YourPolice.UK – a digital youth engagement programme

A national digital youth engagement programme to provide safeguarding tools for children and young people who use social media.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Independently evaluated
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Digital, data and analytics
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Region	London
Partners	Police Education Government department Private sector Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2018
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The aims of YourPolice.UK are to:

- provide children and young persons (CYP) with an opportunity to voice their concerns about the police
- build trust and confidence between CYP and the police
- prevent CYP from harm by providing effective safeguarding and referrals
- engage CYP with police and partner agencies
- provide specialist advice and support to policing on delivering effective communications strategies for CYP
- offer access to a repository of information to support local, regional and national CYP engagement

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- increase CYP knowledge of policing and the law
- increase trust and confidence
- increase crime reports from CYP as victims or witnesses
- reduce harms against CYP
- reduce crime committed by CYP

Description

YourPolice.UK Instagram channel

Digital youth engagement, which sits within the Digital Public Contact programme at National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), runs the Instagram channel 'YourPolice.UK'. The page covers a wide range of subject areas across policing, the law, social and youth issues, safeguarding and online harms. The team posts new content seven days per week, every week of the year.

The content includes getting police officers and staff to talk about their roles through different means to humanise policing such as:

- question and answer videos using questions submitted by the public
- filming in forces, doing 'a day in the life' videos

The team provides training programmes and monthly workshops, such as training how to film yourself, for police officers and staff that wish to contribute to the channel.

In addition, the team engages with all inbound contact from young people, including replying to comments posted in response to daily posts and private direct messages (DMs). The team monitors the channel and responds to such contact 12 hours a day – from 9am to 9pm – seven days a week. Engagement can include:

- answering questions, such as on police procedures, child sexual abuse material, drugs and legislation
- correcting mis- or disinformation
- directing people to further reading or resources
- referring people on to support services and/or local police reporting and contact services

The team, therefore, provide a resource for CYP to contact the police after schools have closed and when school officers and teachers are not available, thereby increasing operational capacity. The digital youth programme team believes much of its demand would otherwise be hidden, as CYP would not necessarily contact policing without the platform.

The team refers high-risk or high-harm contact to the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) Contact Centre Digidesk team for further referral, location finding and resource allocation.

At the end of every engagement, the team logs the contact type (for example, question, crime report, and so on) and contact theme (for example, if it was a question, what it was about). The team analyses sentiment at the start and end of each engagement to determine if there was any change in sentiment. This has built up a large data resource detailing the issues, questions, understanding and experiences of crime and policing that CYP across the UK have. An anonymised version of this data will be made available to any interested policing and external partners to help improve their understanding via analysis and insights dashboards within Knowledge Hub. The digital youth programme team also published bi-monthly newsletters.

Other programme offerings

The programme uses paid promotions on Instagram and Meta to make sure important posts reach young people (under 18 years) in specific areas. This is achieved through:

- target boosting: posts are shown to young people in chosen locations, like a town or region, so they are more likely to see and engage with them
- extra engagement: if a post already has likes or comments, boosting it helps even more young people notice and interact with it
- focused messaging: partners can send tailored messages to young people in their area
- detailed reporting: after the posts are boosted, the programme provides reports showing how many accounts saw the post, how many people interacted with it and useful feedback from the campaign

The YourPolice.UK team has also created an archive of over 1,000 CYP-friendly social media-ready digital assets for policing and related partners. The assets include videos, graphics, and images for sharing via Instagram. The assets are in the public domain and can be accessed via the YourPolice.UK content library (registration required).

The programme has also created a library of relevant research publications, data and insights into all aspects of CYP engagement, youth issues and digital and real-world safety, available from the same website.

Youth advisory group

Digital youth programme also coordinates a youth advisory group (YAG). The YAG runs monthly themed cycles of activities. Each week they organise an activity based on the theme. This

culminates in a live online event where the team asks questions and has discussions with members. These discussions are also used to gauge opinion on their output and their experiences of various aspects of life, policing and social issues. Recruitment for the events happens through the channel, at events or through youth sector partners.

For example, the YAG has done work focused on sextortion. This involved running a large national survey and running focus groups to determine if people felt access to information about sextortion would help prevent it from happening to them. The research also included gathering feedback on:

- examples of YourPolice.uk content
- understanding people's previous knowledge of sextortion
- understanding what influence the YourPolice.uk content would have had on their lives

The YAG is currently still running surveys, when other pressing subject areas are identified.

