



Human Trafficking Foundation Online Forum

Co-hosted with SPACE – Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines

23rd March 2021

Chaired by Tamara Barnett, Director of Operations HTF and Robyn Phillips, London Project and Survivor Lead

Co-ordinated by Jasmine Selby HTF

The recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#)

Introduction by HTF and SPACE

Thank you to SPACE for organising this event, we've got some interesting speakers from the lesser known organisations in our sector.

SPACE was founded in 2018 to campaign for change to the statutory response to exploited children and young people and tackle the disparity in the modern slavery response to British nationals in terms of both recognition and support. SPACE focuses on British criminal exploitation, but these apply to CCE and county lines children as well. The subject tends to generate a black and white response when in reality there are many greys within this conversation.

Speakers address the question: *County Lines is now synonymous with British children and young people and CCE features as the most common Modern Slavery child category. What do you see as an individual working in this area to be the blockers to change and progress for CL victims?*

SPACE (Founder of the Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines NGO, SPACE):

Modern Slavery in County Lines Exploitation – Is it Central, Incidental or Irrelevant for Responders?

I recently read about a police led project used to educate primary school children on aspects of CCE, which was well intended but the title of this project was 'Choices'. I challenge this title as the notion of choice is a key obstacle for children and parents of exploited children and this negative messaging was delivered by a designated statutory first responder agency whose role it is to identify victims of exploitation. These terms are inappropriate and misleading when accurate information is essential but lacking. Terms like this suggest that CCE is a lifestyle choice which is problematic and leads to children being categorised as wayward rather than recognised as CCE victims.

CCE is not crime, its crime committed under abuse, trafficking and control through insidious grooming and rewiring. Children victims do not need steering out of crime, they are aware that these activities are wrong, instead they need steering out of exploitation and intervention.

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

The notion of choice is more robustly pushed when it comes to British boys because they least fit the stereotype of the perfect modern slavery victim. Police hatred is rife within county lines and stems from the rewiring and learnt behaviours, many police officers note the bravado slipping at critical moments but we rarely see the dots joined as the job of the police is to gain a conviction and they are not measured on their safeguarding response.

A discussion is needed about how the age of criminal responsibility is 10 but anyone under the age of 18 are not deemed able to give consent to their own abuse or slavery. County lines is sometimes interpreted as a consensual activity, and this cannot continue. The answer to this problem lies in the countless case studies and there is a need to be pro-child protection.

A case study is shared, which demonstrates the failings of the system to protect victims of CCE and county lines and results in a life sentence for one victim recognised in the NRM and the death of another. There was a responsibility of the state to intervene and identify CCE before it was too late, and the police to intervene from a safeguarding perspective instead of a criminal one. There needs to be questions raised on whether NRM is fit for purpose, and what happens to these children once they turn 18. What is apparent is there is no benefit in being recognised as a modern slavery victim for exploited children as the end result remains prison or death.

Khalid Sugulle (Criminal child exploitation and serious youth violence Youth Mentor):

A Window into The Unspoken Side - Why Victims Don't Share Their Reality.

Khalid is a CCE and serious youth violence worker. He talks about the importance of showing exploited children that you care and that they can trust you, through creative approaches all children can be engaged with.

Khalid discusses the need to recognise that after gaining an NRM many children's emotional wellbeing is not considered and there needs to be a preventative service in the sector that looks at emotional health and puts that at the forefront of all interventions. Furthermore, Khalid raises the issue that when these children turn 18 much of the support stops, and they, in many cases, return to their exploiters.

Dr Romana Farooq (Principal Clinical Psychologist & Clinical Lead):

Victims No More? Exploring Victimhood & the Organised Abuse & Trafficking of CYP

Romana works with children and families who have been subject to trafficking and exploitation. She notes how in her experience victims of trafficking do not present in expected forms and there is a need to interrogate ideas of victimhood to dismantle preconceived ideas of what a victim looks like.

When children are subject to trafficking, they develop trauma coerced attachments which means they develop attachments to their perpetrators. Moreover, there is a need to interrogate language, labels and pre-conceived ideas of victimhood and tackle the culture of disbelief in services. Instead there is a need for self-awareness and reflective practice and ring-fenced funding in the NHS is needed for Trauma sensitive services for victims of trafficking.

Human
Trafficking
Foundation

Alan Patrick (Child Exploitation Activist):

Footprints & Justice – Repeating Mistakes We Made Towards Victims of CSE.

Works with victims of CCE

Alan shares experiences of being a parent of a child who was a victim of CCE between 2007-2010. The system regarded his daughter as naughty, rather than exploited and missing. Her mind had been rewired and she wasn't listening to anyone else apart from those who groomed her. After the trial many years later, there was no support for Alan's daughter who was experiencing chronic PTSD.

