

# Breaking County Lines

A toolkit of awareness raising and  
practical action



A Participant's handbook for an online course

# Breaking County Lines

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## **A word about safeguarding**

County lines (criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults) is a form of exploitation and abuse. If you spot a person at risk or being exploited you should follow the safeguarding procedure for your organisation.

Before using this toolkit/ leading a Lent course we would like you to complete safeguarding training. Safeguarding training should be available through your organisation and you can find out more by talking to the safeguarding lead. Basic awareness and foundation level training is available free online from the [Church of England](#) or your local authority. Online free training on modern slavery is also available through the Church of England's safeguarding portal.

Always seek help and advice if you have any concerns that someone is being exploited or abused. Your safeguarding lead/ police or social care will be able to offer advice on these situations. Please do not investigate situations without professional advice as this could put you at risk of harm yourself.

### **Caring for yourself**

This toolkit is about a subject which is emotive and upsetting. Before you start reading the materials on your own or watching the video clips do think about how you will care for yourself. Please ensure you know where you can go for support.

Each module in this resource contains at least one film/animation telling the story of an individual who has had an experience of County Lines. Also the discussion between participants may trigger something that upsets you. If you need to, do not hesitate to tell the facilitator you need to take a break.

On the following page is a form that should be completed before starting any training on County Lines.

# Safeguarding form

Name of safeguarding lead

How to contact them

Has the leader completed safeguarding training in the last three years?

Has the leader completed training on modern slavery?

**Has the group completing the toolkit/ lent course been advised about the following:**

Who to contact if they have any safeguarding concerns?

What to do if they are upset by the issues raised in the toolkit/lent course and who they can talk to?

Where they can access free online training in safeguarding and modern slavery?

List of places where extra support/ advice can be gained we would suggest:

- Modern slavery helpline 08000 121700
- Safeguarding lead for the organisation:
- NAPAC National Association for people abused in childhood: 0808 801 0331
- Samaritans: 116 123

## Introduction

***“Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced.”***

Henry Blake, the director of the film *County Lines* (2017), believes that this quote by the American writer James Baldwin is highly relevant to the insidious growth of County Lines across the UK.

County Lines is a network between an urban hub and county location into which drugs (primarily cocaine and heroin) are supplied.

Operators of the network exploit young or vulnerable people to store/supply the drugs and to move money around.

Controlling the victims often includes the use of violence, intimidation and weapons.

This resource is written for churches and community groups who want to raise awareness and take practical action against this evil that is becoming one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery in our country.

Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, it is an offence to hold a person in a position of forced labour or facilitate their travel with the intention of exploiting them soon after. County-lines drug gangs move young people around the country with the intention of forcing them to aid with the distribution of drugs for criminal gain. This is achieved through deception, manipulation and coercion.

This Breaking County Lines online course is written in 2 modules and contains animations of real life stories (which can be downloaded from the Clewer website) and a range of practical actions that groups can undertake to reduce the influence of County Lines in our communities.

### **About The Clewer Initiative**

The Clewer Initiative is enabling Church of England dioceses and wider church networks to develop strategies to detect modern slavery in their communities and help provide victim support and care.

‘We believe that the tools to end modern slavery already exist within the local community and that the Church, which is present in all communities and at the heart of many, has a primary responsibility in leading these efforts.’



## Course Preparation before each session

As time is limited, it is important that all participants engage with the media clips provided before each session and come to the sessions having considered the questions so that they have insights to share with the group. We have left spaces in this handbook for you to record your insights. The media clips along with their links are listed below.

### Modules 1 Part 1 Understanding County Lines

#### 1. County Lines – PC1942

This is a film describing the reality of county lines including some of the language used by those involved. It is aimed at young people to raise awareness of the dangers of county lines, emphasising the level of deception used along with the consequences of being drawn in.

[#CountyLines - education film for young people by PC1942 - YouTube](#)

*Question: What new insights do you have having seen this video?*

#### 2. Emma's story

This is the story of how a teenage girl gets drawn into county lines and the consequences to her and her family

[2 - Emma's story - a victim of County Lines - YouTube](#)

#### Questions:

1. *How do you feel after hearing Emma's story? What new insights do you have?*
2. *How was Emma susceptible to being groomed? Could this have been prevented? If so, how?*

#### 3. Biblical reflection on Psalm 10

This is a psalm of lament describing the plight of vulnerable people who are drawn into the schemes of the powerful whose aim is to exploit the weak for their own profit. It powerfully reflects what is happening to our young people who are drawn into county lines drug trafficking.

[Psalm 10 - YouTube](#)

#### Questions:

1. *Pick out a sentence or words that strike you*
2. *Take some time to reflect on this psalm and how it relates to County Lines and other social challenges facing the UK at the moment.*

### Module 1: Part 2: Detection

#### "Trapped"

This is video case study on the damaging effect of County Lines, describing how a teenager is drawn into county lines and in so doing draws in his girlfriend and mother as well.

[Trapped - County Lines - YouTube](#)

**Think about the three characters and ask the following questions:**

- *What were the reasons they became involved?*
- *What are the consequences of their actions? (including the emotional consequences)*
- *Any other insights?*

## **Module 2 part 1: Protection of our children and young people**

### **1. Danielle's story.**

This story is adapted from a BBC radio 4 programme entitled 'Girls under the radar' and describes a young girl's experience of being drawn into County Lines and how she eventually finds a way out.

[Girls under the radar \(Danielle's story\) - YouTube](#)

**Questions:**

1. *What contributed to Danielle's vulnerability to being drawn into county Lines?*
2. *How can we advocate for people like Danielle to people who have power and influence?*

### **2. Adverse Childhood Experiences:**

This video is an introduction to ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and explains why some young people are particularly vulnerable to the threat of County Lines.

