

8 May 2017

Dear Parents/Carers

On Monday 15 May 2017, Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 students will attend a 50 minute SOS+ Gangs Session.

All Year 12 students will be expected to attend this informative session during period 4. Therefore if students were due to have a lesson at this time they will need to register with their classroom teacher first who will then escort them to the theatre for the presentation. All other Year 12 students that do not have a lesson at this time will also be expected to attend this session and should therefore ensure that they sign in on arrival and then make their way to the theatre promptly.

Braintree Community Safety Partnership has funded these sessions in all North Essex secondary schools, as our police are dealing with increasing numbers of cases linked to gangs operating in our area linked to gangs from Newham, Hackney and Haringey.

The Gangs Session is aimed at creating a cultural shift amongst young people, by both dispelling the myths that glamorise gang life and crime, whilst also exposing the serious exploitative and grooming tactics that take place in order to get young people to join gangs and commit crime. The aim is that all young people leave the session understanding the exploitative recruitment processes used by gangs and the catastrophic dangers involved with joining gangs and the serious consequences of supplying drugs/committing crime. Most importantly though, they will walk away with real tools to avoid recruitment and exploitation. SOS+ utilise ex-gang members' testimonials and expose the realities of how girls are treated in gangs.

'County Lines' is becoming quite an issue, especially in many London boroughs where young people are being targeted by gangs to move drugs cross-county lines. SOS+ have been inundated with cases, and think young people need to be made aware of why they are being targeted, and what the ramifications are for them, short and long term. Below is some additional information about the SOS Project.



The SOS Project was first developed in 2006 by ex-offender Junior Smart with the aim of reducing serious offending among young people aged 15-25. From humble beginnings as a Southwark based pilot project, SOS is now the largest ex offender run London gangs service. It supports in excess of 600 young people across 12 London boroughs every year and, as a result of their work, a growing number of young people safely exit gangs, pursue more positive lifestyle choices in the community and rebuild their lives following release from prison. **The project was the 2014 winner of a prestigious charity award under the 'Advice, Support and Advocacy' category.**

Such was the response from schools, parents and community leaders concerned about gangs, serious youth violence, exploitation and the increasing numbers of young people caught in the Criminal Justice System, the team subsequently developed the SOS+ project.

Targets Outcomes

2015/2016 saw the SOS+ team deliver an incredible 111 sessions and reach 6,400 young people. Their ambitious target in 2016/2017 is to deliver 180 SOS+ sessions in twelve months in which over 10,000 young people in attendance will:

- ✓ Understand what constitutes breaking the law.
- ✓ Understand the consequences of breaking the law i.e. prison and how this affects their life choices.
- ✓ Understand the consequences of carrying a weapon.
- ✓ Are capable of sympathising/ empathising with victims of crime and understand the impact this has on the wider community.
- ✓ They have the ability to leave gangs and influence their own education and future; our SOS+ caseworkers will never turn away any young person that comes to them for help.

County Lines

County Lines is a new emergent issue. Over the last couple of years, criminal gangs have slowly been venturing outside of London boroughs seeking to exploit towns and locations where there is less chance of police presence. Young people are used and exploited; being lured by the temptation of easy money and the glamour of gangs. Young people we have come across are no more than children; typically ten years old and above. The consequences for these young people are huge. If they are caught by the authorities they will become criminalised, should they be caught by rival gangs they can be permanently injured or create debts that they could spend a year to 'pay off'. This can be far worse for females who can be forced to carry out sexual favours to clear the balance. Delivering SOS+ outside London then becomes a crucial measure in terms of prevention. Delivering SOS+ sessions to those susceptible to this exploitation, about the dangers of drugs, gangs together with de-mystifying the reality of what they expect can play a huge role in helping them make the right informed choices should they be approached by individuals seeking to exploit them.

Measuring the Impact of SOS+ Session

They elicit feedback from the young people, teachers and our own SOS team members at the end of every session. We effectively monitor and evaluate the project by:

- Holding informal question and answer sessions at the end of each session, reiterating the salient points and asking the young people to describe two things that they will change as a result of the time we have shared with them and two lessons that they will now act upon.
- Measuring the progress made by each young person using a 1-10 scale questionnaire.
- Recording any practical intervention where a young person wanting to leave a gang approaches a staff member.
- Keeping a record of the young people choosing to remain in mainstream education as a result of our 5-step exit programme.

Evaluation of SOS+ is currently underway by Coventry University. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours faithfully

Mrs H Sutton
Assistant Headteacher – KS5