

Powerful new campaign launched across University of Chester sites

A powerful new visual campaign has been launched across University of Chester sites in Cheshire to drive home the proactive message that violence against women and girls will not be tolerated.

The awareness-raising campaign will be supported by the introduction of a network of Sexual Violence Liaison Officers for students at both the University and at Reaseheath College and University Centre Reaseheath.

The campaign has been funded as part of the UK Government's national Safer Streets initiative and received £550,000 following a successful bid from John Dwyer, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire.

Key organisations across Cheshire including the University of Chester, RASASC Cheshire and Merseyside (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre), Cheshire Constabulary, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire and Chester Students' Union have been working in partnership to help prevent violence against women and girls and improve the feelings of safety across the University and College.

Police statistics nationally found that there was a significant demographic of 18 to 23-year-olds identifying as the victims of sexual violence. Although some incidents were reported, there was also significant under-reporting. With a large proportion of students in this age range, both the University and College were identified as the focus of the application.

Plans to help students feel safer across campuses include enhancing lighting and CCTV cameras; developing a student safety app; introducing new safe spaces where students can go to if they feel unsafe; and the introduction of a safe taxi scheme, allowing students to use their student ID card to get home if they feel unsafe. A series of workshops will also be delivered to promote acceptable behaviour and encourage healthy relationships, alongside training for staff on how to support victims and manage disclosures. Additionally, there will be dedicated Sexual Violence Liaison Officers who will be trained to provide a single point of contact for those who have experienced sexual violence.

In addition, a 'Respect' campaign is being launched on February 18 and will include posters, billboards and digital signage around the University of Chester, Reaseheath College and University Centre Reaseheath, and in the surrounding areas. The thought-provoking campaign aims to alert people to sexual violence and controlling behaviours, encouraging young people to recognise the signs which could easily be overlooked.

John Dwyer, Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, said: "This work continues to build on the collaborative commitment between partner agencies in and around the University of Chester. It complements work being done in other areas of the county to help women and girls feel safe.

“Tackling violence against women and girls is one of my priorities in my Police and Crime Plan, and the Constabulary has been working hard across the county to ensure we crack down on this kind of crime so that people feel safe on the streets.

“Education is key in this area, and arming students with the knowledge of what behaviour is and isn’t acceptable moves us one step closer to tackling the issue.

“I want to reassure women and girls in Cheshire that their safety is taken extremely seriously by the police and partners. Violence against them is not their fault. Total responsibility lies with the people who commit these crimes and this project will be key in helping to change attitudes and behaviours.”

Detective Inspector Danielle Knox, Project Lead Safer Streets 3, said: “I am really proud of the work which has been achieved working closely with the University of Chester, Reaseheath College and University Centre Reaseheath and partners in ensuring that we have a multi-faceted approach both to making the students feel safer and actually being safer. Significant work has gone into not only addressing physical safety aspects of campuses but also into education for students around acceptable behaviours which I believe will be a legacy of this project.

“We have put in place a country-leading Sexual Violence Liaison Officer model supporting students and staff within the University and College, which will be seen as best practice for other higher education institutions. I am grateful for the support of community organisations in taking part in our Safer Taxi scheme and Safe Spaces which will really benefit the student and staff communities who use the campuses.”

Dr Helen Galbraith, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience at the University of Chester, said: “I am very proud that the University of Chester is actively furthering our commitment to student safety through the Safer Streets project. The combination of improved education and awareness; the roll out of the Safer Taxi scheme and Safe Spaces, and the introduction of Sexual Violence Liaison Officers across our sites will put us at the forefront of safeguarding our community

“We want everyone who works, visits and studies at the University of Chester to know that we take their safety extremely seriously and that we are here to offer support and guidance to anyone should they need it.

“To receive this funding and deliver this project is an incredible achievement by all involved and I want to thank everyone for their hard work and commitment.”

Peter Greenall, Reaseheath’s Assistant Principal and Dean of Higher Education said: “The Safer Streets project has brought together a range of experts who have designed and deployed a range of effective measures which will further enhance safety and security for all users of our campus.

“The investment in preventative approaches to tackle the increasing and ever complex challenges our young people face has been most welcome. Our staff have benefited from specialist training which will ensure that they are able to offer the best support for future victims of harassment and sexual violence, whilst the striking Respect campaign will bring these sensitive issues to the forefront and enable us to

work with the student community to challenge perceptions and unwanted behaviours.”

For more information visit <http://reflectandrespect.com/>