[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) \(Wales\) - YouTube](#)

**Question:**

*What insights do you gain from the ACEs video for how we can protect vulnerable young people from being exploited by County Lines?*

## **Module 2 part 2: protecting vulnerable adults**

### **3. Dave's story.**

This video tells the story of a man with mental health issues who was cuckooed by a county lines gang with tragic consequences. It shows the importance of protecting those with learning difficulties and or with mental health challenges.

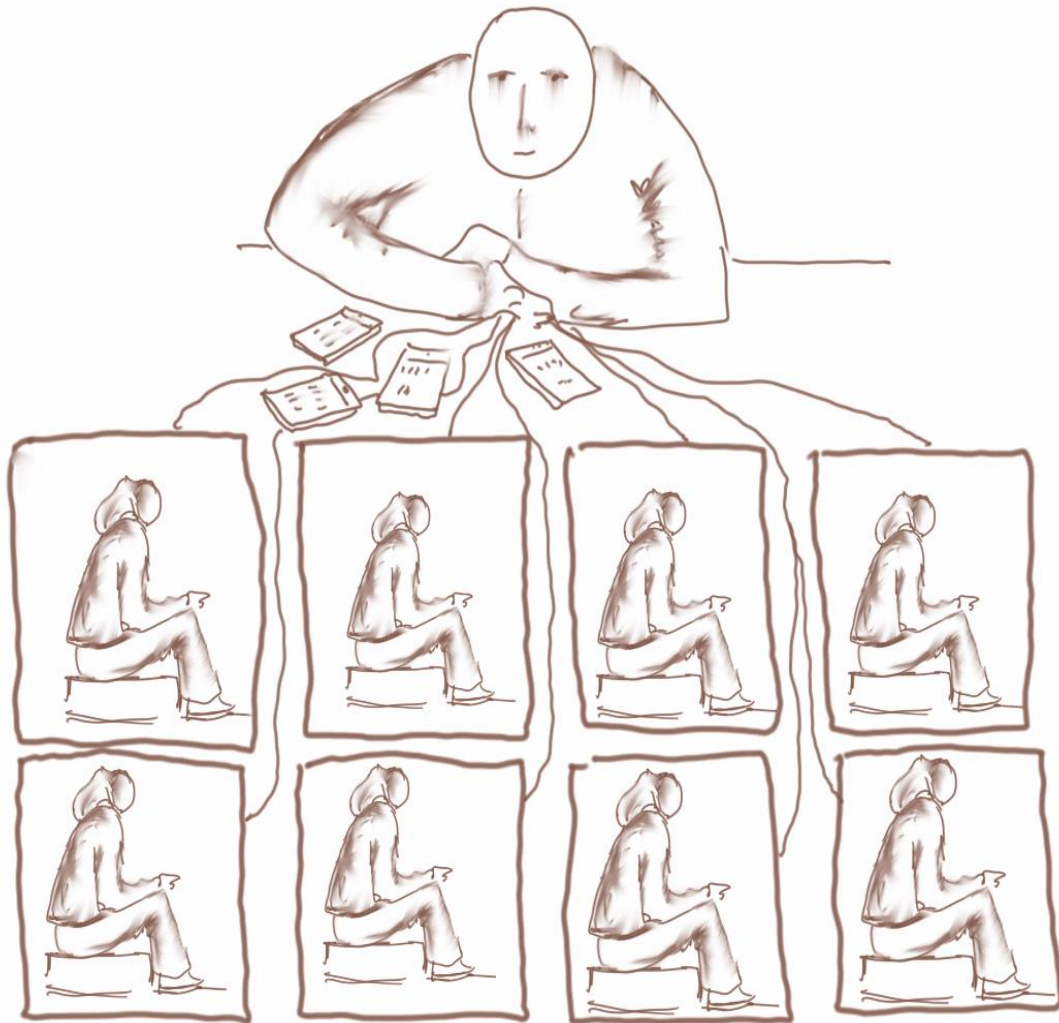
[Exploitation of the most vulnerable \(Dave's story\) - YouTube](#)

**Questions:**

*What were the contributing factors to this tragedy and how could it have been avoided?*



# Module 1: Part 1: Understanding County Lines



# Understanding County Lines

## Purpose

To give participants a good understanding of County Lines, how it operates and its impact on individuals and families. Spaces have been left for you to record your insights having watched the media clips.

## Activity 1: Brainstorm

What is your understanding of County Lines? What is the worst aspect of it in your opinion?

## Activity 2: Terms and definitions



County lines

A road education film by PC 1942

[#CountyLines - education film for young people by PC1942 - YouTube](#)

### Question:

*What new insights have you gained from this video? Use the box on the next page.*

There is a transcript of this film in the participant's notes at the end of Module 1



***Emma's story***

*1. How do you feel after hearing Emma's story? What new insights do you have?*

*2. How was Emma susceptible to being groomed? Could this have been prevented? If so, how?*



## Activity 4: Biblical reflection: Psalm 10:

. [Psalm 10 - YouTube](#)

### Questions:

1. *Pick out a sentence or words that strike you*

2. *Take some time to reflect on this psalm and how it relates to County Lines and other social challenges facing the UK at the moment.*

## Module 1: Part 2:

## Detection of County Lines



## Part 2: Detection of County Lines

### Activity 5: Trapped (County Lines Scenario)

*Trapped* is a video of a scenario of three people who are caught up in County Lines. Your task is to look at the video and answer the questions and record your insights.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLhGpS1f-F0>

Think about the three characters and answer the following questions:



**Jake**

- What were the reasons he became involved?

