



## THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE

Recent research from the Department for Education reveals that between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021,

**12,720**

children assessed by children's social services in England were deemed to be

**AT RISK OF CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION BY GANGS.**



The figures also show there were

**16,830**

children where child sexual exploitation was a factor during their assessment and

**2,710**

children where trafficking was a factor.

In London in particular,

**3,500**

children were identified as being at risk because of involvement with gangs,

**2,650**

children were identified as being at risk as a result of child sexual exploitation.



It explains that “the exclusion of vulnerable young people from full time school, whether placing them on reduced timetables, putting in place home schooling arrangements, or removing them to PRUs exacerbates their vulnerability and increases the risk of being targeted by gangs for exploitation. In some areas, PRUs become the arena for gang rivalries which become dangerous for pupils and hard for staff to manage. PRUs are also viewed as the place where already vulnerable young people get first-hand exposure to and experience of crime (drug dealing /violence /intimidation/ recruitment for ‘county lines’). There are growing numbers of excluded children in alternative provision and this clustering together is creating a recruiting arena for crime and anti-social behaviour.”

Sometimes children deliberately get excluded from school in order to get allocated to a PRU so they can recruit more pupils into selling drugs. At other times, gang members wait outside PRU gates on the lookout for the most vulnerable children to target.

The school to exclusion to prison pipeline disproportionately affects children from Black and Brown communities. The Commission on Young Lives recently found that Black boys in care are more likely to enter the youth justice system, and this problem is worsening as the number of Black boys going into care rises.



## DIG DEEPER

While young people aged 14-17 are most likely to be recruited by county lines gangs, there are reports of children as young as seven being groomed. County lines gangs exist throughout the UK and can target children from any background. However, exploiters usually seek out young people who are marginalised and vulnerable and there is evidence of a strong link between children outside mainstream education and county lines.

According to the Home Office, “gangs wishing to exploit young people target them in arenas where they are likely to have reduced monitoring and supervision such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Children’s Homes.”





TIME TO LISTEN

Ben Lindsay, the founder of Power The Fight explains:

- ▶ How children get targeted
- ▶ Why children get drawn in
- ▶ How children from Black and Brown communities are disproportionately affected by county lines



Scan me or go to The Clewer Initiative's YouTube channel and search for Ben Lindsay's clips

▶ <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk>



REFLECTION

Read Luke 18 v18-30

How hard it is for all of us who are comfortable, like the ruler in the story, to reach out to those who suffer. This is even more true when those who suffer are hidden in plain sight, and the most vulnerable of God's children. In the films above, Ben Lindsay provides a powerful challenge to move from comfort and convention to a new perspective and different priorities.

- Do you, like the ruler, place limits on your discipleship? Are there things that you are unwilling to do when it comes to loving your neighbour?
- What have you learned from Ben and the material this week that might point you to something lacking in your own learning and help you see new things and possibilities?
- Jesus says to the ruler 'give of yourself to help the vulnerable', and in this spirit follow Him. Can we identify new priorities in our following of Jesus, especially in the light of Suzanne's story (next page)?



PRAYER

*Lord of all life, teach us to be honest about what our discipleship might lack, so that with your light we may better identify the needs of your children and adjust our witness and worship - since what might seem to be impossible for mortals is always possible for you. Guide and guard us to be better agents of your saving love - in Jesus' name we pray,*

*Amen.*





### A STORY OF HOPE - REACHING OUT TO VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHEFFIELD

Suzanne is a community pioneer, based at the Winn Gardens Estate in Sheffield. She is responsible for caring for and supporting the 375 households who live on the estate. She is employed by a nearby church, St John the Baptist, Owlerton and Zest, a Sheffield-based charity.

Winn Gardens Estate was built in the mid-1960s - 65 per cent of residents are White British and 35 per cent are from other nations. There are 16 different nationalities on the estate and some people speak no English.

Suzanne recently attended The Clewer Initiative's Breaking County Lines course to boost her knowledge of county lines and how children can be prevented from getting drawn into criminal gangs.

Since moving on to the estate in 2020, she has connected with around 80 - 90 children and young people through detached youth nights and 75 - 80 households via their foodbank and clothing recycle project.

As she lives and works on the estate, she has spent a lot of time connecting with the children and young people from the estate by hanging out at the shared spaces such as the basketball courts and playing fields. She spends many hours chatting to young people and offering them hot chocolate and snacks. This sort of detached youthwork is the only thing that has been possible when COVID-19 restrictions have forbidden indoor gatherings and has been a wonderful way to start forming relationships with local families.

Suzanne explains: "Most days, there are 8-12 kids waiting on my doorstep when I go out or come back from somewhere. The children love meeting my dog, Poppy - she has been a wonderful asset. Everyone knows her and is drawn to her! Wonderfully, we have had people queuing to come to our community church on a Sunday."

During Covid, Suzanne and her team created food packs and daily activities for families so that they had healthy holiday provision. During May half term, 83 children from the Estate received holiday packs and attended organised events such as a treasure hunt and pizza making evening. These sorts of initiatives are just the beginning of trying to build community on the estate.



### SPOTLIGHT ON POWER THE FIGHT

Launched in 2019, Power The Fight is an award winning charity that tackles violence that affects young people. It creates long term solutions for sustainable change and acts as a link between the community and policy makers. Most of its work is with families, churches, faith groups and community organisations who want to be equipped to engage with youth violence issues in their context. This happens through training and events, resources, building connections between community groups, local authorities, services and other partners to promote mutuality, improve cohesion and effect change and also supporting families impacted by youth violence. It provides access to culturally competent therapeutic, financial and legal support.

To find out more, visit



[www.powerthefight.org.uk](http://www.powerthefight.org.uk)





## ACTION 4 – GROUND AND AIR ENGAGEMENT

Churches and individuals can get involved at a ground or tactical level and also at an air or strategic level.

Listen to Ben Lindsay, founder of **Power The Fight** define



Ground Engagement



Air Engagement



Cultural humility and sensitivity



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### Reflect on Ben's challenges

- Do you feel equipped to engage with the children in your communities or would you like to seek out further training on issues such as county lines or mental health issues?
- Do you know your local MP, councillors, headteachers and Police Commander?
- How well do you understand the community you are serving? Is there a way you could engage your community better and listen to what it needs / struggles/successes?
- How can you adopt a posture of cultural humility and sensitivity?

# POWER THE FIGHT

