

News story: Funding granted for new global platform to protect children from online abuse

A £635,000 investment from a Home Office-led consortium has been awarded to The Marie Collins Foundation (MCF), to support its vital work to help children who have been sexually abused online.

MCF has developed the Global Protection Online Network (GPON), a programme to help countries take steps to respond to the threat of online child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSEA).

GPON will help train safeguarding professionals to develop best practice on how to intervene in CSEA cases, including new guidelines and help to design new legislative measures. This will go alongside ongoing targeted interventions such as training and consultancy from MCF for professionals who work with young people and give access to an online portal for knowledge sharing, advice and research updates.

The £635,000 has been provided by the Global Fund to End Violence Against Children (EVAC) – of which the Home Office is the major donor.

Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins said:

The Marie Collins Foundation do invaluable work in providing support for victims and survivors of online child sexual abuse. Providing guidance and resources for governments to tackle this sickening crime will make a huge impact in stamping it out at source.

Child sexual exploitation is a global problem and one which requires a global response. The government is absolutely committed to tackling this horrific abuse wherever it occurs and we are working closely with governments and organisations across the world to protect children from harm.

Founder and CEO of the Marie Collins Foundation, Professor Tink Palmer MBE, said:

We are thrilled to have been awarded this funding, which will allow us to activate GPON and begin to have real impact on the global community enabling colleagues to do more to protect their children through new knowledge, resources and infrastructure.

Our vision is to ensure that all children who suffer abuse via the internet and mobile technology are able to recover and live safe

and fulfilling lives. The nature of the internet means that the sexual abuse of children online is a global problem yet currently the service response is ad hoc, ill-informed and sparse.

Our unique portal will enable the international professional community to share knowledge, gain advice and have access to the most recent research, as well as training materials and templates for relevant policy, legal and practice guidance developments.

The MCF will work in partnership with other NGOs in priority countries. Vietnam has been identified as the first country that will receive bespoke support through training for professionals in how best to help children who are sexually abused online. Vietnam is recognised as a prominent source country for children trafficked for sexual purposes, while online child sexual exploitation is also a growing concern.

The EVAC grant will be used to employ staff to lead and manage the GPON platform and ensure safeguarding professionals across the globe have access to its resources and to develop training programmes.

During a speech in September, the Home Secretary set out that it was his "mission" to help eradicate CSEA, including children being abused on live streams around the world.

In the speech he said that children were often abused to order, sometimes for as little as £12.

In addition to the End Violence Against Children fund, the Home Office is a leading member of the WePROTECT Global Alliance, a global movement that brings together the influence, expertise and resources required to transform how online child sexual exploitation is dealt with worldwide.

The WePROTECT Global Alliance is driven and funded by the UK Home Office and forms a key element of our international response to this crime. 87 countries are members of the alliance along with 20 global technology companies and 25 leading Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), including the Marie Collins Foundation. The Home Office has also secured £2 million funding from the 2018 to 2020 Commonwealth Fund to fund capacity building projects in commonwealth countries to tackle online child sexual exploitation.