- What are the consequences of his actions? (including the emotional consequences)

- Any other insights?



## Katelin (Jake's girlfriend)

- What were the reasons she became involved?

- What are the consequences of her actions? (including the emotional consequences)

- Any other insights?



## Julie (Jake's mum)

- What were the reasons she became involved?

- What are the consequences of her actions? (including the emotional consequences)

- Any other insights?



# Module 1

## Participant's notes

### Part 1:

- Transcript of road education film
- Biblical reflection: Psalm 10

### Part 2:

- Spotting the signs
- Stages of County Lines recruitment



## Module 1 Part 1: Participant's notes

### County Lines – A road education film by PC 1942

This is a transcript of the YouTube video for your reference

County Lines is happening in your area.

County Lines sees criminal gangs from places such as London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool sending dealers to carry drugs into less crowded areas.

This isn't a new thing but over the last couple of years the trickle of city drugs gangs heading into different areas has turned into a flood.

The most common drugs involved are heroin and cocaine (crack and powder) but also MDMA, Cannabis, Amphetamines and Spice.

Criminal gangs begin by taking over premises in our towns, using coercion, and often serious violence.

The coercion of children into drug dealing is traumatic and puts them at great risk – often forced to carry drugs inside their bodies, and sell drugs to dangerous people.

Gangs use vulnerable children and adults, including class A drug addicts, elderly, disabled people, those with mental health issues, sex workers and single mothers.

Once they gain control, through drug dependency, debt or relationship, dealers move in and the risk of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence increases.

Gang members will offer money, drugs, clothing, phones, sexual favours or a false sense of belonging or "affiliation".

This process is known as "cuckooing" – named after a bird which lays its eggs in the nests of other birds – taking over.

They will then expand the work force, recruiting local runners to deliver drugs and money.

The groups USE children, because they work for little pay, are easy to control and are less likely to be detected.

Children and young people – you are being lied to. The promise of status and wealth is fake. You are being blinded by negative social media and false promises.

Most runners are boys aged between 14 and 17.

"Grooming" with gifts and money to control by "debt" is common.

Where girls are used, they can become victims of sexual violence and other abuse. Males can also be sexually abused, often for compliance.



Gangs also violently assault children and young people working for them if they find their drugs or money is missing.

Weapons such as firearms, knives, bats and acid are sometimes used to make violent threats.

The threats and assaults extend to the victim's friends or family, using extreme blackmail, to force control.

Young girls are often groomed and forced into relationships with gang members and are made to perform sexual acts. This is abuse – you are NOT being a valued part of any group or gang.



One example is a county lines group who filmed a female victim being sexually assaulted by gang members, then used the footage to humiliate her boyfriend.

Young people are used and vulnerable. YOU might often feel scared of going to the police and worry that you will be incriminated in criminal activity.

There are different roles and levels of authority in gangs:

**TEENIES** – generally those under the age of 10 – below the age of criminal responsibility – used to carry drugs and weapons between members.

**RUNNERS/SHOTTERS** – generally aged between 10 and 15-ish, who move drugs between older members, sell drugs in the streets and stay in “trap houses” where drugs are sold or made.

**YOUNGERS** – generally aged under 18, they have some level of authority over teenies and shotters. They are street dealers of class A or B drugs, can set up trap houses and recruit teenies, runners and shotters.

**LINKS, BABY MAMA, BAE, WIFEY** – girls used by members as girlfriends, used for sex, exploited, they will carry or hide weapons, drugs and money for members of any age.

**ELDERS** – generally aged over 18, they are in charge of running street operations and trap houses, deal in larger amounts of class A and B drugs, buy firearms and other weapons, have authority over street dealers and youngers.

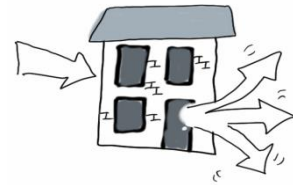


**FACES/OLDERS** – those at the top or higher end of the chain, limited contact with street level operations, not often seen or known by street level members.

**GOING COUNTRY** – this is a term that describes County Lines activity. It can also mean the act of travelling to another city or town to deliver drugs or money.

**TRAPPING** – the act of selling drugs. Trapping can refer to the act of selling drugs or moving drugs from one town to another.

**TRAP HOUSE** – a building used as a base where drugs are sold or sometimes manufactured. Occupied by adult drug users, but sometimes young people are forced to stay there.



**TRAP LINE** – a mobile phone specifically used for the purpose of running and selling drugs. An associated phrase is a “Burner Phone”

**CLEAN SKINS** – Children without a record

**BAIT** – easy to get caught;

**BARE** – lots of:

**BEEF** – trouble

**BURNER** – cheap phone, pay as you go

**ENDS** – home area

**FAM** – family

**FOOD** – drugs

**MERK** – murder or kill

**NITTY** – derogatory name for a female

**P’s** – money – paper notes

**SHANK/DIPPED/CHEFFED/BURST** – a knife, or being stabbed

**SHOOK** – nervous scared

**SLIPPING** – being in the wrong area, not being prepared

**STRAP** – gun



Children and young people are being told or ordered to become “deliberately excluded” or expelled from school or college.

This is so they can become more entrenched in County Lines. Children’s futures and prospects are being thrown away.

Social media – County Lines is being “glamorised” for recruitment. Young people with faces covered, holding weapons and cash, making gang gestures, or “spitting” lyrics about area “beefs” or violence.

Natalie got involved in County Lines when she was 14, dealing heroin and crack. Excluded from school, she ended up in a pupil referral unit, where she says she learned more about “going cunch” or O.T. (out there)

Natalie was reported missing by her family many times.

