

CO-DESIGNING SOCIALLY JUST JUSTICE WITH 18-25 YEAR OLDS

BACKGROUND

Young adults aged 18-25 are caught in a liminal space between child and adult systems in which they do not receive the special protections afforded to children nor the opportunities and entitlements that the majority of adults expect and receive.

This is particularly evident within the justice system whereby young adults are treated as adults, yet are still developing the physical, emotional and social maturity to assess risks, consider consequences, make decisions or fully understand and participate in justice processes. Subsequently, young adults are overrepresented in the justice system, experience poorer outcomes and are more likely to be reconvicted.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What particular challenges do young adults in conflict with the law face?
- 2) What supports are available to young adults in conflict with the law?
- 3) What does social justice look and feel like to young adults?



PARTICIPANTS

13 young adults aged 18-25 with experience of the justice system (three workshops with two sessions per workshop)

8 justice professionals (one workshop)

METHODOLOGY

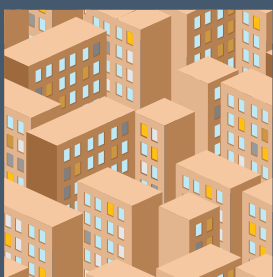
Creative collaboration using design-led approaches.

CHALLENGE: responding to COVID-19 restrictions

SOLUTION: A 'workshop-in-a-box'. A hybrid approach with offline materials and online synchronous engagement via Zoom. Taking into consideration key issues such as digital accessibility, privacy, engagement, tone, pace etc.



FINDINGS



THE 'STREET'

The community was a central theme, either as a factor in becoming in conflict with the law, or as a barrier to desistance and reintegration.

Young adults described multiple, persistent and prolonged challenges in their communities, where 'the street' was an unsafe place to be because of community violence, peer pressure, substance use and cultural norms. Loss, bereavement and grief were also dominant experiences, that the young adults linked to their involvement in offending behaviours and to reduced health and wellbeing.



THE POLICE

Relationships with 'the Polis' were particularly fraught, with young adults feeling targeted and discriminated against because of who they were or what they wore. Despite these challenging relationships, the police were also identified as a key component of social justice, by having the potential to provide a protective and supportive relationship in a new socially just community.

"They all ken all the faces and if you are known to the Police they just target you all the time...they just jump out the car and get in your face and that and try and get you to kick off wi them".

"Whilst we're supposed to treat people in a kind of person-centred way, I don't think we're always very good at doing that. We want to put people into nice neat little boxes..."

THE SUPPORTS

Young adults found it difficult to find accessible and welcoming spaces in their communities for fun, purposeful activity or support. Professionals also identified that young adults did not fit easily into services for children or adults, describing the transition as a 'cliff edge' between often inflexible services.



A SOCIALLY JUST FUTURE

There was synergy between the young adults' and justice professionals' perspectives. From these we distilled the key components of social justice for young adults in conflict with the law, that included:

- Feeling safe and protected
- Fair and equal treatment; a level playing field
- Person-centred, timely and holistic support, across the life course
- (Justice) responses that help and don't harm
- Easy access to essential public services
- Restorative relationships
- Opportunities and alternatives, 'pathways out'.