Resources

The programme is currently staffed by:

- programme lead
- digital engagement officer
- digital engagement assistant
- content production officer

The team also has 0.2 of a full-time equivalent of a strategic engagement lead.

The programme is funded by Home Office grant as part of the Digital Public Contact programme at the NPCC. In addition to staffing costs, funding covers:

- software (content creation: Adobe Creative Suite, Canva; digital asset management: Canto SMMP: Sprinklr; project management: Monday.com) (approximative annual costs £25,000 to £30,000)
- paid advertising with Meta to grow the reach and target CYP (approximative monthly costs: £2,500 to £3,000)

Partnership

At a national level the programme has partnered with:

- the child sexual exploitation taskforce
- the national policing vulnerability knowledge and practice programme (VKPP)
- the hydrant programme (a national policing programme supporting the work of the NPCC protection and abuse investigation working group)
- NPCC communications
- Operation Sceptre, knife crime taskforce
- NPCC anti-social behaviour, roads, body-worn video, and stop and search portfolios

The team also has a close relationship with the University College London (UCL) criminology department.

The majority of these partnerships involve working with partners to:

- determine what their comms priorities are with CYP
- produce appropriate content to address those messaging needs
- post and boost that content
- report back to the relevant partners with AI from those campaigns.

At a local level, the programme has also partnered with a range of teams across multiple forces, (such as corporate comms, to neighbourhoods, prevention, CYP, schools, roads, violence reduction units and violence prevention partnerships) to deliver specific messaging to under 18s in specific geographic areas. This can be either force areas, or down to city or town areas.

Digital youth programme also asks for data and insights from partners to help inform their content and engagement strategies and highlight important themes and potential blind spots in messaging. Similarly, they also feed any AI back to those partners. This may help to highlight particular themes, questions, experiences and crime types that CYP are experiencing in partners force areas.

The team is also doing a big push to partner with organisations they can refer young people to for support.

Evaluation

A consultancy firm (Firetail) was commissioned to conduct an [evaluation report of YourPolice.UK](), which took place from April 2024 to November 2024.

Evaluation methods included the following.

- Desk research: evaluated data from the engagement dashboard to understand engagement with policing. This also included a literature review on drivers of trust from CYP in young people.
- One-on-one interviews: 27 interviews with representatives from police forces, YourPolice.uk partners, CYP experts and academics to understand perception of YPUK and its impact. Policing representatives included various levels of seniority and specialism, including senior officers, front-line officers, national leads and subject matter experts.
- A focus group with ten young people (aged 13 to 16 years) without prior experience of using the platform. Participants were recruited through the youth organisation Leaders Unlocked.

Desk research findings

During the evaluation period, the platform had responded to 1,499 questions across 69 themes.

50% of the questions asked related to:

- police procedure
- drugs
- cars and driving
- joining the police
- the criminal justice system and legislation
- legal ages
- knife crime

The evaluation report suggests that the following qualities can promote CYP trust in policing:

- an ability to listen and treat CYPs and individuals
- being welcoming and friendly
- being caring and understanding
- not being dismissive or patronising, or likely to trivialise concerns
- being non-judgemental and respecting CYPs views
- having time to build a trusting relationship

- being competent, experienced, and qualified

Interview findings

Barriers to youth engagement reported by interviewees were consistent with those identified in the desk research, including:

- negative personal experiences
- historical distrust
- inconsistent approaches
- communication disconnect

The interviews showed that the YourPolice.UK channel is seen as a valuable asset because of:

- two-way engagement
- insight into youth concerns
- information gathering abilities
- deep audience understanding
- bridging communication gaps
- potential for wider impact

Focus group findings

- Young people felt the account is helpful, especially for those who might struggle to talk to parents or teachers about certain issues.
- There was acknowledgment that the channel is consistent in its responses, which some saw as a positive aspect of their engagement strategy as it creates a sense of connection with the people behind the account.
- However, young people were conscious of the issues affecting their age group that are not covered, and feel there is a disconnect or lack of balance in content curation.

For detailed findings, please see the full evaluation report.

