



Emmer Green
Reading
Berkshire
30th October 2023

Parents, Carers, Teachers, Youth Workers of
Children & Young Adults
Reading

Dear Parents, Carers, Teachers, and Youth Workers,

Gangs – County Lines – Knife Crime

Free Workshops – The Ben Kinsella Trust, Parents and Carers Online Training

The Ben Kinsella Trust, a charity dedicated to preventing knife crime, is offering FREE workshops for parents and carers via Zoom on Thursday 16th and Thursday 23rd November between 7-9pm.

The Ben Kinsella Trust Parents and Carer Workshops: *Essential Knowledge for Keeping Your Children Safe.*

Following recent tragic events, such as the murder of 13-year-old Olly Stephens, our son, close to our family home in Reading in 2021, many parents and carers are understandably concerned about the safety of the children in their care.

The workshops will be led by experts from The Ben Kinsella Trust and will provide parents and carers with the knowledge and tools they need to keep their children safe.

Why are these workshops so important?

Exploitation, Gangs and Knife crime are complex issues, and there is no easy solution. However, one of the most important things that parents and carers can do is to talk to their children about them. By talking to their children about these issues, parents can help them to understand the risks and make informed choices.

The Ben Kinsella Trust's workshops will provide parents and carers with the knowledge and confidence they need to have these important conversations. The workshops will also help parents to identify the warning signs that their child may be at risk of exploitation, gangs, or involvement in knife crime, and what to do if they are concerned.

Who should attend these workshops?

The Ben Kinsella Trust's workshops are open to ALL parents and carers, regardless of their background or experience. The workshops are particularly relevant to parents and carers of young people aged 10-18, but parents and carers of younger children are also welcome to attend. They are also relevant for anyone who supports young people in any role.

How to sign up for a workshop

To sign up for The Ben Kinsella Trust workshops, please click the link below. Spaces are limited, so please book early.

<https://benkinsella.org.uk/parents-carers-workshops/>

As the parents of Olly, a child who was criminally exploited, we have to speak up and share our story to raise awareness.

Gangs target the vulnerable, they pick out their victim and befriend them, make them feel protected and part of something untouchable and cool, there is an air of glamour to it and promised financial reward.

Once in the gang, you are trapped, and if you don't do what they want, there are serious threats made to you, and your family.

Olly got caught up in this world, he was worried about being bullied and wanted protection. He ended up "owing" the gang and his prized possession, his bike, got stolen. We had to keep him in, as we were so scared for his safety. We found out he was being threatened online, through various platforms.

Gangs are a hierarchy of bullies. Violence and intimidation keep those at the top, at the top. Gangs groom and recruit children to work for them, often targeting primary school age children.

We see the world differently now, all the kids on e-scooters with their hoods up, backpacks on, checking their phones, who do they work for? Where are they going to deliver? At the Reading Station, the kids travelling alone or in pairs, what are they carrying? Who for? What if they get set up, robbed, or hurt? What happens to them?

Once you see that world, you can't unsee it. Children become trapped in gang culture. The language used, the banter, the coercion, the threats, so quickly, you too could lose your child.

We now have an opportunity to make sure our children see the reality of what happens on the streets. Do not let our children get lured into thinking there are benefits in gang life. There will only ever be two outcomes: PRISON or DEATH.

We wish that Olly and us as his parents received this education, if we had, we would not be bereaved parents. We are now trying to change so much that is wrong in the world, doing all we can to protect our children from harm. This is our Olly's Work.

Mobile phones make your child accessible; they will not protect them from danger. Check your child's phone, their room, their bag, and talk to them. Children are clever, they can have accounts on their devices you are unable to access and hide things, often to protect you, their parents, and carers. Olly tried to protect us, by not telling us, carrying the burden alone, by the time we found out, there was no escape, no return, our lives changed forever.

Kind regards

Amanda & Stuart Stephens