

Betting shop workers urged to report abuse from public

Community gave its backing to an anti-violence at work campaign launched by the Scottish Executive in October.



Part of the Scottish Executive's Bang Out of Order initiative, the Violence at Work campaign aims to raise awareness of and stamp out the abuse of workers by the public. At the launch Community organiser Heather Meldrum urged Scotland's betting shop staff to report all incidents of abuse and promoted the work of union's Safer Betting Shops campaign. 'Our survey of betting shop staff in central Scotland revealed that almost two-thirds had been verbally abused and a fifth physically assaulted by the public in the last year. Many victims failed to report incidents – seeing them as 'part of the job', or believing no action would be taken.'

The campaign also has the backing of Channel 4 racing pundit and ex-bookie John McCririck, who said: 'Punters go through a range of emotions and betting shop workers are in the frontline. No one deserves this level of abuse in their daily job.'

'Community has been campaigning to make employees

aware of their right to an 'abuse-free' workplace and providing special diaries so they can record any incidents,' explained Heather. 'We've also been encouraging employers to meet their responsibilities to protect staff. As well as an end to single staffing, we'd like to see firms training staff to deal with conflict, informing customers that staff abuse won't be tolerated and setting up clear systems for reporting and monitoring incidents. Our members have also suggested creating a 'problem customer' register.'

'We will continue to support staff affected by abuse. While Violence at Work was piloted in Scotland, it has been so successful we hope it will expand throughout the UK,' said Heather. 'Only if people come forward can we establish the scale of the problem and tackle it effectively.'

Betting shop staff can freephone 0800 834 640 or visit www.bookiesrights.com for advice and information.

Membership in independent betting shops grows

Since its betting shop campaign began 18 months ago, Community has recruited thousands of members from the 'Big 3'. But it hasn't forgotten their counterparts in smaller independent bookmakers, who form about 60% of the sector's staff.

'We now have members in over 10 independents, and it's growing all the time,' adds Community organiser Ian Telford. 'They hear about Community tackling issues like lone-working, unpaid overtime, shop security and proper consultation, and want our support, too. The issues that most betting shop workers face are industry wide. However, we're aware that staff in independents, based mostly in smaller towns or rural areas, can face greater security risks and a slower police response if trouble happens.'

'In Region 2, I've been working with independents Pagebet, Chas Kendall and Chisholms, with a great deal of success. There are also a number of Betfred shops here in the North East where interest and membership is taking off,' he explains. 'We've been organising evening meetings so members and potential 'joiners' can discuss workplace issues outside the shop. As numbers and interest grow more shop staff are actively encouraging others to join Community. Some pop into other bookies to place a bet – which they can't do in their own chain – and use the opportunity to spread the Community message.'

'Communicating information has been challenging as there are fewer independents and they are more dispersed. But we're using Community's betting shop websites and newsletters to keep people up to date with developments.'

'Community aims to cover the whole sector,' says Head of Organising Christine Hardacre. 'We want all betting shop workers to know that Community are campaigning to improve conditions across the industry. We want to establish best practice across the industry - like an end to single staffing. The more members we have, the greater our voice will be with employers and industry regulators.'

If you work in an independent bookmakers and want to join Community, call our freephone hotline 0800 834 640 or visit www.community-tu.org or www.bookiesrights.com.

Community joins NUS to protect student 'bookies'

Community has joined together with the National Union of Students to support students working part-time in betting shops.

'Students are increasingly part of the sector's workforce, with firms advertising in student unions, job shops and recruitment fairs,' says Community Head of Organising Christine Hardacre. Of the 40% of students taking part-time jobs to offset their term-time living costs, over 3,500 will end up working in UK bookmakers this year.

'While these jobs may fit in well with study timetables, more students are calling college welfare services with complaints about extreme hours, lack of breaks, single staffing, and in some cases, not being paid by their recruitment agencies,' explains Joe Keenan, NUS Trade Union Partnership Manager. 'That's why we're working with Community to help protect students' rights at work. We are trying to ensure that wherever there are betting shop job ads Community information materials are promoted alongside so that students are aware of their rights. We are also encouraging student welfare centres to refer enquiries from students working in the betting industry on to Community for advice and support.'