



Emmer Green
Reading
Berkshire
16th October 2023

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

Dear Parents, Carers, Teachers, and Youth Workers,

**Gangs – County Lines – Knife Crime
CODE Event – Reading**

We are writing to make you aware of a fantastic event that is coming to Reading on Saturday 28th October 2023.

CODE, Justice in Motion's Urban Odyssey into County Lines and Knife Crime, is a spectacular blend of physical theatre, parkour, and trial bike stunts with live rap music. Set on an urban playground, skilled athletes and performers show what is happening to our young people, exploited by organised drug and criminal gangs.



The event is being held at the Select Car Leasing Stadium, RG2 0FL, on the outside concourse, at 10.30am and 1.30pm, each performance will last 45 minutes.

We are appealing to you to share this information and ask for you to aim to bring children in year 6 and above, to watch a show.

As it's a match day the earlier performance should be easy to get in and out of the stadium, but please if you are driving your child, fill your car with their friends too.

There is parking for minibuses at the stadium if schools and clubs can bring children along. Please bring them! If you need a minibus transfer please get in touch.

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