

**Caritas Diocese of Salford Special briefing paper:
Some thoughts on County Lines and interventions
with young people**

June 2021



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SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to raise the issue of County Lines in relation to safeguarding in our diocesan schools, highlight interventions and reports to date, and explore possibilities for a Caritas response linked with GMP Programme Challenger.

The paper summarises some of the reports and agencies involved and goes on to talk about two projects that attempted to address the issue, the County Lines Project (London and Kent) and Hope High (Huddersfield). A recent link between County Lines, Knife Crime and school exclusion is identified and highlighted in an Ofsted report.

Finally the paper presents some thoughts on a Caritas schools work response working in partnership with Greater Manchester Police Programme Challenger.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The end of year National Referral Mechanism (NRM) figures for 2019 note an increase in the figures for minors, due to recognition that County Lines includes victims of human trafficking.

County Lines drug trafficking is the practice of trafficking drugs into rural areas and smaller towns, away from major cities. Traffickers recruit vulnerable children, including children in pupil referral units, who have been excluded from schools, as drug dealers. Some young people are recruited via debt bondage whereby they enter county lines to pay off drug debts. Others take part of their own volition, owing to boredom and a lack of legitimate opportunity in marginalized communities. The term "county lines" refers to the phone numbers, or lines, dedicated to this activity. County Lines is a growing problem and one that has been in the media a great deal recently. There are an estimated 2,000 county lines and 80,000 young and/or vulnerable people involved. It has even reached primary schools. It seems inevitable that if we looked hard enough we would find it in our schools.

County Lines refers to drugs being carried from one town to another but human trafficking can be linked to the same activity at local level and hence we are starting to hear the term Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), which takes in the total larger group of people that are held in modern slavery.

SAFEGUARDING YOUNG PEOPLE AGAINST COUNTY LINES

There is a huge amount of material that has been produced for safeguarding and staff briefing. Safeguarding in primary and secondary schools is mandatory in Lancashire and probably elsewhere.

Government reports and Home Office and Department of Education guidance address the issue. We are also aware of resources and interventions from other organisations, notably the [Children's Society](#), [Barnardo's](#), [Fearless](#) and the [Clewley Initiative](#).

However, although there is a great deal of knowledge, and in some quarters a great deal of action, there are huge gaps in provision.

To date, Caritas Anti-Trafficking has focused on raising awareness on human trafficking and modern day slavery in churches, schools and with other groups, working with other NGOs and with two Police forces in Salford Diocese.

However County Lines has only recently been recognized as a form of slavery and to date we have given it barely a mention. This is a serious omission in relation to the work of Caritas Anti-Trafficking. Rather than developing our awareness raising activities with a view to increasing referrals to the National Slavery Helpline we should be looking at safeguarding in schools and with young people generally.

At the back end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 we had a number of meetings with GMP Challenger who provide County Lines briefing in educational establishments but are under resourced. Challenger indicated that they would welcome working in partnership with Caritas to increase their County Lines safeguarding input and to help them develop materials for use by educational establishments.

Exploring the issues, it became apparent that the need for safeguarding against County Lines is massive not only in education but also in supporting victims and those in danger of becoming victims. There are more charities attending to this need than we were aware of but for the most part they are responsive at an individual level rather than attempting to address the issue in a larger and more coordinated way. There are initiatives however that do go further and from these we may have something to learn.

THE COUNTY LINES PROJECT

In 2018, JH Consulting in Partnership with the [St Giles Trust](#) and [Missing People](#) published the evaluation of the Home Office funded [County Lines Pilot Project](#) which aimed to test out what might enable vulnerable children to move away from County Lines. The trials comprised one to one support with St Giles Trust, [Abianda](#) and [Safer London](#), and Missing People's [SafeCall](#) service. SafeCall offers a scheduled telephone call to children by professionals. It offers a non-judgemental, safe space to talk about their experiences in confidence and support them to explore their choices, and formulate a safety plan.

