and living away from home. It also manages the national campaign, Stop it Now! UK and Ireland.
www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk