STOP LOAN SHARKS
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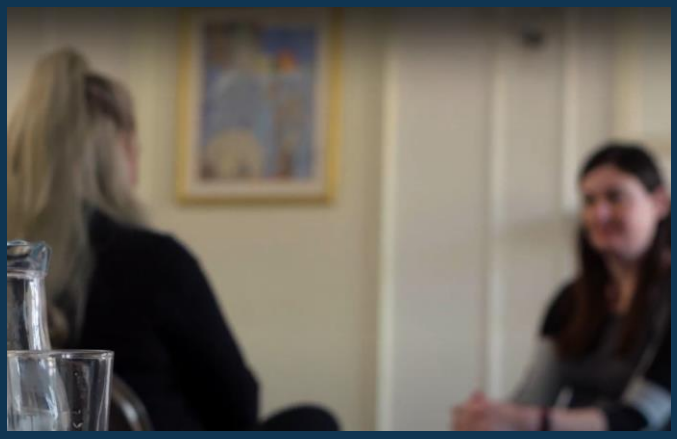
NATIONAL NEWSLETTER
Winter 2022

North East mum driven to brink of suicide and made homeless by ruthless loan shark

A mum-of-three has spoken out about her terrifying experience of being trapped by a loan shark who drove her to the brink of suicide and made her family homeless at Christmas.

Michelle, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, had recently moved to a new area in the North East after escaping an abusive relationship.

When her hours were cut at work, money became very tight and with her son's birthday approaching, she needed emergency cash to see her through the month.



Michelle accepted help from a mum she had befriended at her son's school. The woman offered to help Michelle out with a loan, said she knew what it was like to need a few extra quid, and that she could pay her back next month.

Michelle thought her new friend was just helping her out. She didn't realise she was about to fall into a dangerous trap with a ruthless, intimidating lender who would put her family through a horrific ordeal.

In a video describing her experiences, Michelle said: "I got to the point of wanting to end everything.

"I was very suicidal and didn't know who to go to. There were threats on my life and on my home.

"I had windows put in and I would get messages off people bullying me because she had sent them to my door, she even used local youths in the area as a campaign of terror."

It all started with a small loan for £50, but then the loan shark offered to lend Michelle larger sums of money with interest. The most she borrowed at one time was £350, and she repaid nearly £2,500. The debt quickly spiralled out of control with double interest piled on.

When Michelle struggled to keep up with the repayments, the loan shark resorted to intimidation and violence, making her life a misery.

She was sent threatening messages, people threw things at her house, left unwanted items on her doorstep, and smashed the windows at night.

Michelle was petrified to leave the house in case something bad happened to her family.

She was worried about their safety, so made the decision to leave in a hurry. She fled the family home with her three children and left all her possessions behind.

The ordeal didn't end there for Michelle and she continued to receive abuse online and cruel comments were posted on social media by the loan shark and the loan shark's associates.

The shaming post went viral and many of her close friends and family also saw it.

Michelle's family became homeless just before Christmas 2019. They were given temporary accommodation by the council, but they had no possessions.

Michelle knew something had to be done and searched online for agencies that could help. That's where she found the helpline number for **Stop Loan Sharks** and the support changed her life.

Watch Michelle's Story on YouTube

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Pair sentenced for £4m illegal lending racket

Two women who ran an illegal lending racket worth more than £4 million from their Tooting home have been sentenced.

Luz Guerra Villar, 65, and Leticia Manipol, 69, lent over £4.2 million to fellow Filipinos across South London, including many working at a London hospital.

Appearing for sentencing at Kingston Crown Court on February 4, Villar was sentenced to 18 months, suspended for two years, and ordered to carry out 220 hours of unpaid work.

Manipol was handed a 15-month prison sentence, suspended for two years with 200 hours of unpaid work.

The defendants had pleaded guilty to illegal money lending and money laundering charges between July 2003 and October 2019 at an earlier hearing.

The case was prosecuted by the IMLT in partnership with the London Borough of Merton, Richmond upon Thames & Wandsworth Regulatory Services Partnership and the Metropolitan Police.



When officers from the IMLT executed a warrant at the defendants home in October 2019, ledgers outlining payments and loans were recovered, along with electronic devices which revealed the scale of the illicit operation.

Villar had issued loans totalling £2,741,865 between July 2003 and October 2019, and received £2,841,233 in repayments over the same period. Manipol had issued £1,462,502 in loans and received £1,613,267 in repayments between 2008 and 2019. A Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) timetable has been set for later this year.

Stockton couple ordered to repay £130K

An elderly couple who ran an illegal money lending business have been ordered to repay tens of thousands of pounds of their ill-gotten gains or face jail time.

