



GETTING STARTED

- What do you know about county lines?
- What sort of children do you think get drawn into county lines?

WHAT IS COUNTY LINES?

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit, NCA

County lines involves the supply of illegal drugs from large urban areas to smaller cities, towns and provincial locations using dedicated mobile phones, known as deal lines, to take orders. Offenders frequently target children and vulnerable adults to facilitate such criminality, manipulating and coercing them into drug trafficking and distribution. Young women are sometimes specifically targeted for recruitment into exploitation in county lines because they are less likely to attract suspicion from law enforcement.

Victims coerced into county lines are often surrounded by threats and violence, either from their exploiters or rival gangs. Women and girls can also be subject to sexual violence and blackmail, with offenders sometimes using indecent images as a means of control. As a result of this control and fear, victims are likely to avoid telling others about the reality of their situation.

Demand for drugs has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning children and vulnerable adults continue to be coerced into distribution models, despite school closures altering the places in which victims are identified and recruited. Social media remains a key enabler in this, with vulnerable persons identified and offered opportunities to earn money rapidly.



WATCH GEMMA'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/KqpTVUHAwas>



QUESTIONS FROM THE FILM

- What struck you from the film?
- Did anything you heard surprise you?
- How did Gemma's story make you feel?
- What inspired you?
- What questions does it leave you with?

DID YOU KNOW?

The Children's Commissioner for England estimated



2,290
girls were
associated
with gangs



HOW IS COUNTY LINES DRUG TRAFFICKING EVOLVING?

**Detective Inspector Anne Rannard,
National County Lines Coordination Centre
Protect Lead**

As law enforcement agencies continue to tackle various elements of the county lines business model, the methods will inevitably evolve. The national lockdowns owing to COVID-19 have also impacted the way drug networks operate. For example, analysis has indicated that travel restrictions have led to longer periods of cuckooing.

We continue to see reporting around recruitment from children's care homes in some regions, especially through peers within such settings. There are more reports of debt bondage and coercion as a means of recruitment. We have seen increasing use of social media as a form of recruitment, like other online threat areas and these platforms are also used to display drug related wealth and imagery that seeks to glamorise a certain lifestyle.

Online gaming and games forums have been used to advertise drug related work to children, with young people often befriended and groomed through games 'chat' functions. Perpetrators may also access online accounts to steal or delete online credit and possessions to coerce or blackmail children. Mobile apps with GPS tracking have been used by perpetrators to track criminally exploited children's movements in drug supply chains.

The involvement of females within county lines is still massively underreported, with females often being labelled victims of child sexual exploitation, rather than victims of child criminal exploitation. Those involved in county lines are still reluctant to talk of their experiences, likely owing to the fear of violence.

Communities can play a huge part in identifying and protecting children and vulnerable adults from county lines activity. If people know how to spot the signs and how to manage or report their concerns, numerous agencies can provide interventions and support. Given the information above around the online methods of exploitation, it is really important to identify and report any concerns about the use of specific platforms; for parents and carers to have regular conversations with their children and to encourage them to speak to a trusted adult if they or a friend come across something worrying online.

Communities can assist in identifying county lines activity by reporting potential cuckooed properties. Such premises can be used as a base for storing drugs supplies, but it isn't uncommon for children involved in drug supply to stay at such properties, as they are less likely to be reported than if they were to stay in a hotel.

Communities can significantly contribute to the intelligence picture around county lines criminality. Information about the names, numbers and origins of drug dealing lines; identification and reporting of children who are unfamiliar with an area or travelling at unusual times; reporting any threats or the use

of violence, can all significantly assist the police in understanding the county lines threats within their localities and support them in responding appropriately.

We all have a part to play in protecting our young people.



DIGGING DEEPER

Breaking County Lines – training resource for churches and communities

Breaking County Lines was designed to enable churches and communities to understand and raise awareness of county lines and spot signs of its presence. It looks at ways of building resilience in our communities with an emphasis on the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Breaking County Lines is written in four modules including digital stories based on personal experience, group activities, supporting information and biblical reflections.

The modules cover: understanding county lines; detection of county lines; protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults; and building resilience.

We run online versions of the Breaking County Lines course which take place over two 2-hour sessions. The sessions make use of videos and other online resources to gain an understanding of county lines, how it operates in our communities and what we can do to respond. To find out more, email clewerinitiative@churchofengland.org