

Developing creative methodologies: using lyric writing to capture young peoples' experiences of the Youth Offending Services during the Covid19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT:

The Covid19 lockdowns (2020-2021) disrupted all aspects of usual functions of the Criminal Justice System, the outcomes and impact of which are largely still unknown. The pandemic affected individuals across the wider society, this includes the social circumstances of young people involved within Youth Offending Services (YOS) (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2020; Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2021). This population is frequently drawn from marginalised circumstances and rarely given the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the services they are involved in.

This paper outlines a creative methodology and method used to uncover the experiences and perceptions of the young people undergoing an order within a YOS during the Covid19 lockdowns. The arts-based approach entailed a novel and creative method using an artist to engage with young people through a virtual platform, supporting them to devise lyrics which captured their perceptions and experiences of the YOS during this time.

The artist developed a successful rapport with young people based on familiarity with and passion for, music. He promoted their strength, improving their confidence which was perceived to elicit more in-depth perspectives that might not have otherwise been obtained using more traditional methods. As such, the method and methodology outlined developed the young peoples social and communicative skills whilst producing meaningful feedback that can contribute to the YOS recovery plan and thus future of the service.

CUST_RESEARCH_LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS__(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This paper reports on a novel arts-based research methodology, implemented to capture meaningful data from participants during the Covid19 pandemic.

CUST_SOCIAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This paper reports on a novel arts-based research methodology, implemented to capture meaningful data from participants during the Covid19 pandemic.

Developing creative methodologies: using lyric writing as a method to capture young peoples' experiences of the Youth Offending Services during the Covid19 pandemic

Abstract (250 words)

Purpose

The Covid19 lockdowns ~~of (2020-2021)~~ disrupted all aspects ~~and of~~ usual functioning of the Criminal Justice System, the outcomes and impact of which are largely still unknown. The pandemic has affected individuals across the wider society, ~~this includes but has been found to~~ negatively impact on the social circumstances of children and young people involved within Youth Offending Services (YOS) (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2020; Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2021). This population frequently represent those from marginalised circumstances and are rarely given the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the services they are involved in.

Design/methodology/approach

This paper outlines a creative methodology and method used to uncover the experiences and perceptions of young people undergoing an order within a YOS during the Covid19 lockdowns. The arts-based approach entailed a novel and creative method using a lyric artist to engage with young people through a virtual platform, supporting them to create lyrics about their experiences of the YOS during this time.

Findings

~~It was found that t~~The artist developed a successful rapport with young people based on, familiarity with, and passion for, music. ~~and h~~He promoted their strengths, improving their confidence which was perceived to elicit more in-depth perspectives that might ~~not~~ have otherwise been obtained using more traditional methods. As such, the method and methodology outlined developed ~~their~~ ~~the young people's~~ social and communicative skills whilst producing meaningful feedback that can contribute to the YOS recovery plan and thus future of the service.

Originality

This paper reports on a novel arts-based research methodology, implemented to capture meaningful data from participants during the Covid19 pandemic.

Art-based activities and the Criminal Justice system

Creative, art-based activities and projects have an established and complex history of work within the Criminal Justice System (Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2012). However, the arts, and particularly music-based projects, have been recognised for the associated benefits that they provide to individuals in the Criminal Justice System (Caulfield, 2012; Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008; Henley, Caulfield, Wilson and Wilkinson, 2012; Wilkinson and Caulfield, 2017). Specifically, in the prison environment, the arts have been linked with a “humanising experience” (Allen, Shaw and Hall, 2004) providing a platform to develop key skills (Wilkinson and Caulfield, 2017) that in the long-term lead to better educational achievements and improved self-confidence, social skills and personal development, seemingly increasing self-esteem, communication skills, and self-worth (Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008; Miles and Clarke, 2006). There is also evidence to suggest, that art-based activities help to support individuals with managing anger and aggression (Blacker, Watson and Beech, 2008; Wilkinson and Caulfield, 2017), and for prisoners, potentially helps working towards a non-offending future (Bilby, Caulfield and Ridley, 2013; Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008). Arts and spiritual interventions, as opposed to interventions based on psychology, training or education, provide an “alternative terrain” or pathway through the Criminal Justice System (Parkes and Bilby, 2010; Caulfield, Wilkinson and Wilson, 2016).

