



CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS

REVISITED

#CHILDRENINTHESHADOWS

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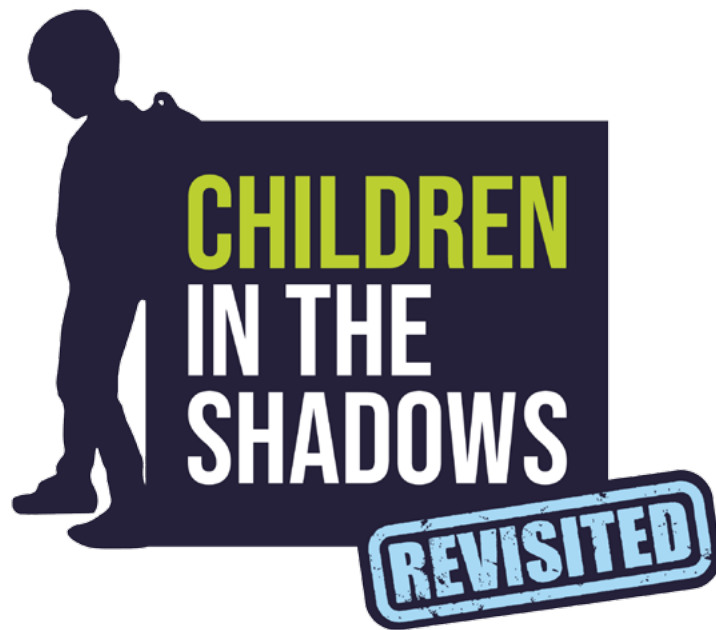
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A NEW COURSE FOR LENT 2026

#CHILDRENINTHESHADOWS

Worldwide, there are about 12.3 million children living in modern slavery – this accounts for one in every four victims. In the UK, it is harder to gather exact numbers but we know that in 2024, 31 per cent of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism were children – this equates to 5,999 under 18s.

To help shine a light on the suffering of children, The Clewer Initiative has launched **Children in the Shadows Revisited**, a new Lent course for churches, community groups and individuals.

Many thanks to those who have contributed to this resource – we are grateful for their time, insight and support.

PARTICULAR THANKS GO TO:

Sabrina Hewitt, Careena Thompson and Leo Powell, county lines educators
Tony Dunkerley, international law enforcement advisor and modern slavery trainer,
Holly Jones, University of Nottingham Rights Lab Doctoral Research Fellow and frontline practitioner,
Ruth Dearnley, founder and president of STOP THE TRAFFIK
Imogen Spencer Chapman, the Head of Training & Practice Development at ECPAT UK and 'Amira', a member of ECPAT's lived-experience Youth Advisory Group
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Children in the Shadows Revisited has been written and developed by Claire Walford, Lois Bosatta and Bishop Alastair Redfern.



CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS

REVISITED

AN IN-DEPTH AND REFLECTIVE LOOK AT CHILDREN AND MODERN SLAVERY

INTRODUCTION BY BISHOP ALASTAIR REDFERN, CHAIR OF THE CLEWER INITIATIVE

In Children in the Shadows Revisited, we invite you to consider the various forms of child exploitation in the UK and beyond, the scale of the abuse, and the need for all of us to play a part in guiding the young people in our lives and spotting those at risk of harm.

This new edition of Children in the Shadows has an extra chapter focusing on online grooming, a rapidly growing area of exploitation that is impacting children in our homes without many even realising it. Two weeks of the resource are based on county lines and how this form of child exploitation is evolving.

Each session contains definitions, statistics, examples of current good practice, a Bible reflection and ways in which individuals and churches can make a significant contribution to extending care and strengthening resilience and resistance in their communities.

WHY RE-VISIT CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS?

The original Children in the Shadows Lent course was released in 2022, when we were still living in the aftermath of the Covid Pandemic and lockdown periods. Since then, our schools and communities have opened up but many families have been crippled by the cost of living and vulnerabilities have increased. This has combined with further fragmentation in our communities and an increased

hostility towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. At the same time, many children have got increasingly drawn into an online world where criminal gangs are equally active and can operate with freedom, undetected by parents.

Over the last four years, much has changed but sadly the trafficking and exploitation of children has not gone away. We wanted to revisit the theme, understand the current landscape and explore further how communities can respond.

The subject is relevant to everyone. We all have a part to play in the protection of children. This is not just

the responsibility of parents – a community response is required.

This is the sixth Lent course The Clewer Initiative has produced and we hope that many churches and communities will use it throughout the season of Lent to reflect on the urgent need to protect children in our

communities from exploitation.

We pray it will challenge many to act in new ways as we seek a better future for our young people together.

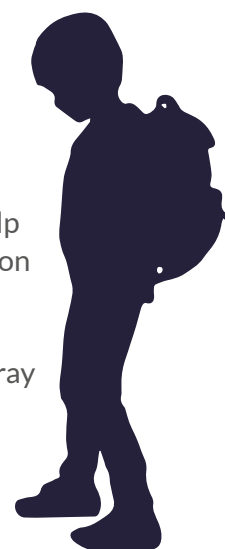
NOTES FOR GROUP LEADERS

The resource has been designed to help explore the realities of child exploitation and encourage people to consider making an appropriate and effective response. Through the resource, we pray it will help us refine our priorities and practices in Discipleship.

“

To be a child is to be, by definition, vulnerable. Sadly, many unscrupulous and criminal people deliberately take advantage of this susceptibility and exploit children for financial gain. The damage done to children abused in this way never goes away.

”



AN IN-DEPTH AND REFLECTIVE LOOK AT CHILDREN AND MODERN SLAVERY

HOW TO USE THE RESOURCE

Each session begins by providing some useful **background information** – why not invite participants to share their reactions as they digest the statistics and introduction? Encourage your group to share any other insights or experiences from their own knowledge and contacts.



There is an urgent need for churches to support the creation of more resilient and healthy communities where all children can grow and develop in safety. The church also has a key role in identifying children in its orbit that are being exploited or who may be susceptible to exploitation.



Once you have read the **Dig Deeper** section to understand the theme of the week, **watch the film** and answer the group questions. Do not feel you have to talk about all of the questions, they are merely a springboard to encourage discussion and reflection.

After this, it is time for the **Bible study and reflection**. Why not read the passage out loud, perhaps inviting people to go round the group, each reading successive verses? After the short reflection, we suggest a few questions which should provide fuel for discussion and encourage a response.

The Bible study is followed by a short **prayer** for the week. You could ask someone to read the prayer aloud, and then give the group a few minutes of silence or further prayer and reflection.

The last section outlines further resources, ideas and actions that could be pursued in response to the weekly theme. You could suggest that participants report back next week on their progress and reflections.

At the end of the session, we recommend summarising any important ideas and actions that participants could consider taking away for further prayer.



AN IN-DEPTH AND REFLECTIVE LOOK AT **CHILDREN** AND **MODERN SLAVERY**



CARING FOR YOURSELF

This resource is about a subject which is emotive and upsetting. Before you start, think about how you will care for yourself and others. If you are distressed by the subject matter or it has triggered painful memories, we would urge you to share your concerns with others who might understand. Alongside the children who suffer, each of us needs grace and healing and the opportunity to recognise and process our own vulnerabilities.

ABOUT THE CLEWER INITIATIVE

The Clewer Initiative exists to raise awareness and mobilise the Church and communities to take action against modern slavery.

We were established in 2016 as a three-year project, funded by the Clewer Sisters, an order of Anglican nuns who donate generously to causes related to the eradication of human trafficking. In 2024, we became an independent charity, funded by several trusts and donors.

There is an urgent need to raise awareness of modern slavery and equip individuals and communities to know how to spot the signs of slavery and report suspicions. Time and again, law enforcement officers state that the single, most useful thing we can do at The Clewer Initiative is to educate the public about the crime.

The Clewer Initiative is unique in the way it works nationally to challenge and motivate churches to improve their response. We work with Anglican churches and other church networks to raise awareness and cascade knowledge and best practice.



HELPFUL CONTACTS:

Modern Slavery Helpline:
08000 121 700
www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/report

Local police:
101
or 999 in an emergency

Crimestoppers:
0800 555 111
(anonymous)

Childline:
0800 1111



WEEK BY WEEK GUIDE

Children in the Shadows is a six-week, film-based, course.

Each week includes definitions, statistics, insight from frontline experts (both written and on film), examples of current good practice, and suggestions of how individuals and churches can make a significant contribution to extending care and strengthening resilience and resistance in their communities.

Through the course, we work through Luke 18 and discuss how Jesus' interactions and parables can inspire our response. Each session closes with a prayer to draw our reflections together.

WEEK 1

THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT CHILDREN & MODERN SLAVERY IN THE UK

Week 1 explores the different forms of child exploitation and the scale of the issue in the UK. We interview the Head of Training at ECPAT and 'Amira', a member of ECPAT's lived-experience Youth Advisory Group.

WEEK 2

THE INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT: HOW CHILDREN OF MODERN SLAVERY VICTIMS ARE AFFECTED

Week 2 shines a light on the suffering and isolation faced by the children of modern slavery victims and how they require specialised care and support. We consider the role the church can play in providing safe spaces and friendship.

WEEK 3

BEHIND THE SCREEN: PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ONLINE GROOMING AND EXPLOITATION

Week 3 looks at the growth in online grooming and how it can lead seamlessly into physical trafficking. We consider how to protect children online; talk about healthy relationships and spot the signs of grooming.



CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS WEEK BY WEEK GUIDE

WEEK 4

COUNTY LINES IN 2026 AND HOW PARENTS CAN RESPOND

Week 4 focuses on county lines – one of the fastest expanding areas of child exploitation in the UK. We interview two county lines educators and consider how parents can be equipped to tackle county lines.

WEEK 5

FIGHTING COUNTY LINES IN OUR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Week 5 continues the focus on county lines but this time exploring some of the adverse childhood experiences that make children particularly vulnerable to targeting. We look at the vital role teachers and schools have in preventing exploitation and harm.

WEEK 6

THE GLOBAL PICTURE: CHILDREN & MODERN SLAVERY ACROSS THE WORLD

Week 6 provides a global perspective on children and modern slavery and interviews the founder of STOP THE TRAFFIK about how technology is helping to thwart global criminal networks and raise awareness amongst vulnerable people and communities.



[www.facebook.com/
theclewerinitiative](https://www.facebook.com/theclewerinitiative)



[www.instagram.com/
theclewerinitiative](https://www.instagram.com/theclewerinitiative)



www.clewer.org.uk



www.twitter.com/theclewer

CHILDREN IN THE SHADOWS

Resource: www.clewer.org.uk/resources/children-in-the-shadows-revisited



THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE

It is hard to identify the exact scale of trafficking in the UK - many cases of child trafficking go unseen.

In 2024, 31 per cent of referrals to the National Referral Mechanism were children - this equates to

5,999 UNDER 18s.



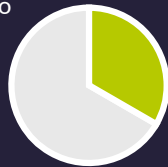
78%

were male



& 22%

were female



3,335 of those were British national children - the remainder were non-British nationals.



DIG DEEPER

Modern slavery is the illegal exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain. Victims of modern slavery can be any gender, nationality, and ethnicity and unfortunately, children are not immune to this dreadful scourge.

Children are trafficked to the UK from a wide variety of backgrounds and from all over the world. Imogen Spencer Chapman, Head of Training & Practice Development at **ECPAT UK**, comments on recent trends: "in the last few years, high numbers of Vietnamese and Albanian children have been trafficked into the UK, primarily for criminal exploitation. We've also seen large numbers of children coming from the Global South and many children fleeing countries such as Sudan where there's huge conflict. We've also met children from countries such as Chad and Eritrea. Like those from Sudan, they pass through Libya, a country where refugees are routinely captured and trafficked to large immigration detention centres where they experience high levels of abuse, torture and exploitation, before journeying onto the UK and other countries where they seek asylum. We also witness children coming from West Africa who are trafficked into the UK, commonly for domestic servitude and sexual exploitation."

WHY IS EXPLOITATION GROWING AROUND THE WORLD?

Modern slavery and exploitation are increasing because of the huge levels of poverty and inequality across the world. Individuals and families are driven away from their homes and communities because of war, conflict and climate disasters and end up in places where exploiters loiter, knowing they can target vulnerable parents and children.

Imogen adds: "In recent years, we've seen unaccompanied refugee children facing greater risks of being trafficked once they're here in the UK. They may not have been trafficked into the UK but on arrival, they face new levels of vulnerability which criminal gangs seek to capitalise on. There are links between organised criminal groups that operate internationally, UK-based criminal groups and young refugees in the care system. There is also a lot of debt bondage and family members are threatened or held ransom by militia groups in the countries children have come from until they pay off their debts."

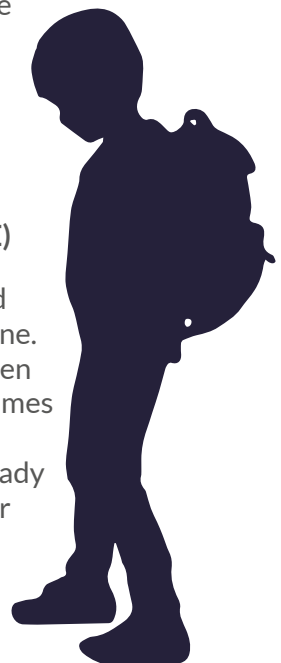
The main forms of exploitation that affect children are labour exploitation; sexual exploitation; domestic servitude and criminal exploitation.

1 Labour exploitation

Victims work for offenders in businesses or sites that offenders directly control. In more organised examples, offenders act as gangmasters, controlling teams of victims on single or across multiple sites. Victims often live in a single overcrowded residence.

2 Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

Vulnerable child victims are targeted for grooming either in person or online. Offenders sexually exploit the children for personal gratification and sometimes force them into sex work in fixed or changing locations. Victims may already be known to the authorities for other reasons. A large proportion of CSE victims have an unstable home life, mental or physical health issues or alcohol and drug use.



3 Domestic servitude

Probably the most hidden form of trafficking, victims, sometimes as young as 10 or 11, live with offenders and are forced to undertake household chores such as cooking, cleaning and childcare. There is generally one victim per household. Some victims are even specifically trafficked for work in diplomatic households. Victims usually lead very isolated lives with little or no unsupervised freedom. They may, however, attend school. Their own privacy and comfort will be minimal, often sleeping on a mattress on the floor, hidden in a cellar or locked room and they are frequently subjected to harsh treatment, both physical and verbal. Sexual abuse of victims is not uncommon.

4 Child criminal exploitation (CCE)

Victims are forced to take part in often highly organised gang-related criminality. This could be county lines drug trafficking, cannabis cultivation, shoplifting, pickpocketing or forced begging. Each of these different types of criminal activities may affect different types of children. For example, most children involved in cannabis cultivation are Vietnamese children who speak no or minimal English.

Recruitment by Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs) commonly occurs in person in the country of origin of the victims. In some cases, the victims' families approach an agent in the hope of giving their child a better life. In contrast, most county lines' victims are from the UK, yet there is also a small but significant number of Albanian child victims, trafficked to the UK from Albania by OCGs.

OCGs exercise high levels of control over their victims, often making it hard for them to be identified and protected. Rates of child victims going missing and returning to traffickers are a significant concern for professionals working to protect them and when identified they may be wrongfully prosecuted rather than identified as a victim of trafficking.

Global and domestic trends of CCE are constantly in flux, impacted by global and domestic politics and social issues such as the cost-of-living crisis driving more families into poverty. Some foreign national children in CCE are extremely hidden, unknown to statutory services, and may only come to light following serious incidents of harm against the child.

Often, one form of exploitation may make a child vulnerable to other types of abuse and exploitation. For example, a child trafficked for domestic servitude may end up being sexually abused by the adults in the household too.



WATCH THE FILM

Learn more about child trafficking in the UK by watching our short interview with Imogen Spencer Chapman of ECPAT UK.



<https://youtu.be/6ssTUKCmsy8>

1. What struck you as you watched the film?
2. Did you know about the high levels of children trafficked into the UK?
3. Were you aware that child victims of trafficking might turn up in your church when they are being exploited or afterwards?
4. Do you feel you and your church are equipped to spot the signs and know how to respond? Remind one another how to raise a safeguarding concern.
5. What do you understand by the phrases 'trauma-informed care' and 'professional love'?
6. How can we help child victims of trafficking not be defined by their trauma?



READ LUKE 18 V1-8

The Power and Purpose of Prayer



Faced with the scale and horror of child exploitation, it is easy to feel powerless and frustrated. Jesus tells his disciples this parable to show them that when faced with suffering and injustice they should always pray and not give up. It is a story about the power of persistent prayer and our inbuilt desire for justice.

The parable reminds us that the systems and powers which organise our world (such as the judge) can fail to notice the suffering of the most vulnerable. Children are often hidden from public view. We are called to notice, pray and seek God's guidance and grace in bringing to the world's attention, the horrific exploitation of children.

Of course, we should not think that our God is like the unjust and reluctant judge in the parable! Rather we can feel encouraged that if this is what an unjust judge is like, how much more will our good and merciful God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night.

How does this parable:

- help you understand the purpose, nature and power of prayer?
- encourage you to be more persistent in prayer, especially for children in their hidden suffering and exploitation?
- Remind you about the potential failings of established systems and our role in speaking up for the vulnerable?

'However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?'

- What can we do in our daily lives to nourish and express the kind of faith that Jesus is encouraging?



PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as you long to give grace and justice to your children, may we learn better to recognise the marks of exploitation and abuse, so that our voices can be raised to you for mercy. Help us become a place people feel safe to share their struggles, and pursue healing and recovery together by the gentle power of your love. Teach us to persist in prayer even when it is difficult.

We pray in faith and hope.

Amen.



STORY OF HOPE – AMIRA'S STORY

Amira shares some of her experiences, to help inform faith communities about the realities of child trafficking.

'Amira' is a member of ECPAT's lived-experience Youth Advisory Group. She was trafficked to the UK when she was a child and, from the age of 17, received huge support from ECPAT UK as she rebuilt her life. She is now a mum herself and is passionate about her role on the Youth Advisory Group and helping people understand the sort of challenges faced by child survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking.

She explains: "you find yourself in a country you didn't choose to come to. Everything is different and as a young person, you have no understanding of the legal systems and a lack of trust, particularly of adults because the people who trafficked you were adults and made lots of promises but ended up mistreating you."

"You've managed to run away from your exploiters, but you find yourself with other adults, like social workers and solicitors, who are making promises. These adults are saying, "we are here to support you... we are here to help you" but the young person doesn't know what to believe. They've learned to fight for themselves either by running away, keeping quiet, or being angry."

"Sometimes you're facing homelessness but the people who trafficked you are still reaching out to you and they're frightening you and threatening your family members. They might claim that the police in UK won't look after you and so many young people end up running back to their original traffickers and are mistreated once again."



www.ecpat.org.uk

Another challenge facing child survivors is the issue of telling their story, repeatedly to different adults and organisations, trying to prove their age and the truth of their exploitation." Amira shares: "People tell you they don't believe your age, or they don't believe your story or that you've been trafficked."