Children need to be told that they will receive support when they come to the authorities in the form of independent advocates and mentors. The system needs to treat victims as children, and once their perpetrators have gone to prison, they need continued support.

10 years ago, Alan was told that lessons had been learnt from his daughter's experience however nothing has changed, instead there has only been pockets of improvement.

Steve Clay (Former Police Detective Chief Inspector):

There Must Be Another Way – statutory services refusal to recognise the NCA's call to see County Lines Exploited Children as victims

In 2015 Steve was the founding member of the Modern Slavery Partnership, at this time there was only four people referred to the NRM in that area. Steve raises the question: are the people referred to the NRM getting the help that they need?

Steve shows posters from the National Crime Agency, which has the national responsibility to guide the police in county lines, which illustrate children victims of CCE and county lines.

MCE group (Missing, criminally exploited) talks about the children that the police have concerns about who has links to organised crime and conclude that these are exploited children that have been coerced into dealing drugs. This is agreed in a multi-agency forum. However, this same child that they have agreed is exploited will be charged criminally for drug charges. This cannot be right.

Steve discusses the nature of culpability within the codes for crown prosecutors, which states that if the suspect has been exploited they are going to have less culpability - culpability levels diminish when you take into account the exploitation (agreed at MCE meetings). Why is the natural next step criminal prosecution?

Statutory guidance attempts to safeguard children but is not fit for purpose for acknowledging criminal exploitation of children i.e. debt bondage alone will not trigger section 47 safeguarding child. There has got to be another way.

The clock is ticking for many children and for some it's too late. If multi-agency professionals are agreeing that children are exploited at groups like MCE then don't prosecute them.

Brett Wood (County Lines Manager-Sussex Police):

Coordinating County lines - Two Years On.

Human Trafficking Foundation

The police are trained to look at the criminal justice process, and much of what we hear today is challenging what is engrained in our culture.

Covid has not had an impact on county lines, this has continued and instead exploiters have changed their operating procedures and have carried on and young people being found further afield during Covid.

Complexity of County Lines

Police officers need to have a depth of information to be able to deal with county lines. Custody guidance document is over 300 pages, while there is good training in the police the impact of Covid has been felt. Another example of the complexity is the 18+ issue which is a difficult one to get officers to understand.

Jackie Long (Channel 4 News):

County Lines - Who Cares? - News No-One Wants to See Or Hear.

Jackie explores who takes responsibility for victims of CCE. Using the example of the Jaden Moodie case, Jackie looks to Ayoub Majouline who was prosecuted for his murder. This was someone who had faced exploitation and had an NRM but was not a priority and was too easily dismissed. If there is no investigation that is public that explores what has happened to these boys who have become perpetrators at 16 years old, then no lessons are learnt going forward. Moreover, the parents of these children are crying out for help that simply is not there.

There is an awful subtext within many news reports that those who die or kill were 'asking for it'. Within work that Jackie did attempting to change the public view of these children she found that 47 children who had died or been harmed had been linked to CCE, we don't know the true scale of this problem.

There is guidance, but if in that first instance whether it be police or local authorities they are thought of as a criminal not a child then nothing else falls into place as it should. Jackie knows many families that fought for NRMs, but once they got them it was utterly meaningless.

Jackie has been recently looking at other issues that aren't always associated with CCE such as debt bondage but found not a lot of engagement with the National Police Chiefs Council or NCA. Debt is critical to what happens to these children it is what traps these children but is not understood as modern slavery.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Karen co-chairs the APPG on modern slavery and human trafficking with Baroness Butler-Sloss, which is a group of cross-party MPs and Peers who come together to discuss and share experiences of modern slavery and human trafficking. The APPG is used to raise issues in parliament, and privately with ministers. Try and make sure that organisations in the sector have an opportunity to speak to ministers.

Human Trafficking Foundation

Reflecting on her experiences as a Minister

Karen Bradley was the Minister for Modern Slavery in 2015 and a year later in 2016 she took on gangs as part of her portfolio and this was the first time, she heard the term county lines. She had never heard this term in relation to modern slavery, despite the fact that young people who are exploited are victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. Karen believes that county lines and modern slavery should be dealt with together, and unfortunately the silos mentality still exists.

It is hard to get police officers to properly record a child as missing and not absent and recording a child as missing means that the case is dealt with in a very different way. Perhaps one of the issues is that this is a cross-agency problem and connects the department of Education, Housing, ministry for Justice and at local authority level and across police forces. Covid-19 has exacerbated the problem, as the government does not have the bandwidth to deal with these issues which span many government departments and agencies. Public awareness is needed for change, and every interaction is an intervention and ownership at a multi-agency level, that can say that intervention needs to be made.