The pilot demonstrated the positive impact of interventions. The report says: *Casework has cost around £80,000 over 7 months, giving a unit cost of around £2,100, compare[ed] with 'standard' casework service. Pilot project costs included the development of processes and partnerships from a 'standing start', and intensive work with families as well as children. This provides value for money as well as significant savings for the public sector. Kent police calculate £271,253 of savings from the steep drop in missing episodes alone...*

In August 2019 the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), which comes under the London Assembly, published their strategic assessment arising from the County Lines Pilot project: [Rescue and Response County Lines Project: Supporting young Londoners affected by county lines exploitation.](#) This document is excellent in summarizing the nature of the problem and what needs to be done. See Appendix 1 for the key ingredients of the pilot and a summary of the main findings arising from the pilot that have relevance outside of London. Appendix 2 gives a case history.

HOPE HIGH

In a 2019, BBC podcast – [Hope High](#) - journalist Annabelle Reas followed the families of four children at North Huddersfield Trust School. It gives a graphic and revealing insight into the issue from the perspective of children and parents. At the end of episode 7 Mark Burns Williamson, makes the same point that Sir Peter Fahy made at a Caritas event in 2019 in Bury when he said, ‘exclusion from school is the road to prison’. Mark Burns Williamson says: *“We’ve seen increasingly exclusions from schools. Are we inadvertently creating a generation of young people who are going to be lost to the system and become victims of crime through County Lines and gang activity but then unfortunately become perpetrators?”* Drugs, County Lines and knife crime are all linked and Hope High is about all three.

KNIFE CRIME AND SCHOOLS

It is clear from the above that our earlier thoughts on safeguarding training and education may not be enough. A 2019 Ofsted report [Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime](#) takes a child centred focus in direct opposition to a zero tolerance policy. Criminal gangs are getting children to take knives into schools so they will be excluded. Removed from safeguarding they are easier for the gangs to exploit. Although based on London research the Ofsted report recommendations (see appendix 3) will apply elsewhere.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR DIOCESAN SCHOOLS

Many of our schools have zero tolerance policies and exclude automatically for drugs and knife incidents but in view of the Ofsted report and the need to see vulnerable children as victims rather than criminals is this something for consideration when considering Bishop John Arnold’s “new normal”? Should we be giving stronger direction to our schools on recognizing and combating Child Criminal Exploitation, and might there be a Caritas role in providing specialist support to school children who would otherwise be excluded.

In trying to influence the Diocese to take an active role influencing schools to tackle drugs and knife crime in ways other than exclusion there is going to be the question of proportionality. How big is the issue compared with the welfare of other children and everything else schools are trying to do? However, County Lines provides a graphic example of the dangers young people face in today’s world. With a focus on examination success, Ofsted results and keeping up a good image for parents we are failing to care for the most vulnerable children and allowing them to become victims and then criminals.

A key priority for our 2020 anti-trafficking plan was raising awareness in schools for the purpose of police intelligence and also safeguarding. However County Lines needs to concern Caritas beyond our anti-trafficking team. Our Schools Service should be aware and involved. We should also work with the Education Department, Caritas Ambassadors and Safeguarding.

There is a case for support worker input for children at risk in schools and for those excluded in order to facilitate their return. However, there are substantial costs to the recruitment, training and employment of Peer Advisors as in the County Lines Project and it may be better to start with input to groups and move onto individual work when the need and the benefits are more clearly understood. A couple of thoughts from an ex Salford Diocese head teacher acknowledged the difficulty of moving schools away from their zero tolerance policy:

- Provide case histories of what happens to excluded children to include those where positive intervention that could have been supplied in school led to a successful outcome
- Be alert to children before any problem signs appear e.g. where a sibling was excluded following a drugs incident

CARITAS AND GMP CHALLENGER

GMP's first serious assault on organised crime goes back to Project Gulf which was set up by GMP and Salford City Council in 2009. Project Gulf now involves 20 national and local agencies from probation to immigration enforcement which collaborate to learn everything they can about organised crime and gang members and disrupt every aspect of the lives of those involved. Project Challenger was launched in 2013, taking in Project Gulf with Operational Challenger teams set up in all 10 districts of Greater Manchester. Every organised crime group in Greater Manchester was mapped, risk assessed and assigned a disruption plan. Programme Challenger now comprises: Organised Crime; Modern Slavery; Trapped (which takes in County Lines); Economic Crime; Foreign National Offenders and Offender Management.

