

THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE YOUTH FORUMS EVALUATION

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the Youth Forums Project which is a Police and young people engagement initiative that uses restorative approaches, coaching skills and theatre arts to improve relations between the two parties. The research was commissioned by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, with the support of Restorative Gloucestershire, and was conducted by a research team from the School of Natural and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire.

The methodology comprised of participant observations and face to face interviews with Police Officers, young people and project facilitators at three Youth Forums in Stroud, Tetbury, and Gloucester, and later, at a structured Police follow up session in Gloucester. The young people involved were entered into the project through their membership of youth clubs and other youth initiatives and came from diverse backgrounds. The participating Police Officers were drawn from a range of different police roles and ranks and included neighbourhood officers, response officers and criminal investigators.

The research is situated against wider national discourses on a perceived crisis in relations between young people and the Police. Although the research team were expecting some disconnect between these two groups, the true extent of the problem was surprising. Forum participants were encouraged to explore their views at the beginning of the sessions and reported a range of issues including a systemic lack of trust and numerous examples of stereotyping and generalisation. In particular, it was found that Police Officers were deeply suspicious of the young people with the majority of police contact with young people occurring within a criminal justice model.

In contrast, the approach taken in the Youth Forums was found to be effective in identifying, challenging and resolving negative perceptions that the participating Police Officers and young people hold about the other party. The Forums met key objectives from the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Plan such as 'Young People becoming Adults', which describes how Police Officers can empower young people by providing a healthy environment for all parties to listen to each other and make changes. The

Forums were also found to have the potential to offer wider community benefits for other people connected to the participants in the forum and can be considered an example of good practice. Overall, the research team were impressed by the adaptability of the Forums as well as the evidence that there is still so much untapped potential for the Forums and the contexts in which they are employed. Finally, a number of recommendations were made that seek to build on the work carried out by the Youth Forums including wider thoughts on police training and the models and styles of policing that are directed at local communities including young people.

1. Introduction to the Evaluation

This *Gloucestershire Youth Forums Evaluation* is the work of a research team from the School of Natural and Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire. It provides a detailed appraisal of the out workings of the Youth Forums Project run by Charlotte Calkin and Paul Mukasa for Restorative Gloucestershire, which ran between April 2015 and October 2015. The evaluation was commissioned by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, with the support of Restorative Gloucestershire.

The Youth Forums Project is a police and young people engagement initiative that aims to connect officers from Gloucestershire Constabulary with young people from a wide variation of backgrounds for the purpose of improving relations between the two parties. The youth forums project comprised of eight facilitated meetings, which took place at locations across Gloucestershire. Each Forum session involved a selection of young people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and Police Officers drawn from a range of roles and ranks. Activities in the sessions involved a combination of coaching skills, restorative approaches, and theatre arts. These were used to promote a broad discussion around the relationships between both groups and ways in which these might be improved.

This evaluation of the Gloucestershire youth forum sessions explores the impact on those who participated in the sessions. In particular, we consider two key aspects of their application:

- i. The ability of the Forums to identify, challenge and resolve negative perceptions that Police Officers and young people hold about each other.
- ii. The potential of the Forums to foster wider community benefits within a police/community engagement model of practice.

The youth forum project facilitators were consulted on the design of this evaluation, and it was agreed that, due to the sensitivity of the Forum procedures, the research would be as unobtrusive as possible. Consequently, in order to complete this evaluation, members of the research team attended three Youth Forum sessions in Stroud, Tetbury, and Gloucester. During these sessions, observations were made of the process and short interviews were conducted with participants and project facilitators. Further interviews were also conducted with Police officers at a structured police follow up session in Gloucester.

A wealth of qualitative data was produced that related closely to the evaluation objectives. This was written up, analysed, and separated into core themes that have informed the discussions and recommendations contained in this report.

The report is therefore comprised of the following key sections:

Section 2. Theoretical Grounding

This section provides the research context, explaining the background to the approaches adopted in the Youth Forums Project.

Section 3. Gloucestershire Youth Forum Procedures and Practicalities

This section describes the approaches taken in the Youth Forum exchanges, outlining the structure for the meetings, the participants involved in the sessions, and the roles and exercises used during the meetings.

Section 4. Police Officers and Young People before the Forums

This section details the perspectives of the young people and the police officers before they had engaged in the forum sessions. It offers an insight into the perspectives of each group and the issues that they face in everyday contact.

Section 5. Police Officers and Young People after the Forums

This section reflects on the opinions of the Police officers and the young people after they have been involved in the forum sessions. In particular, it focuses on the changes in their perceptions of the other group and the ways in which they reported they would modify their future behaviour.

Section 6. Recommendations and summary

The final section provides a discussion that draws together the main findings of this evaluation, considering the two main questions:

- i. The ability of the Forums to identify, challenge and resolve negative perceptions that Police Officers and young people hold about each other.
- ii. The potential of the Forums to foster wider community benefits within a police/community engagement model of practice.

The section goes on to provide recommendations from the research team, which focus on the benefit of the scheme and the potential for expanding its application across Gloucestershire.

2. Theoretical Grounding

This section sets out the theoretical context of the Youth Forums. It outlines the national context of relations between young people and Police Officers, and begins the process of explaining the approaches used, drawing on the literature on restorative justice and expanding to consider other restorative approaches.

2.1 Young People and Policing: Key Issues

In October 2014, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children published a report entitled “It’s all about trust”: Building good relationships between children and the police (APPG, 2014). The report highlighted systemic fault lines in the relationship between police and young people in the UK. In particular, it found that some young people were treated more harshly by the police depending on their circumstances. The report also expressed concern that it was normal for young people to be treated as ‘small adults’ during police procedures such as stop and search. All of these factors, the authors argued, had contributed to an overwhelming lack of trust between young people and the police.

Examples of good policing practice were identified in the report, but these were normally dependent on the enthusiasm of a handful of staff and were not widespread. The authors recommended more resources be set aside for youth engagement and that specialist training be provided so that Police Officers were given the tools they needed to promote the wellbeing and rights of young people (APPG, 2014).

The findings from other research projects have added to this negative representation of the experiences of young people in England and the wider UK. For example, in 2015 the Children’s Society in partnership with the University of York commissioned research into the wellbeing of young people in England in comparison to other jurisdictions. The results were startling, finding that children in England reported lower levels of subjective wellbeing than a diverse range of 14 other countries (The Children’s Society, 2015).