The governing bodies of the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales have acknowledged the need to address responsiveness and diversity issues (Ministry of Justice, 2013; National Offender Management Services, 2012) and there has been greater consideration and recognition for the use and role of art-based activities in this setting (Ministry of Justice, 2010) especially when working with individuals with certain needs, such as low literacy levels, that may otherwise be reluctance to engage with the system or interventions (Caulfield, Wilkinson & Wilson 2016). Plant and Dixon (2019), in the National Criminal Justice Art Alliance report, make the case that art-based activities in the Criminal Justice System can help with individuals redefining themselves, engagement in the system, self-management and communication with others, increasing the likelihood of individuals engaging with other opportunities, positive experiences and opportunities for individuals to reconnect with family and friends.

The Arts and Youth Offending Service

The Youth Justice System (YJS) is concerned with those aged 10-17 years. Youth Offending Services (YOS) are multiagency, community-based and statutory teams that work with children and young people with the aim of diverting them away from crime. Children and young people involved ~~within~~ with the YOS' are frequently considered to be 'vulnerable' and ~~are~~ drawn from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds ~~and have~~ with a range of 'important, interdependent, and interrelated needs' ~~of young people~~ (YJB, 2020a: 2). Practitioners working within the YOS regularly assess their needs to focus on interventions to promote the best outcomes for children and young people. This is a complex role that requires the involvement of a range of services (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2020).

In these settings, children and young peoples' voices are frequently marginalised. Art-based research with this population has sought to explore their relations, understanding, and lived experiences. Dodsley and Gray (2021) engaged young people about their emotional responses to crime through drama-based sessions and focus groups. The research has highlighted criminological issues of labelling, social construction of crime, political economy, gender, and crime and provided a space for participants to articulate damaging representations of themselves within modern cultures. Music-based activities have been used with children and young people in lots of domains and services with success, for example, those who are homeless (Kelly, 2017), hard-to-reach (Millar et al., 2020) and involved within the ~~y~~ Youth ~~j~~ Justice ~~s~~ System (Smithson and Jones, 2021), with noted benefits to health and wellbeing of those who participate (Daykin et al., 2017).

The health and wellbeing issues often experienced by those in the Youth Justice System are said to stem from poverty and disadvantage, which in turn links with offending and reoffending behaviour (Daykin et al., 2017). Participatory music programmes foster social reintegration, support mental health and wellbeing, equipping children and young people with life skills, competencies, and emotional resilience. Caulfield et al., (2020) have documented the benefits that art-based activities have for children and young people who are in contact with YOS. They found that those involved in music-based activities were more likely to attend YOS appointments, along with statistically significant improvements in self-reported wellbeing and music ability. It is more widely evidenced that participation in

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3 art-based activities increases confidence and social skills in those individuals connected with
4 the Criminal Justice System (Anderson et al., 2011; Baker and Homan, 2007; Bilby et al.,
5 2013; Bruce, 2015; Cheliotis and Jordanoska, 2016; Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008; Van Maanen,
6 2010). The evidence supporting the benefits is mainly with adult prisoners, whilst the
7 evidence supporting the benefits for children and young people in the criminal justice
8 system is still emerging.
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15 The YJB (2020b) acknowledged the operational challenges of delivery and provision during
16 the pandemic. Whilst the operation of services continued, practitioners had to move to
17 working from home, limiting face-to-face contact to only those deemed to be 'highest risk'.
18 This impacted upon communication with children and young people during the lockdown
19 periods which brought about further challenges and significant disruption for the YOS.
20 Offices remained open for emergency assistance only, judgements of which were made on
21 individuals risks and needs (Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2021).
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29 Changes to support networks and isolation exacerbated existing difficulties and welfare
30 problems for those involved within YOS' (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2020;
31 Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2021).
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36 Method and Methodology