GMP Challenger work to four Ps – Prepare (link with partners), Prevent (awareness raising), Protect (victims and communities), Pursue (enforce). Talks with Challenger have been about Prevent but listening to the 7 episode BBC podcast, it is clear that awareness raising isn't enough and there is a potential bigger role for Caritas and Caritas school workers on Protect. North Huddersfield Trust School evidently takes children excluded from elsewhere and work with them – “Is a child ever a gangster or always a victim?” Listening to the podcast I got the impression that the school works very differently to schools which are specifically for excluded children.

It is clear that in formulating our strategy to rid Salford Diocese of Modern Day Slavery by 2025 we need to be more firmly linked with GMP's Operation Challenger.

We had initial talks with Programme Challenger at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 and discussed two possible areas for partnership working:

- Direct delivery of County Lines, Safeguarding input to schools and educational establishments
- Development of educational materials for use in schools by schools' staff

With Covid and the lockdown further discussions were put on hold until April 2021 when we next met with Challenger and the GMP Violence Reduction Unit. Their focus is a little different now with the recognition that risk in adolescence is rarely related to just one issue such as County Lines or sexual exploitation. Discussion centred on [Complex Safeguarding](#) and [Achieving Change Together](#) (ACT) and there are three areas for further dialogue:

- The “Universal Offer” which applies to all schools in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and includes a large number of support services including some with a direct link to County Lines and knife crime.
- An invitation to Caritas to join a Violence Reduction Unit Education Group.
- Trainer training

Anthony Brown

November 2020 (rev June 2021)

Note 1

Rescue and Response County Lines Project: Supporting young Londoners affected by county lines exploitation. Strategic Assessment (August) 2019

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/rescue_and_response_county_lines_project_strategic_assessment_2019.pdf

Summary of findings (excluding those with applications specific to London)

- 568 young people were referred to the Rescue and Response (R&R) project during year 1, the majority aged 15 to 18 years old (70%), and male (83%).
- The main referring agencies were Children's Social Care (CSC) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).
- In addition, the R&R Outreach Team lead by St Giles Trust (SGT) conducted 11 'Rescues' of young people from the counties following arrest, ensuring their safe return home and the provision of suitable ongoing support.
- 53% of young people allocated to one of the R&R service providers (130 of 243 allocated) have engaged with their caseworker. Of those young people that have had their R&R case closed following engagement, 63% reported a reduction in county lines involvement and harm (22 young people).
- Our evidence shows however, that despite young people being willing to engage and leave exploitation, external factors relating to gang pressure are often the biggest challenge to overcome and can supersede the progress they make through working with the R&R project.
- In addition, the re-housing of young people and the debt bondage that young people become trapped in are significant challenges faced by them and the professionals trying to help them.
- Our evidence indicates the factors that put young people most at risk of county lines exploitation is the association with someone that is already involved; whether that be directly through association with a gang, or indirectly through a friend of a friend.
- In addition, access to social media is also a key facilitator of grooming and recruitment onto county lines. Snapchat and Instagram are being used by networks to advertise for county lines jobs and for money laundering. The latter is referred to as 'squares' and 'deets', with young people providing networks with their bank card and account details in exchange for money.
- Young people are being exploited from a young age, with the youngest person identified by R&R aged 11 years old.
- Networks look to exploit certain circumstances in a young person's life, including poverty, family breakdown, exclusion from school, drug addiction and learning difficulties.
- Networks use several methods to groom young people and vulnerable adults, often through the offer of money or drugs, and often through the use of other young people. People are approached in venues such as schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), youth clubs and food outlets, and promised a lifestyle that motivates them.
- Young people reported a range of different experiences working on a county line.
- Young people engaging with R&R service providers show signs of trauma and fear, and their experiences of working on a county line involve a high level of harm.
- There are also young people that don't want to engage with R&R; this may be because they are making a lot of money, or because they fear reprisal from the network.
- It has been reported to the R&R services that many young people do not recognise themselves as victims and are unaware of the grooming methods used by networks to recruit them.
- Networks are continually adapting the way in which they operate their county lines in order to avoid detection. This includes developed ways of concealing items during transport, for example the use of empty games console

shells, the strapping of cash and drugs to peoples' bodies and the use of female passengers in cars to avoid suspicion.

