

Wendy Shepherd
Doctor of Civil Law
Durham Cathedral, 11 January 2018

Sexual violence and sexual exploitation are serious social problems which have long-lasting impacts on victims and survivors. Freedom from sexual violence, support for those who have experienced it, educational awareness raising, and responding to those who perpetrate such abuse are all issues close to the heart of Durham University. In recent years, sexual abuse scandals and subsequent inquiries, in towns and cities across the country, have revealed how children and young people have often been failed by those who should have protected them. There is now heightened awareness and more widespread condemnation of sexual exploitation. But this was not the case when Wendy Shepherd first set up the Barnardo's Sexual Exploitation Children's Outreach Service (known as SECOS) in March 2000. Then, it was standard practice to see children, young people and vulnerable adults as offenders rather than victims, with terms such as child prostitute and juvenile prostitute being used in everyday practice.

Wendy saw a different picture though on the streets of Middlesbrough, known then as the prostitution capital of the North East. What she saw was children being victimised and exploited – put on the street to sell sex when they were just 12, 13, 14 years of age. She saw young adult women on the streets who had been sexually abused as children and who were then sexually exploited as adults. Changing this narrative, from one of free choice and offending behaviour to one of victimisation and safeguarding has taken commitment, leadership, empathy, and courage. These are qualities that Wendy has in abundance.

Wendy Shepherd is a qualified social worker, counsellor, psychotherapist and trainer who has worked for many decades to improve the situation of children, young people and vulnerable adults who have experienced sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. Born in Wales to a cleaner and a bus and lorry driver, she left Wales aged two with her mother to start a new life in the North East. One of four children within a blended family, she attended a number of different schools as she moved around the

North East a lot which impacted on her education. Leaving school, she embarked on a career in retail, with the expectation placed upon her that she got married or started earning money rather than continued her education. It was during her time in retail that two things became visible to her - the glass ceiling that existed to prevent women taking high level management positions, and the life limiting poverty and deprivation that choked many North-East communities. Leaving her job as a manager of a newsagent in Spennymoor, she moved back to her beloved Saltburn, worked as a residential social worker at Aycliffe Secure Children's Centre, as a Social Worker at Stockton Borough Council, gaining her BA in Social Work at what was then Teesside Polytechnic. Wendy started her career in Barnardo's in 1992 at the Bridgeway Centre that was set up in the aftermath of the Cleveland Crisis.

It is Wendy's work on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse that she is most well-known for though, both regionally and in her national role as Implementation and Programme Manager for Barnardo's work on Child Sexual Exploitation. Her achievements have already been recognised with a string of awards. Most recently, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Cleveland Police and Crime Commissioner, with Commissioner Barry Coppinger highlighting that 'Thousands of young people and families have had their lives improved thanks to her work and the commitment she's shown throughout her career.'

Wendy's commitment to social work is one of understanding, empathy, faith, and fun. Her colleagues talk of someone with incredible skills in professional nurturing, confidence building, being personally as well as professionally supportive and flexible, and of modelling an ethic of care with her colleagues just as she worked with young people, their parents and carers. They also talk of her immense sense of fun, creativity, and adventure that proves particularly useful when working with young people that others have found difficult to work with. One colleague recollected a challenging boat trip which she and some other professionals took a group of young people on. The boats facilities were basic, and people were getting tired and stressed. Wendy got out her ukulele and started to sing – turning the situation round into a great time for everyone and maintaining a calm and fun stance in situations that others would find challenging.

Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, Wendy Shepherd is a local woman who has made a global difference. There is still a mountain to climb to eliminate one of the great social ills of our time. Sexual exploitation is less visible now it is largely organised via mobile phones and the internet and away from the streets. But it is still there. Wendy Shepherd has inspired her colleagues, the young people with whom she has worked, and indeed many of our students who have had the privilege of spending time at Barnardo's on placement, to continue the fight against sexual violence and exploitation. In her own words: 'If you put enough in, young people can and will change. It's about putting faith in them and lending them your hope until they find their own. Which they do.'

Vice Chancellor, I present to you Wendy Shepherd to receive the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

© Professor Nicole Westmarland, Durham University. Not to be reproduced without permission