“I never felt safe. You are girl and you don’t know what people will do. You could get raped or killed.”

Natalie says “Users out in country are way rougher than they are in London, they will just pull out a knife on you and say, Give me your stuff or I will put this knife in you.”

The deeper she got into that world the harder it was to get out and people around her started to show their true colours, leading to the day she tried to leave and was shot. Only when in hospital did her plight become known to police and others.



### **County Lines – a victims quote**

“The grooming’s so strong that rewards seem worth the risks. It seems better to stay away from parents and go with this “new family” that are going to look after you and provide for you..

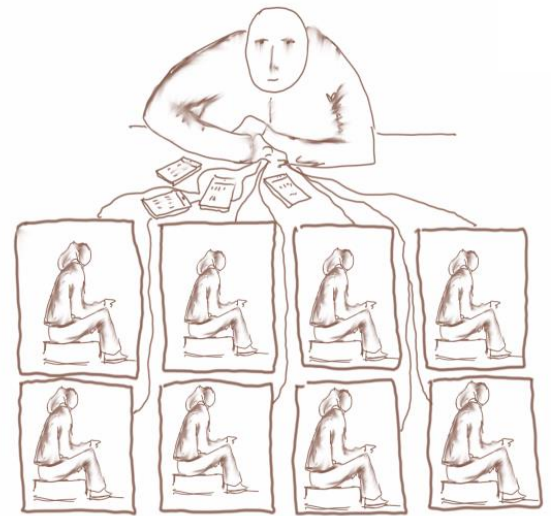
IN THE END- THEY DON’T”

It’s grooming...it’s child trafficking...it’s child criminal exploitation.

## Biblical reflection:

### Psalm 10:

- <sup>1</sup> Why, LORD, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?
- <sup>2</sup> In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,  
who are caught in the schemes he devises.
- <sup>8</sup> He lies in wait near the villages;  
from ambush he murders the innocent.  
His eyes watch in secret for his victims;
- <sup>9</sup> like a lion in cover he lies in wait.  
He lies in wait to catch the helpless;  
he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.
- <sup>10</sup> His victims are crushed, they collapse;  
they fall under his strength.
- <sup>11</sup> He says to himself, "God will never notice;  
he covers his face and never sees."
- <sup>14</sup> But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;  
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
- <sup>17</sup> You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;  
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
- <sup>18</sup> defending the fatherless and the oppressed,  
so that mere earthly mortals  
will never again strike terror.



## Part 2: Participant's notes

### Spotting the signs

#### Location

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g different accents compared to local accent)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia put out with the rubbish or near doorways
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community

#### Young person/s

- Change in young person's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- Unexplained injuries