- Networks have also developed ways to avoid triggering missing episodes and truancy, which means that it is becoming harder for families and professionals to spot the indicators of county lines activity.
- In addition, networks are reportedly recruiting differently, by targeting young people from London who fit the demographics of the county town, in order to avoid unwanted police attention.

(1) Analytical Function

Intelligence Development

Research and analysis provided by four Intelligence Analysts assigned by London quadrant to North, East, West and South:

- Ongoing **identification** of vulnerable and exploited young people
- **Development** of the London county lines intelligence picture
- The development of our understanding of the various **cross cutting themes** and trends impacting on young people

(2) Support Function

Rescue and Response

Rescue and Response has three key Service Delivery partners, providing tailored support to the young people referred into the project:

- **St Giles Trust:** Provides one-to-one support to young men; manages an out of hours phone support service; and operates an outreach 'rescue' team
- **Abianda:** Provides one-to-one support to young women
- **Safer London:** Provides one-to-one support to young people through the LGE project

(3) Training Function

Breaking the Cycle

The project aims to ensure there is continual learning and that this is used to effect positive change:

- To provide **training to professionals**, to ensure that county lines exploitation and its **indicators** are recognised and reported effectively
- To develop and **share good practice** based on experiential learning
- Engagement with local and national politicians, and with front line expertise to **help shape policy and legislative change**

Note 2

Case History from the County Lines Pilot Project

The young woman was referred into Rescue and Response by her social worker as she was thought to have been criminally exploited through county lines and to have experienced child sexual exploitation. She had been missing for long periods of times and had been found in rural areas with an older male. Police had stopped a car she was in where drugs were found. She was placed in a secure unit on safeguarding grounds as professionals around her deemed she was unable to acknowledge her risk and that she was coercively controlled by the older male.

During our work together we have met 16 times so far. Our work together has included the delivery of Abianda's structured programme and our specialist advocacy work. So far, our sessions have explored relationship, contextual relationship mapping, gender roles and expectation of males and females in gangs/county lines, and the role and risks for girls in gangs.

When I first met the young woman, she was quiet and felt vulnerable as she had little control over the decisions which were being made in her life. She agreed to engage and she explained that her best hopes from our work were: to have confidence, to say what she felt and to communicate confidently with professionals. She also expressed she wanted to implement boundaries and keep herself safe. She stated that "I want everyone around me to recognise that I am trying to be a better person, for me and my family"

As a Result of our work so far, the young woman has: Has been able to; voice her hopes and needs, begun to lead her own advocacy, is able to identify why boundaries will be good for her and the difference they would make in her life. Before we began the work, she told professionals around her "I won't change", and believed the people she was associating with to be her friends. She now explains "these people are not my friends." and how her life has been put on hold for the benefit of others and the negative impact it has had on her family.

The young woman had poor relationships with professionals who were trying to keep her safe and now has trusting and open relationships with all those involved in her case. When we began our work together 16 weeks ago the young woman scaled a 4/10 in regards to her best hopes, she now scales 8 or 9. Through our work together, she has significantly increased her critical thinking. She has shown insight and awareness into her circumstances and been able to identify unhealthy relationships, risk, and harm. She has flourished as a result of Rescue and Response. She is now able to see how particular relationships have had a damaging impact on other relationships in her life. She now understands the relationship she has with her boyfriend and associates are unhealthy. She has shown courage and strength each week as she shares her expertise and views on power, risk, barriers and reasons young women may become caught up in exploitative circumstances.

She explained that the reason young women get involved with gangs is that they are looking to be accepted and just want some kind of attention. She explained to me that she was associating with harmful peers because she wanted to be listened to and understood. After two months of working together she realises that she never really had a voice in those relationships and that now she is achieving her best hopes, she has a voice and an opinion and is less gullible.

