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## 1. Introduction

This paper is a case study of an arts-based restorative intervention, the ‘Youth Forums’, which attempted to address problematic relationships between young people and police officers in Gloucestershire, England. Through this case study, we aim to illustrate the benefits of such approaches for addressing issues around perceived procedural justice and police legitimacy. Arts-based restorative interventions have been the focus of previous research: Deuchar et al. (2015) examine a research-informed intervention designed to improve relations and community capacity between police, young people and residents in the west of Scotland; Froggett et al. (2007) explore the contribution of a creative writing project to restorative youth justice in the UK; and both Lavrinec (2014) in Lithuania and Thomas et al. (2015) in the mid-southern USA explore the role that arts-based community interventions can play in strengthening local communities. Our case study adds to this body of evidence, exploring an innovative attempt to identify and go some way towards rectifying systemic interpersonal difficulties around respect, stereotyping and problematic interactions. These Youth Forums were prompted by a report on young people commissioned by Gloucestershire Constabulary, in concert with the county’s Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), which highlighted significant concerns about the relationship between the police and one of the most at-risk and vulnerable sections of the community.

This case study draws upon the findings of an independent evaluation that we conducted, commissioned by the OPCC for Gloucestershire, to establish how successful the intervention was in improving these problematic relationships (Payne, Hobson and Lynch, 2016). It first considers the literature in the area, including issues around young people’s experiences of policing and disengagement, the legitimacy deficits that can arise from perceived and real failures of procedural justice, and the role that community-based arts interventions and restorative justice approaches can play in resolving such concerns. Following this, we set out the methodological approaches that form the basis of this case study. We then provide a thematic analysis of the Youth Forums, including findings from both groups that highlight: the ability of the forums to challenge preconceptions; the forums contribution to creating positive behaviours; and the perceived usefulness of the forums in identifying challenges for participating police officers in their future work. The paper concludes with a short summary and key learning that can be taken from the intervention process.

## **2. Understanding the troubled relationship between young people and the police**

### ***Young people, policing and disengagement***

The often difficult relationship between young people and police officers has attracted significant attention from researchers, policymakers and media (see for example: Hurst and Fine et al., 2016; Frank, 2000; Gleeson and Byrne, 2016; Kennelly, 2011; NPCC, 2015; Sarre and Langos, 2014; Walmsley, 2015). In the UK in 2014, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children (APPGC) published a report entitled *“It’s all about trust”: Building good relationships between children and the police* (APPGC, 2014), which highlighted systemic fault lines in the relationship between police and young people and an overwhelming lack of trust between young people and the police in the UK. Other research has focused on a series of practical issues that often arise. Hurst and Frank (2000) identify how young people are over-represented in terms of police contacts and arrests, with suspects under the age of 18 more likely than adults to receive sanctions from local police officers. Hinds (2007) highlights the ways in which young people can often challenge and reject aspects of the law and legal institutions, as personal experiences and the opinions and beliefs of their friends and peers exert influence with the maturation process. Finally, those from disadvantaged backgrounds or neighbourhoods characterised by low social cohesion are more likely to exhibit impulsive and risk-taking behaviour and are less inclined to report crimes or cooperate with the police (Meier et al. 2008; Slocum et al., 2010).

Positive social interactions are not only important in terms of emotional support but can be crucial in giving people more opportunities, choice and power (Boeck et al., 2006). They can also be a valuable means for improving the lives of young people, providing them with supportive relationships and a source of feedback on their own behaviour, therefore helping to create social capital (Chapman and Murray, 2015). By getting involved in community youth work, organisations like the police can help to build social capital and play a role in promoting ‘community cohesion’ (Thomas, 2003; Hobson et al, 2018). However, achieving this is challenging, and identifying effective ways in which the police can interact and engage with young people and those who are hardest to reach can require significant effort (Graham and Karn, 2013). The extent to which traditional fault lines between the police and public appear

to become exacerbated when placed in the context of police encounters with young people has ensured that such efforts to develop a greater understanding of the needs of at-risk young people have proven difficult. In this case study we consider one such intervention, designed to improve these negative relationships. Underpinning this are two key considerations, dealt with in turn in the following sections: how police legitimacy and procedural fairness can impact on relations between police and young people; and the potential for using restorative justice and community-based arts approaches to bring about positive social change.

### ***Young people, police legitimacy and procedural justice***

An extensive literature has focused on the relationship between perceptions of procedural justice and public cooperation with the police. The central argument is that if the public believe they are being treated fairly and respectfully, they will be more likely to defer to or cooperate with police officers (Bradford and Jackson, 2016; Murphy 2015; Pickett et al., 2018; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003). Research has also shown that perceptions of procedural justice are more important to people than other factors such as police effectiveness and the ability to combat crime, largely because it increases the perceived legitimacy of those in authority (Reisig et al., 2007; Tyler, 1990). From such a perspective, legitimacy as a concept of power and political authority is encapsulated by a two-dimensional definition wherein an authority is legitimate if people feel that they ought to defer to the judgements of that authority despite the absence of coercion or anticipation of reward (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2003). As a legal authority, the legitimacy of a police service depends, therefore, on its ability to demonstrate to the public why its exercise of powers is rightful (Reisig et al., 2007), with efforts to promote public cooperation and compliance with police requests often being dependent on the construction of discourses that evoke a shared moral purpose between police and citizens, which justifies and legitimatises the application of their powers (Jackson et al., 2012).

Such arguments are supported by previous research, which has consistently found that perceptions of police legitimacy, compliance, and cooperative behaviours suffer when there are concerns over procedural justice on (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Procedural justice is often defined as a four-stage construct (Tyler and Fagan, 2008), with the public being viewed as more likely to believe they are being treated fairly when they: 1) have

confidence in the neutrality of the police; 2) feel that the dignity of citizens has been preserved in encounters with the police; 3) believe that the motives for police activities are trustworthy; and 4) feel that the police are listening to the public. All of these factors, when working appropriately, should allow the police to focus on crime control without being disrespectful to, or alienating, the public.

The majority of studies in this area have focused on adult samples, with less specific consideration given to the relevance of police procedural justice and legitimacy in the context of young people. For example, Murphy's (2015) review of existing research on young people and procedural justice found that no current theoretical explanation existed that could explain why procedural justice may shape perceptions of police legitimacy in young people. Similarly, Hinds (2009) found that while a large expanse of literature exists on police legitimacy, it is largely confined to studies of adults, despite age being one of the most consistently cited variables in people's attitudes towards police. Nevertheless, there is research that considers young people's interactions with police. For example, McAra and McVie (2005) describe how perceptions of socio-economic status impact on the application of police discretion with young people, producing a form of urban discipline that can increase problems experienced by excluded youth. In Canada, Kennelly (2011) describes the nuanced and complicated relationships between young people and police, in particular the ways in which police treatment of young people can shape their ongoing relationships with law enforcement. In Finland, Saarikkomäki and Kivivuori (2013) found that young people had a relative high probability of adversarial police contact, estimating this at one in four for young females and almost one in three for young males.

What is evident, therefore, is that young people are often at higher risk of negative encounters with the police, which can have a profound impact on the attitudes that both parties have for each other, including negativity, alienation and perceptions of overly authoritarian policing approaches (Forman, 2004). For Roberg and Bonn (2004), one important way to attend to these issues is through the reforming of training and education for police officers delivering enhanced skills – skills that are necessary for the effective challenging of police outlook when undertaking community policing. Moreover, as we describe next, interventions designed to address these issues appear more impactful when

they take place in the local communities, where issues with police/community relationships are often acted out.

### ***Community-based arts interventions and restorative justice approaches***

A growing body of work has focused on the ability of community-based arts initiatives to bring about positive social change through the promotion of personal well-being, increased citizen participation, cultural awareness and community cohesion (Howells and Zelnik, 2009; Kay, 2000; Lavrinec, 2014; Stein and Faigin, 2015). Less common has been the application of such methods within criminal justice literature, although a number of studies have attested to the successful use of the arts for young people in the areas of crime prevention and offender rehabilitation. In particular, arts programmes that utilise poetry, creative writing and dramatic arts have been found to help reduce offending behaviour and incidents of disruption, promote engagement with education, and support personal and social development (see for example: Farrier et al., 2009; Froggett et al., 2007; Hughes, 2005; Rimmer, 2018; Spiegel and Parent, 2017). Key to such methods is the promotion of dialogue as a means for directly or indirectly attending to conflict and addressing asymmetrical power relationships that can hinder effective engagement. This includes perceptions of being overly authoritative, a lack of trust in those in authority and fear of the consequences of negative encounters (Deuchar et al., 2015), all of which, we argue, are highly compatible restorative justice approaches. These approaches are considered next in the context of improving relations between police and community members, particularly young people.

The principles that underpin restorative justice allow for innovative responses to a range of challenges, with benefits that extend well beyond the confines of the criminal justice paradigm (Doak and O'Mahony, 2011). These attributes have become more relevant in recent years due to attempts to develop more 'socially proximate relationships between 'community' and 'justice'' (Crawford, 2008: 125), fuelled, at least in part, by attempts to overcome a perceived 'legitimacy deficit' caused by the widening gap between state-sponsored systems of policing and criminal justice and the public that they are meant to serve (Home Office, 2010). Restorative approaches can appear an attractive means for helping to bring about greater civic involvement in crime and conflict due to their ability to give greater involvement to offenders, victims and the wider community (Rosenblatt, 2015; Zehr, 1990; Zehr and Mika, 1998).

There has been growing interest in restorative methods for reducing crime and social harm in a range of international contexts, including in youth offending (Karp and Frank, 2016; McAra and McVie, 2010; Sherman and Strang, 2007; Waldorf, 2008). In the UK, the continued rise of restorative policing, where the police deploy or are involved in restorative justice interventions at the pre-court stage, has opened up new avenues for police-youth engagement. Police officers are able to carry out restorative practice themselves through community resolutions or cautions that can take place at street level, with no prior planning or authorisation necessary (College of Policing, 2015; Shapland et al., 2017). This may bring the potential to replace adversarial contacts with restorative interventions in certain situations, with potential benefits to speeding up and improving procedural justice and improving community relations.

For Roche (2003), restorative justice involves creating not just greater links between individuals and communities but helping those involved to understand more about those with whom they find themselves at odds. Roche proposes four key aspects that underpin restorative approaches: participation, in that parties must have a willingness to take part; personalism, whereby those involved understand the impact of their behaviour on the victim, offender, family and/or community; reparation, whereby there is some consideration on how to repair the harm done; and reintegration, wherein the process results in a plan for moving forward in a positive way. In short, the values underpinning both these approaches present a highly attractive opportunity for fostering community engagement and rebuilding relationships, and they can be used to support and enhance a range of interventions and activities. Building on this, Doak and O'Mahony (2011: 311) suggest that key restorative values, such as repairing harm, promoting reconciliation and rebuilding relationships, can work to resolve micro-conflicts between victims, offenders and their respective communities and 'assist in boosting democracy and inter-communal healing by forging better relationships between civil society and the various faces of the formal criminal justice system'. The continued proliferation of such methods can also help to change the working culture of criminal justice professionals and increase the capacity of citizens and local communities to address crime and conflict (Bazemore and Schiff, 2001).

Although restorative justice is frequently described as a way of building and nurturing social capital (Bazemore, 2000; Braithwaite, 1989), less work has been done on the importance of

social capital in bringing forward public acceptance of the ideas of restorative justice (for exceptions see: Braithwaite, 2000; Wenzel et al., 2008). The dissonance between this imagined version of 'restorative justice' and realities in modern urban centres raises significant challenges for police and other practitioners. That is, we need to have a 'community' with which to do restorative justice, and that community must have strong capital or 'capacity' for social action; however, this capacity may not always be present (Sampson, 2004). Initiatives that promote the use of restorative justice can improve social capital by creating new connections among individuals within networks and across networks. This works both by bringing people together and empowering them to build new relationships that help them to work through divisions, particularly those between state and individuals (Castiglione et al., 2008; Klamp and Paterson, 2017). The next section sets out our case study, which explores the application and outcomes from one such initiative.

