



COUNTY LINES

“County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons”.

County lines is a major threat to young people and vulnerable adults throughout England, Scotland and Wales, that is expanding and progressing at fast pace. With a growing number of County Lines operating throughout England and Wales putting thousands of young people and vulnerable adults at risk.

How does the operation work?

The group begin by taking over premises in the target area or by befriending locals – sometimes by coercion, by using property belonging to local addicts who are paid in drugs, or by beginning a relationship with a vulnerable female.

Once in place they use common marketing tactics to get established, including introductory offers on their drugs. They then set about expanding the ‘workforce’; recruiting local runners to deliver drugs and money. The groups often use children, because they work for little pay, are easy to control, and are less likely to be detected. Children are often recruited by social media where gang members

make their lifestyle appear desirable with designer clothes, cars and cash.

A recent report found that most runners are boys aged between 11 and 17 and that grooming with gifts and money to control them via a ‘debt’ was common. Where girls were used, they sometimes also became the victims of sexual violence.

The groups continually use various tactics to evade detection, including rotating gang members between locations so they are not identified by law enforcement or competitors, and using women and children to transport drugs in the belief that they are less likely to be stopped and searched.



SPOT THE SIGNS OF COUNTY LINES

Children and vulnerable adults are at risk of exploitation from gangs. This could include...



What are the signs?

There are a number of behavioural warning signs that you should be looking out for:

- Repeatedly going missing for long periods of time and whereabouts unaccounted for
- Sudden rise in truancy/staying out unusually late
- Returning home with money, clothes or accessories which they are unable to account for
- Being stopped in relation to drugs – especially if this is outside your area
- Being involved in fights or disorder – again, especially if this is outside your area
- Being stopped and searched in the presence of other gang members
- Changes in behaviour; becoming fearful and/or withdrawn and/or prone to unexplained outbursts of anger
- Being secretive (more guarded than usual for a typical teenager)
- Carrying more than one mobile
- Real distancing from one or both parents/ caregivers
- Carrying weapons
- Unexplained injuries (which may indicate violence from others and/or self-harming), refusing medical help
- Abusing drugs and/or alcohol
- Gangs will often have profiles on social or networking websites like Instagram or Snapchat so look out for sudden changes to their profile and/or use of slang/derogatory language.

Please note this list is not exhaustive, you should always seek advice if you are concerned.

What can you do?

It is important to remember that you are not to blame, criminal groups exploit the young, the vulnerable and those that are within easy reach. They reach out to young people and groom them into believing they are part of a group. No matter how confident or secure you may feel the child in your care is, the group will present themselves as whatever is missing, or with what the child wants or feels that they need.

However, once they have them, often their treatment of your child will change to coercion, bullying and exploitation.

For these reasons it's important to remember that the child is just as much a victim and there are things you can do to help stop your child from being involved or to help them get out.

Here's some helpful tips

- Talk to your child and listen – you are looking for open, honest and non-judgemental communication without anger
- Encourage them to get involved in positive activities and to think about their future and employment
- Get involved in your child's school activities
- Know your child's friends and their families
- Always know where your child is and who they are with
- Help them to cope with pressure and how to deal with conflict without the use of violence
- Speak to them about the serious consequences of violent or illegal behaviour
- Help them to understand the dangers of being in a gang and find alternative constructive ways to use their time
- Keep lines of communication open
- Be aware of what your child is doing on the internet
- Look for ways of disciplining children that do not involve harshness, anger or violence
- Work with other parents and schools to watch their behaviour
- Contact local voluntary organisations that provide mentoring and other support for young people
- Talk about your child's behaviour with their school and other parents

If you suspect your child is already involved

Remember that they may not want to talk about it or may be scared. If young people have become involved in drug supply they may be fearful of disclosing this to parents and professionals for fear of repercussions. It is this fear which allows them to remain under the control of the gang. It is important that they know you want to listen and support them. Make sure they know they have a choice and you are there for them.

Stay calm

Ask questions, but listen too. Don't be afraid of confrontation, but try not to approach them with anger and accusations. Try to understand the situation from their point of view and why they have joined the gang. Ask them what you can do to help. Try to agree on what they should do next. Work with them to find solutions and choices.

