

# 'Police do care about helping sex workers... they are not all like Dhanda'

PC Jasbir Dhanda was jailed after being found guilty of having sex while on duty with a vulnerable woman who was an ex-prostitute. A charity that helps sex workers in Derby believes he was a one-off but admits such women are an easy target for predatory men. **Aly Walsh** reports.

DESPERATE, emotionally-scarred and disadvantaged is how Dionne Reid, of Women's Work, describes many of the women the charity helps.

Dionne, chief executive of the charity, based in Charnwood Street, says: "Sex workers are an easy target as they are very vulnerable women."

"A lot of them not only have drug problems but have emotional scars, have been sexually abused and have low self-esteem."

But while Dionne is very aware of these women's circumstances, with her charity working regularly with about 40 sex workers in the city, she is also familiar with how the police work in the area.

"I believe that the police do genuinely care," says Dionne, who has regular meetings with officers to talk about the issue of street sex work.

"This man (Dhanda) is a criminal but there are criminals everywhere, from all walks of life. You cannot tarnish the police force because of what one person has done."

"But this case should send out a clear message to any individual - that they will have to think very clearly before preying on these vulnerable women."

Following a two-week trial, Dhanda was cleared of having sex with one prostitute while on duty, and taking crack cocaine with her, but found guilty of three misconduct charges relating to another prostitute, with whom he had sex while on duty between January 2008 and July 2010. He was also convicted of searching his force's computer system for her details as well as for information about two other women.

Dhanda, 53, who was based at Pear Tree police station, and is from Littleover, was jailed for two-and-a-half years.

The case cast a spotlight on the sex workers and how they are policed.

But Dionne says Dhanda was one bad apple in the barrel.

She said that the charity, which has 14 members of staff and 20 volunteers, normally has a very good relationship with the police.

"I couldn't fault the police in any shape or form," she says. "They support us in our work. We meet regularly with them and talk about the women's safety, which is paramount."

"The police have a duty to keep these women safe, just as we do. They are members of the community, just like you and I."

Dionne explained that the women were generally very open with those that work for the charity and she believes she would know if they were being mistreated by officers.

She says: "When the women come into the centre they are not frightened to share their experiences. They feel very comfortable sharing

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**DIONNE REID**

things with us, as we do offer a confidential service."

But she said she also understood there needed to be a level of enforcement.

Women's Work was set up nine years ago, following some conflict between residents and sex workers in the Rosehill Street area of the city.

Dionne, who had been a drugs worker for the charity Safe and Sound, began by going out into the streets and speaking to the women.

"I was quite shocked at first. I didn't understand at the time why the women were there leaving themselves so vulnerable," she said.

"To be quite honest it was at times a little frightening, walking around the streets at midnight and talking to the women. I didn't know what to expect and this work was out of most people's comfort zone."

She says that once she knew what the issues were, they could begin to address the problem of sex work and start working to improve



Dionne Reid, above, chief executive at Women's Work, helps prostitutes to try to get out of the sex industry, left. Right, PC Jasbir Dhanda who was jailed for two-and-a-half years for having sex with a prostitute while on duty. Dionne believes he is a one-off and the police genuinely care about helping sex workers.



## CAMERAS WILL HELP DETECT KERB CRAWLERS

POLICE in Derby are taking a tough stance in their battle against prostitution and have vowed to name and shame kerb crawlers who pick up prostitutes in the city.

Number-plate recognition cameras are being used to detect motorists who regularly visit areas where sex workers operate

and their cars could be seized. Police say that women, who are sex workers, receive a fine of £80 if convicted of soliciting but penalties for men caught looking for sex are higher.

Since January 1, 26 suspected prostitutes had been arrested and six suspected kerb crawlers had been snared.

things with the women. Now, staff and volunteers from the charity regularly go out to speak to the women on the streets, handing out condoms and literature and inviting them to its drop-in centre.

But Dionne is keen to point out that what they are doing

way of initiating conversation with the women. "It's quite a complex issue, with many strands, and to work on this effectively for long-term outcomes, that takes time."

"Asking people to turn their lives around in this economic climate is difficult and you are working with some very emotionally and physically damaged individuals."

"It's not an issue you can change overnight and is not an issue we change alone."

She says the charity works closely with health professionals, the police, social care, schools, probation, the courts and the drug and family intervention project.

After a full assessment of

each woman, an action plan is developed to work towards making positive and lasting changes to their lives. The women can go to the centre as many times as they want.

"We recognise staying off drugs and alcohol is a lifetime's work," says Dionne. "There's no quick-fix and short-term solution but on-going education and support can make a difference."

Another of Dionne's aims is to change how people see women who are involved in sex work.

She says: "A lot of people have stereotypes in their head of what these women might be like and just label them 'prostitutes'. But people aren't labels."

