A conversation with Allister Woods: Video transcript

This video features Allister Woods, Regional Safeguarding Officer for Northern Ireland, and Danielle Oakford, Safeguarding Engagement Manager at DBS.

Danielle:
Hi, my name’s Danielle Oakford. I’m a Safeguarding Engagement Manager at the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), and I’m here today with one of my colleagues, Allister Woods. Allister is a Regional Safeguarding Outreach Officer for Northern Ireland. We’re going to be talking a little bit to Allister about his current role within DBS, hoping that you’ll find out a little bit more information, and you’ll find it useful.

First off Allister, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, and your current role within DBS?

Allister:
Yes, so as Danielle said, I’m the Regional Safeguarding Outreach Officer for Northern Ireland, so my main responsibilities are trying to raise the profile of DBS, and awareness of the key products that we as an organisation offer, to the key stakeholders and partners that we have within Northern Ireland.

A large part of my role, and a large part of my responsibility, is engaging with the key partners and stakeholders, and helping to support them in making safer recruitment decisions going forward, and helping them understand the key products we offer, moreso from a barring perspective.

My background in safeguarding comes from a range of organisations. I was formerly the Lead Welfare and Safeguarding Officer for a sports organisation in Northern Ireland, but I do also have quite a lot of experience of working within local authority councils, and also within some educational settings as well – so it’s nice to come into a different role, and be a bit more focused on safeguarding, and that outreach aspect, and working with partners and stakeholders, trying to make sure there’s consistency across Northern Ireland.

Danielle:
So you’ve touched on what you enjoy about the role Allister – working with partners and providing consistency across Northern Ireland – is there anything else that stands out for you about the role?

Allister:
I love being involved in a team that has the ability to impact the safeguarding of children and vulnerable groups, right across the UK. Obviously there’s myself based in Northern Ireland, but there are a number of other members of staff and a number of other members of the team, who are based right across the UK, in England and in Wales. One of the things I really enjoy, is the opportunity that we have as an organisation, to engage with these key partners and stakeholders. It’s tremendous.

I think as a team as well, we’re able to showcase the excellent work that DBS does, and the opportunities that we can provide for partners and organisations to learn, and to grow, are fantastic; with the different national campaigns that we run, with the annual conference, and hopefully now with the appointment of these regional safeguarding outreach workers, there’ll be a number of regional events that we will be able to run too – these will only strengthen the knowledge that our key stakeholders and key partners have.

Danielle:
It does sound really exciting in terms of the direction that it’s going in. I suppose for some context for the audience, back in 2020, we launched our DBS 2020-25 Strategy, and within the strategy, one of our key objectives is around our ‘Profile’. It talks about DBS becoming a respected and trusted organisation, working with our partners to play an influential role in the environment within which we operate. Are there links Allister between your role and the strategy?
Allister:
Yes, so the DBS Strategy 2020-25 is naturally linked to everything that we as an organisation do, and what we aspire to do. It reflects a number of our core priorities, where we aim to provide high quality service for all of our customers, as well as raising the profile of DBS and I think that's a really key point for the regional outreach programme in terms of raising the profile. One of the main strategic priorities is ‘Profile’ and raising the profile of DBS and what we as an organisation do, and what we can do.

Through the regional outreach programme, we’re going to aim to raise awareness of DBS and the services we offer, so by keeping people informed through communications we can increase public understanding of our organisation in terms of what we can do, and what we can offer. In terms of aiming to become a respected and trusted organisation, we’re in a pretty unique position whereby we have quite a lot of responsibility in protecting children and vulnerable groups, as well as employers, so we want to be the face of the organisation that does that, and to be respected and trusted within the community so people know that they can come to us whenever they do have a query or concern. That’s going to be vital.

Working with our partners to play an influential role in that environment, is going to be key.

Danielle:
So thinking about your role specifically, who you’re working with and any benefits to the approach so far, can you tell us a little bit about what you’ve found?

Allister:
Yes, so I’m currently working with some of the largest recruitment organisations in Northern Ireland to help them better understand the role that DBS as an organisation can play, and supporting their safeguarding structures and practices. Some of the key stakeholders that I’ve met with and that I’m currently working with include the Department for Health, the Education Authority, the Child Protection in Sport Unit, and some other local authority councils who would be some of the biggest employers of people in regulated activity, right the way across Northern Ireland.

A lot of the work that I’m carrying out with partners centres around the legal duty to refer and the different ways in which an organisation can submit a referral should they have a safeguarding concern about an individual. I suppose I’m in quite a unique position whereby I have AccessNI in Northern Ireland who look after the disclosure side of things, so it’s their responsibility and their role to process the applications for members of the public who require a criminal record check for employment purposes. I’m in that kind of unique position where I have another partner to work alongside, and that’s another thing that I’m looking forward to in my role, to strengthen that relationship that DBS has already built with AccessNI, and it’s something I’m building on, and establishing that relationship, and that point of contact. I’m looking forward to working alongside them.

Danielle:
Brilliant. I think the insight that you’ve provided today Allister, in terms of your background, and your role as Regional Safeguarding Outreach Officer in Northern Ireland has been invaluable. If anybody would like to find out more about the work of the Regional Outreach team, they can contact us via DBSRegionalOutreach@dbs.gov.uk. Thank you.