

“ALWAYS trust your instincts” Train conductor’s message after helping return missing vulnerable children to their homes

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A train conductor whose intervention helped return a group of vulnerable children that had been reported missing to their homes is encouraging colleagues and customers to follow suit if they see something that doesn't feel 'quite right'.

The conductor, who works for Northern but wishes to remain anonymous, initially approached the group of three young girls – who were hiding in the toilets on-board a service from Hull to Halifax – for suspected fare evasion.

However, following a brief interaction, his instincts told him this wasn't a simple case of ticketless travel and he contacted British Transport Police (BTP) to intercept the train at Leeds.

The girls, all of whom were aged 16 and under, were playing truant from school and had been reported missing earlier in the day.

On hearing how the situation developed, the conductor has said: “Having the opportunity to spend three to four minutes questioning the girls proved pivotal. The more questions I asked, the more implausible their answers became. I followed my instinct and text BTP on the 61016 number.

“BTP responded very quickly and having discussed the situation, they agreed this needed further investigation. I’m pleased the girls are now home safe.”

In 2022, Northern began the process of training its 7,000-strong workforce in how to spot vulnerable people on the railway and have the confidence to intervene.

The training is provided by the charity ‘Railway Children’, whose work focusses on identifying individuals at risk and helping with early forms of intervention.

The conductor has said it was the training by ‘Railway Children’ that gave him the confidence to act on his instincts.

Tricia Williams, chief operating officer at Northern, said: “This could have developed into an unimaginable situation had our conductor not had the confidence to intervene and I applaud him for his actions.

“I’d like to echo his advice and encourage anyone to act if you spot something ‘not quite right’ on the railway. This case is an important reminder to look out for one-another.”

Chief Inspector Graham Bridges said: “Safeguarding vulnerable people is an incredibly important part of our work as guardians of the railway.

“We constantly work with – and train – our rail industry partners to recognise the signs of vulnerability and exploitation and urge the public to know and report them too.

“Just as our officers know to look beyond the obvious, this is a perfect example of someone doing just that and we commend the conductor’s actions.”

Anyone can contact British Transport Police via text message on 61016 or call 0800 40 50 40.

Northern is the second largest train operator in the UK, with 2,500 services a day to more than 500 stations across the North of England.

Photo credit: Northern