Such findings focus on broad issues around school life and wider problems with the way that young people perceive themselves. However, it is difficult to ignore the importance of the interface between young people and the police in any wellbeing dynamic. In February 2013 the Police Foundation commissioned a scoping study on the policing of young adults (Graham & Karn, 2013). The report noted that many young people “hold negative perceptions of the police, who in turn view young adults as suspects in need of control rather than potential victims in need of protection.” The authors argue that negative stereotyping by both parties often

leads to fraught encounters and a vicious circle of negative experiences (Graham & Karn, 2013: P2).

The interface between young people and wider society, including the police, has also been further affected by the rise of anti-social behaviour as a major political focal point and policy concern. The introduction in April 1999 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO), possibly the best known of the range of measures used to tackle anti-social behaviour, was originally intended for use against adults, however in practice it has become synonymous with young people (Scruton, 2007).

This conception of the ASBO is borne out by Government statistics. In 2013, just over 36% of all ASBOs issued in England and Wales had been against 10–17 year olds, although they account for only 10.5% of the population (Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, 2015). This age category also accounts for 42% of all those ASBOs breached during that year (Ministry of Justice, 2014). As Ashworth (2004) has commented, the definition of anti-social behaviour extends to a wide range of activities, misdemeanours, incivilities and potentially serious crimes. However, despite its generic definition, the anti-social behaviour programme has been pre-occupied with the question of governing ‘troublesome youth’, often to the detriment of those young people who are caught up in such responses to perceived offending behaviour (Squires and Stephen, 2005).

Young people who persistently offend are invariably vulnerable and marginalised within society. Allied to this, research highlights how they may have often experienced trauma such as multiple bereavements and violent events (Vaswani, 2008). Their offending behaviour has therefore partly been affected by the nature of their relationships with family and school and these relationships are then further threatened by such offending behaviour. McNeill (2009) describes such persistent offenders as often highly fatalistic and lacking in agency. The process of attempting to desist from crime is particularly fraught for young people in this scenario, in large part due to their exclusion from the social capital necessary to lead a productive life.

Social capital, therefore, can be viewed as a valuable resource for young people, not only providing them with the supportive relationships that they need but also as a source of feedback on their own behaviour (Chapman and Murray 2015). Positive social networks are not only important in terms of emotional support but also are crucial in giving people more opportunities, choice and power (Boeck et al., 2006).

Therefore, by getting involved in youth work, organisations like the police can help to build social capital and play a unique role in promoting 'community cohesion' (Thomas, 2003). However to achieve this, greater efforts are required to identify ways that the police can interact and engage with this age group, particularly those that are hardest to reach (Graham & Karn, 2013). The potential benefits of moving away from the existing social control approach are well worth the effort. For example, Clayman & Skins (2012) argue that by fostering a new relationship based on respect and trust, the police can elicit greater support and cooperation from young people, transforming them from one of the most difficult aspects of their job to one of the most rewarding.

2.2 Restorative Practices: Theory and Application

Restorative approaches offer offenders, victims, and the community at large an opportunity to come together and collaboratively resolve conflict and repair the harm that arises from crime (Zehr, 1990; Zehr & Mika, 1998). The process is based on practices, which have evolved from victim-offender mediation such as family group conferencing, 'circle' processes, and various types of citizen panels (See for example, Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). From such a perspective, restorative approaches have come to be most associated within the criminal justice dynamic, but they are also used in many other modes of practice (Zehr, 2002), with the title 'restorative justice' used when describing criminal justice approaches and restorative 'approaches' or 'practices' often used to describe non criminal justice interventions.

Although restorative practices are often portrayed as a new and radical concept it is by no means a recent invention. The method is grounded in traditions of justice from the ancient Arab, Greek, and Roman civilizations that accepted a restorative approach even in cases as serious as homicide (Braithwaite, 2002). However, since the 1970s it has enjoyed something of a revival in popularity when victim offender mediation and community mediation centres were opened in America and the development of these methods can be charted from New Zealand, Australia and England to Germany over the last three decades (Hudson and Galloway, 1996).

Restorative justice is used widely for young offenders and less serious offences. Family group conferences and victim-offender mediations are popular and useful tools in these instances and have proven to be successful in Australia, New Zealand, and Scandinavia among other jurisdictions. However, restorative approaches are not restricted to minor offences and can be used in cases of sexual and domestic violence as well as other crimes of severe violence (McAlinden, 2007). For example, in Rwanda, traditional style *gacaca* courts have been used in

the aftermath of the 1994 genocide to attempt to achieve justice, truth and reconciliation (Waldorf, 2008).

As this evaluation highlights, restorative approaches can also be applied to many everyday situations and is becoming a popular tool in classrooms and workplaces here and abroad to deal with every level of harm or dispute (McCluskey et al, 2008; Cameron and Thosborne, 2001). As attitudes to restorative approaches become more open, the practices become increasingly developed, and the expertise required for deploying these strategies advances.

Deaclan Roche (2003) suggests four key values that contribute to a better understanding of restorative justice, these are: 'personalism, participation, reparation, and reintegration'. Restorative justice can therefore be viewed as a dialogic process which attempts to repair emotional harms and rebuild broken relationships. The process is structured to discover what has happened and why with regard to a crime or wrongdoing; and how those involved have been affected; to attempt to analyse issues of causation; and subsequently to find a resolution all or most parties are in agreement with (Bazemeore, 2000). In this conception, the main principles of restorative justice make it a highly attractive tool for fostering community engagement (Crawford, 1999).

Finally, for many proponents of restorative justice, a key theoretical underpinning is the theory of 'Reintegrative shaming' (Braithwaite 1989; 1993). The theory, while not a central component of all operational examples of restorative approaches more broadly, has heavily influenced their development. According to Braithwaite, societies experience lower crime rates if they communicate shame about crime effectively. In this conception, the stigmatic or disintegrative shaming typically dispensed by the criminal justice system serves to increase crime. Such stigmatization he argues is unforgiving; the offender is permanently stigmatized, whereas reintegrative shaming is about decertifying deviance and restoring the offender back to the community. His thesis proposes that a society which is simultaneously forgiving and respectful while taking crime seriously has low crime rates. In comparison, those societies that degrade and humiliate offenders have higher crime rates (Braithwaite, 2000, p282).

As restorative approaches have evolved, three distinct models have tended to dominate: victim offender mediation, family group conferences, and circle approaches (Zehr, 2002).

