

Respect the roots – community outreach barbershop event

Hertfordshire Constabulary's Positive Action Department organised a community engagement event at a black Afro-Caribbean barbershop, promoting police transparency, trust-building and inclusivity, with minimal costs and diverse representation.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Diversity and inclusion
Organisation	Hertfordshire Constabulary
Contact	Andrew Thomas
Email address	andrew.thomas@herts.pnn.police.uk
Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Business and commerce
Stage of practice	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	August 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Communities
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Aim

The aims of respect the roots are to:

- establish stronger connections between the police and the black community, to build trust and rapport
- demonstrate the force's commitment to listening and addressing concerns of the black community
- provide a welcoming space for members of the black community to voice their concerns or questions, especially those related to racism within the police, stop and search practices, and related issues
- fostering a positive atmosphere through showing a genuine appreciation for the culture of the black Afro-Caribbean community
- demonstrating the force's values of diversity and inclusivity by recruiting more ethnic minorities into the constabulary, ensuring the force is more representative of the communities it serves.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of respect the roots are to:

- increase the number of positive interactions and ongoing engagement between the police and the black Afro-Caribbean community
- decrease the number of reported incidents of tension or concerns related to policing within the black community
- provide positive feedback and expressions of appreciation from community members regarding the police's respect for their culture
- increase the number of visibly ethnic minorities expressing interest in joining the constabulary
- establish collaborative initiatives or partnerships between the police and community organisations
- encourage positive shifts in community members' perceptions of the police force
- increase in the number reporting of crimes to deliver greater community cooperation with law enforcement.

These intended outcomes were designed to address specific issues and problems related to community-police relations, inclusivity, and trust-building.

Description

An inspector, sergeant and two police officers from Hertfordshire Constabulary working within the Positive Action Department recently organised an event at a black Afro-Caribbean barbershop. The team collaborated with the owner to set up a stall at the barbershop to engage with members of the black community. The barbershop was selected as the sergeant in the team had been getting their hair cut there for many years prior, building a positive relationship with the owner over time. This broke down initial barriers and scepticism around their role within the police, leading the owner to agree that the event the team were planning would be positive for the community.

Activities Undertaken:

- Pre-event promotion: to create awareness, the team distributed informative leaflets in various black-owned and Afro-Caribbean businesses within the community.

These leaflets outlined the event's purpose and details. The team collaborated with the corporate communications department, which reached out to local news outlets and radio stations. This proactive approach ensured that the broader community was aware of this upcoming event.

Leveraging the power of social media, the team posted engaging content to attract a wider audience. These posts included event teasers, information about activities, and reminders leading up to the event date.

- Event setup: at the event, the team arranged a table showcasing a variety of police equipment. This included a display of police uniforms, method of entry equipment, and other tools used in policing.

To engage with young community members, the team provided activities for children, such as colouring books related to police themes.

As part of the recruitment outreach, the team offered materials that explained the process of joining the police force.

To captivate the curiosity of both children and adults, the team featured a police vehicle for attendees to explore, creating an interactive and educational experience.

- **Diverse representation:** recognising the importance of representation, the team ensured a diverse group of police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) were present at the event. Throughout the event, around 25 police officers and PCSOs filtered through the event. This approach allowed them to convey a unified message of community engagement, with both visibly ethnic officers and white colleagues participating.

To maintain a relaxed and approachable atmosphere, most officers were in uniform and hats, avoiding any overly formal or intimidating attire. This approach encouraged open dialogue and interaction.

The costs associated with organising this event were kept minimal to keep within the Positive Action budget. Expenses primarily consisted of printing and distributing leaflets for advertising purposes, which equated to approximately £70. Additionally, the team allocated approximately £150 to provide refreshments for attendees. This included cans of popular beverages and water to ensure everyone was comfortable during the event.

In summary, the approach to organising this event was not only cost-effective but also focused on meaningful engagement with the black Afro-Caribbean community. The combination of pre-event promotion, interactive displays, diverse representation, and thoughtful spending allowed the team to successfully achieve goals of building community trust and fostering positive relationships.

Overall impact

The intervention has yielded a significant and positive impact, aligning closely with the intended outcomes:

- **Increased social media engagement:** a noticeable increase in social media views and clicks on our event-related posts, including:
 - 48,000 impressions on Meta (Facebook and Instagram)
 - 4,000 views on TikTok
 - 1,000 impressions on LinkedIn

This heightened online engagement demonstrates a growing interest and awareness of efforts within the wider community.

- Media attention: several radio stations reached out, leading to two interviews discussing the team's initiative. Additionally, the event featured in the local newspaper, the Herts Advertiser. This is a testament to the community engagement event and highlights the importance of outreach efforts in the media.
- Positive community feedback: numerous comments from members of the black community have praised the police's efforts and acknowledged their dedication to building positive relationships. This positive feedback underscores success in fostering trust and open communication.
- Overcoming wary attitudes: one key goal was to bridge the gap with individuals who were initially wary of the police. One way this has been achieved by engaging with community members who are now considering participating in a ride-along. During the event there was:
 - 10 expressions of interest for a ride-along
 - 4 expressions of interest in joining the police
 - 3 expressions of interest in joining the race inclusion board

This transformation from scepticism to active involvement indicates progress in addressing community concerns and building rapport. These observed impacts directly align with original intentions.

As the team plan more barbershop events, they anticipate these impacts to continue to grow, solidifying efforts to strengthen ties, promote diversity, and enhance community-police relations.

Learning

The implementation of this intervention has yielded valuable insights and learnings:

1. Humanising the police: one significant mechanism for success was the humanisation of police officers. Interacting with officers in a relaxed setting, witnessing them get haircuts while in uniform, and engaging in open conversations helped break down barriers and quickly dispel initial wariness. This human connection was key to building trust.
2. Ride-along scheme and trust building: the willingness of individuals initially wary of the police to consider going on a ride-along demonstrates the power of personal engagement. It allowed them to see policing from the inside, fostering greater understanding and trust in law enforcement.

3. Open dialogue on black history: discussing black history openly with the police facilitated important conversations and cultural exchange. This created a platform for sharing knowledge, dispelling myths, and fostering a sense of inclusivity.
4. Non-corporate leaflets: the use of non-corporate, vibrant leaflets featuring Caribbean flags and colours added a cultural touch that resonated with the community. It made the outreach more relatable and approachable.

For those considering implementing a similar initiative, here are some key recommendations:

- Human connection: prioritise humanising the police force. Create opportunities for officers to engage with the community as individuals rather than solely as representatives of law enforcement.
- Open conversations: encourage open and honest dialogues. Providing a safe space for community members to voice their concerns, ask questions, and share their experiences is vital.
- Community engagement: hosting events in culturally relevant settings, like barbershops, can make a significant positive impact. Ensure that the outreach resonates with the community you're engaging with.
- Cultural sensitivity: incorporate cultural elements into the materials and activities to show respect and appreciation for the community's heritage.
- Building trust takes time: building trust is a gradual process. It is essential to be patient, and consistently demonstrate the force's commitment to the community's wellbeing.
- Measure impact: continuously assess the impact of your initiatives through metrics like social media engagement, participation in a ride-along and community feedback.
- Sustainability: plan for long-term engagement. Regular follow-up events and initiatives can help maintain and deepen the positive relationships you've built. Incorporating these strategies can help foster stronger community-police relations, promote inclusivity, and create lasting positive impacts.

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