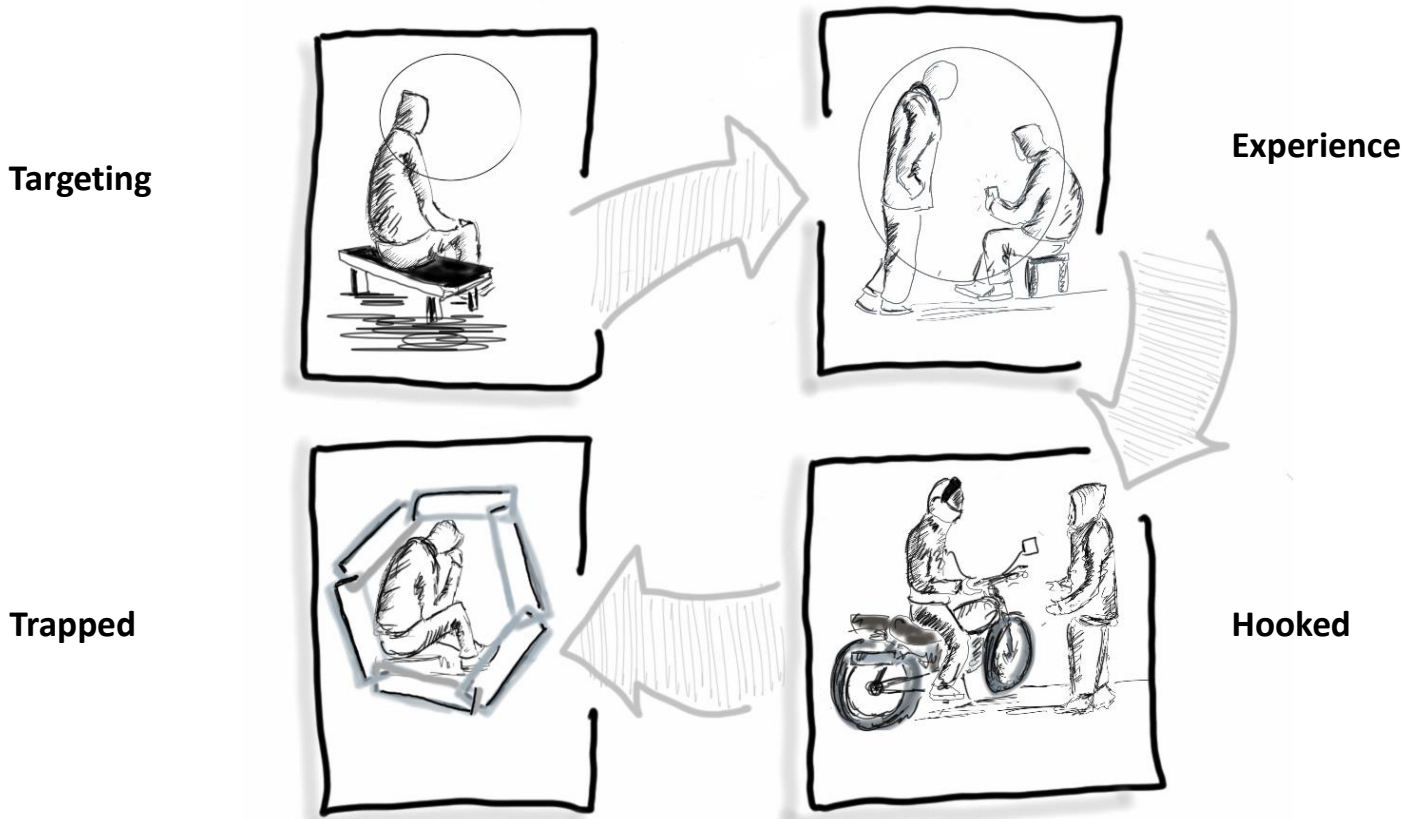
### What to do if you are concerned

Work within your safeguarding policy and with advice and support from your safeguarding lead. If you are not sure who this is please contact the local authority. Some helpful numbers are:

- Modern slavery helpline: 08000 121 700
- NAPAC National Association for people abused in childhood: 0808 801 0331
- Local police 101 or 999 in an emergency
- Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111 (if you would prefer to remain anonymous)
- Childline: 0800 1111

# Stages of County Lines Recruitment

(Source: The Children's Society)



## Targeting

This is when an exploiter targets a young person who is vulnerable, reducing their chances of getting caught. Exploiters pick their targets based on things like your age, strength or situation.

Signs of this stage include an exploiter:

- Observing a young person
- Finding out a young person's vulnerabilities, needs and wants
- Glamorising their lifestyle
- Gaining and developing a young person's trust





## Experience

This stage is where an exploiter might try to get a young person used to their lifestyle, or train them up in what they're doing.

At this stage an exploiter might:

- Make a young person feel wanted
- Give them gifts and rewards
- Include them in their activities
- Test out a young person's loyalty
- Offer a young person protection
- Give them a sense of belonging
- Introduce a young person to more established members of their gang



## Hooked

This is the stage where an exploiter will make a young person feel like they're a member of their gang, even though they're just exploiting them.

Signs that a young person is in the hooked stage of being exploited can include them:

- Having an identity in the group.
- Being given a bigger role in the group (eg people running for them).
- Getting more responsibilities within the group eg more money.
- Engaging in thrill seeking behaviour/ committing low level crimes
- Having a dependency created by their exploiter
- Engaging in activities such as drugs, alcohol and sexual behaviour
- Being asked for favours/to keep secrets to recruit others to the gang



## Trapped

Now a young person feels dependent on the group, their relationship with their exploiter may start to become unpleasant, as their exploiter's true intents or character is revealed.

At this stage a young person may experience:

- Threatening behaviour
- Blackmail – include 'fake' mugging organised to create a debt
- Physical violence and sexual assaults including strip searches, drugs being inserted for running
- People playing on their guilt, shame and fear and attempting to isolate them from their family, friends and society
- People humiliating them, either sexually or by exposing their mistakes to others
- Running a trap house
- Drug addiction (encouraged by others) or dependency on their exploiter (resulting in them having less money)



## Module 2 Part 1:

# Protecting children and young people



# Module 2 Part 1: Protecting children and young people

## Purpose:

To understand why children, young people and those with learning disabilities and mental health disorders are so vulnerable to County Lines activity, and to explore ways of protecting them.

## Introduction

This module is made up of two key areas:

1. Protecting children and young people
2. Protecting vulnerable adults including those with learning disabilities and mental health disorders

While each of these areas has a specific focus, the main overall learning from this module is about equipping church and community members to be more vigilant and aware of County Lines and look out for the most vulnerable members of our communities.

## Protecting children and young people

### Activity 1: Danielle's story



Having watched the animation of Danielle's story discuss the questions:

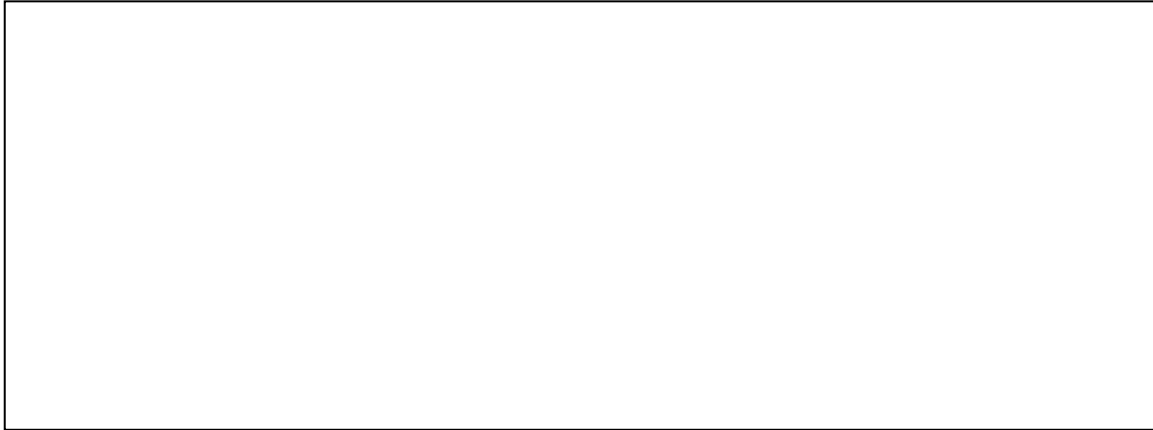
1. *What contributed to Danielle's vulnerability to being drawn into County Lines?*

