

Cleaning up the streets

*Initiative aims to keep young girls out of vice trade.
David Kessen reports.*

26 December 2003

The Star

Teenage sex abuse has been exposed by classes in Doncaster schools, aimed at warning children about the dangers of prostitution.

A programme in schools throughout the borough has led to police and welfare agencies being contracted after young people told of abuse.

An evaluation of the scheme, which has targeted pupils as young as 14, states: "What did result, although rarely, was evidence of young people who were involved in sexual exploitation or knew someone who was being sexually exploited."

The scheme is run by Streetreach, which works to get girls out of prostitution, and the evaluation comes in a report to the Doncaster Central NHS Primary Care Trust.

It adds: "Fortunately Streetreach is well-established in partnership working and therefore able to introduce relevant agencies, that is police education welfare and social services.

"In each situation this was done with the young person's consent and was supported by the Streetreach team throughout."

The schools scheme was brought in over Streetreach became concerned over a rising number of under age teenagers identified as being either involved or at risk of becoming involved in prostitution.

The organisation says there was no evidence of under 16s frequenting the red light area in the last six months.

But it adds Streetreach is aware it must not become complacent as it has evidence of young people becoming involved in sexual exploitation, with men known to them, often to where they live.

It states this is currently being addressed with the annual plan of the Streetreach project.

No-one was available to comment further from Streetreach, but its report says that most schools have taken part in the scheme – although a number had opted out.

A spokesperson for Doncaster education authority said they were very supportive of Streetreach's commitment to help education young people in Doncaster's secondary schools.

She added: "Streetreach's success during the school visits lies in their hard-hitting approach to communicating the dangers and harsh reality of prostitution and it is not a glamorous lifestyle as portrayed on television or in films such as *Pretty Woman*. In the real world, girls are mugged, raped and murdered.

They may be in the grip of a drug addiction or putting themselves at risk of catching a sexually-transmitted disease.

Streetreach tells it to them straight and we hope it will go some way to preventing young people getting lured into such a destructive existence."