Alan and Joyce Fromson from Carlton in Stockton were handed a 10-month prison sentence, suspended for two years in November 2020.

They had previously pleaded guilty to charges of unlawfully engaging in the activities of a consumer credit business for which a licence was required and money lending when not authorised.

At a confiscation hearing on January 19 at Teesside Crown Court, the couple were ordered to repay £136,623 in the next three months, or they will be jailed for 18 months.

The court was told that the pair had worked for the loan firm Provident and decided to establish their own lending company called JFA Personal Credit in 1997.

Alan Fromson, 81, and Joyce Fromson, 80, ran a legitimate business until 2007 when they failed to renew their licence to loan money to customers. They continued running their business illegally and did not pay tax on their earnings.

When interviewed Alan told IMLT investigators “we could get away with it so we did” and “we have had a very, very good living out of it”.

The couple explained that they had copied the Provident model, with Alan operating in the Thornaby area and Joyce in Stillington and Carlton.

Read the full press release on our website.

Got information about loan sharks?
Email us ✉ 0300 555 2222 ☎

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Terrified dad tells of his ordeal at the hands of a loan shark who posed as his friend

A dad-of-two has spoken of his horrific ordeal of being trapped in the clutches of a loan shark.

Mark, whose name has been changed to protect his identity, was working in a supermarket when he was approached by a friendly member of staff who offered him a loan.

Mark borrowed £2,000 to send home to his family in Southeast Asia. He said the loan shark seemed friendly and pleasant at first, but quickly turned nasty when he struggled to keep up with repayments.

Under the terms of the loan, which was available straight away, Mark had to pay 10% interest each month (£200) until he could repay the full amount in one single instalment.

Struggling to keep up with the interest payments, he borrowed another £4,000 from his colleague, which took the monthly interest payments to £600 a month.

Mark's debt quickly spiralled out of control and he struggled to keep up with the demands. That's when the loan shark turned nasty and threatened to hurt Mark and his family if he didn't pay up.

He said "The loan shark kept turning up at my doorstep and threatening me and my children."



Mark's ordeal came to an end when he called Citizens Advice for help. The IMLT launched an investigation into the loan shark who was terrorising other families in the area.

Thanks to the evidence provided by Mark and other borrowers, the loan shark was arrested and brought to justice. Victims are being urged to seek help and to not suffer in silence.

Watch Mark's Story on YouTube

Partnership launched with VRS will help protect loan shark victims

The IMLT has teamed up with the **Vulnerability Registration Service (VRS)** in a unique partnership to offer further protection for loan shark victims.

The VRS is a not-for-profit company providing the UK's first central vulnerability database. The powerful partnership will for the first time enable service providers, such as banks, utilities, mobile phone companies, local authorities and councils to play a vital and active role in protecting those customers who have fallen victim to loan sharks from further financial harm.

The new partnership will enable IMLT to refer people who have borrowed from loan sharks into the Vulnerability Registration Service database for support.

This database is a central, independent register that helps organisations to identify vulnerability and treat their customers fairly. Service providers using the VRS database will be alerted if their customers are victims of loan sharks through a 'risk of coercion' flag.

Not easily available to service providers anywhere else, this information will give them the ability to adjust their approach and take more appropriate steps with those customers. It will enable them to focus their resources effectively, such as assigning a trained advisor, adjusting their collections strategy or applying a fairer lending criteria.

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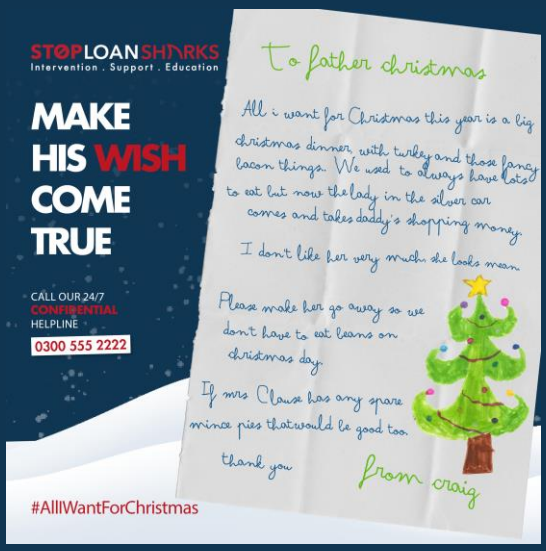
Thank you for supporting our #AllIWantForChristmas Campaign

We wanted to say a huge thank you to all the organisations that supported our #AllIWantForChristmas campaign and helped spread the important message about the dangers of using loan sharks.

