

Lancashire Constabulary, the Office of Police and Crime Commission, West Lancashire Community Safety Partnership and not for profit production company, AlterEgo Creative Solutions, have all joined together to launch a week of action in West Lancashire, to raise awareness and educate young people and parents around child criminal exploitation.

County Lines – out in the counties, is a play performed by young people for young people and will tour round nine schools in Ormskirk and Skelmersdale w/c 7th October.

Child Criminal Exploitation is when a child or young person is exploited (used) for profit, labour, sexual satisfaction or personal financial advantage. Children are being groomed into county lines which is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas, as well as market and coastal towns, using dedicated mobile phone lines.

However criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and can include children being forced to work on cannabis farms, commit theft or begging.

The play will aim to educate pupils on the dangers of child criminal exploitation. The story will unfold showing how easy it is to get wrapped up with the wrong people, what this can lead to, the dangers and consequences.

Genga is Lancashire Constabulary's partnership approach to tackling serious and organised crime, this includes county lines and criminal exploitation. Genga works with a number of local and regional partners to not only pursue offenders but to also prevent organised crime from taking place in the first place, protecting those most vulnerable and preparing communities to be more resilient against organised crime.

Catherine Hoyle, OCG and Genga (Partnerships) Lead said: "By working in partnership with local authorities and education to tackle serious organised crime, theatre plays such as AlterEgo enable us to utilise all available legislation and powers to not only disrupt county lines offending but also to safeguard those at risk."

Sgt Andy Bramhall of Lancashire Constabulary added: "Many children who are targeted will be unaware of the dangers they are getting themselves into or the types of things they may get asked to do. This can include anything from drugs to shoplifting to sexual exploitation. The play will highlight these issues and raise awareness. In addition we want parents to be more aware if they notice any changes in their child's behaviour and provide guidance and support."

Heidi McDougall, Chair of West Lancashire Community Safety Partnership said: "Lancashire Community Safety Partnership takes the issue of County Lines very seriously and we are delighted to have jointly commissioned, along with the Police, the AlterEgo County Lines drama presentations into our local secondary schools.

"The presentation will help raise awareness of the warning signs of child criminal exploitation and how the gangs use grooming techniques to make it appear as though children have 'made their own choices' when becoming involved in criminal gangs. The presentations will build on the excellent Crossing the Line film which has been delivered to thousands of school children in West Lancashire to raise awareness of the consequences of becoming involved in organised crime and to help them make informed decisions."

Clive Grunshaw, Lancashire's Police and Crime Commissioner concluded: "Supporting vulnerable people and victims is a key priority in my Police and Crime Plan and I believe that education is critical in tackling any form of child exploitation.

"By working together and ensuring the right messages reach young people in an engaging way is an important part of keeping people safe and preventing others falling victim to these awful crimes."

The schools that will be visited include Hope High School Carfield; Up Holland High School, Latham High School, Burscough Priory; The Acorns Centre, Tarleton Academy, Our Lady Queen of Peace, Ormskirk High School and St Bede's High School.

Further information on child criminal exploitation can be found at www.lancashire.police.uk/findawayout