### **3. The research study and local intervention**

#### ***Focus and method***

This case study examines an arts-based restorative intervention that took place in Gloucestershire, bringing together young people and police officers with the aim of improving interactions and fostering better relationships. The intervention was prompted by a report conducted by the Restorative Engagement Forum (2015) on behalf of the OPCC for Gloucestershire, as a response to concerns about problematic policing relationships in the county. The report highlighted concerns about police engagement with young people, many of which reflected the earlier national APPGC (2014) report:

- Lack of respect from officers
- The perception that officers target members of the black community
- The perception that officers assume guilt in the first instance
- Young black people are uncomfortable being seen speaking with officers in public
- Officers treat young black people differently to other ethnic groups
- Officers do not properly explain what they are doing
- Stop and search is used indiscriminately and the rules around the process are not clear.

(Restorative Engagement Forum, 2015)



In his response to this report, the PCC for Gloucestershire made the relationship between young people and the police a strategic priority within the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Plan (OPCC, 2016). As part of the strategy to address this, the OPCC funded Restorative Gloucestershire, a county-wide organisation that provides restorative support and solutions to help improve approaches to, and outcomes from, interactions with the criminal justice system. Restorative Gloucestershire and the OPCC were approached and then commissioned by the organisation Restorative Engagement Forum to run a series of Youth Forums across the county, the aim of which was to improve relationships between police officers and young people. As part of this, the OPCC also funded the authors of this paper to conduct an independent review of the intervention (Payne, Hobson and Lynch, 2016), the findings of which form the basis of the case study presented here.

We used an ethnographic method to evaluate the intervention, a broad approach that Fleetwood and Potter (2017: 1) describe as ‘particularly suited to studying crime, control and victimisation’. More specifically, our research involved participant observation of each constituent part of the Youth Forums supported by targeted interviews. Four sessions were attended at different venues across the county, including pre-meetings with both groups (police and young people) individually and then the combined sessions. Efforts were taken to minimise the impact of the researcher’s presence. The forum facilitator made participants aware that the research team would be present prior to events, and at the start of each session, the researchers would introduce themselves to the group and would then sit at the fringes of the sessions to allow the main participants to engage. Where there were general group activities, and where the session facilitators indicated it was suitable, the researchers would participate; for instance, in the role-playing games that were used to help overcome post-lunch lethargy. The researchers were unobtrusive when not participating in activities, making handwritten notes at suitable points during and immediately after the sessions. Within 24 hours of each session, notes were written-up in a more comprehensive manner. No names or easily identifying characteristics were taken during the research. In this case study, comments from young people are referred to with the moniker YP, and police officers with PO.

An initial analysis of the data was completed using a thematic approach that was defined in the original evaluation agreement with Restorative Gloucestershire. The themes were: the

impact of the Youth Forums Project on young people's perceptions of police officers; and the impact of the Youth Forums Project on participating police officers' perceptions of young people and of the use of restorative approaches. For the analysis in this case study, we combined these two themes into one: 'the ability of the forums to challenge preconceptions'. For this paper, we added two further themes that emerged from the data: 'how the forums contributed to creating positive behaviours' and 'the forums' usefulness in identifying challenges for the police officers in their future work'. These three themes form the basis of the case study structure in the following section of this paper.

### ***The intervention***

There were eight forum sessions, involving young people aged between 11 and 20, with the majority aged between 13 and 16. The lowest number at a session was ten and the highest 12. Between eight and 10 officers were in attendance at each session, with roles including neighbourhood policing, response policing, and criminal investigation. Although it was preferable for police officers to come from the same duty area as the young people, the practicalities of releasing officers meant that they tended to come from various locations across the county. It was notable in that regard that the researchers found no evidence to suggest that police officers recognised any of the young people in the forums or remembered having previous contact with them while carrying out their roles. The young people also did not appear to recognise the police officers. Each session was hosted and jointly run by a youth group or similar organisation and took place in a club or community space familiar to the young people.

The police participants were nominated by the Constabulary, and the young people were selected based on their association with the youth groups utilised by the facilitators. The research team had no control over the participants, as we were there to observe the Youth Forum processes. Although we could not be certain if those involved were a representative sample for the region, at the time of the forum sessions, all of the young people lived across the county, which meant that they represented a mix of urban, semi-urban and rural locations, and all the police officers worked in the county.