Victim-offender mediation is generally considered to be the original archetype in the modern emergence of restorative justice. It normally involves a structured

meeting involving an impartial mediator who invites the two most evident protagonists in the aftermath of an offence to communicate with each other, with a view to arriving at appropriate restitution, compensation or reparation for the harm caused by the offence (Walgrave, 2008). Family group conferencing has been described as the 'most restorative practice' (McCold, 2000) and consists of an inclusive process that brings together the victim, the offender and their 'supporters' in order to find a socially constructive solution to the problems and harms caused by the offence (Roberts and Masters, 2000; Daly, 2002). Finally, the circle approach involves a group of participants arranging themselves in a circle and passing a 'talking piece' around the circle to assure that each person speaks, one at a time, in the order in which each is seated in the circle (Zehr, 2002; Van Ness and Strong, 2002). One or two 'circle keepers' serve as facilitators and the discussions are often more wide-ranging than in other restorative practice models because any member of the community can become involved (Walgrave, 2008).

Restorative approaches, therefore, often attempt to directly include those community members most affected by an offence. It personalises the consequences of the misbehaviour, and allows for the harm suffered to be expressed in personalised terms with little guidance from the facilitator. From such a perspective, facilitators generally encourage participants to speak for themselves and are trained to stay out of the interaction while guarding the process (Marsh and Crow 1998).

3. Gloucestershire Youth Forum Procedures and Practicalities

This section explains the format for the Youth Forums, based in part on the explanations of the project facilitators as well as the observations and experiences of the researchers that attended several of the Youth Forum meetings. It then briefly outlines each of the exercises employed in the sessions, reflecting on how these exercises worked and their impact on the participants.

3.1 The Approach to the Forum Sessions

Observing the youth forums was an interesting and thought provoking experience for the research team. Police and young people were actively engaged by a series of innovative exercises underpinned by a 'what works' agenda, where new initiatives and relationship building exercises were introduced in response to the characteristics of that groups in that session, and the nature of matters discussed. Consequently, there was often a lively feel to the sessions despite the fact that for many participants, this was a novel and occasionally challenging experience.

During the observations of the forum session, it was evident that the facilitators were experienced and well able to manage the dynamics of the groups and activities. Charlotte Calkin was introduced as an accredited restorative practitioner with extensive experience in Theatre Arts and in handling some of the most complex and difficult cases. Paul Mukasa similarly told of his experience as a volunteer restorative facilitator and his work as lead facilitator in a project that explored the relationship between black young people and the police in Gloucestershire. These experiences and the principles underpinning their work were evident in the procedures that followed.

Several days prior to the forum session, the young people involved would take part in a pre-session run by Charlotte and Paul. During this pre-session, the young people were invited to discuss their experiences of the police and encouraged to share these stories in a constructive fashion at the upcoming Forum. As Charlotte explained, the vast majority of the young people accepted the ethos of the Forums but some precautions were made to ensure that the Forums ran smoothly:

Every young person is risk assessed before they come into a forum. However, those young people who are set on being disruptive will always deselect themselves. However, some young people have also been excluded from the project due to the challenging nature of their behaviour.

The Forums normally took place in a youth club or community space that was familiar and represented a safe place to the young people, but was not a common destination for most of the Police Officers. The sessions began with only the Police Officers in the room. The group of officers commonly comprised a mix of between 10 and 20, with roles in neighbourhood policing, response, and criminal investigation. The facilitators, when asked, said that it was preferably for police officers and young people to come from the same local area in order to build effective relationships between people more likely to encounter each other. Whilst location-based groupings in the forums were common, there were often both officers and young people involved in individual sessions that came from across Gloucestershire. The facilitators also explained that they preferred a mix of neighbourhood and response Police Officers as this created a more interesting debate. However, no PCSOs were invited as they were considered 'more au fait' with young people and community issues by the facilitators.

With only the Police Officers present, the facilitators then thanked the youth workers associated with that particular group of young people for hosting the Forum. They explained to the Police Officers that the youth club signified a safe space for young people between the ages of 13-21 and in some cases acted as an alternative family for those who had a challenging home life.

The session began by exploring some of the views that the police held about the young people they policed and how they felt they were perceived by the young people. Once a range of opinions and preconceptions had been established, the young people were invited to join the forum session, and were seated in pairs with one young person to every Police Officer. Once both groups were present, the facilitator stated the ground rules:

1. No mobile phones were to be left on
2. People would talk in turn without interruption
3. Matters discussed were confidential and anonymity should be maintained
4. Participants would be respectful to the other people present at all times

3.2 Forum Procedures and Activities

The group then embarked upon a series of exercises, designed to encourage conversation and dialogue between the two groups and to help build positive relationships:

Exercise 1: This initial activity was an 'ice breaker', in which pairs comprising a Police Officer and a young person were encouraged to interview each other and find out:

- a little about their partner;
- what their partner would change about their role or their self;
- an interesting fact about their partner.

Following this, each set introduced their partner to the rest of the group using the information they had gleaned from them.

The resulting display of memory recall, cooperation and discussion helped with 'humanising' the groups to each other in a relatively jovial and non-threatening manner. It began the process of dialogue and engagement between the two groups, and was essential to the subsequent forum activities.

Exercise 2: For this exercise, the young people were invited to communicate a selection of their experiences of previous interactions with the police, many of which had been part of the pre-sessions with the young people several days earlier. In practice, this often led to a dialogue between the two groups: the more jovial atmosphere of the previous activity gave way to a more serious discussion in which the police officers listened intently to the often very serious scenarios and attempted to explain or rationalise what had happened. In some cases, the young people were happy with the explanations they were given, whilst in others, the Police Officers would acknowledge that, from what they were being told, the police response in the incident the young person was recounting was not acceptable. This process continued for approximately one and a half hours after which a break was called for refreshments.

This was a valuable activity, which enabled the young people to express their concern over certain experiences and to have their questions about these answered. Similarly, it was clear that the police officers viewed this as an opportunity to explain their perspectives on events to the young people. In both cases, it was very positive that there were instances on both sides that were resolved, and both groups were able to acknowledge where mistakes or misinterpretations might have played a part in those experiences.

Exercise 3: The young people and police were placed in groups of 3 or 4 around a table, with a Pizza of their choice, and were encouraged to get to know each other in a more informal setting. This resulted in a return to a lighter atmosphere with smiles and jokes, although there were some serious conversations as the facilitators had in some cases, matched Police Officers with young people that had serious experiences or grievances they did not want to air in front of the whole group.

As with the previous activities, this was an important opportunity for Police Officers and young people to talk to the other. The informal setting, over food, helped to personalise the experience and the small group setting meant that it was a less pressured environment.

Exercise 4: For this exercise, the group were placed into a 'restorative circle' and the police and young people were invited to answer a series of questions such as:

- How do you feel when you approach a Police Officer or a young person?
- What do you do?
- What would you do now after today's session?
- What would be helpful?

