

# Ways and means

Whatever your day job, there are many ways to help kids – from fundraising to staffing a phonenumber

Liza Ramrayka

Cardiff City players out celebrating a win on their home turf were persuaded to part with more than £250 for ChildLine one night when volunteer fundraiser Janice Driscoll bumped into them in Cardiff Bay. “I left where I was and rushed back home to get my collection box!” she laughs.

At weekends, the mother of four grown-up children can be found collecting donations at sporting events and in Cardiff town centre, or distributing collection boxes to local shops. Despite working full-time shifts in a probation hostel and playing baseball with a local team, Driscoll also fits in around three hours of telephone counselling each week.

“I know from taking calls how important it is to have someone to listen. The thought of them not having enough money to provide this service is terrible; that’s why I got involved in fundraising,” she says. “I live near the Millennium Stadium so started off with a collection box and some key rings in local pubs. When I talk to people, I stress the fact that there are innocent children who haven’t got a voice.”

## The role of school staff

Mark Burdass, a year 5 teacher at an East Sussex junior school, points to the role of school staff in child protection: “Apart from parents, we’re the people who spend the most time with children. Teaching assistants – as well as lunchtime supervisors – are very important. Often they live locally and their children go to the same school that they work at, so they sometimes hear about things that the teachers don’t and can tell us to look out for things.”

Teachers learn to look out for telltale signs of neglect or abuse, such as the child who’s always taking off their shoes (because they’re two sizes too small) or not wearing school uniform (because they don’t have clean clothes).

“Any sort of reluctance about getting changed for PE is treated with extreme caution. It may be that they just don’t want to get changed because of physical changes associated with their age, or that they’re worried about bruising or marks that they got at home being noticed,” says Burdass.

Keeping children safe in the virtual world is a concern that Childnet International, a charity that works with schools to alert children to potential dangers such as online grooming and cyber-bullying, seeks to address. Schools manager Ellen Coen runs practical sessions for children from primary school age to teach them appropriate behaviour when using computers.

Coen takes children through different scenarios, such as what to do if a holiday snap of them in a swimming costume starts to attract comments, or if they start to receive nasty text messages. “We ask them questions like: ‘Would you respond?’ and ‘Who would you tell?’ and will talk through the safety features associated with the particular service,” she says.

Helping adults to keep children safe is the aim of the NSPCC’s child protection helpline, where callers can speak in confidence to a trained child protection officer. Head of NSPCC helplines John Cameron works alongside helpline staff, having had previous career experience of child protection and social work. “Calls can come from parents ringing to say: ‘I’m beginning to smack my child too hard’ or: ‘I’m starting to have sexual fantasies about my child’.” Around one-quarter of calls are about children believed to be at risk immediately, in which case we identify locally those agencies that can investigate, such as children’s services and the police.”

Detective superintendent Pete O’Sullivan is head of public protection at Surrey police. His role is to protect vulnerable people in general, and that involves

child abuse investigations.

The police may be made aware of allegations through social services, schools, or incidents – such as domestic abuse – that

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they attend. “If there are immediate issues to be dealt with, we’ll deal with them – as you’d expect,” says O’Sullivan. However, in longer-term child abuse investigations, there will be a joint investigation with social services and perhaps other agencies, he says. “The principle we work to is to look for the best outcome for the child. So the end game is not necessarily the criminal justice system.” At the heart of the investigation, though, is to make sure that the child is safe.

Awareness of children and children’s issues is also part of public protection as a whole, so whenever officers are called out, this awareness should be on their radar. “Whatever you attend, even something as simple as a road traffic collision, there are issues that can be flagged up if children are involved,” he says. “So if one of our units goes to a neighbours’ dispute and there’s a child that looks not very clean, with nothing to stimulate them, no toys, our officers may flag it up to social services. It’s all about adding a bit to the jigsaw.

“Recently I saw Chosen, a TV documentary about abuse in a boarding school [to be shown on More4, on September 30]. Victims were taking openly about being abused. That focused my mind on why I do my job. If I can prevent that from happening – it’s why I’m here.”



