



Pupils from Old Park Primary School in Telford see the Knife Angel sculpture

# Pupils meet the Knife Angel

The Knife Angel towers over this group of Telford youngsters during an event to highlight the dangers of carrying weapons. A total of 150 pupils from Old Park Primary School attended the event at Telford's Southwater complex yesterday.

The youngsters, aged nine to 11, were taken to see the sculpture outside the library and University Centre complex. They then watched a short mono-

logue, performed by Loudmouth theatre group, highlighting the dangers of carrying a weapon.

The statue will be at Southwater throughout March, and 2,100 youngsters will see the play over the month. Lyn Stepanion, of Telford & Wrekin Council, said it was important to promote the message that it is not normal to carry a knife.

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At 27ft high, the Knife Angel is an imposing presence as it looms down on the young children below, its body and wings made from 100,000 blades handed in at police stations around the country, its melancholy face and outstretched hands conveying the question 'why?'

If this will not get young people questioning the wisdom of carrying a knife, it's hard to know what will.

"When you walk round the corner, and see the back of the Angel, then you look up and see the sheer size and quantity of knives, it takes your breath away," says Erica Fynn, a teacher at Old Park Primary School in Telford.

The Knife Angel, or the National Monument Against Violence & Aggression to use its more formal title, will be in Telford throughout March, before moving to Wolverhampton next month as part of a nationwide tour to discourage knife crime.

Over the course of the month, 2,100 children from schools across the borough of Telford & Wrekin will visit the sculpture, created by Alfie Bradley just up the A5 at the British Ironwork Centre in Oswestry. Also, as part of the initiative by Telford & Wrekin Council and West Mercia Police, the youngsters are shown a short monologue telling the story of Danielle, a teenager who ends up being stabbed having been drawn into knife crime by a county lines grooming operation.

Jodi Farmer, of Loudmouth theatre group, has just finished performing the role of Danielle in front of a group of 150 youngsters aged 9-11 at Wolverhampton University's centre at the Southwater complex.

The 26-year-old puts on an animated performance as she tells how Danielle, who lost her father at the age of 11, is befriended in a park by an older girl who invites her to a party. At the party she is introduced to an older man who treats her to gifts in exchange for running errands, and she is gradually manipulated into working as a drug courier.

At the end of the play, the youngsters are first invited to question 'Dani' in character, before Jodi invites them to consider the warning signs when it became apparent that Dani was being exploited.

She says Loudmouth works with a number of groups which provide support to the victims of child exploitation, and the story is loosely based on the experiences of real-life victims.

"All our work is researched with organisations that work with victims of child exploitation," she says. "It isn't the story of one particular individual, but it is based on real experiences."

Jodi says that being young probably helps her to reach the children in a way that would be more difficult for traditional authority figures such as teachers and the police, and she says she can certainly empathise with somebody such as Dani who finds it hard to escape the environment she is slowly sucked into. "A lot of young people do carry knives, and it's often a result of grooming," she says.

Mrs Fynn says youngsters at Old Park Primary School had already been talking about knife crime following the recent stabbing of a 16-year-old boy in Telford



Pupils took a field trip to the sculpture

'It is scary thinking about how these knives could be used'

Town Park, adding: "It was the children who brought the discussion into school - they were saying 'did you hear about what happened in the town park?', and we had a discussion about it."

Mrs Fynn says a police officer also regularly comes into school to talk with youngsters.

"Sometimes the children benefit from listening to somebody who isn't a teacher, because they hear from us all the time," she says. "It's about making them realise how easy it could be to be manipulated by somebody you think is a friend, it makes the children think 'it could happen, and it could happen to me'."

Loudmouth is putting on three productions of the play each day at the University Centre this month, with a slightly different show being performed for secondary school pupils.

The event certainly seems to have left an impression on the youngsters from Old Park.

Abbie Tattersall, 10, says seeing the Knife Angel is a thought-provoking experience, adding: "I think it's really interesting, just seeing all those knives. It makes you think it's scary about how they could be used."

Abbie says she was surprised and saddened by the content of the play. She said: "I thought it was going to be a nice story, and it made me feel disappointed how many people are doing this, they shouldn't be doing that sort of thing."

Benjamin Antwi, 10, said he too was surprised how dark Dani's story was. "It was sad how, at a young age, she was misled by an older person," he says.

"I was also disappointed in Callum, because you think an adult should be able to be trusted. I don't think 14-year-olds should carry knives, and if an older person invites you to a party, you shouldn't go."

Kacey Fletcher, nine, says she was surprised by how badly things ended for Danielle in the play, adding that it shows how important it is not to be drawn into doing things for others.

Kameron Braiden, nine, says: "I've learned not to talk to strangers, and not to believe everything that somebody says just because they are older"