During our work together, I worked shoulder to shoulder with her to respond to her complex needs and to ensure her voice was heard during safeguarding and statutory processes. This included: Sharing the young woman's concerns and hopes for upcoming care plan reviews and court proceedings; Attending LAC and secure accommodation reviews, court proceedings and supporting her when transitioning in to a new care

home; managing expectations for the young woman and other professionals, ensuring that the young woman had clarity on proceedings and timings.

As a result of Abianda's specialist approach to advocacy, the young woman has developed skills which mean she can advocate for herself and become more independent of service support in this regard. She is now confidently sharing her views with the professional network around her and being heard by those in statutory decision-making roles. She has demonstrated assertiveness and a willingness to be a partner in her own safeguarding efforts which means the changes in her life are more likely to be sustainable.

Most recently the young woman prepared a very powerful statement that she read to the judge during her court proceedings where she chose to share her views on gang affiliation. She said: "I fully regret the stress I have put on the people around me, myself and my future. I have realised that being in a gang is not worth it, and definitely not what I deserve in life. I now know that I am worth so much more than that." She has displayed maturity and confidence. The judge praised her for her hard work and progress and her case has now been removed from the court team. Her guardian explained the changes she has seen in the young woman, and her ability to both express her needs and display her emotions.

The young woman was very proud of herself and feels her life is moving forward. In this young women's case we see her journey from preparation with support and guidance, moving to independently creating documents for herself, critically thinking and creating dialogue with professionals while understanding their views. The young woman has completed a transition to her new residential care home. She will join her new school soon and I am working closely with her to make sure she has a great support network for after our work comes to an end. She is much happier and confident in herself and mostly is beginning to think about her future, dreams and aspirations.

She says: "I am not the same girl I was when I entered secure, I have honestly changed and changed for the better, I truly believe that I now have boundaries to keep myself safe. I am also still learning how to navigate myself away from negative influences; I just want to be given the chance to live a normal life with my family where I belong."

Note 3

Recommendations from the 2019 Ofsted report: Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime

Recommendation 1: Local community safety partnerships should fully involve schools, colleges and PRUs in developing and implementing local strategies that aim to address knife crime and serious youth violence. Exclusions and managed moves

Recommendation 2: All schools and academies in London should ensure that their exclusion policy reflects the practice set out in the DfE's statutory guidance. Local authorities should have a strategic response to permanent exclusions. They should also, in conjunction with regional schools' commissioners, challenge schools and multi-academy trusts if exclusions do not appear to be in line with statutory guidance.

Recommendation 3: The Department for Education should collect data from schools about managed moves in the same way in which it collects information on permanent and fixed-term exclusions. Early help and prevention

Recommendation 4: Safeguarding partners should involve school leaders at a strategic level in assessing the needs of children and young people in their area, and in planning and delivering early help services in response to those needs. Schools need to participate actively in local arrangements as required under 'Keeping children safe in education' statutory guidance.

Recommendation 5: Local safeguarding partnerships should facilitate all agencies including schools and colleges in challenging each other's practice if they believe any agency is failing to contribute to the local strategy to protect pupils from knife crime. Improving information-sharing

Recommendation 6: Schools and colleges should share full information with one another when pupils and learners move schools, PRUs or alternative provision or move to further education, to safeguard them and other pupils and learners.

Recommendation 7: Pan-London safeguarding partners should provide challenge to schools and colleges and, when necessary, drive improvement in how well schools and colleges share information with others to promote children's safety when those children move schools or begin further education, including via a managed move or when they are permanently excluded.

Recommendation 8: The Metropolitan Police Service needs to establish a clear and consistent protocol and memorandums of understanding with schools that ensure that it and schools routinely share information about children for the purposes of safeguarding. Safeguarding children and young people in education from knife crime March 2019, No. 190005 32 Teaching the Curriculum

Recommendation 9: School leaders should consider how their personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) curriculum reflects local safeguarding issues and trends, including knife crime.

Recommendation 10: Pan-London bodies should consider ways in which they can support schools in ensuring that external organisations that are delivering anti-knife crime and gang affiliation sessions can provide a high-quality and impactful contribution to the school PHSE curriculum.

Recommendation 11: Safeguarding partnerships and school leaders should raise awareness of the dangers of grooming and criminal exploitation among both parents and children.