Through Amira's role on the Lived Experience Advisory Board, she tries to raise awareness of the different warning signs to look out for and what to do if you have suspicions. She says: "You might come across young people with inappropriate sexual behaviour, for example, using words that you wouldn't expect, being dressed in a provocative way or acting around other people in a more grown-up manner than usual. You might notice a young person with an adult who is not allowed to speak and the adult does all the talking. The young person might keep looking at the adult when you ask them a question and you feel that, in their eyes, they are screaming out for help and support."

Amira believes that faith communities have an important role to play as victims of human trafficking and modern slavery may be taken along to mosques or churches by their exploiters or may seek out these communities after they've left exploitation. Amira explains: "I would like to tell people in churches and mosques to look out for these signs because you can save someone's life. Do not ignore what you see - do something. Provide regular training about trafficking to your church or mosque members because it could make a big impact to a young person's life and also to the community life. Speak about it often so that people can learn to recognise the signs and know what to do. Most of all, be friendly and welcoming when young people come into your group and make sure you have good safeguarding policies in place."

ECPAT UK's youth advisory group was set up in recognition that young people affected by trafficking are the experts in their own lives. The group is made up of former members of ECPAT UK's youth programme and longer-term members who are in a position to get involved with steering its organisational campaigns and strategy. The youth advisory group meets monthly, and members take part in awareness-raising activities, public campaigning and training for frontline professionals.



ECPAT UK

Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT UK) is a small London-based, human rights charity that works throughout the UK to protect children from trafficking and transnational exploitation.

There are three main strands to its work:

1. research, campaigning and influencing – it lobbies governments around the world to improve legislation and policy
2. delivering training to improve the child protection response of professionals. ECPAT UK provides training to frontline professionals including social workers, police, immigration, legal, Prisons and Probation service, the CPS, health professionals, teachers and foster carers.
3. running a youth programme for young people who've experienced child trafficking between the ages of 15 and 25

Over the last three years, more than 150 children and young people have engaged with ECPAT UK's youth programme. It provides tailored and gender-specific support and mentoring as well as practical help with case work.

Imogen Spencer Chapman, Head of Training & Practice Development at ECPAT UK, explains: "Often the cases can be complex because young people are having to navigate multiple systems – immigration, care, legal and mental health systems – and engage with multiple professionals who don't always talk to each other. We spend a lot of time working closely with the young person to make sure their needs and the different parts of their lives are being connected and everyone's talking to each other. We have an open space where young people are encouraged to drop in and have a session with their youth mentor.

We also have two therapists who offer specialist, trauma-informed therapeutic care to young people.

"We have a fantastic ESOL teacher who offers weekly English language classes, and we also run a boys' group and a girls' group where, if funding allows, we take the young people on residential to a wonderful interfaith centre in Gloucestershire. For a couple of days, we provide them with a sense of escape and peace and do fun outdoor activities such as tree climbing."

Imogen sees a huge opportunity for churches and faith communities to offer care and understanding: "We need more specialist foster carers. Living in a stable home and receiving love and support can have such a profound impact on child victims of trafficking. This is something that churches and faith communities could really encourage and spearhead. I would urge anyone who thinks they may have the time and energy to become a foster carer to make enquiries with their local authority or with an independent fostering agency."



www.ecpat.org.uk

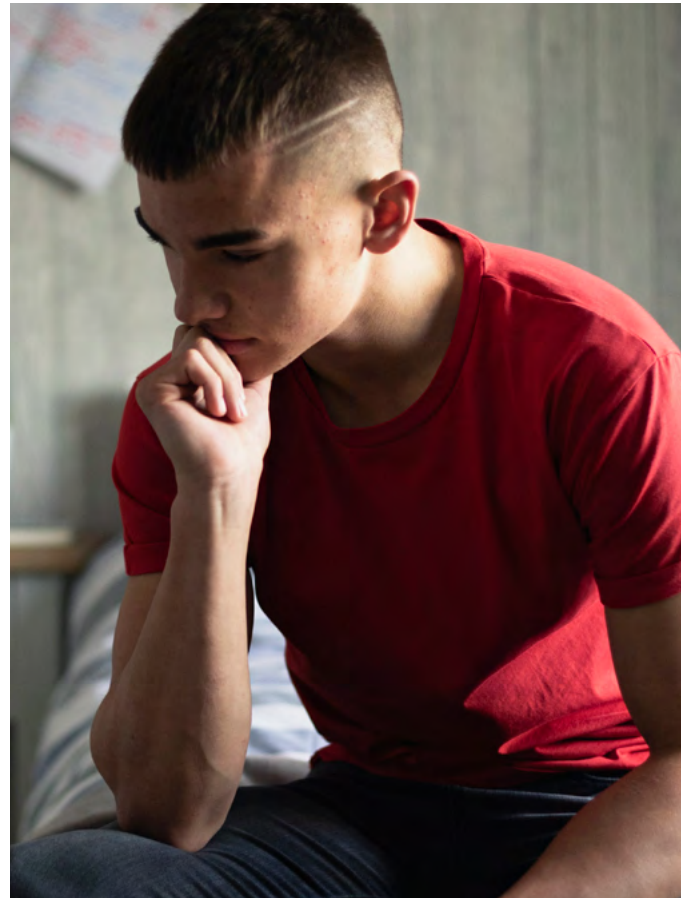




ACTION – JOIN THE FIGHT

There are many ways you can join the fight against child exploitation. A first step is to increase your own awareness and understanding of child exploitation.

1. Ask your church to organise some safeguarding or general training about modern slavery.
2. Commit to raising awareness amongst your networks and in your local area – start following The Clewer Initiative on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn and share our awareness raising campaigns with your friends and networks.
3. Could you (or someone you know) consider fostering or hosting a child victim of modern slavery? Pray that the God of all compassion would raise up more foster carers from within the church to respond to this practical need.
4. Download posters from The Clewer Initiative's website about the signs of exploitation and display them in your community halls.
5. Persist in prayer for victims of child trafficking, for their protection, recovery and hope for their future.





THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE



DIG DEEPER

Very little is known about the children of modern slavery victims and the intergenerational impact of the trauma they and their mothers have been through. Most services and support is currently focused on the needs of the adult survivor: the health and social support needs of dependents and families are under-reported. It is assumed that the adult survivor can provide suitable support needs for their dependent but sadly this isn't always the case. It is a very long road to recover from an experience of exploitation and often the trauma is passed down to the next generation.

To help fill the knowledge gap, a number of organisations and individuals have commissioned research. London-based charity Hestia's report '**Forgotten Children**' outlines the deep and lasting impact on the lives of these children.

The Hestia researchers observed that some children of modern slavery victims were forced into **premature responsibility** or became hypervigilant to their mother's needs as a reaction to the challenging circumstances they were living in. Several women told researchers that if they got sad their children would sense it and get upset too. If they cried, the child would cry, or if they were experiencing low mood, the child would try to protect them by bringing a book or some other comforter.

Low self-esteem was common, often affecting both mother and child. For example, the daughter of one survivor was no longer speaking at school following a period where her mother experienced low self-esteem.

Many of the women faced **difficulties in setting boundaries and managing the behaviour** of their children, especially as they got older. A member of the Hestia Modern Slavery Response Team explains: "The children push at the boundaries, but the mothers feel guilty if they say no." Another said: "All four children were born during her exploitation and were brought up while she was enslaved in domestic servitude. She is so upset because she does not know how to help them. She can see the impact it has had on them, but feels ill-equipped to help them, and can't see how. She is too gentle with them and will not enforce boundaries or discipline because they have been through so much and she doesn't want to be harsh and strict."

Several children were being tested or supported for **developmental delay**, particularly speech delays. Other health needs of children included autism, eating difficulties, and low self-esteem. Older children had either been direct victims of violence and abuse by the traffickers or witnessed their mothers being hurt.



¹Hestia, Underground Lives: Forgotten Children: The Intergenerational Impact of Modern Slavery, 2021

Holly Jones, a PhD research fellow at the University of Nottingham's Rights Lab, is also looking at the experiences, needs and support provision for dependents. She explains: "the impact of modern slavery extends beyond the individual victim. There is a knock-on impact and intergenerational trauma that the whole family faces. In the UK today, there is an invisible population of children that are not being catered for and there is a lack of understanding about the uniqueness of their needs."

Holly's research echoes many of the findings in the Hestia report. As well as developmental delays, behavioural challenges, a prevalence of ADHD and autism, hypervigilance and premature responsibility, Holly also observed the impact of family's living situations. She explains: "We all want to give our children a sense of safety, particularly after experiencing trauma, but the lack of a safe space, and the insecurity of not knowing if you're staying in particular accommodation or moving on, creates huge anxiety. There is no consistent, safe space."

"Parents speak of being overprotective of their children because of how unsafe they feel the world is and as a result, they struggle to allow their children to play outside with friends or socialise with others. Instead, they often use screen time as a way to distract children. For parents, being on their screens themselves was a big part in their own rehabilitation, providing a break and time to think but they felt this resulted in their children being online too much and worried about the consequences. Parents are trying to juggle so much on their own."



WATCH THE FILM

Learn more about intergenerational trauma by watching this short film with PhD research fellow, Holly Jones.



<https://youtu.be/ewChjJSUbg>

1. What struck you as you watched the film?
2. What do you understand by the phrase 'intergenerational trauma'?
3. How do you think churches can respond to this gap in support provision?
4. What can your church offer in terms of community and stable relationships?