This is one of the key activities in producing changes to perceptions and behaviours. The questions are designed to challenge 'normal behaviour', breaking down barriers between the police and young people and encouraging both groups to consider how they might maintain these new behaviours once they leave the Forum and return to their local communities.

Exercise 6: The Forums then concluded with a series of games that drew heavily on theatrical arts and restorative justice principles. For example, it often included a game where everyone present (including the research team) had a playing card attached to their forehead, of which they had no idea of its provenance. Participants would then circulate around the room moderating their behaviour to the others based on the 'status' afforded by their card:

- A five or lower = lower status
- A Jack or higher = higher status
- An Ace = Neutral status: they were to be treated completely normally

The participants would then guess which card was on their own forehead: in almost all cases they guessed correctly or almost correctly. The facilitators then reinforced the message of this exercise, emphasising the impact that other people's perceptions have upon our own self-worth.

Another game required the Police Officers and young people to read out a scripted conversation with their partner where their tone and enthusiasm was based on a particular scenario such as hearing that your friend has been 'bad mouthing' you in school or work. This reinforced the perception that relationships work better when you treat people in the same way that you would like to be treated yourself.

To close the Forum the entire group were situated in a circle and invited, one person at a time to describe what they would take away from the session. Often this took the form of a change to attitude or behaviour. Section 5 discusses these changes in more detail.

4. Police Officers and Young People before the Forums

This section of the report explores the perspectives and perceptions of Police Officers and young people before they had taken part in one of the forum sessions. For the young people, this information largely comes from the pre-sessions meetings they attended a few days before the forum to which they were invited. For the police officers, this material comes from the session they had alone with the facilitators at the start of their forum session.

4.1 Police Officer's views before the sessions

Before the start of each forum, the Police Officers were asked for their key impressions of the young people they deal with during their work. There were a number of issues that emerged from this discussion prior to the start of the Forum, and these are broadly aggregated into three themes:

- The perception of a lack of respect for officers from young people.
- A concern that both Police Officers and young people were too quick to generalise behaviours to each other.
- The need for officers to be able to engage more with young people.

- *Lack of respect for Police Officers*

There was a general feeling amongst the officers that many of the young people they encountered did not respect them. This was despite their assertion that they felt they treated young people fairly. There were a number of reasons why they thought this might be the case. For instance:

- That this was part of a wider societal issue and respect for the police had declined within society across all age-groups.
- That young people were unwilling to take personal responsibility for their behaviour.
- That young people could not see beyond the uniform.
- That in groups, peer pressure had a significant adverse effect on behaviour.
- Officers felt they received a little more respect from those in rural locations such as the Forest of Dean as compared to a city such as Gloucester.

I know why they don't like us – it is because we tell them what to do and they don't like it.

When they are in a group they are difficult to talk to, but when you get them on a one to one basis it is ok.

Relations were very dependent on what you give and whether you treat them with respect.

- Concern over young people's' generalisations of the Police

One issue that was clear, for both Police officers and young people, was the degree to which they felt the opposite group stereotyped them. On the other hand, at the same time it was common for both groups in turn to generalise and stereotype the other.

Officers were, however, often aware of this, expressing the belief that it is often difficult not to generalise when discussing young people. Many clearly expressed that they felt there must obviously be good young people out there, but that they often did not come into contact with them.

- Need for positive engagement with young people

Tied into the concerns around lack of respect, many officers identified a lack of engagement as a significant issue in their relationships with young people. Part of this lack of positive engagement was around the nature of the officer's role in dealing most frequently with issues of crime and criminal behaviour. For example, one officer described how their contact with young people was almost entirely through criminal justice responses to perceived crimes or misdemeanours, often involving late-night drinking with young people as young as 13 years of age. These concerns were expressed by a number of officers, who felt that the constraints of time, resources, or role and location meant that they had little opportunity for positive engagement with young people.

We do not get to work closely with the young people very often as the PCSOs deal with all the community level stuff.

It is difficult to have the opportunity to engage with specific young people attached to a certain incident as we deal with the situation quickly and then move on to the next one.

Interaction often depended on the area, culture and geography.

Despite this, several officers also expressed the opinion that there were things they could do to actively improve their relationship with young people, and many were also keen to explore ways in which they might increase their levels of communication and interaction in order to improve their relationships. Where there were already schemes in place that provided officers and young people with the opportunity to work together, the benefits were clear.

In Gloucester we are attached to the XXXX project and they are also quite glad to see us. The young people are often reported missing or get into other scrapes and they are very happy to enlist the help of the police.

- Summary of Police officers' impressions before the forum sessions

That there were preconceptions held by Police Officers about young people is not surprising, indeed the process of the youth forums was instigated in part as a way of tackling these. What was interesting was that there was a feeling expressed by officers that they were at once being stereotyped by young people and a concern was that, given the nature of the contact they had with young people, it was all too easy to slip into generalisations themselves. However, there was a positive solution expressed with respect to this potential issue in a wider role that officers felt they could take with young people in situations that did not revolve around crime and criminal behaviour. Visits to school, youth centres or interactions with young people on a more informal basis were put forward by some officers as a positive way to improve the relationships between young people and the Police more generally.

4.2 Young people's impressions before the forum sessions

The young people were given the opportunity prior to the forum meeting to express their own views and perceptions of Police Officers. As with the officers involved, the young people came from a range of different regions and background across Gloucestershire and whilst this did mean that their experiences varied there were a number of key issues that emerged from these pre-session meetings:

- Police Officers were often intimidating in their demeanour and behaviour when dealing with young people.
- Police Officers were a law unto themselves.
- Police Officers were all the same.
- Police Officers did not respect young people.
- That young people were not taken seriously by Police Officers.
- Police Officers did not communicate effectively with young people.
- That young people lacked confidence in Police officers due to issues around incidence of prior contact.

These issues fall into three broad themes: impressions of a lack of respect from Police Officers; concerns over feeling generalised in dealings with Police Officers; the need for more positive experiences of engagement with Police Officers.

- Lack of respect from Police Officers

There was concern expressed by a number of young people before the sessions that Police Officers did not listen to or respect them during interactions. Furthermore, several young people indicated that they felt that Police Officers would at times exhibit intimidating behaviour. Descriptions of Police Officers focused on them appearing intimidating due to the uniforms and the way that encounters played out. For example, one young person reported feeling repeatedly intimidated by the body language of Police Officers who were felt to behave aggressively in their attitude and demeanour. Specifically, the placing of thumbs in the lapels of the upper part of their jackets was seen as an aggressive stance that was designed to be intimidating and would elicit defensive behaviour from the young person when in contact with Officers. Other examples of young people's impressions included:

I just wasn't taken seriously ... As soon as I turned up with an adult, all of a sudden it mattered

They can just do what they want

They were rude, just no explanation...They just shouted: 'We don't need a warrant!'