Seek help from local community organisations or youth services

They can offer specialist support and programmes to help them leave the gang. (See useful contacts on back page.) Contact local support networks.

USEFUL NUMBERS

To report your child's involvement in County Lines/Criminal Exploitation

Northumbria Police

Tel: 101 or in an Emergency 999

Crimestoppers

A free confidential service where you can report information about a crime anonymously.

Freephone: 0800 555 111

Web: www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Local Authority /Council

Connect to your local authority and find out about local specialised work with gangs, parent groups and activities for young people in your area. They can also refer you to parenting support programmes:

Northumberland County Council

County Hall, Morpeth NE61 2EF

Tel: 0345 600 640

North Tyneside Council

Quadrant, Silverlink North, Cobalt Business Park, North Tyneside NE27 0BY

Tel: 0345 2000 101

Newcastle City Council

Civic Centre, Newcastle, NE1 8QH

Tel: 0191 278 7878

Gateshead Council

Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead NE8 1HH

Tel: 0191 433 3000

South Tyneside Council

Town Hall and Civic Services, Westoe Road, South Tyneside, NE33 2RL

Tel: 0191 427 7000

Sunderland City Council,

Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland SR2 7DN.

Tel: 0191 5205555

Changing Lives - Changing Lives: GAP MAP provide support in the following areas: Northumberland, Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland and South Tyneside. They are a proactive outreach service provision reaching out to some of our most vulnerable people in our society.

GAP MAP - Sexual exploitation, Sex Work & Survival Sex - Nichola David - 07812663077 - Nichola.David@changing-lives.org.uk, Modern Day Slavery - Megan - 07812663290 - Megan.Farrelly@changing-lives.org.uk

Bright Futures N.E is a registered Charity working with young women aged 11-25 yrs covering CSE, sexual health and relationships, alcohol and substance misuse, family relationships, homelessness, friendships, training and education. Web: www.brightfuturesne.co.uk or Email: brightfutures@live.co.uk

The Children's Society, (Scarpa Project)-working with people who are currently involved or have been involved in child sexual exploitation, county lines/urban street gangs. 2nd Floor New England House, 18 Ridley Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8JW. Tel: 0191 2210836 or Email: sca@childrenssociety.org.uk

Family Lives

Gives advice on all aspects of the parenting role and is open 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week.

Freephone: 0808 800 2222

Web: www.familylives.org.uk

Anti Bullying Alliance

Advice on bullying.

Web: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

Runs a wide range of services for both children and adults, including a national helpline and local projects. Their helpline is open 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week.

Tel: Freephone 0808 800 5000

E-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk

Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

Victim Support

A national charity supporting people affected by crime.

Web: www.victimsupport.org

HYPE at Pallion Action Group Covering the City of Sunderland

Contact : emma.sloan@pallionactiongroup.co.uk or Tel 07308124182

Action for Children - Newcastle tel; 0300 123 2112 or e mail ; askus@actionforchildren.org.uk

CEOP - Child Exploitation and Online Protection command - go to website and make a report. Email: ceop.police.uk

Edge North East

Edge offer Mentoring packages to Young People involved or at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation, Serious Youth Violence, Gang Activity and Organised Crime. The Mezzanine - Byker Community Centre, 153 Headlam Street, Byker, Newcastle NE6 2DX
Tel: 0191 447 1611 or 07530089214

Missing People Charity

If your child is going missing from long periods of time in addition to contacting police you can also obtain support from Missing People Charity.

Freephone: 116 000

Text: 116 000 (you can text this number if you have run out of credit)
Web: www.missingpeople.org.uk

SafeCall

- Away from home or care?
- Caught up in a gang or going country?
- Are you a family member or carer worried about your loved one being involved with a gang?

Missing People Charity will listen and offer you support. Not judge you or tell you what to do. It's your call. SafeCall is confidential. 9am - 5pm.

If you would like to speak to someone urgently, please contact Missing People's free, 24/7 confidential helpline by call/text 116 000 or emailing 116000@missingpeople.org.uk