In terms of the replicability of Gloucestershire to other contexts, the county had a population of 623,129 in 2016, with a population growth rate of one per cent per annum, which is slightly higher than the total for England and Wales (GCC, 2018). Young people under 19 years of age make up 22.6 per cent of the population, which is slightly lower than the England and Wales figures of 23.7 per cent. The latest data suggest that the number of young people cautioned or arrested for criminal offences was lower than the national average, but reoffending rates were higher at 47.2 per cent, compared with 34.9 per cent for the South West region (GCC, 2018). Of a small cohort of children and young people with whom the Gloucestershire Police are engaged because of their risk of offending, 69 per cent have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Bellis et al., 2014). The Youth Forums team risk-assessed the young people before they joined the process, with some excluded before the process began for overly challenging behaviour.

The forum process was in three parts: separate preliminary meetings with the young people and with the police officers; the forum events; and a follow-up focus group three weeks after the last session with 11 of the police officers who had taken part in the forum process. We were informed that these were the only officers who were available for this final session due to shift patterns and the need to ensure that busy police districts were resourced sufficiently.

The preliminary meetings with the young people and police officers took place separately, an approach common in restorative justice, in which facilitators can introduce the parameters for the eventual group meeting and begin to identify issues of concern for each of the groups (Bazemore and Schiff, 2001). In the combined forum sessions, the facilitators deployed a range of innovative restorative and arts-based practices to engage participants and encourage interaction. The sessions started with the young people and police officers interviewing each other in pairs to find out some general information, including their name, an interesting thing about them, and what they might change about their role or their self. They then introduced their partner to the rest of the group using these cues, thus hopefully generating an element of personalism and participation common in restorative approaches (Roche, 2003).

The second exercise involved the young people communicating their experiences of negative interactions with the police. The police officers listened intently and would attempt to explain or rationalise what had happened. In some cases, the young people were happy with the

explanations, while in others the police officers would acknowledge that the events as recounted should not have happened. Both groups recognised when mistakes or misinterpretations might have played a part in negative encounters. The facilitators encouraged participants to speak for themselves and were able to exercise considerable skill in guiding the process, reflecting the importance of trained facilitators in managing complex issues (Marsh and Crow, 1998). According to Green et al. (2014: 54), this type of restorative process can be empowering for participants, both in ceding some responsibility to the intervention process and allowing those in positions of authority the opportunity to promote a sense of responsibility for their colleagues.

Following a shared lunch, the group members were placed into a restorative or 'peacemaking' circle and invited to answer questions including: How do you feel when you approach a police officer or a young person? What do you do when approached? What would you do now after today's session? What would be helpful? This aimed to challenge 'normal' behaviour and encourage participants to consider more positive behaviours for future interactions. The final stage of the forum involved reinforcing the positive message of the day with a number of activities that drew heavily on theatrical arts and restorative principles, emphasising the impact other people's perceptions have upon our own self-worth. In one activity, facilitators applied playing cards to the foreheads of every police officer and young person present in a manner that ensured they did not know the identity of their own card but could walk around the room observing the card on each person's forehead. They were then asked to act out both verbal and non-verbal reactions to others based on the value of the card they were wearing. After each person had experienced several encounters, participants were asked to guess the identity of their card. A similar activity required police officers and young people to act out a scripted conversation in pairs, adjusting their tone and enthusiasm as they described or responded to a scenario. Following both activities, the facilitators led a discussion on how people respond to perceived status based on the way they are spoken to and treated. Participants collectively related how they felt about each conversation, reinforcing the idea that showing interest and respect leads to more positive encounters and that relationships work better when we treat others in the same way we would like to be treated (Murphy, 2015).