- Generalisations by Police Officers

As with the Police Officers before the forum session, there was a perception from the young people that they were being stereotyped during interactions with the Police and that this stereotyping was in turn influencing their own interactions with Police.

The world is set on stereotypes; I'm just a teen hoodie walking down the street, think police have suspicions of hoodies.

- Need for positive experiences of engagement with Police Officers

Again, as with the Police Officers before the forum session, there was a feeling amongst the young people that more positive interactions with police would help build the relationship between the two groups. The importance of positive interactions was stressed by one young female who explained how her previously good experiences and impressions of Police Officers was significantly damaged during a stop and search in a park which she felt was overly aggressive and where she was searched by a male, rather than a female Officer. Other young people expressed the desire to see Police Officers in their schools more frequently,

although it was also clear that the process of building these relationships is one that takes some time.

I would like to see the police in my school more often; but I would feel intimidated about asking them a question.

- Summary of young people's initial impressions

There is a striking similarity in the impressions of both Police Officers and young people before the forums. As with the Police Officers, the young people felt they were being judged as a group rather than being viewed as individuals. Similarly, as with the Police Officers there, was a feeling amongst the young people involved that there was significant scope for improving the relationship between themselves and Police Officers. Where interaction between the two was poor, the potential impact on relationships could be very negative, however taking the time to meet in circumstances and environments that were more positive and where young people felt less intimidated could lead to significant benefits in building positive relationships.

5. Police Officers and Young People after the Forums

This section of the evaluation sets out the responses of the Police Officers and young people after their attendance at a Forum session. It looks at each group in turn, considering both changes in attitude and perception as well as intended changes to future approaches or behaviour.

5.1 Police Officer's impressions after the Forum sessions

After the forum meetings, the researchers took the time to speak to Police Officers about their perceptions of the event. In particular, they discussed how the forum experience may have changed Officer's views around young people, and how this change might affect their practice. This discussion often focused on how perceptions of young people were now more complex and that consequently, this meant they would approach young people differently in their professional capacity.

- *Change in Police Officers perceptions of young people*

One of the main topics raised by the Police Officers was the way in which their perceptions of the young people changed as a result of the forum meeting. In particular, they were aware of how they came across to the young people:

.. perceptions of how we look to young people are important. I didn't know that we looked intimidating to the young people.

The uniform can be intimidating, we need to make ourselves more approachable.

Noting the issues that both groups expressed around stigmatisation and stereotyping before the forum session, and the subsequent discussions during the forums, it was interesting to observe officers spending some time reflecting on how they viewed the young people with whom they came in contact. Many officers indicated that they would pay close attention to their perceptions of young people, and how these impacted on their behaviour.

I've learned that everybody absorbs information differently and we need to adapt our approaches to make sure some young people do not develop negative views of the police.

I've learned that I should be wary of categorising people and will always keep an open mind.

I've learned that assumptions are dangerous. We should not assume. We should engage more on an equal and level playing field, and welcome engagement.

- *Intended changes to approaches and practices when dealing with young people*

As a result of their changed views of the young people, some of the Police Officers identified ways in which they could see their experiences feeding into changes in their future approaches to encounters with YPs in a professional capacity.

I will try to speak to young people more and to be more visible and approachable.

I think things like this help to bridge the gap between police and young people. However, the way that policing is going it is going to be much harder to do this sort of thing. If officers can be spared from front-line duties then these sorts of scheme will be really worthwhile.

I've learned not to pre-judge a situation going into it and look a lot happier while we are doing it. That way we will be more approachable.

The forum facilitator commented on this last comment: *'That is the first time I have heard that!'*

Some of the POs who took part in the evaluation expressed concerns that more was needed to capitalise on the benefits of these forum experiences. One expressed a concern that once the YPs left the forum they would return to their own social networks and their views of the police would revert to their perceptions prior to the forum.

I thought it was a great two and a half hours but they will leave and start interacting with their peers and parents who will undo all the good work.

However, others reflected that it was important to build on these positive experiences with the young people.

The young people seem to have got a lot out of it and we need to keep that contact with them. These can be our allies out there in the communities.

Others identified ways in which they could embed this experience in future practice.

I'm going to take the time to go into more schools and clubs

I will feed back to my Chief on the need to visit schools.

I need to make more time for interaction between young people and Police Officers.

It would be helpful to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of young people.

- Reflections from the Police Officers Follow-up session

The Police Officers were given the opportunity to attend a follow-up meeting a short period after the forum meeting in which they participated. During this meeting the POs were encouraged to reflect on the longer term effects of attending a youth forum event. The Police Officers were interviewed after carrying out workshops. One group recommended that:

- All Police Officers be trained in youth engagement.
- There is a need for a dedicated school liaison Officer who has a deep affinity for that sort of work.
- That other ways of extending and reinforcing the work of the forums should be found.
- For example by putting on ride alongs for the young people so they get a chance to see what police work is all about.

Another commented that police should take whatever steps are possible to ensure that stop and search provisions are not unnecessarily intrusive or upsetting. The following are examples of feedback from Police Officers on the follow-up session process.

I can see the point of it, although there has been quite a long time between this and the forum I attended so things are not as fresh.

It is good to reinforce what happened in the forum.

It allows us to take what we learned in the forum and think about it in terms of the big picture of policing.

This is very different to our normal training which is on-line and does not go in as well. Face to face contact is much better.

Clearly the Police Officers saw the benefit both of the forums and of the opportunity to take what they had learned and reflect on their implications for policing practice. They did, however, have comments on the process of the youth forums, in the form of how it affected their view of the young people:

I attended the Tetbury forum and felt that they were not the real kids we have the problems with. We need to work out how to meet the really hard to reach kids - the ones who do not go to nice youth clubs.

... how it impacted on their practice:

I am very happy I had this allocated to me this week. I am not getting the opportunity to do very much community work at all at the moment. I am a minority of 3 officers that gives a toss in a squad of 22. After a while you feel like why should you bother?

... and how it could be built on:

I think we should try to work out a way of getting young people to help other young people to broaden the impact of the forums. It is about promoting positive peer relationships.

Misuse of public space such as McDonalds and local parks was a particular source of frustration for the Police Officers. They repeatedly described how much of their time is used up attending call outs due to anti-social behaviour by young people and the facilitators discussed the possibility of widening the remit of the Forums to reflect other key interfaces with young people such as public spaces like McDonalds or Burger King.

