



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?

County lines is fast becoming one of the most prevalent forms of modern slavery in the UK. County lines involves criminal gangs moving illegal drugs from cities to provincial locations using unseen but vulnerable people who carry dedicated mobile phones. Young people are targeted, groomed, manipulated and coerced into drug trafficking and distribution and the gangs make huge profits.

Young women are frequently used because they are not suspected, operating in the shadows - a disproportionate number are in care. Sadly, the very nature of county lines means that it is happening all around the country, in communities of all types.

In lockdown, county lines victims have been more easily seen on sparsely used public transport. When the pandemic recedes and life returns to normal, the fear is that these women and children will blend in again. Coerced by threats of violence, their lives are fearful and precarious.



WATCH GEMMAS' STORY

<https://youtu.be/KqpTVUHAwas>

Gemma's story

"It comes suddenly. Heart racing. Struggling to breathe. A huge surge of panic. Sweat pricks me. I'm drowning in fear. I'm back there."



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



34%
of all gang-
associated
children.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

(Psalm 23)

Having read this famous Psalm, consider this dark inverse:

COUNTY LINES PSALM

The gang leader is my shepherd, I shall not ask.
He makes me lie down in unheated flats;
He leads me beside needle-strewn stairwells;
He enslaves my soul.
He leads me down windswept streets
For his own profit.
As I walk down the darkest alley, I feel evil;
For he is with me;
My phone and my stash, they cling to me.
He prepares every deal for me in the presence of
my enemies;
My head it drips with sweat;
My water bottle is empty.
Surely ruthlessness and cruelty shall stalk me
All the days of my life,
And I shall live in an unfurnished home
My whole short life.



EXPLORATION

Psalm 23 has perhaps a greater recognition than any other piece of scripture and it is not hard to see why. Its sparse words offer huge solace to fearful people. Though we try to look to others as though we are not afraid, many of us live with this vulnerability. Psalm 23 is an anchor in an anxious world.

Getting in touch with nature is a way of soothing trouble, so the Psalmist's reference to 'green pastures' and 'still waters' quickly help. But we should be careful not to think God only meets us in nice views. There is ambiguity in Psalm 23 too, in talk of the 'darkest valley' and 'the presence of my enemies'.

Many lives alternate between these realities. God comforts us, but we are soon aware of how near our enemies are encroaching and feel the need consciously to embrace his presence again. Some live only with the ever-present fear of other

people, who inhabit their waking moments like a shadow over their shoulders. Girls and women running county lines are frequently in the company of those who commit casual violence. Fear stalks each day.

It is not God's will for people to endure this pain, so we have a rallying cry from heaven. Our first instinct may be to avert our eyes from suffering, but Jesus tilted into distress in his earthly life and in our prayer life he calls us to the same.

True intercessory prayer doesn't skate over the frozen surface of others' pain; it breaks the ice and sits in the freezing water until pain is felt. It's the point at which intercession begins to kick in, if we have the endurance to stay the course.



FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What feelings do you have after reading the County Lines Psalm?
- 2 As the survivor in the film says, "he didn't love me: he was just using me." What should our intercession look like as we pray for girls and women caught up in county lines?
- 3 How can we make life in our communities more attractive than life in a gang? How can we make the alternative better?

"Let's all play our part and do our bit in making the alternative to being in a gang much better. And that means support networks, life chances, getting people trained in education. It means talking to people, connecting with people - all of those things have a massive part to play."

Clive Davies, Chief Superintendent,
East Surrey Division



PRAYER

Lord, you are a shepherd to those who are fearful and lost.

We pray for those who walk streets they don't know to meet people they don't trust. May your goodness and mercy overtake those who are afraid of the only shadow they see, to restore souls that have been stolen.

For Jesus' sake we pray.

Amen.



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.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, we are running online versions of the Breaking County Lines Course. These 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



FURTHER READING THIS WEEK:

To follow up today's session, you may like to spend some time during the week reflecting on what you have learnt about county lines and thinking about how you can encourage and support vulnerable children that you know of locally.

You can also read more about Harriet's radical ministry:

HARRIET MONSELL - CARING FOR PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS

The House of Mercy which Harriet Monsell ran also recognised very early on that specialised care was needed for the women. Not all of them who were rescued were prostitutes. Some were alcoholics, some had suffered abuse and trauma, and some had special needs. Instead of putting the women into one category, Mother Harriet and her staff established different programmes to address the specific situation of each individual.

In addition, T. T. Carter and Mother Harriet did not operate their ministry in a vacuum. They looked to the church, to the British government, and to their influential friends for help. Just as the spiritual life cannot be practiced alone, neither can a ministry function without a wider community of support.

The enormous groundswell of concern for the ‘fallen women’ in Victorian England provided many people willing to help. Bringing those people into the work, and not just restricting it to Sisters and staff behind closed doors, served as a ministry not just to the women, but also to those who yearned to help them.



- 1 Is there a danger that in your mind you put all vulnerable people in the same category and struggle to see them as individuals?
- 2 Mother Harriet recognised the importance of providing support appropriate to different kinds of suffering and exploitation. How might we learn to best target our contributions today?
- 3 Mother Harriet aimed to build a supportive community – which included helpers and those seeking help. How might this wisdom contribute to our responses? How do we balance this with contemporary concerns about expertise, professional standards and objective monitoring?



SPOTLIGHT ON CARITAS BAKHITA HOUSE

Caritas Bakhita House provides women escaping human trafficking with the safety and support to allow them to begin the recovery process. The house has been open since 2015 and as well as a safe temporary home, it offers women a range of services including emergency support, legal and financial assistance, mentoring, and help with accessing accommodation

The house is named after St Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of victims of modern slavery, who is seen as a beacon of hope for all the guests. (Pictured above).



www.caritaswestminster.org.uk/bakhita-house.php

From the frontlines

“Children as young as seven and eight are being targeted... outside schools, outside takeaways such as McDonald’s and on social media.”

Jackie Mouradian, Mosaic Creative



WOMEN IN THE SHADOWS

resource: www.theclewerinitiative.org/womenintheshadows