2. *How can we advocate for people like Danielle to people who have power and influence?*

## Activity 2: Adverse Childhood Experiences Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHGLY19KZ-A>

*What insights do you gain from the ACEs video for how we can protect vulnerable young people from being exploited by County Lines?*



# Module 2: Part 2

## Protecting vulnerable adults

### Activity 3: Dave's story



Watch the animation of Dave's story and discuss the questions:

*What were the contributing factors to this tragedy and how could it have been avoided?*

# Module 2

## Participant's notes

### Part 1: Protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults

- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- How children are drawn into gangs
- Life stage approach to the protection of children
- Examples of people and projects vulnerable to County Lines and Modern Slavery activity
  
- Biblical reflection Psalm 139

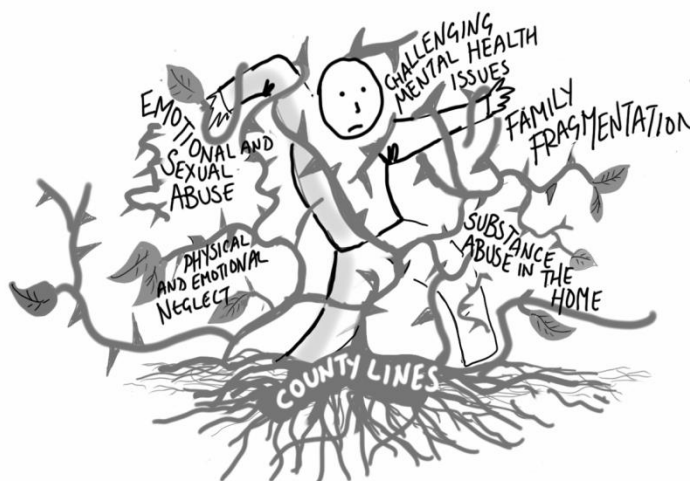
## Module 2 Part 1: Participant's notes

### Adverse childhood experiences (ACE)

For a visual summary of ACE see the following YouTube clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHgLYI9KZ-A>

Childhood experiences have a massive impact on lifelong health and opportunity. **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** refer to stressful or traumatic events that children and young people can be exposed to as they are growing up. ACEs range from experiences that directly harm a child, such as physical, verbal or sexual abuse, and physical or emotional neglect, to those that affect the environments in which children grow up, such as parental separation, domestic violence, mental illness, alcohol abuse, drug use or imprisonment.



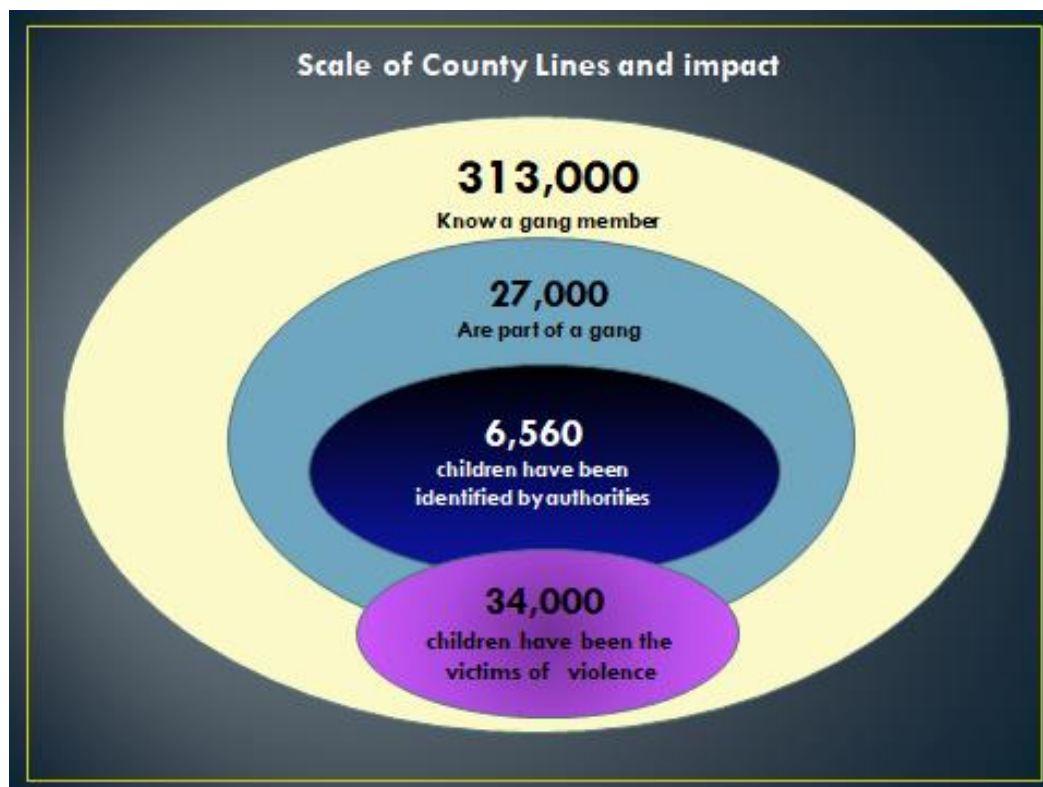
### The impact of ACEs

When exposed to stressful situations, the “fight, flight or freeze” response floods our brain with corticotrophin-releasing hormones (CRH), which usually forms part of a normal and protective response that subsides once the stressful situation passes. However, when repeatedly exposed to ACEs, CRH is continually produced by the brain, which results in the child remaining permanently in this heightened state of alert and unable to return to their natural relaxed and recovered state. Children and young people who are exposed to ACEs therefore have increased – and sustained – levels of stress. In this heightened neurological state a young person is unable to think rationally and it is physiologically impossible for them to learn or develop in the same way a child not having these experiences will.