An observation made by one of the researchers was that the Police Officers need quite a lot of prompting to engage in this follow up session. The research team reported hearing the facilitator's voices a lot more than in the forums. This suggests that having the young people present actually helps to relax the Police Officers and they found this to be the most enjoyable part of their experience.

In some ways, the follow up meeting almost became an informal stop and search training session for the Police Officers. Police were required to show their knowledge of the topic through the setting of 'what would you do' tasks by the facilitators. One officer when describing a police raid noted that 'raid' is a negative term that should be avoided. They should be called the execution of a warrant or an operation instead.

5.2 Young people's impressions after the forum sessions

As with the Police Officers, the young people were given the opportunity to reflect on their experience of the youth forums, their perceptions of the Police Officers and the impact of the youth forum events.

- *Change in young people's perceptions of Police Officers*

The young people acknowledged the need to not stereotype all Police Officers and expressed increased confidence in their contact with them outside of the Forums. The young people encouraged Police Officers to visit schools regularly to break down barriers and perceptions between them. Young people also expressed how they now possessed a wider understanding of issues regarding the police which can only be useful.

I learned that I should not stereotype Police Officers.

Police officers are not as scary as it is made out.

Police officers are not all the same as I used to think.

Don't judge by uniform, take [Police Officers] at face value.

Some saw media portrayal of the Police Officers or the experiences of family members as being to blame for the way they thought of them:

I learnt that the media do not always tell the full story about the police. I know now that I should not be scared to go up to the police and talk to them in future and take them at face value, not to judge them by their uniform.

Because of my past and family name it's not going to affect my future, not going to judge coppers like I used to.

While for some, they could see that their new way of perceiving the Police Officers may have an impact on their future encounters with them

I know now that if I show respect to the police, they will give me respect back.

If you respect me, I will respect you as I have a lot of respect for the role that you do.

The police are not just here to arrest me.

Trust the police and treat them respectfully.

Don't judge the police, they are not all bad and have more conversations with the police.

Respect them: they're helping us.

I just didn't like the police, I just didn't like them at all, I can see now there not all the same.

Yeah just that their human like us.

I don't like the way that the police tuck their hands into their vests but I now realise why they do it so I don't find it intimidating anymore.

PO's were not as scary as people make out.

Not all police are the same.

- Intended behaviour change towards Police Officers

As well as the positive changes that young people indicated in their perception of Police Officers, there were also changes that the young people indicated they would make to their behaviours when dealing with the police. For example:

I learned never to shout abuse at Police Officers as they are actually nice people sometimes.

I feel more confident about talking to the police now after this.

Police do have a job they want to help us they're not coming to bother us, and not to be rude to police in future.

I've more confidence in general in approaching the Police.

Not to stereotype the Police.

6. Summary and Recommendations

This final section draws together the analysis of the forums to address the two key dimensions of this evaluation:

- i. The ability of the Forums to identify, challenge and resolve negative perceptions that Police Officers and young people hold about each other.
- ii. The potential of the Forums to foster wider community benefits within a police/community engagement model of practice.

Following this, the section makes recommendations that build on the achievements of the Youth Forums Project.

6.1 The ability of the Forums to identify, challenge and resolve negative perceptions that Police Officers and young people hold about each other

In practice, the research team found that the Youth Forums they observed encapsulated a compelling ‘before and after’ narrative where fundamental fault lines between young people and Police Officers were identified and challenged with evidence of real success in finding practical and workable solutions to the topics discussed. The opportunity for the two groups to meet in a non-confrontational and guided setting acted as a catalyst for both groups to view each other as individuals rather than generalising the other party. The complexity of the Forums and the often sensitive nature of the topics discussed required skilful management by the facilitators and there was a strong sense amongst the research team that a more police led approach would struggle to achieve the same goals.

It was apparent however, throughout the research, that the Police Officers require more training, support and encouragement than they currently receive, especially in terms of promoting the wellbeing and rights of young people. A frequent theme from the Officers was that the situation was getting worse, not better. They expressed fears about the cut-backs in police resources leading to the eventual demise of neighbourhood / community policing. They felt that such policing was less measurable than volume crime and its potential future benefits were difficult to subject to cost-analysis. All Police Officers in Cheltenham and Gloucester were disillusioned by changes to their existing roles within the police force. Similarly all Police Officers in the meeting expressed low morale with many describing how they would leave the Police tomorrow if they could pay their bills.

Another key finding from the research was that there is a problem with the police making themselves accessible to young people in the local communities that they

operate. The young people frequently described how the police were cold, withdrawn and overbearing. They also felt that the police response to their own behaviour was disproportionate and heavy handed.

From the perspective of the young people, the identified theme of their legitimacy as young adults rather than children also began to be tackled. Similarly, the theme of the perceived intimidatory nature of the Police Officers, especially when approaching young people was explained and misunderstandings were discussed. This served, to some extent, to reassure the young people. Similarly, the theme of respect discussed from the perspective of both groups appeared to be indirectly addressed through the restorative process, having a positive effect on attitudes and perceptions between the two groups.

In one session, the Police Officers and the young people discussed a number of case studies of experiences the young people had with coming into contact with the police. These were instances where the young people did not understand how the police would normally operate in these circumstances and the police were unaware of how the young people experienced these incidents and interpreted them. In two cases the Police Officers accepted the experience of the young people and offered to discuss them one-to-one.

Police Officers generally felt that PCSOs had a positive role to play in building a positive relationship with Young People, in particular as they had the necessary time to engage and build a rapport with young people. The community came into contact with PCSO's far more than regular Police Officers who have effectively been removed from contact with the community.

These 'us and them' discourses were also frequently exhibited by the police who described how 'youths' refused to show them the respect that they felt they were entitled to and described how the young people, particularly when they were in groups, were often rude and abusive to the police when they were exercising their duty.

Building on these previous points, the forums were found to be highly effective as they placed police officers, often reluctantly at the beginning, at the level of the young people. Although the police officers all remained in non-dress uniform with their big police-issue combat boots and black outfits, the removal of a criminal matter or complaint to investigate, and the presence of the facilitators, ensured that the young people could speak to the police freely and with confidence.

This had a measurable impact on the power relations between the two parties with the Police Officers now the ones being held accountable for their actions, feeling the need to respond and to discuss their fellow Officer's conduct in a particular matter, while at the same time being mindful of their brief to appear approachable and open to the young people.

Seeing the matter from a fresh perspective was key for both parties. As the police and young people listened to each other's accounts they were able to see what their behaviour is doing in terms of the impacts and emotions that it engenders.