READ LUKE 18 V9-14

Learning the humility that equips us for witness and service

The Pharisee thought he was an upright citizen, deeply religious and well equipped with rules and values to deal with the complexities of human living.

In our world today, there are many people who claim to know the answer to life's challenges but fail to understand the complexity of individual circumstances. For example, people may share strong opinions on social media but fail to show compassion and understanding regarding the brutality of modern slavery, and the damage it does to children and families.

There is a temptation to judge one another, particularly parents, rather than viewing everyone with kindness and empathy, recognising that many of us have histories in a broken world that has abused and failed us. With survivors of trafficking, we have all played a part in their trauma – whether through apathy, indifference or ignorance.

Jesus contrasts the self-righteous prayer of the Pharisee with the approach of the tax collector. Our response needs to be modelled on the latter, who was humble and aware of his own weakness and culpability. He knew that his work and witness always fell short, and that he needed continuing guidance and grace to better fulfil his calling. This is our starting point when we approach God in prayer and petition.

- When are you tempted to be proud or self-righteous or feel good about yourself because of your good works, beliefs or backgrounds?
- Reflect upon the danger of self-righteousness and how it can infiltrate our hearts and even our acts of kindness and mercy
- How can our interactions with other people be characterised by humility?
- How can you improve your awareness and actions to support children being exploited in modern slavery?



PRAYER

Holy God, help us to recognise the pain of all who feel inadequate and excluded, especially in the face of possible exploitation and abuse.

May we own our own failings and shortcomings and our tendency to put ourselves first. We ask for your guidance and blessing through him who sets all captive free, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.





A STORY OF HOPE – HOLLY JONES

Holly Jones is currently a PhD researcher at the Rights Lab in Nottingham. Prior to entering academia, she worked for Causeway, a Sheffield-based charity, as the South Yorkshire Services Manager. Causeway exists to support, empower and create change for survivors of modern slavery. It has a government contract to support adult survivors of modern slavery and runs family safe houses for survivors who are referred with children, or who are pregnant.

During Holly's time working at Causeway, she worked with hundreds of families and became increasingly aware of how the parents felt there was a lack of resources, support, and funding for their dependent children.

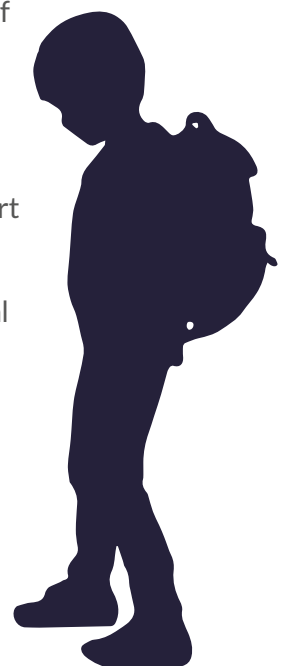
She explains: "Over time, I recognised the massive gap in support provision for children. Children would come into Causeway, and I could see they had unique needs due to the intergenerational trauma they were experiencing, and these needs were not being addressed. My time at Causeway compelled me to spend the last four years researching what support is available and exploring what best practice would be.

"As a new mum myself, I know that motherhood is hard enough on its own, let alone with the kind of trauma that you face because of modern slavery."

Holly has big hopes for how her research could drive a change in the provision of support services for dependent children. She wants to start a national conversation and help people see how children of modern slavery survivors are victims themselves. She hopes her research will lead to more funding and resources for this hidden population.

Recently Holly has been involved in drafting the new **Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards**. The updated edition has an appendix on how to support dependent children of modern slavery survivors and the base level of care that children should receive.

Holly comments: "I was so pleased to contribute to the Care Standards section on dependents. It is a good start for people in the sector – support providers, charities, healthcare providers, the police, criminal justice professionals, legal advisers, and local authority – to encourage them to recognise there are children within these services that need more help."



CAUSEWAY

Causeway is a Sheffield-based charity which exists to support, empower and create change for survivors of modern slavery. It has been supporting thousands of individuals to make progress and thrive for more than 15 years and currently works with more than 2,000 service users each year. It has a Government contract to support adult survivors of modern slavery but also runs family safe houses for survivors who are referred with children, or who are pregnant.

One small but significant way in which Causeway helps modern slavery families as they rebuild their lives is by providing material items when survivors first arrive at their safe houses or later when they move to live independently in the community. Often survivors and their children arrive at safe houses with literally just the clothes on their backs.

This year alone, Causeway has given 7,181 items, including duvet covers, crockery, cutlery, toys and clothing, to modern slavery families.

It also provides a service where the parent and the child can go on the website and pick something that they want for free. It gives survivors autonomy and agency – being able to decide what they want for themselves. This service wouldn't be possible without the generous donations of individuals and businesses, both locally and nationally.



www.wearecauseway.org.uk

CAUSEWAY



ACTION – LOVING FAMILIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Churches and faith groups can play a key role in providing safe spaces for modern slavery survivors and their children to process their trauma and receive solace, support and companionship.

- Do you have access to a community space that could be used to create this safe space to connect and play?
- What family support groups exist in your area? Are they looking for volunteers who have time to go along and befriend families? Are they in need of donations, such as toys or cake, or behind the scenes support? How could you get involved?

- Find out about local modern slavery organisations that are already working in your area alongside victims of modern slavery. Are they looking for volunteers to befriend individuals or offer transportation or access to a church hall or safe place to meet with clients?
- Could you organise a donation drive for a local modern slavery charity like Causeway and collect material items that could help a family as they rebuild their lives?





THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE



IN 2023/34

online grooming crimes reached record levels across the UK.

According to research by NSPCC, there were

7,062



'Sexual Communication with a Child' offences – up 89% since 2017/18 when the offence first came into force.

The most common platforms used to target children online were:



SNAPCHAT 48%
WHATSAPP (META) 12%
FACEBOOK AND MESSENGER (META) 10%
INSTAGRAM (META) 6%
KIK 5%



In 2023/24

81% of children targeted were girls.



Children as young as **FIVE** have been victims of online grooming.



DIG DEEPER

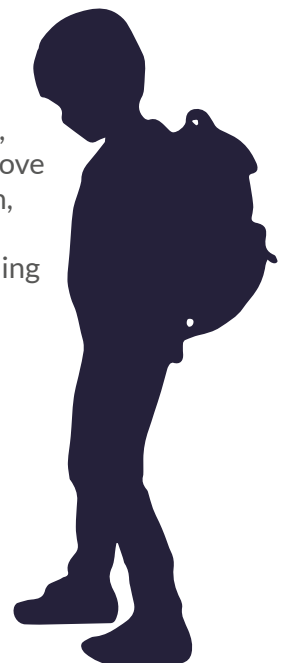
According to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command (the National Crime Agency team that focuses on protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation, both online and offline) grooming is a process that “involves the offender building a relationship with a child, and sometimes with their wider family, gaining their trust and a position of power over the child, in preparation for abuse.”

Grooming can happen anywhere, online, in organisations and in public spaces. Children and young people can be groomed by a stranger or someone they know and the age gap between a child and their groomer can be relatively small.

It can be easier online to pretend to be someone you're not, like a friend, mentor, boyfriend or girlfriend, and by doing this, criminals begin to form a relationship of trust with the young person.

Perpetrators typically use mainstream and open web platforms including social media chat apps, video games and messaging apps on consoles, dating sites and chatrooms as the first point of contact with children. They then encourage children to continue communication on private and encrypted messaging platforms where abuse can proceed undetected.

Grooming techniques can be used to prepare children for sexual abuse and exploitation, radicalisation or criminal exploitation. Offenders build trust digitally, then use threats, blackmail, or emotional control to move the child into real-world exploitation, whether sexual, criminal, or labour-related. In many cases, online grooming transitions seamlessly into physical trafficking.





SCAMMING COMPOUNDS

Recent international investigations have revealed how adults and young people are being deceived through fake job adverts and online recruitment scams, then trafficked into so-called 'scam compounds' abroad, where they are forced to conduct online fraud or romance scams under threat of violence. These cases, identified across South East Asia, demonstrate how online manipulation can evolve into in-person coercion, abuse, and forced criminality.

While these scam compounds are primarily an international phenomenon, the recruitment and grooming tactics used by traffickers mirror those increasingly seen in the UK, where criminals exploit social media and messaging apps to target young people with promises of easy income, friendship, or opportunities to earn online. Many of these interactions later develop into financial scams, sextortion, or money-mule activity, highlighting how online exploitation can be both a domestic and global risk. What begins as a simple online conversation can quickly lead to significant deception, control, and harm.



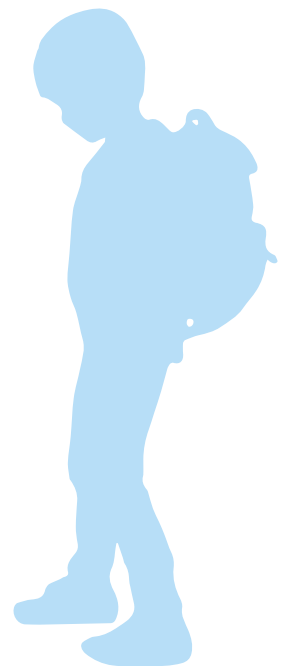
WATCH THE FILM

Tony Dunkerley, a former UK detective and international advisor on investigating human trafficking, explains more about protecting children from online grooming and exploitation.