The awareness campaign ran across the Stop Loan Sharks social media platforms from November 29 until December 5 and reached over one million users.

Research conducted by the team found that Christmas is the second highest reason people borrow money from illegal lenders. Letters to Santa were used to highlight the misery inflicted on vulnerable families by loan sharks.

The heartbreaking letters to Santa are based on anecdotes from families and children supported by the IMLT who help people out of spiralling debt and tackle the criminals who exploit them.



Woman sentenced for £300k illegal business

A Barnet woman who ran an illegal money lending business has been given a suspended sentence.

Irene Murunge, 51, of Watford Way in Hendon, was sentenced at Harrow Crown Court on November 8.

She was convicted on September 13, 2021, after a jury found her guilty of a single offence of unlawfully engaging in money lending between 1st April 2014 and 20th February 2018.

Her 18-month sentence was suspended for two years and she was ordered to complete 200 hours of community work.

The case was prosecuted by the IMLT working in partnership with Barnet Council Trading Standards and the Metropolitan Police Service.

The terms of the loans were 10% interest, chargeable every 14 days. Many loans were rolled over thereby incurring additional interest and penalty charges were imposed on victims who were unable to pay their loans. The value of the loans paid out in the period was £283,973.25 and the value of the loans repaid was £315, 508.27.

Successful forfeiture order obtained under POCA



The IMLT have successfully obtained a forfeiture order under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) against a man from Birkenhead, for cash amounting to £30,000 that was seized during an illegal money lending warrant.

The money seized through POCA is reinvested back into communities through projects aimed at tackling loan sharks.

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Storybook warns children about loan sharks

A new storybook that aims to warn children about the dangers of loan sharks has been launched at a primary school in Birmingham.

Pupils at Heath Mount Primary School in Balsall Heath were paid a surprise visit by England's Illegal Money Lending Team mascot Sid the Shark on January 24.

The children also read a new story called 'Amsty meets Mr Loan Shark' which aims to warn them about the pitfalls of unscrupulous lenders online. The story is a sequel to 'Amsty Gets Online', published in October 2020.

The story – aimed primarily at children aged 5-11 years – sees the return of Amsty, an old wise computer who lives in the library. Together with old and new friends, Amsty is on a mission to help families learn about the dangers of loan sharks and where to seek help.

The 31-page illustrated storybook, written by Hafsha Dadabhai-Shaikh and Salim Shaikh from the **Get Families Talking** project, run by Smartlyte, has been funded from proceeds of crime taken from convicted loan sharks. Copies will be available to borrow from all libraries in Birmingham.



The launch of the book comes after reports of predatory lenders using social media sites to openly advertise loans and snare potential victims.

Cllr Jayne Francis, Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Culture at Birmingham City Council said: "This new book is a brilliant way to get children engaged in the serious subject of loan sharks and will better prepare them for adulthood. It is also hoped that the young people will carry the message home and encourage parents who may be in difficulties to seek help." **Get your hands on a copy here**.

Quids in! guide raises awareness of loan sharks

The IMLT has partnered with Quids in! to produce a free 8-page magazine, available in dual language English and Bengali, warning people about the dangers of borrowing money from loan sharks.

Over 5000 copies have been printed and distributed to low income social tenants in Tower Hamlets. The guide includes advice, support and information about how to spot the signs of illegal money lending and access help from Stop Loan Sharks.

The guide has been funded by proceeds of crime money which has been confiscated from convicted loan sharks following successful prosecutions.



Help us pick a new social media cover photo

The IMLT need YOUR help picking a new cover photo for their social media pages. Make sure you're following Stop Loan Sharks on **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Instagram** for more details on how to get involved in the mural photo competition. The winner will be announced on Monday 28th February.



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Campaign to tackle loan sharks in North Ormesby

Thirteen is lending its support to a national campaign aiming to help tackle loan sharks.

A week of action was held in North Ormesby to raise awareness of illegal money lending and signpost victims to support outlets.

The campaign was the result of a partnership between the IMLT, Moneywise Credit Union and the wider North Ormesby Locality Working Team which includes partners such as Thirteen, Middlesbrough Council and Cleveland Police.

During the week, officers took part in a leaflet drop in North Ormesby where they spoke to residents about illegal money lending and provided real alternatives and assistance for those struggling financially.

The campaign's mascot, Sid the Shark, also made an appearance to raise awareness of the issue and provide safety information and advice.

Thirteen is training staff at all levels to ensure they can identify loan sharks and signpost victims to support confidentially and safely.