Overall impact

During the evaluation period, around 3 to 5% of all contacts sent to the channel were reports of crime. These were referred to local forces or handed directly through the MPS Contact Centre Digidesk.

The page reaches on average 300,000 unique accounts per month. Meta does not provide engagement data from users under the age of 18 years, therefore the evaluation was unable to research who the content was reaching.

Although difficult to quantify, the programme could lead to a reduction in harm.

Learning

Overall learning

- Priority - CYP engagement has traditionally been a 'nice-to-have' extra rather than a priority. The digital youth programme team has been making the case for the benefits of getting 'upstream' to save resourcing 'downstream'.
- Buy-in - it has been a challenge to get engagement in some areas from some teams across policing. Corporate comms have been the most difficult teams to work closely with across all forces, although some have been enthusiastic and proactive partners. This could be because of resourcing (people feel too busy to add extra elements to their workflow), 'parochialism' (not understanding how a national offering helps them), lack of understanding or priority given to CYP engagement, lack of knowledge of impact-led engagement.
- Funding - the team is currently housed at Digital Public Contact and are funded by a Home Office grant, so they currently have a relatively stable funding model. The team is working to stabilise this further and develop a sustainable model soon.
- Replication - the team is trying to encourage forces to use their services centrally, to ensure a nationally consistent service for young people. Having said that, they do offer advice to forces who want to attempt to develop something similar (although they are aware that they usually will not have the resources to dedicate a CYP-specific engagement channel(s)). DYP is keen to emphasise that the key element of their activity is the engagement aspect, such as making sure that all contact from CYP is engaged with for at least 12 hours per day, 7 days per week. The team's offer is to do that on behalf of forces, but then feed into them when there are local questions or crime reporting.

- Risk - there is an inherent risk of disclosure of harm or risk from CYP when the team does not know their location or ID. This has been resolved by partnering with Met Contact Centre Digidesk.
- National implementation and placement - it has taken some time to define how the team can work locally as a national platform. It has been difficult to find a permanent 'home' for the programme at a national level.

Evaluation report recommendations

Recommendations from the evaluation report were delivered under three headings.

As a channel for young people:

- expand to alternative platforms: explore TikTok, Discord, and emerging platforms popular with youth – with resources appropriate to achieve this, the team is currently planning to expand to other platforms
- tailor content strategies for each platform's unique characteristics: this will have resource implications in itself – in other words, content for Instagram does not 'lift-and-shift' to other platforms
- explore more reporting routes and referral pathways for young victims of crime
- continue to build YPUK's network of youth advocates to provide insights and feedback

As a service for policing:

- grow the visibility of the offering: develop a clear service catalogue detailing all offerings with case studies demonstrating successful implementations; continue to implement a user-friendly portal for forces to access services - this is a continuous process
- continue and communicate evidence-based content: create a comprehensive repository of good practices in CYP communication
- facilitate cross-force sharing of successful CYP engagement strategies
- grow access to the analytics dashboard: communicate the analytics tool for forces to track engagement metrics, to provide insights on trending topics and emerging youth concerns

As a national subject matter expert:

- continue to share insight on CYP needs, best practice in CYP engagement – within and beyond policing

- provide training programmes for police officers on digital youth engagement
- partnership and referral pathways: strengthen relationships with youth support organisations; develop a comprehensive referral system for non-police interventions

Ways to tackle the issues above are currently being considered by the digital youth programme team or are in development.

These recommendations all point to the main underlying issue with the programme - resourcing. While it was noted that the programme achieves a high level of output and reach for the size of the team, it is clear that other platforms could be used to extend that reach. Another improvement could be an extension of operating hours to cover out of hours contact. Both of these improvements would require a modest increase in team size, which is currently being scoped.

Another issue highlighted in the report was 'visibility' of the programme within policing and across partner organisations. This continues to be addressed by maintaining a presence across policing areas of business, and resourcing boosts and programme growth will help to increase the profile, but it is noted that this is not an issue unique to this programme.

This issue has been addressed through:

- constant engagement across government, academia, the youth sector, national policing groups, portfolios, committees, task forces and working groups
- presence at events and conferences, engagement with forces and regional boards where possible
- monthly updates sent out to a growing mailing list of stakeholders and partners, a governance board made up of advocates from across policing
- articles in Policing Insight and other sector publications, contributions to parliamentary select committees

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