

Knowledge Exchange Network: meeting three

On 9 March, the [Knowledge Exchange Network](#) held their third meeting. The meeting brought together police Inspectors and Chief Inspectors from across England and Wales to co-create new and better ways of policing young adults aged 18-25. This meeting focused on policing challenges in identifying and supporting vulnerable young adults in the criminal justice system and explored how the involvement of young adults with lived experience at strategic and operational levels can reduce demand on policing.

Dara De Burca, Director of Children and Young People and **Lucy Dacey**, National Programme Manager, from The Children's Society began the discussion by looking at a systems approach to disrupting child exploitation.

Burcu Borysik, Policy Manager and **Tassie**, New Generation Campaigner, from Revolving Doors Agency then shared their recent research on young adults' views and experiences of policing across England and Wales.

Simon Hardwick, Chief Inspector at Devon and Cornwall Police spoke about trauma-informed and relational approaches in policing.

The presentations from the event can be found [here](#).

Following this, the group was split up into break out rooms to discuss the following questions:

- How do we ensure exploitation and trauma form part of ongoing professional development?
- How do you support your staff's wellbeing who deal with traumatic incidents every day? What are the challenges?
- How can people with lived experience and police work together to acknowledge and address the trauma experienced on both sides?

Identifying trauma and vulnerabilities

While there is extensive training around recognising vulnerabilities in children up to the age of 18, there is hardly any focus on identifying vulnerabilities for young adults: *"we set up teams to look at exploitation, but it looks at children and not young adults"*. This young adult age group was described as a 'national gap' and members said still more needed to be done to recognise the distinct needs of this group; *"we still don't understand what's going on in young people's brains"*.

Currently, there is no comprehensive training that combines personal, community-level trauma that has a clear life-course perspective. Where there is training, it tends to focus on adverse childhood experiences, household disruption, domestic abuse, and the impact this might have on individuals' behaviours and thinking. However, these do not extend to adversities experienced at the community level (e.g., the traumatic impact of racism and structural inequalities), and not always applicable to the fast-time policing response (e.g., how police can better take a trauma-informed approach during arrest or detention). Members also highlighted that vulnerabilities and trauma are often understood and responded to in the context of mental capacity (e.g., detention of a person under the [Mental Health Act](#)).

Trauma-informed training

Where trauma training for police forces has been developed and implemented, they were done so locally. For example, Lancashire and Devon and Cornwall (see below). Members expressed the need

for a standardised and comprehensive training across all police forces, potentially supported by the College and evaluated nationally

Members were concerned that training programmes were often 'shoe-horned' into policing practice. This often made the training feel sporadic and inconsistent. While the increase in trauma-informed training opportunities showed a drive for awareness, members felt that the trauma-informed approach has not yet been fully embedded into policing culture.

Despite this, good examples of training were cited. This included:

- The [Domestic Abuse Matters](#) programme which has been [evaluated by the College of Policing](#). DAM is described as a cultural change programme designed to create long term, sustainable improvements and consistency in the response to domestic abuse cases.
- [Lancashire constabulary](#) have introduced trauma-informed training across the force. This has helped officers to recognise and understand why someone has committed an offence and ensure they use this knowledge to respond accordingly.
- Northumbria police are in the process of designing vulnerability training. They are consulting on the College of Policing's 'three C's' (clues, curious and closure) to encourage professional curiosity when working with vulnerable people. They are eager to shift the focus towards the person rather than the incident.

Members spoke about the value of involving people with lived experience who can be "*vocal and real advocates for change*" in developing and delivering the training programmes. Their personal accounts amplify serious issues and "*cut through the noise*" to help make a stronger case.

Taking a systemic approach to trauma

Members expressed that the Child-centred Policing Principles should be expanded to working with young adults, especially those who have experienced significant and multiple traumatic life events. This would mean that police will need to take responsibility to pull together the system in the best interests of the young adult and support them away from the criminal justice system as much as possible. For example, a multi-agency child exploitation panel would identify the range of needs and risks affecting a child and pull together resources and support from YOTs and social services. However, we did not find any examples in the discussion where the same practice was followed for the same children once they turn 18.

Members cited [MARAC](#) as a good example of a multi-agency approach. A MARAC is a regular local meeting which discusses how to help victims at high risk of murder or serious harm. A domestic abuse specialist, police, children's social services, health and other relevant agencies come together to produce an action plan for the victim. Members discussed the idea of a MARAC arrangement for the 18–25 year-old group.

In North Yorkshire, working with school liaison officers has been crucial in recognising children at risk of trauma. Working in schools to prevent escalation and specifically, sexual harm, has been useful. Currently, they are developing a project about recognising and responding to children who are on the peripheries of criminal exploitation but are not yet in the criminal justice system. Members expressed interest in exploring which anchor institutions they might be able to work with to identify young adults who are at risk of exploitation, as they are no longer at school.

The impact of trauma in policing

Members said that the policing structure has shifted over the years from a top-heavy organisation, to now having *“too many boots on the ground”*. This means that Sergeant ranks are managing far too many staff without adequate support: *“when I was a staff sergeant, I couldn’t see the woods for the trees - we’re managing workloads, HR, day to day running’s”*. This means that the workload increases and mental health suffers. ‘Cultural bravado’ was also cited as a factor which propels worsening mental health.

One member said that police lack a place to unwind and debrief – and that these are the key spaces when you recognise that someone needs support. This was raised in relation to the 20,000 new police recruits and concerns around their young age and potential inexperience: *“Our brain doesn’t evolve until 25 but we’re hiring police officers aged 18 – will they need more support?”*

One account highlighted the need for more support for younger officers. A member described managing seven young male officers who all experienced a family loss within eight weeks of each other. This took a lot of time to deal and provide the appropriate support: *“it can be tough to support young colleagues”*.

Members said that the emotional impact of policing work goes ignored or unnoticed. While there is a good response to large-scale traumatic events with the use of a process called [TRIM](#), the smaller micro-aggressions or the daily grind goes uncharted. For example, many police forces do not report on self-harm and suicide of police officers. There was a recognition that a traumatised and unsupported police workforce would not be able to have the resilience to deal with difficult cases or be able respond to the trauma of children and young adults who are victims, witnesses or suspects of crime.

However, members did describe examples where positive wellbeing programmes had been rolled out in their local area. This included:

- Members discussed [Oscar Kilo](#) which has started a conversation about police wellbeing at a national level.
- Thames Valley invest a large amount of money into wellbeing. This includes wellbeing champions and occupational nurses.
- In Devon and Cornwall, mental health programmes are run by officers which make it more engaging than the traditional top-down delivery.
- In some areas, the Police Federation have paid for [MHFA training](#) which was received positively.
- Greater Manchester has staff support networks, wellbeing champions and ensures officers receive support through the TRIM process.

The next Knowledge Exchange Network meeting will take place on 20th April, 3-5pm on Microsoft Teams. [Click here to join the meeting](#).

The session will aim to understand the reasonable adjustments and the support available to young adults with neurodevelopmental conditions, as well as the resources and training available to the police to support the identification of neurodiversity.

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