Working together with partner organisations is an incredibly effective way of highlighting the serious issue of loan sharks who target some of the most vulnerable communities.

The IMLT offers online sessions and face-to-face training for frontline professionals on how to identify the signs of illegal money lending.

Contact us at partner@stoploansharks.gov.uk to enquire about scheduling a training session.

Lanterns shine a light on illegal money lending

The IMLT worked with Hopeful Families to run loan shark awareness sessions with families in Wakefield.

Young people created fish shaped lanterns to highlight the dangers of illegal money lending.

The lantern event attracted more than 250 families and was funded through proceeds of crime. It saw a myriad of brightly lit lanterns of all shapes, sizes and guises parade through Hemsworth Water Park in December.

The lanterns were made from willow and paper and used battery powered candles so did not pose any health or fire risks to local wildlife.





Kids design mugs to combat loan sharks

A design a mug competition at Old Sarum Nursery in Salisbury has been helping to raise awareness about the dangers of loan sharks.

Children as young as two designed posters with their families to highlight the risks of illegal money lending and the winning designs were printed onto mugs.





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Credit union joins fight against loan sharks



Somerset Community Credit Union (SCCU) have been helping to combat the menace posed by illegal money lenders.

Sid the Shark, the IMLT campaign mascot, has been touring the town of Bridgwater with the brilliant SCCU staff and volunteers to raise awareness of the dangers of dealing with loan sharks, and encouraging local residents to save through their local credit union.

Cash confiscated from loan sharks will be used to reward people with a £25 bonus who have opened a SCCU account and saved over the winter months.

Wirral pupils taught to avoid loan sharks



Children at a Wirral primary school have been learning about the perils posed by loan sharks.

Pupils at Riverside Primary School in Wallasey took part in a competition to design a poster warning people of the dangers of illegal money lending. They were also paid a surprise visit by national mascot Sid the Shark.

The IMLT have been working with Merseyside Police as part of the Mini Pathfinder Project which aims to support young people to make positive choices through early intervention. It is hoped that pupils will carry the stop loan sharks message home and encourage parents who may be in difficulties to seek help.

New mural unveiled in Jaywick to raise awareness of loan sharks



A new mural was unveiled in Jaywick Sands as part of a project funded by money confiscated from the ill-gotten gains of loan sharks.

The IMLT worked with Mind Charity and London based muralist Will Redgrove to create the stunning design to warn residents about the dangers of loan sharks.

The artwork features a race car jumping out of water and escaping the jaws of a great white shark. It also includes information about Stop Loan Sharks for people to access support if they are involved with an illegal lender.

Being involved with a loan shark can negatively affect mental health and lead to severe anxiety, stress, depression and feelings of isolation.

To break the stigma surrounding mental health and loan sharks, members of the community were invited to take part in the painting of the mural and share their own experiences.

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Press Coverage



'I borrowed £50 and we ended up homeless'

BBC News Online
9th December 2021



Warning as loan sharks trawl the web for victims

ITV Regional News
31st January 2022

TeessideLive

60-year-old woman among suspected loan sharks arrested in Teesside raids

Teesside Live
27th January 2022



EXCLUSIVE: Inside raid on suspected loan shark's £300,000 home as Christmas crackdown launched

Sunday Mirror
4th December 2021

ECHO

Women arrested over money laundering after house raids in Liverpool

Liverpool Echo
4th February 2022

Evening Standard
11th February 2022

Evening Standard

Two women ran £4m loan shark operation from their Tooting home

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Update from Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit

The Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit (SIMLU) are pleased to be funding a project that will provide multi-lingual support to vulnerable people who are seeking asylum, refugee and new migrants to improve their financial capability and avoid the need to use illegal money lenders.

John Pollock, Partnership and Support from SIMLU said: “We are delighted to be partnering with Positive Action in Housing, who provide support to people at risk from illegal money lending and destitution. There are many challenges facing people who are seeking asylum, refugee or a new migrant coming to Scotland and we hope this project removes some of these challenges.”

POSITIVE ACTION IN HOUSING

Have you gained Partner Recognition status yet?

The **Stop Loan Sharks Partner Recognition Programme** recognises and rewards partners that work alongside IMLT to raise awareness of loan sharks, their impact on local communities, and help to create safer spaces for people to live and work.



Congratulations to our latest recognised partner organisations: University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust, Aspire Housing, Sussex Police, Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, Quaker Social Action, Thamesbank Credit Union, Broadacres Housing Association, Bromley Children's Services, Manchester Credit Union, Smartlyte Limited.

Keep up to date with the latest news about the work of Stop Loan Sharks

www.stoploansharks.co.uk

Click to follow us on social media