

Unhidden in Plain Sight: Exhibition challenges images of human trafficking

EMBARGOED: 19 September 2018

A thought-provoking exhibition of photography will challenge sensationalised images of human trafficking – dominated by depictions of chains or ropes, or people with exposed flesh and marked skin – to tell a more realistic story of a person’s complex journey into and out of modern slavery.

Unhidden in Plain Sight is a collaboration between photographer Jeremy Abrahams and University of Sheffield academics Dr Hannah Lewis and Dr Gwyneth Lonergan to counter images used in anti-modern slavery campaigns, which often stereotype and re-victimise the people they are trying to support.

They have worked in partnership with three Sheffield-based organisations – City Hearts, Ashiana and The Snowdrop Project – to create a set of images that can be used by anti-trafficking campaign organisations and those which support victims of exploitation and abuse.

The photographs, which are posed by an actor and tell the story of one woman’s journey into and out of modern slavery, are accompanied by quotes from real people who have exited exploitation. The project is underpinned by research by Dr Lewis and Dr Lonergan through an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project: *Understanding the role of faith based organisations in anti-trafficking*.

Dr Hannah Lewis, from the University’s Migration Research Group and Department of Sociological Studies, said: “Many of the depictions of modern slavery we see in anti-trafficking campaigns and communications are sensationalising, and do not reflect realities of experiences of severe exploitation in the UK.

“Anti-trafficking imagery is designed to be troubling and arresting, but such images can be very unhelpful and, in fact, detract from adequate responses to the multiple causes and consequences of severe exploitation.

“We have worked in collaboration with Jeremy and three Sheffield-based organisations to create a set of images that are not dehumanising or sensationalist, that avoid simplistic depictions of traffickers as sole perpetrators and those experiencing exploitation as victims. They also show how processes of exploitation are not exceptional, but part of a labour-migration spectrum.”

“We hope these allow people to see the reality of complex journeys into and out of modern slavery.”

The collection of 11 images were photographed by Jeremy Abrahams, a Sheffield photographer whose previous work includes: Arrivals: Making Sheffield Home (exhibited at Weston Park Museum) and Remain/Leave (which was part of the 2017 Off The Shelf Festival and the University’s Festival of Social Sciences).

He said: “We want to change the frame of reference that people use to create images depicting human trafficking and modern slavery. We want to show that these experiences are complicated and that exiting a situation of severe exploitation is often the start of a long and difficult journey to recover physically and emotionally.”

The exhibition is part of the University of Sheffield’s Festival of the Mind, which sees academics from the University collaborate with some of the most talented professionals from the city’s cultural, creative and digital industries to showcase their world class research.

Unhidden in Plain Sight will be on display at the Winter Gardens in Sheffield city centre from 8am-8pm between 20-30 September 2018.

Members of the public are also invited to attend three workshops at Sheffield Library to meet the photographer, academics from the University’s Department of Sociological Studies and anti-trafficking organisations to explore the challenges of creating images that humanise survivors of a dehumanising crime. These will take place on Saturday 22 September from 12pm-1pm, Tuesday 25 September from 12pm-1pm and Wednesday 26 September from 5.30pm-6.30pm.

For more information visit www.sheffield.ac.uk/fotm or www.jeremyabrahams.co.uk/unhidden

Ends

Media contact: Hannah Postles, Media Relations Officer, 0114 222 1046 or email h.postles@sheffield.ac.uk

Notes to editors:

If you think you might be a victim of modern slavery, or think you may be aware of an incident of modern slavery, please call the Modern Slavery Helpline on 08000 121 700. For more information about modern slavery visit:

www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

Project partners

Hannah Lewis and Gwyneth Lonergan from the Department of Sociological Studies at the University of Sheffield work on the ESRC project 'Understanding the roles of faith based organisations in anti-trafficking' along with Professor Louise Waite and Professor Emma Tomalin from the University of Leeds.

www.faihandtrafficking.org

Ashiana Sheffield works with Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) adults, children and young people fleeing abuse – including forced marriage, human trafficking and 'honour' based violence.

www.ashianasheffield.org

City Hearts pursues the freedom and restoration of lives torn apart by modern slavery and other controlling issues. They create projects to bring a real chance to vulnerable and exploited people in society.

www.city-hearts.co.uk

The Snowdrop Project was founded to address the gap in long-term support to empower survivors of human trafficking. They provide community support, including casework, befriending, house renovation and counselling.

www.snowdropproject.co.uk

The University of Sheffield

With almost 29,000 of the brightest students from over 140 countries, learning alongside over 1,200 of the best academics from across the globe, the University of Sheffield is one of the world's leading universities.

A member of the UK's prestigious Russell Group of leading research-led institutions, Sheffield offers world-class teaching and research excellence across a wide range of disciplines.

Unified by the power of discovery and understanding, staff and students at the university are committed to finding new ways to transform the world we live in. Sheffield is the only university to feature in The Sunday Times 100 Best Not-For-Profit Organisations to Work For 2018 and for the last eight years has been ranked in the top five UK universities for Student Satisfaction by Times Higher Education.

Sheffield has six Nobel Prize winners among former staff and students and its alumni go on to hold positions of great responsibility and influence all over the world, making significant contributions in their chosen fields.

Global research partners and clients include Boeing, Rolls-Royce, Unilever, AstraZeneca, Glaxo SmithKline, Siemens and Airbus, as well as many UK and overseas government agencies and charitable foundations.