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# Community Safety Awareness Session for Parents



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Parents attended an information evening to learn about the dangers of their children becoming involved with knife crime, gangs and county lines – with over 70 attendees.

Hertsmere Community Safety Partnership organised the event in conjunction with Cowley Hill Primary School in Borehamwood, which aimed to teach parents how to spot the signs that their child could be at risk of becoming involved in criminality.

Ex-offender, Gavin McKenna, spoke about his experience of gang culture and the pressures he faced. He reassured parents and encouraged them to support their child, learn more, to openly discuss these topics with their child and seek help if needed.

Parents who attended the event praised Gavin's presentation, stating it was both informative and relatable. One parent said 'it was scary to think how easily kids can get in to a bad lifestyle, but that it was great to hear how he changed his life around'.

Tracy Hanson spoke about her son, Josh, who at 21 years old was stabbed to death in an unprovoked attack in West London in 2015. She encouraged parents to ask questions and support their children. One parent said that Tracy's presentation really brought the message home to them.

At the awareness session, parents heard about the harsh realities of county lines, which is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines.

It was explained how drug dealers identify young people, the grooming process and the young people's roles within county lines. Parents were informed of the signs that young people display when they are involved in gangs and county lines, what parents should look out for, such as changes in their behaviour, use of new slang words and new friends that they may have met online.

Cllr Pervez Choudhury, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, said: "Although Hertsmere is a safe place to live, we cannot afford to become complacent, especially with the violent crime being experienced in the neighbouring areas.

"It was great that so many parents attended the awareness evening, which provided vital information and will hopefully enabled parents to be more proactive and prevent their child from becoming involved in criminality."

Jon Hood, Head Teacher at Cowley Hill Primary School, said: "This event is an excellent example of local schools working together with other agencies and the wider community to keep our young people safe.

"We know there are dangers out there that our children face, but by arming parents with information, they

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then feel empowered to work with schools and the police to steer their children on a positive path.

“We are learning from the heart-breaking stories of others, how we can make changes to protect our community.”

If you have any concerns around drug and knife crime in Hertsmere, you can get in touch with the police on the non-emergency number 101. If a crime is in progress, always call 999.

For more information about knife crime, gangs and drugs, visit [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org) and <https://www.fearless.org/en>.

Alternatively, call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

The awareness session took place on Tuesday 25 June.

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