

Ref

CPU: 1,358 child abuse reports in eight months

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The Child Protection Unit (CPU) of the Police Service says it will continue to implement the strictest possible procedures when investigating reports of abuse against children and to act immediately to ensure the well-being of the victims.

Senior officials said yesterday they had already forged close links with the Children's Authority to ensure relief could be afforded to the victims almost immediately and that action could be taken against the accused in the shortest possible time.

During the weekly police briefing on Wednesday, acting Sgt Valarie Hospedales said the CPU had received 1,358 reports of crimes committed against children from May 2015 to December 2015.

Of this number, 500 were said to be of a sexual nature.

Reiterating that it had done a lot of work in the past several months, head of the CPU, Supt St Louis-Pesnell, said once a report was submitted to her unit and there was evidence to suggest any kind of criminal activity against a child, officers were mandated to act immediately.

Defending the work of her officers throughout the last six months, St Louis-Pesnell said there was almost 500 matters before the courts.

She said although the outcomes were pending, that did not mean the CPU was not fulfilling its mandate.

She added it had so far secured approximately four convictions in matters both in Trinidad and Tobago.

Explaining how its operations were carried out, St Louis-Pesnell said once a report was received and evidence gathered, the accused would be asked to find

alternative accommodation or the victim would be removed from the home.

She said the Children's Authority would then get involved as the CPU was mandated to report all matters to it, so it would decide what was deemed a "safe house" for the victim.

The CPU was mandated under the Children's Authority Act No 46 (10) to engage in a collaborative relationship to ensure the care and protection of the nation's children, she said.

The primary role and function of the CPU was to investigate matters of a sexual nature, physical abuse, abandonment/neglect and ill-treatment of children, she added.

Last December, head of the Victim and Witness Support Unit, Margaret Sampson-Browne, called for more aggressive efforts to be introduced to reach persons who were victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

She added her unit had begun checking social media daily in an attempt to track new cases and reach the victims.

She said with videos and recordings now being uploaded to social networking sites in many cases, it was a new medium which they needed to monitor consistently for information about such acts as some victims may be unable to access help for various reasons.