For example the police learned that young people hate:

- Inappropriate use of stop and search powers
- Rude and overbearing attitudes and behaviour
- Misuse of force including barging through front doors
- Failing to listen when they try to explain something
- Talking to them in a patronising manner

Further, the young people learned that the police dislike:

- Being spoken to by young people in a disrespectful manner
- The ways that group dynamics normally alter young people's behaviour making them more aggressive and abusive, making the job more difficult for the police.

6.2 The potential of the Forums to foster wider community benefits within a police/community engagement model of practice.

Although many of the Police Officers described how they had been obligated to attend youth forums, most engaged in a positive manner. They felt that the shared experience of attending was far more beneficial than individual on-line training. The Police Officers also hoped that it was a positive experience for the young people though they feared it was human nature to revert back to type. They also felt that the Young People attending the youth forums were receptive but that perhaps those that they needed to be in contact with were not always in attendance, although the research team found that a diverse range of young people, including those with very serious issues, were often in attendance.

Most notably, many of the Police Officers and young people described how they would pass on the knowledge they had gained to their friends and colleagues. Subsequently, the forums have the potential to extend out into the local

communities bringing real benefits to a much broader cross-section of the population.

Examples of the value of developing communication and understanding were plentiful across the sessions observed as part of this evaluation. For instance, there was a lot of benefit in Police Officers discussing with young people the experiences of previous contact with the police. It was clear that officers often didn't understand how their actions were perceived by young people, and that young people often didn't see 'beyond the uniform'.

The interaction and communication between the groups helped to humanise both sides and helped to explain problematic experiences. For example, it gave officers a chance to explain why certain incidents might have unfolded in the way they did, and gave young people the chance to understand why the police might have taken a particular set of actions. For both groups, it was a valuable opportunity to understand how the other might perceive their actions and a chance to reflect on their own future conduct or behaviour when they met each other, or other similar people in the local communities from which they were drawn.

6.3 Recommendations from the youth forums

Drawing on the findings from the 'Youth Forums Evaluation', the research team would like to make a number of recommendations that seek to build on the achievements of the Youth Forums Project. These relate directly to the Forums and to wider issues around the policing of young people.

In terms of the Youth Forums Project:

- It is recommended that the excellent work of the Youth Forums Project be extended so that the project can reach other areas that were not incorporated in the initial sessions.
- Linked to this, project facilitators and funding bodies should be supported in their desire to find innovative ways to deploy the workings of the Youth Forums in diverse situations (such as McDonalds) where young people, community members and the police often come into conflict.
- Further other ways of extending and reinforcing the work of the Forums might be found. For example by putting on a "ride-along" for the young people who attend the sessions so they get a chance to see what police work is all about.

- Consider employing a selection of the young people who were most engaged in the Forums and employ them as engagement ambassadors so that they can return to their communities and extend the reach of the forums.
- Consider extending the use of the Forums outside of the police/youth setting. For example in the social housing, prisons or public space sector.
- It would be helpful if the majority of the Police Officers that attend a forum also work in the local neighbourhoods in which the Forum is situated.
- Finally, it might be helpful to ascribe a final cut off time when the Forum must end as one or two of the sessions were quite long over four hours, causing some of the participants to flag a little.

In consideration of wider issues around policing young people:

- The research team recommends that the drift away from neighbourhood policing be reversed with more officers given the opportunity to develop a more positive relationship with local communities including young people and their family members.
- Similarly, Police Officers could benefit from further specialist training in youth engagement/wellbeing that builds on the findings from this work.
- Police Officers should also be supported and encouraged to visit local secondary schools in order to meet young people in a more structured environment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Information Sheet



Youth Forums Evaluation **Information Sheet**

We are researchers from the School of Natural and Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire and are involved in the collection of qualitative data for the purpose of exploring the outworking's of the Youth Forums Project.

The Youth Forums Evaluation is funded by office of the PCC and aims to appraise the extent to which the Youth Forums Project meets its key aims, particularly its potential to foster wider community benefits. The Evaluation therefore comprises of three main objectives:

- I. Identify the impact of the Youth Forums Project on young people, particularly their perceptions of police officers
- II. Illustrate the impact of the Youth Forums Project on participating police officers' perception of young people and restorative approaches
- III. Produce a range of materials to assist Restorative Gloucestershire in developing their work in restorative practices.

The research team comprises of Dr Brian Payne (lecturer); Dr Jon Hobson (Senior Lecturer); Dr Kenny Lynch (Reader) and Darren Hyde (Research Assistant).

The method of data collection will be participant observations of Youth Forum procedures and, when appropriate, short semi-structured interviews with young people and police officers. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your involvement at any time. If there are any questions or concerns that you may have about the research please speak with a researcher and we will do our best to explain the parameters of the research.

Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form



Youth Forums Evaluation **Informed Consent**

We are researchers from the School of Natural and Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire and are involved in the collection of qualitative data for the purpose of exploring the outworking's of the Youth Forums Project. The Youth Forums Evaluation is funded by office of the PCC and aims to appraise the extent to which the Youth Forums Project meets its key aims, particularly its potential to foster wider community benefits. The Evaluation therefore comprises of three main objectives:

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I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

YOUNG PERSONS SAYS:

**I JUST WASN'T TAKEN
SERIOUSLY AS SOON
AS I TURNED UP WITH
AN ADULT ALL OF
A SUDDEN
IT MATTERED**

**THEY WERE
RUDE NO
EXPLANATION
THEY SHOUTED
WE DON'T
A NEED
WARRANT**

**THEY
CAN JUST
DO WHAT
THEY WANT**



**POLICE OFFICERS
ARE A LAW
UNTO
THEMSELVES**

**THE YOUTH
FORUMS**

POLICE OFFICER SAYS:

**RELATIONS WERE VERY
DEPENDENT ON WHAT
YOU GIVE AND
WHETHER YOU TREAT
THEM WITH RESPECT**

**I KNOW WHY THEY
DON'T LIKE US
IT IS BECAUSE WE
TELL THEM WHAT
TO DO AND THEY
DON'T
LIKE IT**

**WHEN THEY ARE IN
A GROUP THEY
ARE DIFFICULT
TO TALK TO
BUT WHEN YOU
GET THEM ON
A ONE TO ONE BASIS
IT IS OK**

**THE YOUTH
FORUMS**

YOUNG PERSONS SAYS:

DON'T JUDGE BY
UNIFORM
TAKE
POLICE OFFICERS
AT FACE
VALUE

I LEARNT THAT THE MEDIA DO NOT
TELL THE FULL STORY
ABOUT THE POLICE
I KNOW NOW THAT I SHOULD
NOT BE SCARED
TO GO UP TO THE POLICE AND
TALK TO THEM

