

THE LONG GAME – NORTH YORKSHIRE

A lived experience approach to county lines prevention

2024 REPORT

Foreword

My name is Adam and I'm a young person with lived experience of criminal exploitation through county lines. I designed **The Long Game** to benefit young people and their communities across the country, reducing the chances of young people experiencing debt bondage, peer-on-peer grooming, and exploitation. North Yorkshire has been the first region to take up the offer and have been amazing partners in this first edition of the project.

The Long Game is a series of workshops for young people, educating them on:

- Exploitation through instant gratification
- Peer on peer grooming¹
- Debt bondage²



Young people need to know about the very real dangers and what grooming looks like.

I am 21 years old from a small rural town in the East of England, I've worked many different roles in my short career but by far my proudest job is working with Leaders Unlocked. I started work for them on a voluntary basis working on another project that really looks some of the key issues that our young people face today. I had always had a strong passion for helping people and with the help of Leaders Unlocked, including being an Intern, I had training and learned valuable skills that I had missed out on during school years. This skyrocketed my idea of educating people on some of the issues I faced growing up. This passion and desire for helping all our young people has only got even bigger.

I have spoken to **over two thousand three hundred young people** in North Yorkshire in this bespoke education programme, and feedback already shows this is opening conversations and reducing the chances of them being at risk of exploitation.

If readers choose to read on, they will learn about some of the common feedback and information I have received from young people. They will also read about how we can all do something to make change happen in our communities and our fight against child exploitation, modern slavery and county lines.

Adam Elliott

Lead Facilitator

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This project was funded by the former Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for North Yorkshire's Community Fund

¹ See <https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/04/what-is-peer-on-peer-abuse/>

² See <https://www.gla.gov.uk/who-we-are/modern-slavery/who-we-are-modern-slavery-human-trafficking-forced-labour-and-debt-bondage/#:~:text=Victims%20of%20forced%20labour%20may,passed%20on%20to%20their%20families>

WHAT WE DID

The core of The Long Game presentation is my own life story, what happened to me and how I got help. So many young people and professionals don't know the meaning of terms like 'clean skin', 'BICs' and fake debt³. And they don't know what a county line really is.

I designed The Long Game as an early intervention with young people, especially in Years 7 to 9, to help raise awareness and understanding of these dangers.

The design process started in my Internship and I used the feedback of my colleagues to fine-tune my presentation skills and the information I deliver.

The main version is a 90-minute session but we developed shorter versions for Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and special provision and tailored some content depending on the age of each audience.

At each step, I encourage open and honest conversations so that young people feel included and engaged.

We delivered sessions across North Yorkshire and York in mainstream schools, special provision schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and to small at-risk groups.

I was always accompanied by another Leaders Unlocked staff member who helped with taking questions and we also found an extra pair of hands was crucial in special provision settings where behaviour and disruptions can be unpredictable.



ADVISORY GROUP

We met throughout the project with an advisory group of Police and council professionals from York and North Yorkshire. The advisory group helped us to identify areas to visit and helped introduce us to schools, especially mainstream. They connected us with practitioner groups in North Yorkshire and enabled us to present to The City of York Safeguarding Children Board (CYSCP) Exploitation Subgroup and to deliver an Exploitation Masterclass at the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Safeguarding Strategy Week. The advisory group is also key to the legacy and ongoing impact of this project. Heartfelt thanks to:

- Heidi Lewis (N Yorks Police), Kathryn Morrison (N Yorks Safeguarding), Odette Robson (N Yorks Community Safety)
- Jane Mowatt (York Community Safety), Joanna Williamson (York CYSCP Performance), Sophia Lenton-Brook (York CYSCP Safeguarding), Vicky Brook (York Police)

³ Clean skin: an individual unknown to the authorities. BIC: a disposable person (like a disposable BIC pen). Fake debt: see the link in footnote above for debt bondage.

REACH

We reached 2,328 young people in York, Craven, Harrogate and Scarborough as follows:

Mainstream schools	2165
Special provision and PRUs	158
At immediate risk and outside education	5

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Brompton Hall School, City of York Council, Craven PRU, Danesgate PRU, Forest Moor PRU, Huntington School, Joseph Rowntree School, Manor CE Academy, Millthorpe School, North Yorkshire Council, North Yorkshire Police, Springwell Harrogate Academy, Vale of York Academy

WHAT WE HEARD FROM STUDENTS

We found that projects like The Long Game are needed more than ever before, there is a real lack of information on drugs and county lines that needs to be addressed with a modern-day lens.

"I'm so glad you came to my school and warned me of things I didn't know about"

Most young people have a misunderstanding that selling drugs will make them money and many feel like it's their only option to make money at a young age. In relation to facing altercations with others, one young person said **"well you just stab them then, init"** and another said

"it's hard to find a job under the age of 16, how else do you make money?"

There is a perception that county lines only affects boys, and there is little to no point in telling anyone, especially staff, about the things they witness and experience due to the risk of criminalisation and being marginalised from society due to school exclusions. There is a perception that working on a drugs line is cool. Without projects like The Long Game that view would not get challenged.

Young people are not confident enough to speak up due to fearing getting into trouble with parents/school/police or stereotyped. This came up in multiple visits.

"No point in telling anyone - they just get social services involved and then they don't do nothing, or you change social worker and they don't know what's going on then they leave"

OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATIONS

The Long Game was designed to provoke open and honest discussions where young people feel like their thoughts and questions are valued and they are finally being heard.