<https://youtu.be/g8M11SfYzOw>

1. What struck you as you watched the film?
2. Are you aware of the potential signs that a child has been groomed online?
3. Do you talk openly in your family about what happens online and the potential risks?





READ LUKE 18 V15-17

A good test of knowing whether you have understood the gospel of Jesus Christ and the coming of the kingdom He proclaims, is your attitude towards children.

Children were very important to Jesus, and he valued their contributions and way of seeing the world.

In this passage, people bring children to Jesus to be blessed but the disciples tell them to stop. They think the kingdom is about different, 'more important' things and are focused on their own status and reputation rather than the children around them. Jesus challenges them to welcome and include the children in their midst.

Consistently in the Gospels, we see Jesus reaching out to and including the most marginalised or overlooked by society – the broken, the poor and the children.

Amazingly, as the church responds to this teaching and truly values children in our communities and encourages them in their faith, it can also protect them from other harms. Our inclusion of children, building trusted relationships and instilling wisdom and confidence, is a key protective measure against exploitation and abuse.

Also, as children are often naturally curious and inclusive, they have an ability to befriend those who don't look like them and bring joy to those they meet. Enlisting the children in your life to love their neighbours is a wonderful way in which their God-given personalities can be used in the work of the kingdom.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What does it mean to receive the kingdom of God like a little child? What is it about children that Jesus wants us to emulate?
- How can we show that we value the children in our community?
- How can we include the least impressive and weakest in society and show we value their insights and contributions?
- Make some resolutions about how you can welcome and love the children in your community better and show them that the kingdom of God is for them too



PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as you call us to receive your coming kingdom, help us to recognise the priority you give to the most vulnerable – especially to children.

Teach us to order our worship, our witness, and our fellowship in ways that extend this invitation, so that those who most desperately desire your blessing may be noticed and embraced in the common life of grace and mercy.

We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.



STORY OF HOPE - TONY DUNKERLEY

Tony is a former UK detective and international advisor on investigating human trafficking. During his time as a UK Police Detective and Covert Intelligence Officer, he gained extensive experience in managing serious and organised crime investigations at national and international level.

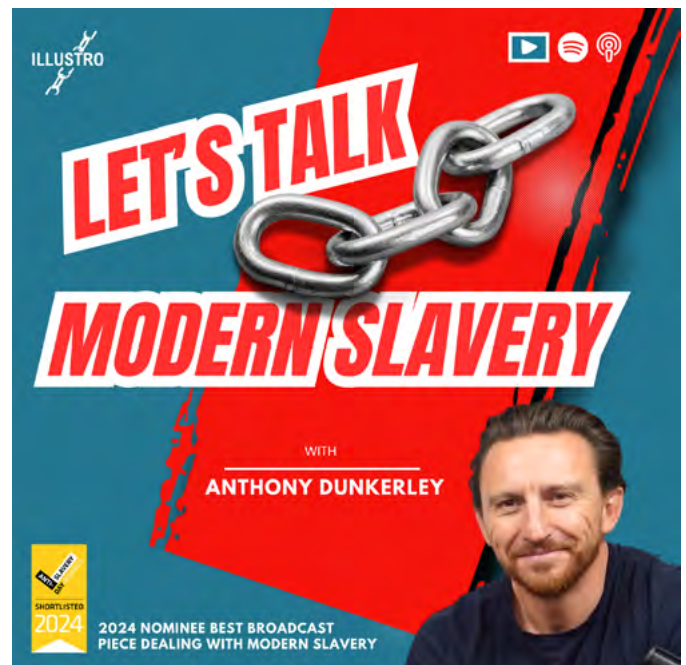
Tony is passionate about raising awareness of modern slavery, particularly amongst the next generation, and has delivered free assemblies and workshops on human trafficking and online safety to more than 3,000 children in the UK, Nigeria and Serbia.

He explains: “We wanted to understand how children in different countries were being groomed online and how it differed in three extremely different cultures and regions. We developed our own curriculum based on what we learnt.

“We discovered that children as young as four years old had some knowledge of being approached online by people they should not be speaking to. This is troubling because if you look at Instagram and other social media organisations, you will see that you’re supposed to be 13 years old to have profiles. Yet we were finding very, very young children who had profiles because it gave parents a little bit of a break and time off active parenting. These extremely young children were being approached online by strangers.

“Once we noticed this, we developed new curriculum, specifically for very young children. We discovered that talking about relationships and what a healthy relationship is really resonates with young children – they can understand the concept of applying ‘stranger danger’ in an online world, like they would offline.”

Tony has also pioneered the “Let’s Talk Modern Slavery Podcast” to raise awareness of modern slavery. The podcast consists of interviews with individuals from international law enforcement, survivor leaders and others in the global anti-trafficking community sharing their lived experiences of investigating cases, identifying suspects, protecting victims and empowering survivors.



Episodes have covered Femicide and Gender-Based Violence, Modern Slavery in Supply Chains, Human Trafficking & Terrorism and Forced Scamming. We would highly recommend **watching or listening** to the podcast – it is suitable for adults.

As well as schools’ education and the podcast, Tony leads a training programme on business and human rights to help organisations think about supply chain due diligence and other risks businesses face. If you own a business or know a business leader, you can find out more at:



www.youtube.com/@letstalkmodernslavery



PREVENTION

What children need to know: the signs of grooming

- Someone who wants to move the conversation to private messages.
- A person who gives constant praise, gifts (online or offline), or attention to build trust.
- Anyone who asks for secrets to be kept or tells you not to talk to adults.
- Someone who pressures you for photos, videos, or personal information.
- Promises of money, opportunities, or friendship that seem too good to be true.

Staying safe online

- Talk openly about what happens online - both the good and the bad.
- Talk about healthy relationships, boundaries, and consent - online and offline.
- Ensure children and young people are not on social media platforms under the appropriate age
- Ensure profiles are set to private
- Understand the risks of false profiles online, and the bad intentions of some internet users
- Opt out of public chat room functions
- Tell children not to share their full name, school, home address, or phone number online, and avoid posting photos or videos in school uniform or that reveal a location.
- Encourage children not to share passwords, even with close friends and to remember that once something is online, it can be copied or shared forever.
- Talk about what action to take if you are concerned you are being groomed online

If something happens

- Tell a trusted adult right away - a parent, teacher, or youth worker.
- Don't delete messages or images; they could be important evidence.
- Report it directly to:
 - CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command): www.ceop.police.uk
 - Childline: 0800 1111
- Block and report the person on all platforms.
- Do not meet anyone you have only met online.



ACTION – PRIORITISE PROTECTION

1. Consider the children in your life – are they informed about the risks of online grooming? Could you start a conversation today about some of the good and bad things that happen online?
2. Spend some time on the CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command) website: <https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/> It has interactive resources for 4-7, 8-10 and 11-18 year olds about staying safe online. It provides brilliant and age-appropriate information for young people. Who could you tell about this resource today?
3. Talk to your church, school and community leaders – could they run an age-appropriate seminar or assembly on what healthy relationships or wise choices online look like?



THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE

An estimated

27,000 children in England identified as a gang member (Children's Commissioner, 2019)

In total,

1,845 COUNTY LINES REFERRALS

were flagged through the National Referral Mechanism in 2024, accounting for 10 per cent of all referrals received. Three quarters of these referrals were boys. However, NRM referrals are just the tip of the iceberg.

The Home Office estimates that approximately

14,500



children were at risk or involved in child criminal exploitation in 2023/24 (this is also likely to be a significant underestimate)

In 2023-24, **6,644 COUNTY LINES**

were recorded by National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). This number was 4,007 in 2022-23.

There were

1,447 ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS

(OCGs) linked to County Lines and these were overwhelmingly recorded as British (91.3%).



According to the NPCC, county lines is becoming more localised, with fewer lines running outside force boundaries.



DIG DEEPER

County lines is a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs befriend, persuade, coerce, manipulate or force children and young people, either online or offline, to get involved with drug dealing, often storing or transporting drugs. The 'lines' refer to mobile phones that are used to control a young person who is delivering drugs.

County lines gangs are organised criminal networks that are constantly refining their operations to avoid detection resulting in the signs of exploitation changing and becoming increasingly subtle.

According to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), county lines is becoming more localised, with fewer lines running outside force boundaries.

Crack cocaine and heroin continue to dominate the County Lines market though the selling of powerful synthetic opioids such as nitazenes has also increased.

WHY AND HOW DO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE GET DRAWN INTO COUNTY LINES?

The criminals behind county lines are ruthless but organised gangs. They use sophisticated techniques to coerce children and shocking levels of violence to keep them compliant.

In broad terms, young people are **targeted** and chosen - the exploiter usually seeks out those that are marginalised and vulnerable. They will observe their chosen victim to understand their vulnerabilities, needs and wants and then work to gain and build the young person's trust.

Many of the children and young people who are **targeted** share similar characteristics including a lack of attainment in education; limited employment or financial opportunities; a difficult or traumatic upbringing (sometimes known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)); a lack of agency or opportunity to make choices in society.

County lines gangs exploit these dynamics and rather than immediately using threats, gangs ‘groom’ children and young people into county lines by building trust, creating a sense of belonging, friendship and family and by displaying their wealth (high-end cars, expensive clothing) as a sign of the ‘benefits’ of county lines involvement.

Once recruited to a county lines gang, the control escalates to **coercion**, often involving threats or actual violence. The aim is to trap the person so they feel they have “no reasonable alternative” but to comply with criminal demands.