I LEARNED THAT I
SHOULD NOT
STEREOTYPE
POLICE OFFICERS
THEY ARE
NOT AS SCARY
AS IT IS
MADE OUT

POLICE OFFICERS ARE
NOT ALL THE
SAME
AS I USED TO
THINK

**THE YOUTH
FORUMS**

YOUNG PERSONS SAYS:

DON'T JUDGE BY
UNIFORM
TAKE
POLICE OFFICERS
AT FACE
VALUE

I LEARNT THAT THE MEDIA DO NOT
TELL THE FULL STORY
ABOUT THE POLICE
I KNOW NOW THAT I SHOULD
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I LEARNED THAT I
SHOULD NOT
STEREOTYPE
POLICE OFFICERS
THEY ARE
NOT AS SCARY
AS IT IS
MADE OUT

POLICE OFFICERS ARE
NOT ALL THE
SAME
AS I USED TO
THINK

**THE YOUTH
FORUMS**

POLICE OFFICER SAYS:

**I'VE LEARNED THAT EVERYBODY ABSORBS
INFORMATION DIFFERENTLY
AND WE NEED TO ADAPT
OUR APPROACHES TO MAKE SURE
SOME YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT DEVELOP
NEGATIVE VIEWS
OF THE POLICE**

**I'VE LEARNED THAT
ASSUMPTIONS
ARE DANGEROUS
WE SHOULD
ENGAGE MORE ON
AN EQUAL
AND LEVEL
PLAYING FIELD
AND WELCOME
ENGAGEMENT**

**PERCEPTIONS OF HOW WE
LOOK TO YOUNG PEOPLE
ARE IMPORTANT
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT
WE LOOKED
INTIMIDATING TO
YOUNG PEOPLE**

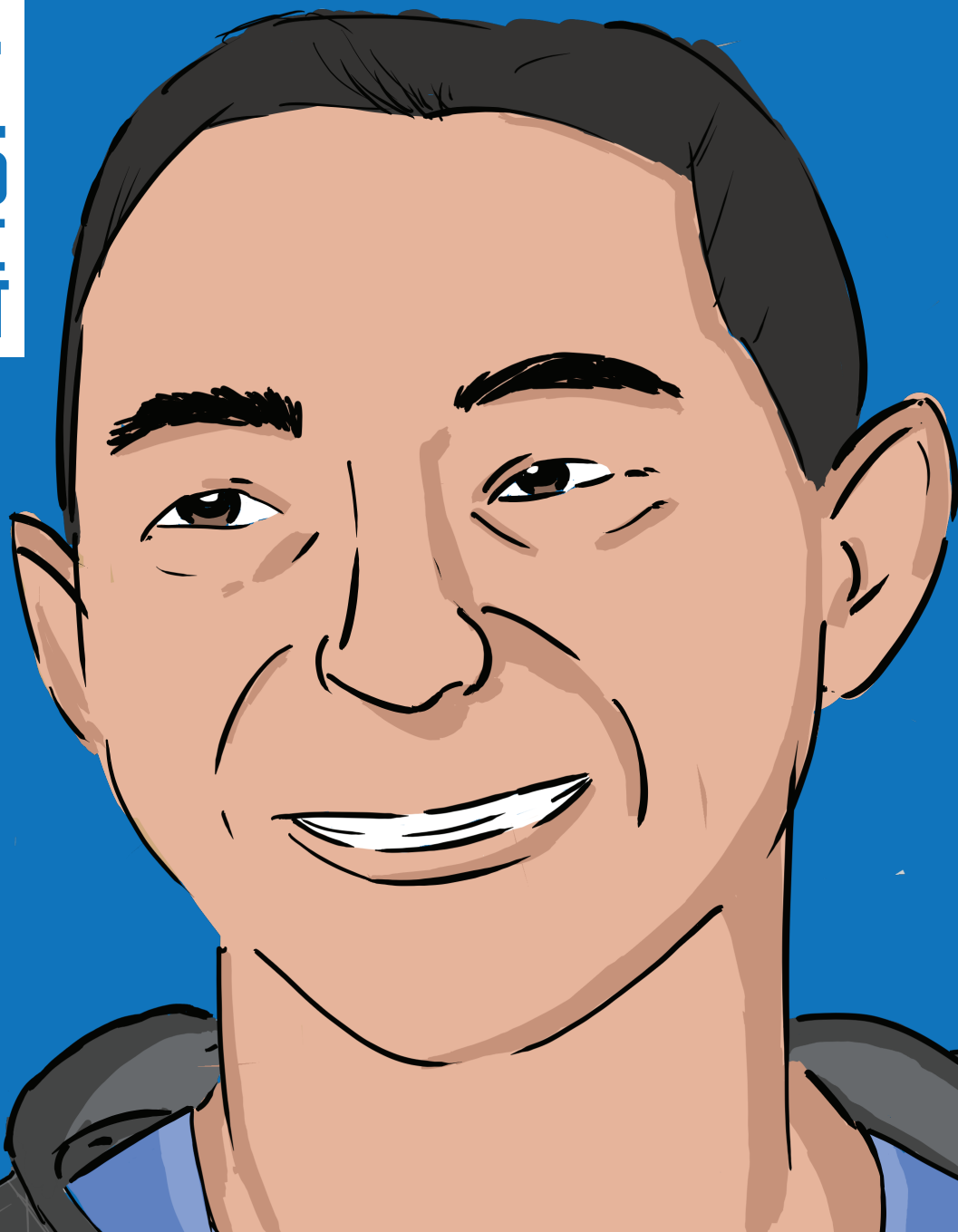
THE YOUTH FORUMS

POLICE OFFICER SAYS:

**I'VE LEARNED THAT EVERYBODY ABSORBS
INFORMATION DIFFERENTLY
AND WE NEED TO ADAPT
OUR APPROACHES TO MAKE SURE
SOME YOUNG PEOPLE DO NOT DEVELOP
NEGATIVE VIEWS
OF THE POLICE**

**I'VE LEARNED THAT
ASSUMPTIONS
ARE DANGEROUS
WE SHOULD
ENGAGE MORE ON
AN EQUAL
AND LEVEL
PLAYING FIELD
AND WELCOME
ENGAGEMENT**

**PERCEPTIONS OF HOW WE
LOOK TO YOUNG PEOPLE
ARE IMPORTANT
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT
WE LOOKED
INTIMIDATING TO
YOUNG PEOPLE**



**THE YOUTH
FORUMS**

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