ACEs can therefore have a negative impact on development in childhood and this can in turn give rise to harmful behaviours, social issues and health problems in adulthood. There is now a great deal of research demonstrating that ACEs can negatively affect lifelong mental and physical health by disrupting brain and organ development and by damaging the body's system for defending against diseases. The more ACEs a child experiences the greater the chance of health and/or social problems in later life.

## How children are drawn into gangs

- Gifts or praise, overture of friendship.
- Protection of the child from some danger (real or contrived).
- The child is asked to run some errand during which the child is mugged and becomes in debt to the gang.
- Exploitation of response of agencies – eg if a child is excluded, the child is told by the gang he/she has no chance of further education or getting a job so must carry on being in the gang.
- Threat of violence is a recurrent issue for children wanting to extricate themselves from gangs. Often children have these threats alongside fractures in their home life and exclusion from school. This lack of stability in any part of their lives leads them to choose to stay in the gang.

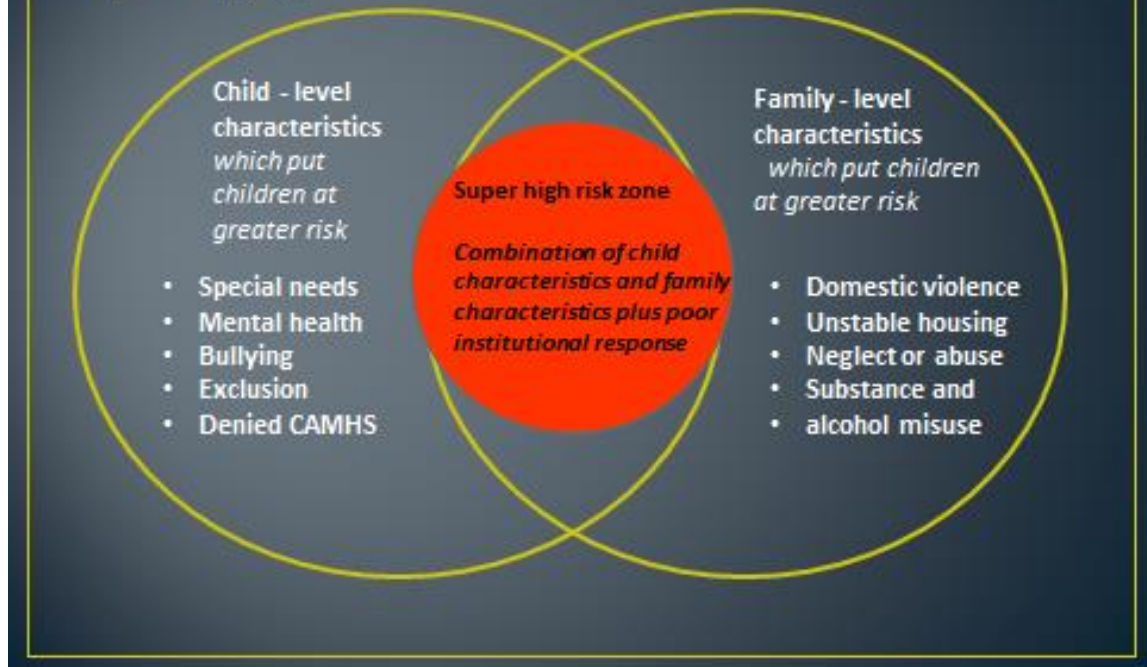


British Crime Survey data held by the Office of National Statistics Feb 2019



## County Lines: Children in Gangs

The diagram below shows which children are most at risk of being groomed and exploited by gangs



Adapted from 'Keeping Kids Safe', Children's Commissioner Report Feb 2019

### Children in gangs are:

- 95% more likely to have social and emotional health issues
- More than twice as likely to be self-harming
- 41% more likely to have a parent or carer misusing substances
- Eight times more likely to be misusing substances themselves
- 76% more likely not to be having their basic care needs met at home (as assessed by a practitioner)
- 37% more likely to have witnessed domestic violence
- 37% more likely to be missing/absent from school



## Life stage approach to protection of children

Gang membership is complex and those recruiting children are ruthless. Once a child is within a gang, extracting them is not straight forward. It is much easier to stop children becoming involved in gangs than it is to get them out. To achieve this we need a life stage approach, recognising that while a child may be drawn into a gang as an adolescent, the underlying reasons why they were susceptible almost certainly appeared years earlier.

Life stage	Vital facts
<b>Early years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental mental health is vital for babies and young children’s development</li> <li>• Conduct problems can emerge as early as 2-3 years old and are closely related to poor emotional stability</li> <li>• Less than half of the children with special educational needs have these identified before primary school, which often makes conditions harder to treat or manage.</li> </ul>
<b>Primary school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent exclusion from primary schools have risen by 67% since 2012/13.</li> <li>• Children excluded from school by age 12 are 4 times more likely to be in prison by age 24</li> <li>• Research from the Early Intervention Foundation found that emotional health at age 7 was a key predictor of future gang involvement</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary school</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable children often find transition to secondary school hard, as the limited number of close relationships at primary school are replaced by a larger number of much briefer relationships</li> <li>• Exclusions from secondary school has almost doubled since 2012/13</li> <li>• Youth services have been cut by 60% since 2010. Children aged 13-15 are most likely to be spending large amounts of time on line or sedentary. Children say this is because of a lack of safe spaces or activities available.</li> </ul>

## Module 2 Part 2: Participant's notes

### Examples of people and projects vulnerable to County Lines and Modern Slavery activity

While many church and community projects seek to support and improve the lives of vulnerable individuals, they can become targets of criminal groups and traffickers. Therefore the volunteers and staff need to be alert to this threat and to raise awareness with those who frequent such projects.