Finally, the groups were seated in a circle and invited to describe what they would take away from the session, particularly changes to attitude or behaviour. Both the young people and police officers engaged enthusiastically throughout the observed sessions, and there was often a lively feel to the forums. In these sessions, it was clear that the forums had a positive impact on perceptions; the two groups were much more willing to humanise each other and to consider the other as having a distinct personality rather than as a member of a group. This was a significant achievement given that both parties had expressed reservations at the start of the exercises, and both related some difficult personal experiences throughout the discussions. The value of such peacemaking circles has been well documented; for example, in a study for the European Commission, participant satisfaction with a circle process was near 100%, emphasising their ability to promote 'dialogue and a sense of humanity' (Weitekamp, 2013: 412).

#### **4. Research findings and discussion: building positive relationships through the Youth Forums**

This section considers the findings of the case study under the following thematic areas: the ability of the forums to challenge preconceptions; how the forums contributed to creating positive behaviours; and the forums' usefulness in identifying challenges for the police officers in their future work.

##### ***Challenging preconceptions***

The perception of being treated in a fair and respectful manner is a vital element in building effective and positive relationships (Murphy, 2015). During the preliminary sessions, the young people frequently expressed a lack of confidence in police officers. They felt the police did not take their concerns seriously because they were 'only' young people, or because the police officers did not understand or want to understand what they were trying to communicate. They often talked of the police as a homogenous entity and felt they were being negatively stereotyped during interactions:

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

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

Similarly, many of the police officers felt they received little respect, particularly when young people were in larger groups, where negative peer pressure had a significant adverse effect on behaviour:

*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 okay. [PO]*

It was clear that both groups felt subject to stereotyping, although it was also noticeable that both were generalising and stereotyping the other. The police officers were often more aware of this, expressing the belief that it is often difficult not to generalise when discussing young people. Many said that they felt there must obviously be good young people out there, but they did not often come into contact with them. The forum processes were designed to challenge this by engineering positive contact and to generate the kind of 'personalism' that Roche (2003) identifies as crucial to improving relationships. As a consequence, both the young people and the police reflected on their perceptions, and in each of the sessions we observed that there was a marked change in the attitudes of both groups:

*I just didn't like the police – I just didn't like them at all. I can see now they're not all the same. [YP]*

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

*Not going to judge coppers like I used to. [YP]*

*...we need to adapt our approaches to make sure some young people do not develop negative views of the police. [PO]*

*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. [PO]*

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

It should also be noted that while the young people present were representative of a broad range of ethnicities, the issue of race did not emerge during proceedings, except when the facilitator was describing the origins of the project to the police officers when the young

people were not present. More pertinent was social class and, in particular, the sense that as the police officers did not live in the same neighbourhoods as the young people, this possibly contributed to the apparent distance or sense of 'othering' between the two groups at the beginning of proceedings.

### ***Creating positive interactions***

As well as challenging attitudes, the Youth Forums had the aims of changing problematic behaviour exhibited by both groups and helping to improve future encounters. In particular, the promotion of parity in interpersonal interactions was important, as it can be deeply damaging if those in authority do not order their interpersonal behaviour in a manner that is consistent with the rest of society (Sykes and Clark, 1975). In the discussions prior to the forum sessions, the young people frequently expressed serious concerns over their treatment by the police, with the young people unanimous in their view that police officers were both heavy-handed and brusque during encounters:

*They can just do what they want. [YP]*

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

*There is a bridge of trust that the police need to build between us and them. [YP]*

Several also indicated that they felt police officers exhibited intimidating behaviour; one young person said their own behaviour had consequently become more defensive when dealing with the police, and another reported that their positive opinions of police officers had been significantly damaged by a stop and search incident that they felt was overly aggressive and had involved being searched by an officer of the opposite sex. Such discourses of the lasting damage caused by negative encounters resonate with the evidence collected in other studies (Gormally and Deuchar, 2012; Jackson et al., 2012; Murphy 2015). As Tyler (2007: 674) notes, people obey the law only when they believe they are being treated 'with fair procedures', and it was interesting to observe that there was deep concern shown by police officers when these events were recounted by the young people.

