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## **DIVERSE FAITH COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER AND PLEDGE TO TACKLE STIGMA**

Eleven Lanarkshire faith communities have become the first in the country to unite together and publicly pledge their commitment to work with 'see me', Scotland's national campaign to tackle the stigma and discrimination of mental ill-health.

The 'see me' campaign aims to form partnerships with companies and organisations across Scotland to take positive mental health messages into local communities. 'see me' is committed to empowering people to speak openly and confidently about mental ill-health, to break down the associated barriers.

Representatives from eleven faith communities publicly signed the pledge and agreed action plans to join with 'see me' to tackle the stigma and discrimination around mental health problems by taking action as community stakeholders. The faith communities participating in the pledge signings include:

- Baptist Churches of North and South Lanarkshire
- Hamilton Presbytery of the Church of Scotland
- Lanark Presbytery of the Church of Scotland
- Lanarkshire Hindu Welfare Association
- Islamic Education Trust Cumbernauld
- Central Mosque Lanarkshire, Mossend
- Lanarkshire Circuit of the Methodist Church in Scotland
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Motherwell
- Lanarkshire Regional Council of the Scottish Episcopal Church
- The United Reformed Church in Lanarkshire
- North Lanarkshire Muslim Women's Association

Suzie Vestri, 'see me' Campaign Director, said: "We welcome the commitment of Lanarkshire faith organisations and look forward to working with them to break down the barrier that stands in the way of people talking about mental ill-health. Mental health problems can and do affect people from all walks of life. It's the reaction and

support of family, friends and colleagues that can make a huge difference to recovery. We hope that the support pledged here will encourage more people across Lanarkshire to take positive action by joining 'see me' in tackling stigma and discrimination."

Kevin O'Neill, Chair of the Lanarkshire Mental Health Improvement Partnership Group said, "We wish to see a Lanarkshire where we all understand how to look after our mental health, how to support others mental health and well-being and what support is available. By working with faith communities we are able to support faith leaders and promote positive mental health messages to faith communities and congregations. We are delighted that Lanarkshire is the place where the first faith communities in Scotland are signing the 'see me' pledge and joining over 170 organisations in Lanarkshire who have already signed the 'see me' pledge and who are making a contribution to the well-being of our communities."

Rev Graham Austin Convener of Church and Society Committee of Hamilton Presbytery said: "Mental health is an issue that affects almost every family to one degree or another and yet it is brushed under the carpet. What this campaign does is to highlight the issue, give people permission to talk about mental health and offers to provide help and support. This can only be a good thing and Hamilton Presbytery is happy to support the 'see me' campaign."

Rev Sarah Ross of the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Lanark said: "With help from 'see me' we have developed an action plan from which we will inform and resource congregations in ways they can support and encourage people with mental health issues. It is the hope of Lanark Presbytery that by encouraging congregations to talk openly about mental health issues including stigma and discrimination we will be able to provide warm, welcoming and appropriate spaces and services."

Mrs Asha Mallik of the Lanarkshire Hindu Welfare Association said: "As Hindus we welcome the opportunity to sign the 'see me' pledge with the other Lanarkshire faith communities. It is good to sign the 'see me' pledge as it will encourage openness about mental health problems and this can only be a help for all."

Mr Azhar Din of Islamic Education Trust Cumbernauld said: "The Islamic Education Trust of Cumbernauld recognises the 'see me' campaign as an important step towards physical and spiritual well being of everyone in our communities. By signing

the pledge together with the other faith groups we hope it will give the campaign a real boost.”

Rev Allan Loudon of Lanarkshire Circuit of the Methodist Church in Scotland said: “The Methodist Church see being involved in ‘caring for each other’ as an important part of our calling. The Lanarkshire Circuit signing the ‘see me’ pledge expresses this as it enables everyone to become more aware of mental health issues and the stigma it can create.”

Imam Kurshid Khan of the Central Mosque Lanarkshire & Lanarkshire Muslim Welfare Society said: “We of the Central Mosque Lanarkshire are very happy and honoured to be signing this ‘see me’ pledge alongside the faith communities of Lanarkshire. Standing up to support the needs of those with mental health problems is an extremely virtuous act in our faith and important to our community.”

Mrs Aisha Tasneem of the North Lanarkshire Muslim Women & Family Alliance Association said: “North Lanarkshire Muslim Women and Family Alliance, consider signing the ‘see me’ pledge will help in general to overcome the barriers of misunderstanding about people with mental health problems. We are very happy to be part of this campaign with other faith organisations across Lanarkshire.”

Rev Stephen Younger, of the Baptist Churches of North and South Lanarkshire, said: “Baptist Churches are deeply committed to Jesus as Saviour and Lord revealed in Scripture and seek to emulate His healing ministry to the whole person – body, soul, spirit and mind. Faith ‘sees’ God’s peace brought to the Whole Person and sees that every person is loved and valued by God.”

Rt Rev Bishop Devine of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Motherwell said: “The Diocese of Motherwell is honoured and privileged to sign the ‘see me’ pledge; the fact that most of the religious communities from across Lanarkshire have come together to sign the ‘see me’ pledge and unite to remove the stigma that surrounds mental ill health and help people in our society; can only be a good thing.”

Rev Lorna Mortis of Scottish Episcopal Church, Lanarkshire Regional Council said: “The Churches of Lanarkshire Regional Council, Scottish Episcopal Church, are pleased to sign the ‘see me’ pledge with other faith communities of Lanarkshire.

Anything that leads to greater understanding and support of mental wellbeing is something our church is very committed to.”

Rev John Humphreys of the United Reformed Church in Lanarkshire said: “The Synod of Scotland of the United Reformed Church aspires to be a community in which all will find welcome. The ‘see me’ pledge is part of this aspiration and I hope that the ‘see me’ pledge moves beyond Lanarkshire across Scotland helping all our communities to reach genuine inclusiveness.”

For more information on signing the ‘see me’ pledge visit: [www.seemescotland.org](http://www.seemescotland.org)