County lines gangs often stage a robbery as a tactic to get young people into **debt bondage**. They ask an individual to look after drugs or cash but then they steal the items themselves and demand repayment through labour. Alternatively, some young people are given drugs for “free” or on credit (“on tick”) but once addicted or unable to pay, they must work to repay the debt. Gangs rarely release control even when the supposed debt is paid off.

Physical and mental abuse are common, along with threats of violence or death to their family members if they try to leave the gang. Gang leaders and members often live near one another, and home addresses are known and used as leverage. Gangs cultivate reputations for extreme violence or murder and believe that harm will occur to them or their family members if they refuse to comply.



WATCH THE FILM

County line educators, Sabrina Hewitt and Careena Thompson, explain more about how county lines gangs target vulnerable young people.



<https://youtu.be/pwsEZBypCoM>

1. What struck you as you watched the film?
2. What sort of children might get targeted by county lines gangs?
3. How does the grooming process work?
4. What do you think parents need to bear in mind as they think about getting alongside their children and encouraging open conversation?





READ LUKE 18 V 18-30

How hard it is for all of us who are comfortable, like the ruler in the story, to enter the kingdom of God. We tend to prioritise our own security and comfort, before reaching out to others. To think and act differently might seem as difficult as trying to put a camel through the eye of a needle. Imagine a child having a large needle and trying to squeeze a toy camel through the eye – its simply impossible!

Jesus is using hyperbole to highlight just how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples are astonished and ask, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus’ words go against their natural assumptions. They might have seen the wealth of the rich man as a sign that he is blessed by God and therefore likely to enter the kingdom of God. But it is just the opposite. The trappings of wealth can make it very difficult for someone to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, the greatest commandment in the law. What’s more, the distraction of riches can blind us to the needs of others and stop us from loving our neighbours as the Lord would like.

However, nothing is impossible with God. Even a rich man can be saved through the power of God! And what’s more, for anyone who leaves their home or family for the sake of God’s kingdom and takes the costly path of discipleship, Jesus promises they will receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come!



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How do Jesus’ words in this story surprise you?
- What encouragement is there in the passage for those who are finding following Jesus costly?
- What challenge is there in the passage for those who have material wealth and comfort?
- Do you, like the ruler, place limits on your discipleship? Are there things that you are unwilling to do when it comes to loving your neighbour?



PRAYER

Lord of all life, teach us to be honest about what our characters might lack, so that with your light we may better identify the needs of your children. Help us to adjust our attitudes and actions in a way that thinks about others. Thank you that what might seem to be impossible for mortals is always possible for you.

Guide and guard to be better agents of your saving love in Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen.



A STORY OF HOPE – EQUIPPING YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR PARENTS TO RESIST COUNTY LINES

Sabrina was criminally exploited from a very young age but now works as a county lines educator, helping young people, parents and teachers understand more fully the dynamics around county lines, exploitation, grooming and coercive control. She is passionate about raising awareness around child criminal and sexual exploitation and draws on her personal experiences to provide training, advice and guidance to a wide range of professionals and organisations who work with children and young people.

She is particularly troubled by the misconceptions and myths that sometimes surround county lines and exploitation. For example, the belief that sexual exploitation only affects girls and criminal exploitation only affects boys. This just isn't the case – there is much more complexity and crossover.

Similarly, Sabrina wishes there was much more understanding of the victim perpetrator cycle and how some victims move from being targeted to targeting others. They 'do what they know' and in this way, exploitation gets embedded even deeper in communities.

Over the last nine years, Sabrina has worked directly with young people and families who have been involved in or affected by exploitation and county lines. Sabrina has put in place numerous interventions including 1:1 mentoring to protect young people from further involvement in crime and exploitation.

She has seen firsthand the impact county lines has on parents and siblings and how few parents are equipped to identify the signs of exploitation, respond appropriately and seek help. She sees early intervention and the educating and empowering of children AND parents as critical to breaking the cycle of exploitation.

Sabrina (and her team) run training workshops for vulnerable young people and their families. She explains: "We always put the young person at the forefront of our workshops - it's not a session for parents or teachers. It is wholly aimed at the young person. We try to create a safe space and discuss topics they wouldn't normally talk about with the adults in their life.

"We facilitate the workshop in a way where everyone gets heard. If people don't want to speak, we don't force anyone. It's quite relaxed and chilled but also an opportunity to share our own personal experiences. Our stories nicely underline the things we are saying to them.

"It's a bit of a balancing act. Trying to communicate certain truths about county lines and exploitation as well as giving them the knowledge and the voice to know they can say no and challenge other people's decisions if they feel they are not benefiting them.

"We try to teach parents how to be patient and calm because the information they're going to hear from their child won't be nice and might break their heart, but they need to keep their cool. Because as soon as a parent gets scared, the child also draws back thinking 'I've seen how much this has frightened mum. I don't want to put her through that.'"



www.sabrinahewitt.com

Sabrina has also written three books telling the stories of three different characters – Aisha, Kyle and Darnell. The first one describes a 14-year-old's descent into county lines. The second book focuses on the exploiter in the first book and how he became a perpetrator. The third book concentrates on the perpetrator's younger sister and how his decisions affected her future. Sabrina has also written workshops around the books as well as a parents' handbook on grooming and exploitation and some colouring books for younger children.

You can find out more through Trapline Legacy's Instagram or LinkedIn: <https://www.instagram.com/traplinelegacy/>

Or purchase one of her books for young people or guides for parents and carers here: **Amazon.co.uk: Sabrina Hewitt: books, biography, latest update.**



ACTION – TRAINING

A central part of The Clewer Initiative's mission is to provide training for individuals, churches and community groups. Our hope is that through providing up-to-date and relevant training, people will grow in their awareness of modern slavery, confidence to spot the signs and know what to do with any suspicions.

We have several training courses on county lines, written for different audiences. Our Breaking County Lines training is designed to enable churches and communities to understand county lines better and look at ways of building resilience in communities, so county lines can't get a foothold.

We also run Train the Trainer courses for those who want to take the Breaking County Lines course out to their own communities as well as county lines training for foster parents, teachers, parents, grandparents and guardians. More recently, we have developed county lines lesson plans for schools.

For more information, visit <https://clewer.org.uk/training-and-events>



THE COUNTY LINES PSALM

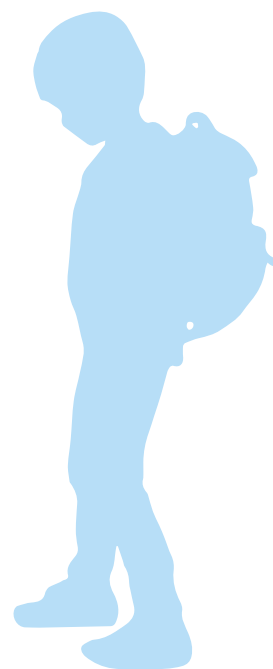
*The gang leader is my shepherd,
I shall not ask.*

*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.*

*Rt Revd Simon Burton-Jones,
the Bishop of Tonbridge*





THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE

46,000

children in England are thought to be involved in criminal groups but that there are likely to be many more.

The Children's Society estimates that in London alone,

4,000 TEENAGERS

are being criminally exploited.



In last year's NRM figures, there were:

2,661 county lines referrals in Greater London,

842 in West Midlands and

549 in Greater Manchester.



Having said that, county lines gangs exist throughout the UK.

While young people

AGED 14-17



are most likely to be recruited by county lines gangs, there are reports of children as young as seven being groomed.

In Dame Carol Black's 2020 independent review of drugs, she observed that "the trends in young people becoming involved in drug supply, drug consumption and in serious violence have occurred against a backdrop of increasing numbers of children in care and children in need, falling local government budgets, cuts to young people's services and increasing child poverty.

"Another key factor appears to be the rapid increase in permanent exclusions from school over the past five years. There is clear evidence that those young people, disproportionately young black men, drawn into county lines and related activity are much more likely than other young people to have been affected by adverse experiences such as neglect, substance misuse problems in the family, domestic violence, poor mental health, and exclusion from school."

A breeding and training ground for recruiters

As Black observes, there is a strong link between children outside mainstream education and county lines. According to the **Home Office**, "gangs wishing to exploit young people target them in arenas where they are likely to have reduced monitoring and supervision such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Children's Homes."

It explains that "the exclusion of vulnerable young people from full time school, whether placing them on reduced timetables, putting in place home schooling arrangements, or removing them to PRUs exacerbates their vulnerability and increases the risk of being targeted by gangs for exploitation.

"In some areas, PRUs become the arena for gang rivalries which become dangerous for pupils and hard for staff to manage. PRUs are also viewed as the place where already vulnerable young people get first-hand exposure to and experience of crime (drug dealing / violence / intimidation / recruitment for 'county lines'). There are growing numbers of excluded children in alternative provision and this clustering together is creating a recruiting arena for crime and anti-social behaviour."



DIG DEEPER

County lines gangs target children from any background but they usually seek out young people who are marginalised or vulnerable in some way.

Most county lines victims have **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** - stressful or traumatic events that occur in childhood such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, domestic violence, substance abuse or mental illness in the family, loss of a parent or an incarcerated family member. In fact, in 2017, an American study found that children who experienced a combination of ACEs were more at risk of becoming a victim of human trafficking.¹

1. Reid, J.A. et al. (2017) 'Human Trafficking of Minors and Childhood Adversity in Florida', American Journal of Public Health, 107(2), pp. 306-311

Sometimes children deliberately get excluded from school in order to get allocated to a PRU so they can recruit more pupils into selling drugs. At other times, gang members wait outside PRU gates on the lookout for the most vulnerable children to target.