"These women, who do it, are mothers, daughters and aunts. At the end of the day, they are women who haven't had the same opportunities, confidence and self-esteem to make better life-choices as a lot of other women and so have resorted to street sex work to try to get out of their situations."

"And sadly, quite often, it's drugs but also other issues, such as money."

Over the past decade, street work has been concentrated in different areas around Pear Tree and Normanton, with the numbers of street workers fluctuating.

"There was a time when things went really quiet," says Dionne.

"Women come to us in complete states of near-death and there are times when their lives are completely turned around."

**DIONNE REID**

"We thought we had had a good impact with all the work we and the police had been doing. But it has become more visible again, for some reason, and we need to find out why that is."

"Numbers do fluctuate but we have seen a slight increase in the last couple of months - maybe it's to do with the economic climate, I don't know."

"I'm not sure I believe the reason is drugs, as heroin misuse has diminished because the treatment system in Derby has improved significantly."

But, she says, it is important to keep it in context.

"In Derby, I think, we have a far smaller issue of street work than in other cities - we

know most of the sex workers by name," she said.

"It's just when it becomes visible there's a tendency to blow it out of proportion."

In the past there has been discussions about having safe zones for these women in the city.

But Dionne is convinced this is not the way forward.

"We shouldn't be saying sex work is okay because I don't think it is," she said. "It's where a lot of women are vulnerable, abused and controlled."

"We should give women the opportunities to move away from this lifecycle."

"We should be encouraging our young women to become doctors, nurses and teachers, not sex workers."

Last year, the charity saw 46 women in the city leave the industry. But this has not always been a joyful thing - sometimes it has been because the woman has died.

Dionne's voice is emotional as she recalls one woman, who passed away last year and with whom the charity had been working for eight years.

Dionne says: "She was addicted to prescription drugs, heroin, crack-cocaine and alcohol. She was a very poorly lady and all this was related to her being abused as a child."

"She had come off everything shortly before she died."

But, the charity also has some very happy stories - about women who have completely turned around their lives.

"We've had women who have come off the drugs, completed courses at our centre and then gone on to university," said Dionne.

"Women come to us in complete states of near-death and there are times when their lives are completely turned around."

"I would like people to open their eyes to how poorly and disadvantaged some of these women are and not judge them."

The charity works with the women on a one-to-one basis and looks at what is happening in all aspects of a woman's life. Dionne tells the story of one "fantastic" family who have been going to the centre for many years.

"The mum was a sex worker, who turned her life around. She's taken all the educational courses we do as well as parenting and underwent a course of counselling with our psycho-therapist."

"We helped the dad get a job and we helped them find a house. They still come here for support but their lives have been turned around because of the non-judgmental attitude and continued support and encouragement we have given them and now they're flying."

Just before Christmas the charity put on a dinner for the women, with volunteers preparing and serving a three-course meal. "A lot of the women had never had that experience and were so grateful," said Dionne.

"A lot of people think these women are not part of society or the community but they are - they're just desperate."

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## 'Suspect burglar' was policeman tracking raiders

A RESIDENT who reported a driver acting suspiciously in Belper was surprised to be told it was a plain-clothes police officer.

Belper town councillors were told about the incident at their latest meeting and urged neighbours to help police deal with a recent spate of burglaries in the town.

Acting sergeant Greg Hunt told town councillors that the resident had dialled 999 and was told it was an officer looking into the recent raids.

He said: "Some people are reluctant to call us if they think they see something but we need to know about it."

"I cannot guarantee a police car straight away but I will get one as soon as possible to go into the area."

He said Operation Rana had some success in halting the break-ins and appeared to have moved them into the Ripley area.

"The work has involved officers in high-visibility vests, unmarked cars and CID officers interviewing suspects."

Sgt Hunt added: "Two key offenders are out of the picture and hopefully we will continue to drive the number of burglaries down."

## Residents urged to keep up recycling

RESIDENTS in South Derbyshire are being encouraged to continue their recycling efforts over the coming months.

New figures show that 54.76 tonnes of glass and 4.43 tonnes of cans were left in recycling banks during the festive period. And 4.8 tonnes of real trees were collected from drop-off points.

Compost collections start between next Monday and February 3 and the council wants the recycling effort to carry on.

Food and garden waste can be left in brown bins - but cardboard no longer can be.

It can be taken to recycling centres and schools receiving money for recyclables as part of the Cash for Trash scheme.

These are listed at www.south-derbys.gov.uk.

## Parking restriction on busy town road

MOTORISTS will be banned from parking all day on a busy road in Matlock town centre from "late spring".

Derbyshire County Council has confirmed it will introduce the restriction on the length of time drivers can stop in Edgefold Road. It will mean cars can only park for one hour between 8am and 7pm.

A report from the council's highways and transport department says the road, "located close to Matlock town centre and adjacent to a busy doctors' surgery", is often full of people parking all day.

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