Finally, these problems cannot be addressed unless victims are believed. Within the processes we have, there is an assumption that there will be an abuse in the system, that people are trying to get help for the wrong reason and there is a need to move away from this thinking.

Dame Sara Thornton, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

Last week the Home Office published the latest NRM statistics which showed that 1,544 for county lines which is just the tip of the iceberg. Last year we did some work on statue 45, as well as looking at the defence was operating what struck us was how child protection was not working. There was an absence of effective intervention, and Sara left feeling that NRM referrals for children victims of CCE was not leading to the right action taken. A child in need plan is always voluntary and there is no escalation in non-familial violence. There is such an imbalance with the support a child receives in the criminal justice system maybe up to 25 hours a week of intervention compared to what they would get in a voluntary care plan when the harm is outside of the family.

As a consequence of that Sara wrote to all the local safeguarding boards in the country and written to Gavin Williamson and the Home Secretary to say that local authorities need to know it is their responsibility that there is the right kind of intervention for children in these situations.

Unfortunately, it is a frequent phenomena this overlap of victims and offenders and the link to the NRM. Looking at serious case reviews, there is common themes of the need to safeguard children when the danger is outside the family, the importance of cross agency collaboration and the significance of information sharing. The importance of using these reachable moments, that are not grasped and the risks of school exclusions. How can we use these themes to push for the necessary changes that are needed?

IN the last few months, we have been working with the violence reduction units around the country in the police and most of them have programmes on CCE and they are doing good work around interventions, reachable moments and school exclusions. It is important that the funding is not year-by-year and instead an investment to reducing CCE and violence.

Human
Trafficking
Foundation

Also the work that Bedford University has been doing on their contextual safeguarding programme – looking at what can be done in terms of peer relationships, community locations and school cultures. So often children are seeing social care and policing intervention as increasing the risk for them.

Moreover, in the last year in the focus on law enforcement – there has been a targeting of line holders so that traumatised children do not have to give evidence in court.

Q & A Session with Panellists

1. Have you got any advice for how police officers can best engage with young people who they suspect are victims, in order to try to help them to open up and disclose what's happening? Especially considering many may have been essentially taught to hate/distrust the police.

Khalid: Be creative. It's about co-working. We do Coffee with a Copper to try and build trust and positive relationships. We've facilitated conversations between the police and children and even had a non-uniformed officer help paint a young person's flat. When the young person was told the man worked in the police he just smiled.

2. Is there much information about how often asylum seeking / refugee children in their own families (not unaccompanied or separated) fall victim to CL. If so, how is that responded to?

SPACE: Most victims of CCE are British children, despite them not being thought of as victims of modern slavery.

3. How can the Police and CJS involve the parents and carers? We are not involved and left aside.

SPACE: Parents and carers should be included from the offset. They are the only ones who can actually safeguard children and be there round the clock. I understand there can be confidential information but partners should be invited to the strat meetings and worked in partnership with.

4. This is probably for Karen Bradley MP and Dame Sara Thornton to take forward. They've both had to leave so we will pick it up offline: Is the government going to review the convictions of people subsequently found to be victims of CCE?
5. We've spoken a lot about response to criminal exploitation but haven't touched on prevention. What are the speakers thoughts on this?

Alan: Education. When my child was found with drugs, she was excluded. There was no conversation. She was moved to a PRU where she was easily accessible to her exploiters. Talking about exploitation with children doesn't lead them to being exploited. We need to be talking about this and educating everyone.

Additional Questions there wasn't time for:

6. Looking at the chat, there appears to be this wish for a national strategy but also recognition of the challenges of coordinating responses and varied resources across local authorities.

Human

Trafficking

Foundation

What do the speakers think about pan-London or cross-LA working with young people affected by CL?

7. To what extent do you think race and discrimination is a significant factor in county lines?
8. Why can't under 18's arrested for PWITS or in a force away from their home be given a similar card with support information from external organisations, to encourage them to divulge their exploitation?
9. There seems good practice out there, but it isn't across the board. Why do you think that might be?
10. And similarly, do you find the larger cities more publicised than smaller areas?
11. Karen, what is your view on the proposed overview of the Modern Slavery Act and Section 45 defence announced this week?
12. We often see news releases to say a young person involved in County Lines has been "safeguarded" rather than arrested. But what does that actually mean or look like in practice?

Throughout the Online Forum, the 500 participants were expressing their opinions, sharing best practice, experiences and resources on the Zoom chat. View these reflections and resources [here](#).