In terms of ethnicity, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) observed that for all regions (except London) the greatest proportion of individuals involved in county lines are of white ethnicity. However, in all regions, individuals of black ethnicity, where recorded, are over-represented in comparison to the regional population data.

Most victims feel they have a 'lack of options' and grow up in a pressure cooker environment. They are often 'born' into a world of serious organised crime. Against this backdrop, it is vital that communities work together to intervene earlier and break the cycle of poverty, abuse and exploitation.



WATCH THE FILM

Leo Powell, a county lines educator, shares his experience of getting alongside vulnerable young people.



<https://youtu.be/7V0-sfc4ngw>

1. What struck you as you watched the film?
2. How can churches play a part in preventing vulnerable children from getting targeted by county lines' gangs?
3. What warning signs did you learn about that teachers or youth workers can look out for?
4. Who could you develop a mentoring relationship with? What themes could you bring to a mentoring relationship to deepen trust and help young people navigate the challenges of adolescence?
5. How can children also play a part in looking out for their friends?





READ LUKE 18 V 31-34

Jesus tells his disciples about the way of the cross – a journey involving challenge, conflict and opposition. Yet on the third day he will rise again. This is the mystery of Easter for which we prepare in Lent.

By predicting the nature of his final days, Jesus demonstrates once and for all that he is in total control of his destiny. While Jesus' crucifixion looks like pointless suffering and a meaningless death, it is, in fact, the hope for all people and communities. Wonderfully, death and evil do not have the final word. Jesus predicts he will rise again and on Easter Sunday, we see this prophecy fulfilled, in all its glory.

At one level, such a message seems beyond every possibility we can see and measure. But Jesus's life gives us hope about the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

- How can this hope drive our prayers and actions as we engage with those facing evil and abuse today?

The disciples did not understand or believe what Jesus was saying about his death.

- How can we try to listen and understand when people are telling us their own stories of struggle?
- How can our churches be places that help people find their own 'rise' after abuse, accompanied by our love and support?
- How can we hold out the hope of Easter to families and young people who are struggling in our communities?



PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

*We praise you for the mystery of the cross.
We praise you for sending your son to suffer
and die for us. We praise you that death
and the devil did not get the final word and
that Jesus rose again. Help us to hold out
this hope to those who are suffering in our
communities.*

In Jesus' name,

Amen





A STORY OF HOPE – LEO'S STORY

In 2010, Leo began attending a church in London, where he became a Christian and soon got involved in the youth work. He eventually stepped into the role of full-time Youth Pastor, spending the next decade mentoring and supporting the young people in the congregation. Afterwards, he worked as a Behaviour Mentor in a school and took on a mentoring position at HMYOI Feltham. He later returned to education as Head of Year at a large college in Enfield which led him to become a county lines educator, delivering assemblies and talks in primary and secondary schools and colleges, and offering county lines training to teachers, parents, and practitioners.

Having worked with young people in gang-affiliated environments, particularly those in the criminal justice system, Leo has first-hand knowledge of the dangers and consequences of being involved in County Lines activities. He has also extensively researched the subject, drawing on the expertise of experienced practitioners in the field of gangs, County Lines, and child criminal exploitation.

He explains: "The kids in your church are not in a bubble. They live in the communities that we grew up in and they're going through the same experiences that we went through, or even worse. They're in our local schools and working our local streets. Kids are growing up in dysfunctional homes and from deprived backgrounds.

"We've got to really get to know the families in our churches and understand their issues and what they're facing so that when they come to church on a Sunday, they know the genuine heart you have for them.

"In our prisons, there are a lot of kids from different backgrounds - from care homes, single parent homes, from the street. Often choices have been taken away from them and they have a lack of opportunities.



"I remember a 16-year-old boy I was working with in prison and he used to be a footballer. He was reflecting on his past and he said to me: "I wish I could go back to when I was 13" and I knew what he meant. At that stage in his life, something got taken away from him. He could have been a footballer, but he had no transportation to get to the ground every Sunday. His mum never had a car or transportation for him. No one was there to pick him up and take him to football on a Sunday. The only option he felt he had was to get involved in his local gang in the area that he grew up. I felt sorry for him because he didn't want to be in prison. He didn't want to be there but he got caught up in this pressure cooker, an environment where he got consumed. A simple gesture of driving him to football on a Sunday, that a community could have provided, could have potentially prevented so much heartache."

Another facet of Leo's work is his filmmaking. Leo uses his creative, storytelling skills to capture the struggles and experiences of young people on film and convey them in a way that resonates with audiences.



www.leopowell.co.uk



ACTION – BOLD INITIATIVES

1. Leo challenges the church to think radically about the role it can play in building community.
 - How can your church use its resources – its buildings, money, people - to affect change?
 - How outward looking is your church? Do you know the children in your community and the gaps in terms of youth groups / support provision?
2. Do you have connections with local schools? Could you encourage teachers you know to organise a county lines lesson or assembly?
3. Do you have a youthworker at your church? How aware are they of county lines? Could they host a county lines session for the young people they minister to?

The Clewer Initiative has created County Lines lesson plans for children aged 4 to 18. Take a look at them and consider forwarding to teachers and youthworkers that you know.



www.clewer.org.uk/resources/county-lines-lesson-plans-for-schools

The Clewer Initiative has recently pioneered a new badge with the Girls' Brigade called "Respectful Communities". The vision behind the series of new badges (Respectful Communities, Respectful Relationships and Speaking Up) is that they will help equip girls and young women to live compassionately and thoughtfully in the world around them. The Respectful Communities badge is designed for girls, aged 4-18 and introduces concepts of community safety, injustice and valuing fellow humans. It helps young people understand potential warning signs of harm and abuse and know to do if they see or experience something that makes them feel uncomfortable. Why not get in touch with your local Girls' Brigade group and encourage them to do the badge this year?





THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE



Hazardous child labour is defined as “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children”.

The ILO Minimum Age Convention has established minimum age thresholds for various forms of employment, setting 15 as the age for general employment, 18 for hazardous work and 13 for light work if it does not harm a child’s health or interfere with their education.

According to the ILO, 61 per cent of child labourers work in agriculture. The rest are trapped in services, including domestic work (27%) or industry (13%) such as construction, manufacturing and mining. Younger children generally work in agriculture but as children grow older, boys are increasingly found in industry, while girls are more likely to be in services (including domestic work in third-party households, small-scale commerce and other informal activities).

The key driver behind child labour is poverty – children are sent out to work to help provide for their family. They are often deprived of an education, keeping them in the cycle of poverty and exploitation.



DIG DEEPER

In different cultures and family settings, children work. It is therefore critical to understand the difference between acceptable conditions, forced and hazardous child labour.

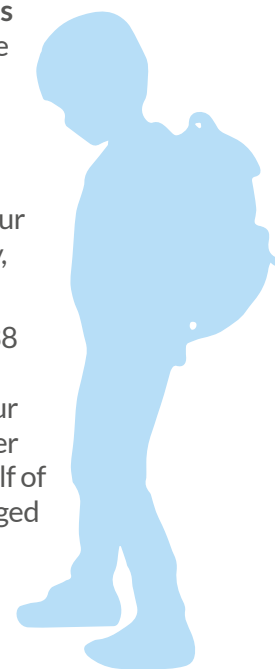
According to the ILO, child labour is defined as “work that deprives children (any person under 18 years of age) of their childhood, potential, dignity, or harms their physical or mental development.” This includes work that is dangerous to children mentally or morally, or that disrupts their education by preventing them from attending school or requiring them to juggle schooling with long and difficult working hours.

Whether something is defined as “child labour” depends on several factors, including a child’s age, the type and number of hours worked, the work conditions and the specific laws within individual countries.

ERADICATING CHILD LABOUR AND FORCED MARRIAGE

In September 2015, the UN announced its **2030 Sustainable Development Goals - 17 interrelated goals** which promote economic, social and environmental development. One of these targets, Target 8.7, aimed to eradicate forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking and in particular, child labour in all its forms by 2025. Unfortunately, the world missed this target.

According to the ILO, an incredible 138 million children – 59 million girls and 78 million boys – are still in child labour worldwide, accounting for almost 8 per cent of all children globally. Nearly half of these child labour victims (48%) are aged 5 to 11 years old.



There has been some progress - since 2000, child labour has nearly halved from 246 million to 138 million children, but the current rate of decline is too slow. Progress needs to multiply by 11 times if we are to meet the global elimination target by 2030.

There has also been some progress regarding forced marriage: during the past decade, **the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent**, from 1 in 4 (25%) to approximately 1 in 5 (21%). South Asia is still home to the largest number of child brides, followed by sub-Saharan Africa. However, in the last year alone, Kuwait, Bolivia, Zambia, Bulgaria, Sierra Leone and Belize has raised the legal age of marriage to 18. These reforms are the result of the long-term advocacy of international organisations and human-rights groups.



WATCH THE FILM

Ruth Dearnley, the CEO and founder of STOP THE TRAFFIK, shares her experience of using tech to fight modern slavery globally and locally.



https://youtu.be/_a_Fg-DGi54

1. What struck you as you watched the film?
2. How can we learn from some of the techniques used by criminals and use them instead to disrupt their networks and activities?
3. How is innovative technology helping the global fight against modern slavery and human trafficking?
4. How can we work locally and globally to disrupt criminal gangs?
5. Why is it so important that we work together?





READ LUKE 18 V 35-43

The wicked exploitation of children thrives across the world because of the blindness and silence of the great majority of people. We do not know how to 'see' the signs or how to 'shout' so that others might notice and respond with us. However, in this encounter, Jesus hears the blind man's calls and stops. Many people pass by unmoved by the blind man but Jesus is the one who notices. And when he comes near, Jesus says "What do you want me to do for you?"