Similarly, in the pre-sessions, the police officers frequently reported that there was a general feeling that many of the young people they encountered did not respect them, despite their

belief that they treated young people fairly. For some officers this was a product of a 'general malaise' in society, where respect for the police had declined across all age groups. Others felt that young people were unwilling to take personal responsibility for their behaviour and were unhappy when the police had to intervene:

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

Many of the police officers identified a lack of opportunities for positive engagement as a significant issue, with one describing how their contact with young people was almost entirely through the criminal justice system. Part of this, they felt, was due to the nature of their role, but other issues included lack of time and resources:

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

*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. [PO]*

While elements of self-justification or providing mitigation were relatively common in the pre-sessions, upon completing the intervention, several officers felt that there were things they could do to actively improve relationships with young people. Many were keen to explore how they might increase communication and interaction with young people in situations that did not revolve around crime; for instance, through visits to schools, youth centres, or by seeking out more spontaneous interactions on an informal basis.

It was clear that the combined sessions had a marked impact on both groups' intended behaviour and had even brought about a willingness to build a different type of relationship between the two parties, based on what Hughes (2005: 70) characterises as a 'non-judgmental and un-authoritarian' model of engagement. For the young people, this was reflected as increased confidence in procedural justice:

*I feel more confident about talking to the police now after this. [YP]*

*I feel much more comfortable now to interact in the street with the police; I didn't before. [YP]*



*I know now that I should not be scared to go up to the police and talk to them. [YP]*

For the police officers, the reflections were more commonly around how they could improve relationships by adapting behaviour during interactions:

*I've learned not to prejudge a situation going into it and [to] look a lot happier while we are doing it. That way we will be more approachable. [PO]*

*I will try to speak to young people more and to be more visible and approachable. [PO]*

One example related to perceptions of appearance and body language and the common behaviour of police officers tucking their thumbs into the tops of their stab vests. The young people described this as aggressive and intimidating, whilst police officers were surprised, explaining that it was merely instinctive behaviour, often for comfort due to the weight of their protective equipment and because they are not allowed to put their hands in their pockets. In conversation on the issue, both groups recognised the position of the other:

*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 any more. [YP]*

*The uniform can be intimidating. We need to make ourselves more approachable. [PO]*

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

In several sessions, the discussions focused on the use of stop and search powers, with the officers present acknowledging that these seemed to have a particularly negative impact on young people. One officer commented that police should take whatever steps are possible to ensure that stop and search provisions are not unnecessarily intrusive or upsetting. Lipsky's (2010) work on 'street-level bureaucrats' and the use of discretion in public policy processes can be useful for understanding how such potentially divisive powers as stop and search (Ellis, 2010) might be applied in a more sensitive manner. Lipsky highlighted how front-line workers can contribute significantly to policymaking through exercising pragmatism and discretion in their everyday work, and it was evident that the forums helped in highlighting to police

officers the importance of behaving in a fair and procedurally just way, in order to legitimate their encounters with young people (Mazerolle et al., 2013). This was certainly evident in some of the changed attitudes expressed by the young people around stop and search and arrest:

*I can see the police are not just here to arrest me. [YP]*

*Police do have a job. They want to help us; they're not coming to bother us. [YP]*

Examples of the value of developing communication and understanding were plentiful across the observed sessions. The positive interactions between the groups added personalism with emphasis given to emphasising the 'human' element (Roche, 2003; Weitekamp, 2013) of the fledgling relationships, so that those present were able to see beyond each other's group identities and begin to attend to problematic experiences that had occurred in the past. For both groups, it was a valuable opportunity to understand how the other might perceive their actions and a chance to reflect on future conduct, with both groups expressing a desire for greater opportunities for positive contact:

*If we saw local police officers a lot more at school and youth club, we would get more comfortable with the police. [YP]*

*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. [PO]*

*I'm going to take the time to go into more schools and clubs. [PO]*

*I will feed back to my chief on the need to visit schools. [PO]*

### **Identifying challenges for future policing practice**

It was clear that the forum sessions had a positive impact on both the young people and the police officers. During the follow-up focus group, many of the officers reflected on the wider considerations of the process and their learning:

*[We should] take what we learned in the forum and think about it in terms of the big picture of policing. [PO]*

*This is very different to our normal training, which is online .... Face-to-face contact is much better. [PO]*

