

Policing, culture and community: Effecting change through the arts

A place-based interdisciplinary body of work using arts-based methodologies to interrogate contemporary challenges around police-community engagement with seldom-heard communities.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Warwick
Principal researcher(s)	Prof Jackie Hodgson Jackie.Hodgson@warwick.ac.uk
Police region	West Midlands
Collaboration and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Midlands Police • The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry • Birmingham and Coventry schools
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	August 2021
Date due for completion	July 2025

Research context

We know that arts and culture can have benefits in social, health and economic terms, and arts initiatives are now widely used in prisons and across the criminal justice system. We investigate the ways in which arts-based interventions might generate more empathetic and trusting relationships between police and seldom-heard/minoritised communities.

We began in 2021 by examining the partnership between West Midlands Police (WMP) and the

Coventry City of Culture Trust during which an embedded police team worked with creative practitioners to co-design and co-deliver arts-based initiatives, such as a forest camp with young people deemed at risk of school exclusion/withdrawal and/or criminal exploitation, a mural with people with experience of homelessness, and an artist-in-residence.

We evaluated the possibilities and challenges of this collaborative endeavour, considering the opportunities that may be afforded by the arts over more traditional methods of police-community engagement, for instance sport. Our report: '[Policing, Culture and Community](#)' is available to read online.

Building on this research, we:

- undertook an evaluation of an outreach programme led by WMP and Ernst and Young for young people at risk of school exclusion and/or involvement in criminal activity
- constructed an empathetic story-telling initiative
- collaborated with the Belgrade Theatre (Coventry) to produce a performance piece, 'After Preston', written by Amahra Spence, based on the findings from our research around young people's experiences of policing in Coventry.

We continue our collaboration with the Belgrade in a new project 'Keeping us Safe?' in which we are working with local schools, using arts-based workshops, to gain an understanding of how young people feel about policing, and how they believe they are perceived by those who police. We are also working with WMP to explore the use of arts-based training as part of their Police Race Action Plan delivery.

Research methodology

This project employs a range of methods including qualitative interviews and focus groups, especially as part of the evaluation work. More innovative is our collaboration with theatre directors and actors to use creative methodologies as a means to open up space for seldom-heard voices, and to build empathy.

Interim reports or publications

Hodgson J and Lewis R. 2022. 'Building trust in policing through arts collaboration'. University of Warwick.

Hodgson J and Lewis R. 2023. ['Policing, culture and community: West Midlands Police as City of Culture partners'](#). University of Warwick.

Lewis R and Hodgson J. 2023. 'Police engagement with and through the arts: an innovative approach to building trust and confidence?' Policing Insight.

Hodgson J and Lewis R. 2023. 'Arts-based interventions for building trust in policing. Arts Professional.

Hodgson J. and Lewis R. 2024 (forthcoming). 'Arts and policing: imagining new approaches to police community relationships.' In Asquith NL and others, eds, Routledge International Handbook on Critical Policing.

[Further information about the project](#)

Tags

- [Operational policing](#)