Today, Jesus asks each of us: 'what do you want me to do for you?' We need to learn to pray each day "I want to see." I want to see what is really happening and how I might be able to respond in ways that can glorify God and cause 'all the people' to praise God too.

- What might be contributing to your blindness or ignorance to the exploitation of children?
- How might you learn to 'see' more clearly, and respond more effectively?
- Draw up a list of tasks for yourself and your church to help you 'see' and 'shout' about the plight of children in modern slavery during the next year.

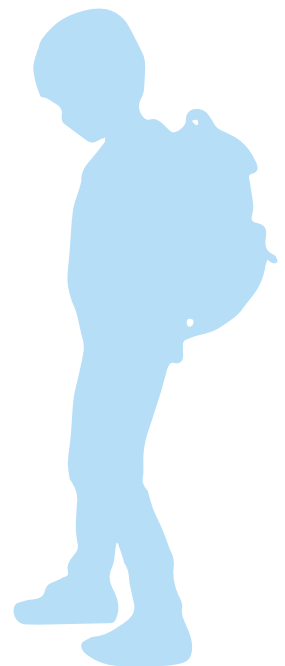


PRAYER

Lord God, open our eyes that we may see more clearly the suffering of your children, and make our voices heard so that more and more people can recognise the challenges and the opportunities that we need to pursue as a witness to your love and grace, and as a way of enabling your salvation to be tasted and celebrated in our busy world.

We ask in the name and power of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all your children.

Amen





A STORY OF HOPE - RUTH DEARNLEY, THE FOUNDER OF STOP THE TRAFFIK

When Ruth Dearnley heard about the scale of human trafficking across the world, she knew she had to do something. She founded STOP THE TRAFFIK in 2005 and began campaigning, going to large Christian conferences such as Spring Harvest to build support and momentum. By February 2008, STOP THE TRAFFIK was able to present 1.5 million signatures to the UN, urging it to shift the public debate from rescue to prevention.

Ruth explains: "I met people all over the world who were doing incredible front-line work, but they were always exhausted because for every person they rescued, it didn't disrupt the traffickers' business model. I came across the deputy director of human intelligence at the Serious Organised Crime Agency at an event, and he started me on the journey of understanding how sharing data and intelligence could change everything!"

"I realised that all these different organisations - government, NGOs, faith networks, businesses, banks, law enforcement and individuals - knew different bits of information about modern slavery and human trafficking, but no one was collecting it. It felt like a jigsaw, and I saw that if we could build

a technology platform and put all the pieces together, then we could begin to understand the big picture and start to be effective in our war against the criminal networks.

"I passionately believe that modern slavery and human trafficking thrive for three reasons - firstly, its profits move unimpeded through financial institutions; secondly, businesses overlook exploitation in their supply chains, and thirdly, vulnerable communities remain unaware of how and where traffickers operate. If we share what we know, we can strengthen the hand of those who advocate against these three pillars that prop up trafficking."

In 2017, in collaboration with IBM, STOP THE TRAFFIK launched the Traffik Analysis Hub, translating the largest collection of survivor stories into a comprehensive and interactive database. STOP THE TRAFFIK now uses AI to analyse the data and look for patterns and hotspots. This intelligence can be used by banks, businesses and law enforcement to go "upstream" and stop something from happening before it happens.



One of STOP THE TRAFFIK's other tactics is geo-targeted social media campaigns. This is another brilliant way in which the organisation is harnessing modern technology to fight human trafficking. It uses social media adverts to inform at-risk groups about how to spot the signs of trafficking, where to report it and offers legitimate alternative recruitment pathways to vulnerable, hard-to-reach communities.

STOP THE TRAFFIK was contacted by a young person from Afghanistan who had seen one of its campaigns. He lived in a closed camp in Lesbos. He feared deportation and was told he had to pay for a lawyer. Out of desperation, he was considering selling an organ for money to pay the lawyer. STOP THE TRAFFIK advised him of the dangerous situation he was considering and the potential risks. It assured him that he was entitled to legal aid and connected him with an organisation that could provide shelter and legal support. He said: "I had many problems. I was considering selling one of my organs to solve my problems in Greece. I now have good living conditions. Thank you to your good organisation"

He was later granted asylum and no longer faces the threat of deportation. He is attending school and is learning English and Greek. Thanks to the support he received, he is no longer considering putting himself in high-risk situations.

Ruth adds, "We kept him safe, and he went on to live a whole different life. Over the last eight years, we've reached more than 30 million people from Ukraine, the Philippines, the UK, America, Europe, Africa, India and Nepal through geo-targeted social media campaigns like this. We work globally and locally. Technology is giving us the tools, but the tools alone aren't enough. It's the stories that we share and the leadership that means we work together in a way that transforms the world."



ACTION – JOIN THE TECH REVOLUTION!

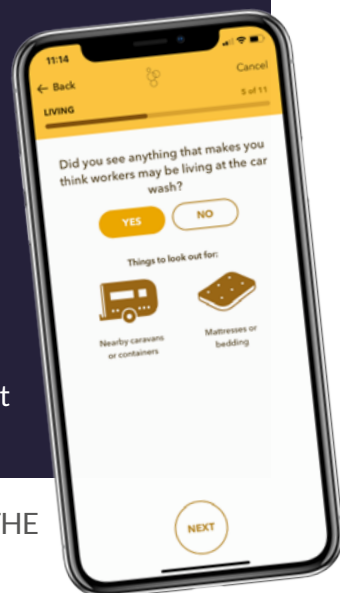
Like STOP THE TRAFFIK, The Clewer Initiative is also passionate about using technology to fight modern slavery! In June 2018, The Clewer Initiative launched the Safe Car Wash App and since then, it has been downloaded more than 40,000 times. It has received almost 9,000 reports, with many reports being referred to Modern Slavery Helpline and law enforcement every month. This intelligence has been crucial in building a clear picture of exploitation in the hand car wash sector around the country and has enabled law enforcement agencies to follow-up on numerous businesses that may be exploiting their workers.

The Safe Car Wash App is available for both Android and iPhones through the relevant app stores.

Android:
Safe Car Wash
App on Google Play

Apple:
Safe Car Wash App
App Store

Download the Safe Car Wash App so you know the signs of exploitation to look out for at hand car washes and can report suspicions if you have any.



You could also download STOP THE TRAFFIK's STOP APP. The STOP APP can be downloaded anywhere in the world and is anonymous, confidential and secure. It is available in 15 languages and allows you to submit suspicious trafficking-related activity quickly by sending text-based messages and uploading photos and videos.

Thank you for taking the time, during Lent, to learn and think about children caught up in slavery in the UK and across the world. We know that many of these reflections will have been deeply troubling. It is because of these dreadful statistics and growing trends that we, at The Clewer Initiative, and our guests in this resource, press on in our work.

When I was chatting with Ruth, she said, “Churches are bursting with the ability to care. We’re there to be ‘incarnate’ and present in our communities. We care about what happens on our streets.” It is this presence which gives faith communities power in numbers as we pray, love, and seek justice.

At The Clewer Initiative, just as with each of our guests, we believe that knowledge about modern slavery and exploitation empowers us to see wrongs and to act wisely. Building that knowledge is a key that runs through our prevention strategy:

1. We must strengthen early awareness, address root causes and equip communities, especially young people, to recognise risk long before exploitation takes place. Through this resource and other initiatives, we are continuing to build our education and training programme as well as support awareness events with cathedrals, youth groups and schools
2. Anecdotally we know that some victims of modern slavery access services such as food banks, refugee and homeless services, many of which are on church premises. For those who have already found themselves in exploitation, building awareness and confidence in church members through regular safeguarding training to know how to spot the signs and respond safely is so vital!

3. At The Clewer Initiative, we believe there is a huge opportunity for churches to provide safe, welcoming, trauma-informed spaces, where survivors of modern slavery can build relationships of trust and find long-term stability.

When I hear about some of the amazing work being done by churches or partners like we’ve read about here, my hope and determination for our work is charged. So I pray, in the words of our communion liturgy: “Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so that we and all your children shall be free!”

If you have been stirred by the material in Children in the Shadows Revisited and are keen to think further about how you can support child victims of modern slavery in your existing social action projects or in future initiatives, please get in touch with us by emailing info@clewer.org.uk

Spread the Word!
Warmly,



Lois Bosatta,
the director of The Clewer Initiative



REPORT A CONCERN

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SPOT THE SIGNS OR ARE WORRIED THAT SOMEONE MIGHT BE TRAPPED IN MODERN SLAVERY

As with other crimes, it is important you report any suspicions of modern slavery to the police. Do not attempt to intervene yourself, as you may put yourself and those around you – including the potential victim – in danger.



WHO TO CONTACT

If there is an emergency and someone is in immediate danger, call **999**.

If you would like to report any non-emergency suspicious activity in your local area then call your local police on **101**, the Modern Slavery Helpline on **08000 121 700** or Crimestoppers on **0800 555 111**.

Alternatively, you can report your concerns online on the [Crimestoppers website](#) or [Modern Slavery Helpline website](#). They will then pass the information on to the Police or relevant agency. You can remain anonymous.

If you need advice or support on modern slavery, the Modern Slavery Helpline (**08000 1 21 700**) operates 24 hour a day, 365 days a year.

If you are on church property or if your concerns relate to something or someone connected to your church or church project, get in touch with your Parish Safeguarding Officer. There is usually a photo of your Parish Safeguarding Officer in your church building.