Although many of the police officers described how they had been obligated to attend the sessions and might have felt somewhat inconvenienced in having to do so, they invariably began to engage in a positive manner once they were able to meet the young people. Certainly, a clear contrast could be observed across all officers in terms of their disposition at the pre-session – reserved, mildly defensive, occasionally dismissive – in comparison to the enthusiasm with which they participated in the activities. Most remarkable was that officers could be observed to seek out a particular young person after hearing their story and talk with them at length in a quiet corner of the room. Another sign of success was the extent to which many of the police officers and young people reported how they would pass on the knowledge they had gained to their friends and colleagues. While this stops well short of McAra and McVie's (2010) recommendations from the Edinburgh study for an 'overhaul of entrenched working cultures', it does show that the forums have the potential to extend their effects into wider policing practices and bring benefits to local and community relationships. Despite this, there were concerns voiced over the wider application of the forum and the longevity of the impact:

*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 [in] a minority of three officers in a squad of 22 that gives a toss. After a while you feel like why should you bother? [PO]*

*I attended the XXXX 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. [PO]*

*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. [PO]*

The second two of these quotes reflects the perceptions of some police officers when engaging with hard-to-reach or marginalised communities (Sadd and Grinc, 1994). Although these perceptions may be borne out of some experience, they also reflect how such views can become entrenched within police forces, and that breaking down barriers between communities and police needs to be a reciprocal process. While there was optimism on the part of the police that they had been able to engage successfully with the young people in the forums, they often voiced fears that this good work would dissipate once they left to join up with their peer groups and families, who had not had the benefits of a forum and might hold

negative perceptions of the police. For some police officers, the answer was to increase efforts to engage with communities in a positive manner, having witnessed at first-hand how such initiatives can be effective in breaking down barriers. However, the effects of austerity and associated policy shifts have ensured that initiatives of this nature tend to operate only on a short-term basis, due to a lack of sustainable funding (Rimmer, 2018). It should be noted that despite their evident success, the Gloucestershire Youth Forums have not been recommissioned, due to financial constraints.

## **5. Summary and key learning**

As identified at the start of the paper, interventions that are community, restorative or arts-based are commonplace across the world (Deuchar, et al., 2015; Froggett et al., 2007; Lavrinec, 2014; Thomas et al., 2015). The Youth Forums featured in this case study represented an interesting blend of arts-based and restorative approaches as a means for repairing relationships between police and young people and for improving future encounters. Although we must be cautious in how far we can extrapolate success, it is important to note the improvements in perspective and behavioural intention that arose from this case. In this respect, we hope our case study adds to the existing body of literature by suggesting that community-based arts interventions can be a valuable tool in encouraging interaction and dialogue, and that framing this in a restorative manner can maximise impact on those taking part.

In terms of the success of the Youth Forums, it was clear that those who participated reported a significant reconsidering of preconceptions and negative bias. As well as helping to redress preconceptions of 'the other', participants reflected on past and present behaviours, often making commitments to seek more positive interactions with the other group. If we were to identify one aspect of the intervention as being the most important, then it would be the facilitation of structured dialogue underpinned by restorative principles and mediation between police and young people that had the most impact. That said, however, it is unlikely that such discourse would have occurred had it not been for the ability of the arts-based activities to break down barriers and challenge preconceptions between two highly disparate groups. As perceptions of police fairness appear to match up with how people generally

expect to be treated within society (MacQueen and Bradford, 2015), active consideration of how behaviour can be perceived as procedurally-just suggests real benefits for improving police legitimacy and enhancing public cooperation with the police. Such a process can go some way to addressing all four of Tyler and Fagan's (2008) concepts for effective community policing: that the public have confidence in the neutrality of the police; that they feel dignity has been preserved in encounters with police; that police motives are trustworthy; and the police are listening to the public.

Despite the success of this programme, and the relatively low cost of such interventions, that it was not repeated more widely reflects the ongoing impacts of fiscal constraint in the UK. Austerity and the ongoing impacts of cuts to police budgets have left little space for such projects (Rimmer, 2018). Future research should continue to explore the potential of programmes that combine arts-based interventions and restorative justice approaches, in order to make a compelling argument for such schemes appropriately, so that more young people, in particular, can realise their transformational impact.

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