**Night shelters** – these are run by churches generally over the winter, to give homeless people a warm place to sleep as well as food and a bed. The risk for these people is that traffickers can identify where they are and contact them on the way to or from the night shelter.

**Homeless hostels and drop-ins** – these are temporary accommodation options or places of contact where food and shelter can be provided throughout the year. These are often run by churches and/or local authorities. Similarly traffickers can identify where these are and either get access or contact the residents/clients in a nearby location.

**Rough sleepers and sofa surfers** – these are groups of people who have no permanent accommodation and resort to sleeping in sheltered, mostly urban, areas or sleeping on friends' or relatives' sofas. They are susceptible to the attraction of a 'better' offer



**Users of foodbanks** – these are often people on very low incomes who need to supplement their household food stocks. Traffickers will offer them the opportunity of earning a good income to reduce their dependency on benefits and handouts. Victims may also be using foodbanks because the traffickers do not pay them.

**Church and community drop-in cafes** – these places often attract vulnerable and marginalised members of the community because of the spirit of acceptance and welcome. However, staff of these cafes need to be alert to strangers who make contact with the more vulnerable users of the facility as there is the possibility they could be deceived into modern slavery.



**Refugees/asylum seekers** – these groups are often caught in a period where they can't earn an income either because of their status, their lack of educational qualifications, or language skills. They are vulnerable to offers of easy work, paid in cash, which turn out to be exploitative.

# Operation Blue Gem Summary

This is a Bangor initiative whereby local policing officers work in partnership with local housing associations and drugs support agencies. The partnership use information and intelligence to identify potential cuckooed victims. A visit is then conducted at the home address of the potential victim. This may be a joint or single agency visit. If cuckooing is disclosed or suspected, they are offered the opportunity to work with the police to address their vulnerability. Residents who sign up to Operation Blue Gem are provided with a poster to display in their window. This advertises that they are part of Op Blue Gem.

They also sign a contract of engagement. One local policing officer in Bangor currently has a cohort of around 25 individuals. They are visited and contacted regularly by her. Efforts are made to quickly address any issues, such as repairing broken windows etc. This provides tenants with reassurance that their needs are being addressed and makes them more likely to trust services and continue with the scheme. The operation leads to greater intelligence collection and there is intelligence to suggest that county lines teams quiz local residents as to whether they are members of Operation Blue Gem to ensure that they don't 'cuckoo' addresses which are part of the scheme.

The scheme has been successful in supporting 3 residents to become 'clean' from drug use. Good partnerships with health services has resulted in speedy access to drug treatment when the window of opportunity for engagement has been open. The allocation of new SIM cards to some members of the scheme has been a good supportive measure in preventing drug dealers from having continued contact with drug users and has supported their engagement and recovery by removing the pressure from aggressive marketing by county lines teams.

## How did it start?

Social services drug services and other statutory organisations were alerted to growing instances of drug related crime and drug taking which led to visits by the community police officer. It emerged this was a drugs programme being run from Liverpool. The Superintendent at the time had links with the Liverpool police and realised this was a major issue. It was identified as county lines activity and led to formation of various partnerships, most notable being ADRA – social housing agency.

The priority was to identify those who had been cuckooed and those who were at risk. Identified individuals were asked to sign up to be part of the operation which involved regular unannounced visits from the Police. These help to build trust and find out the needs of that individual and then try to meet them. The monitoring by the police means that the responsibility of turning gangs away is lifted from the vulnerable person. They can simply say that they are being monitored and anyone staying at the property will be thrown out.



## **Outcomes**

Blue Gem is a highly successful operation that has removed county lines in Bangor. By removing the distribution base, they have effectively removed county lines as there is nowhere for the drugs to be distributed from. Because of the extent of county lines in Bangor the community was fully involved in reporting concerns and wanting to see this crime removed from its streets.

Critical success factors:

- Dedicated community police officer with superb relationship skills and support of superiors to be embedded into the community.
- Good partnerships with housing and social services and drug services and free flow of information sharing.
- Intelligence sharing from the community to housing/social services – passed on to the police.
- Awareness raised at Foodbanks, Air B&Bs, guesthouses.
- Everything possible is done for identified people – new sim cards, Food Bank cards if needed, help with flat renovations and help with rehab. Therefore growing trust in the police.

## Biblical reflection: Psalm 139: 1-18, 23-24

Alternative Biblical reflection for Module 2 Part 1



Read the passage below or watch the film of Psalm 139

[Psalm 139 - YouTube](#)

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup>You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

<sup>5</sup>You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup>If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

<sup>9</sup>If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

<sup>10</sup>even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup>If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"

<sup>12</sup>even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup>For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup>I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

<sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the  
secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup>Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.



<sup>17</sup> How precious to me are your thoughts, God, How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup> Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.

<sup>23</sup> Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

### Questions:

- Which verses strike you in this psalm?

- What does this psalm mean to you in the context of County Lines?

### Reflection

Written by the Rt Revd Dr Alastair Redfern, Chair of The Clewer Initiative.

In the midst of confusion and struggle the Lord's "right-hand will hold me fast". This faith gives Christians confidence to confront darkness and false dreams. Deep in each person is the light of Christ – the light that lightens every creature.

How can we help young people raise their dreams higher – and so taste better promises than fake friendships and grubby earnings?

What might local churches provide to offer a taste of new life that develops light and banishes darkness, and invites fun and fulfilment by creating gracious fellowship with others?