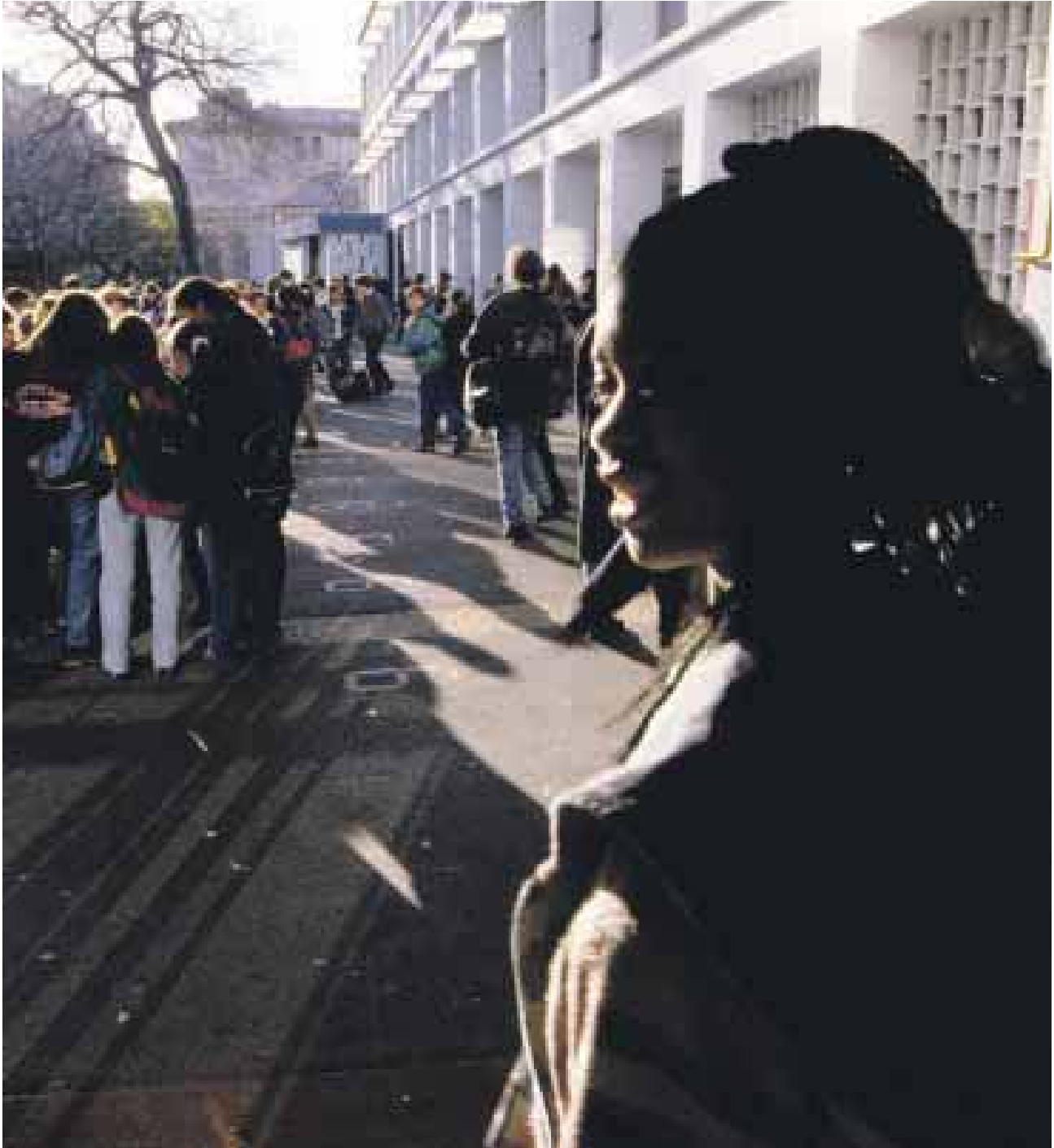
### Art as therapy

Matthew Audley joined London-based charity the Place2Be ([theplace2be.org.uk](http://theplace2be.org.uk)) as a volunteer children's counsellor in 1994. Today he manages the charity's work in south London, which provides counselling to primary-school age children. "We work with children who are withdrawn in the classroom. They can be very young – some nursery age – so can't specify what they're feeling. Children often express themselves best through play so we work with art materials and they develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor.

"We've seen a number of children where domestic violence has been involved and we liaise with social services. We also offer counselling to parents to explain how their childhood might have affected their parenting."

For Driscoll, the motivation for helping to keep children safe is simple: "Some of these children have nothing, nobody to listen to them."





**Watchful eye: School staff – and not just teachers – are trained to spot problems and have a vital role in child protection**

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