

Charity project to support vulnerable children and young people on Scotland's railway

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Young people leaving home to escape family conflict, abuse, mental health issues and exploitation by criminal gangs are to be helped through a new safeguarding project at Scotland's busiest railway station.

Railway Children, an international children's charity, launched its Safeguarding on Transport programme at Glasgow Central Station on Monday, 23 October. By bringing together the rail industry and British Transport Police (BTP), the charity works to raise awareness of vulnerability on the railways and strengthen safety responses in and around major stations to protect young people from harm.

This is Railway Children's first project in Scotland and will help them to reach more young people in vulnerable situations, including those who are using trains to run away from home.

Glasgow Central Station is one of the top five UK stations for safeguarding incidents reported to BTP. In 2022/23, out of 962 Safeguarding and Vulnerability Reports for incidents occurring in Scotland involving children and young people, 181 (20%) were for Glasgow Central.

When BTP identify a child or young person at risk, they can refer them to Railway Children's Youth Practitioners who provide trauma-informed, bespoke support plans and family interventions to create positive change in their lives.

Railway Children's Glasgow project is funded by Alstom and Avanti West Coast and follows successful programmes in London, northwest England, West Midlands and Yorkshire. Alongside rail industry partners and BTP, the charity continues to work towards its long-term goal of building a safety net across the UK rail network while tackling local issues affecting stations.

A Safeguarding Action Group has already been established in Glasgow, made up of representatives from rail industry partners, local organisations and people who work in and around the station. The aim of the group is to raise awareness, share relevant information to generate local solutions and improve responses to vulnerable adults, children and young people.

Francesca McKay, Railway Children's Regional Manager for Scotland, said: "We know that many children who are at risk of harm and who use the rail network do not necessarily come into contact with BTP, which is why our work is so vital. Glasgow has two of Scotland's busiest stations within a few minutes of each other and the area around Central Station is a well-known meeting place for children and young people, many of whom travel to the area by train. By working together with the rail industry and other partners, we can ensure that no child goes unnoticed on the railways and provide support to those at risk of harm before it's too late."

Fiona Hyslop, Minister for Transport said: "We know from our own research that some groups can feel more vulnerable on the railway. We also know from BTP that there are many incidences involving children and young people who may be at risk from their own behaviours or that of others who seek to exploit them. The partnership between Railway Children, BTP, and the rail industry that will deliver this project in Glasgow will provide a vital safeguard for at risk minors and provide a support system to help steer them away from harm."

Andy Mellors, Managing Director at Avanti West Coast, said: "We're proud to be supporting Railway Children to roll out their safeguarding programme at another destination on our route. Through a similar partnership with the charity in the West Midlands, we've seen first-hand the difference their efforts can make to the lives of vulnerable children on the rail network. We look forward to playing our part to aid their vital work in supporting and protecting young people to bring positive change for children in Scotland."

Colin Haynes, Environment, Health and Safety Director at Alstom, said: "Alstom is proud to partner with and support Railway Children with their mission to make the railway a safer place for young people. Tackling social inequality and driving equal opportunity are two of the key pillars of Alstom UK and Ireland's corporate social responsibility and sustainability strategy and our involvement with Railway Children directly aligns with our goals in these areas. Our employees are keen to be involved, with many choosing to use their volunteer days to support Railway Children through fundraising and volunteering directly with the projects. We can't wait to get started on this latest iteration of the Safeguarding on Transport project in Glasgow and congratulate the team at Railway Children for their ongoing work supporting vulnerable young people across the UK."

Brian Wylie, Vulnerability Manager at BTP, said: “We work in partnership with Railway Children across the UK and their latest project in Glasgow will be invaluable in helping us to safeguard further vulnerable children and young people and ensure they get the support they require. The railway is one of the easiest ways to travel for runaway children and those at risk of harm or exploitation will often gravitate towards train stations and transport hubs because they are busy, anonymous places which help them escape their current situation. Our officers patrol the railway network day and night to protect vulnerable people, and working jointly with Railway Children gives us all the chance to intervene before it’s too late. I’d urge anyone with any concerns to text us on 61016.”

Further information can be found at www.railwaychildren.org.uk.