*"I have learnt a lot and **you have motivated me to look at work in health and social care.**"*

*I have learnt things I didn't know before **and I feel more aware and comfortable being able to relate to some of your personnel experiences.***

Did you go to prison?

How long did you spend in prison?

What support do you get now?

How old are you?

What was being stabbed like?

These speech bubbles show the most common questions we were asked

How much money did you make?

How many scars have you got?

Did you get all these clothes when you were drug dealing?

Where do you work?

How are you not in prison?

Do you still smoke weed?

What's the worst thing you've seen happen?

Could you have just said no and walked

How did you not get blinded after the acid?

How long did it take for the acid to heal?

Do you deal with PTSD?

What is dyslexia?

how it can impact girls?

If I know someone that smokes, am I at risk?

What's it like in trap houses?



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

↳ We have learnt that **all young people need someone to relate to** or who will go out of their way to understand their experiences.

↳ **Having peer to peer conversations helps young people to feel more comfortable** to open up more. Peer to peer learning is an effective way to get the most impact, where information is taken on board. Young people respond best when they are involved in identifying issues and solving problems in a non-hierarchical or judgemental environment.

↳ **The lack of information for young people around county lines and exploitation is even bigger than we originally thought.** There are many misconceptions that need correcting which adds to the secrecy of the issue. Especially that it doesn't happen that much in middle class areas, or that specific children, especially girls, are less at risk than others.

↳ **Schools and teachers are more supportive and more surprised by the information given than we originally thought.** There is a lack of practical relevant insights from some adults working within education. Training seems to be more theoretical and ends with staff more cautious about following procedure as opposed to ensuring safeguarding procedures in place are effective enough in protecting and rescuing children from exploitation.



There is a real lack of training and support for parents. Parents are often in the dark or left to hope and assume educational provisions are effective enough to protect their child from exploitation. More information sharing is needed and this should include sources outside policing and the criminal justice system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Increase life opportunities for all young people and access to afterschool activities, apprenticeships/work experience, and therapeutic support for those who have had traumatic childhood experiences.

Equip all young people with up to date, reliable information around life skills and lifestyle choices and ensure young people have a sound understanding of money, saving and delayed gratification.

Provide training for parents, guardians and school leaders to equip them with up to date information on drugs sale and usage that threatens young people in today's modern society. This may look like creating a tutorial package that staff can run independently and connecting with projects like The Long Game to offer a service to young people that need further support with leaving a gang/friends with negative impacts.

Ensure that every young person has a trusted adult that they can talk to and rely on. Make sure that disclosures aren't being blown out of proportion or taken out of their control even if the information doesn't go any further than that person. Young people need to practice articulating their problems and building on their integrity. They need to be able to trust that doing the right thing will keep them safe.

Simply invest in the young people of today, to help them achieve whatever goal they have, ensuring that we empower everyone to become the best version of themselves and have clear role models for everyone to follow. We recommend a peer mentoring service that has people from all backgrounds and walks of life, with inclusion in the forefront of their minds.



CONCLUSION

This project in North Yorkshire has exceeded all our expectations and we have had far more demand than we were able to meet in this pilot of The Long Game. We would love to return to North Yorkshire and build on all the connections we have made. We also plan to expand across England and work with other counties. Going forward, the project will also include bespoke training for practitioners.

TESTIMONIALS

From students:

"You did really well to get yourself out of working for a county line and your discussion on exploitation was very valuable"

"Raw and honest I wanted to hear more"

"You confirmed that anyone can be one a victim of grooming. Thank you!"

"You are incredibly brave, and you had us all captivated. I was very impressed with your strength"

From professionals:

"It has gone on to prompt further conversation between pupils, among themselves and with staff. Many of our pupils are working with social care and some have criminal exploitation support plans in place.

I have had parents contact me to tell me they have been able to talk to their children about it when they got home

...it's not unusual for visitors to skim over some of the difficult behaviours or questions from the boys, however, he engaged brilliantly and ensured every boy felt their contribution valued"

"Our kids were fascinated by your story Adam and have taken some vitally important messages from your presentation. What you are doing is incredibly brave, thank you for your willingness to share your story and your commitment to helping other young people avoid the situations you found yourself in.

Yesterday was one of the most powerful bits of PHSE we've done in school for a long time"

"The students and staff found the presentation so engaging and informative... we hope that we will be able to work together again on future projects"

"I just wanted to say a massive thank you for last week. The kids are still talking about it. It was such a great opportunity for them"

"I cannot describe to you just how much of an impact you have made. You have been the talk of the school. You are a true inspiration and the work you are doing is and will continue to make a huge difference"

"I just wanted to add that this has been one of the best training events around criminal exploitation I have ever been to"

"Your story was really moving & impactful. We would very much like you to speak to our Police colleagues"

"We have had many speakers in school and you were by far the best! An incredibly powerful story and you have had such a positive impact on our students (and staff) thank you so much"

“One of the best external speakers I've seen as long as I've been teaching. Brave, frank, honest, relatable and powerful. If you keep doing what you are doing it will really help keep potentially vulnerable students on the right track”

“Adam's story felt even more real and detailed the second time. The way he spoke engaged the entire Year 7 cohort”

“This will always stick with me. I admired your honesty and the way you changed your life”

“You surpassed my expectations. Thank you for your bravery, reliving traumatic experiences and giving us clear explanation of the life you have lived. It was excellent”

“We cannot explain how powerful your talk was and it was such an important thing for our students to hear about, you are such an inspiration”



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