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39 The overall research project sought to understand the implications of the Covid-19
40 pandemic for practitioners and young people involved with the YOS, to inform the current
41 and future developments of the service. Therefore, this study was underpinned by three core
42 aims:
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- 46 • First, to generate knowledge about how YOS have adapted to the required changes
47 and the impacts that the new ways of working have had upon communication and
48 relationships between practitioners and young people
- 49 • Second, to offer distinctive and timely insights into new ways of working and the
50 implications of the changes during the pandemic upon young people and their
51 sentences
- 52 • Third, to draw conclusions and to offer recommendations to inform the development
53 of coordinated best practice which can assist services and inform future policy.
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5 This research has value for the YOT who are required to submit recovery plans to the Youth
6 Justice Board (2020c) about their responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic and to the young
7 people who participated. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article
8 12 and Children's Act 1989 outline the importance of children and young peoples'
9 participation and views upon key aspects of their lives. This approach has subsequently
10 been adopted in policy and academic literature. Becko (2014: 3) argues that youth
11 participation includes a diverse range of approaches including but not limited to "youth
12 consultation - asking young people what they think about activity, policy or issues but not
13 necessarily involving them in making changes" and "youth voice -giving young people a say
14 on activities, services and policy". To achieve the research aims with a participatory focus, it
15 was felt that engaging young people through a creative, arts-based participatory method,
16 would allow for greater expression of experiences from this population from a bottom up
17 rather than top-down perspective that might not otherwise be obtained through more
18 traditional methods such as interviews.
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31 Traditional methods of engaging participants and collecting valuable data has huge
32 limitations when used with 'hard to reach groups' and disadvantaged young people
33 (Boneyski et al., 2014). Livingstone *et al.*, (2014: 286), argue that participatory approaches
34 to ~~the~~ research ~~aims to~~ 'shift the objective of doing research "on youth" to doing research
35 "with youth". For young people involved in the YOS', who ~~may~~ struggle with aspects of
36 communication, creative methods "that draw on inventive and imaginative processes"
37 (Veale, 2005: 254) can improve their skills along with their confidence and self-esteem
38 (Daykin et al., 2017; Millar et al., 2020). Creative methods can be more inviting and
39 accessible for marginalised populations to employ a dialogue that resonates with their
40 experiences (Millar et al., 2020). The use of lyric based methods was chosen as it was
41 assumed young people may have a relationship with music allowing them to make a
42 connection to the research, ~~and~~ become more confident expressing themselves (Kelly,
43 2017).
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57 Van der Vaart et al., (2018) further supports creative and art-based research methodologies
58 and argues that they are valuable because they generate deep insight into lived experiences
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3 and views. Such an approach “has significant potential for the enactment of social change in
4 youth justice settings” (Smithson and Gray, 2021: 6). Furthermore, creative, participatory,
5 and art-based methodologies offer opportunities and ways to ‘give back’ to a community or
6 group, allowing them to develop and achieve, as well as potentially motivating a community
7 or group of individuals. The Youth Justice Board (2018) advocate a child first approach and
8 have a participatory strategy (Youth Justice Board, 2016) which outlines the importance of
9 ensuring that young people's voices are heard, respected and seriously listened to.

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16 Smithson and Gray (2021) however, argue that this has not been sufficiently adopted in
17 research and youth justice practice should be collaborative. This requires an approach to
18 research that begins from the position of the young people rather than the researcher.
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27 Policy centred on children and young people frequently lacks consideration of those it intends
28 to support. Assumptions based on what officials presume is required to ‘fill gaps’ in service
29 provision is not always the most beneficial. ~~For~~ Groundwater-Smith *et al.*, (2015: 62) maintain
30 ‘reporting children and young people’s voices often involve adults making some judgements
31 about interpretations’. This is supported by Reason (1994: 10) who argues “we can only
32 understand our world as a whole if we are part of it; as soon as we attempt to stand outside,
33 we divide and separate”. Research projects are often developed without incorporating and
34 respecting the views of participants. They follow an agenda that assumes by simply
35 ‘participating’, the voices of children and young people have been captured effectively. It
36 would be inadequate to simply assume that in offering young people a voice to instigate
37 change, their participation will be forthcoming. The trust of children and young people take
38 time to build (Greenwood and Levin, 1998) and can be damaged by our tendency as
39 researchers to profess we are the experts. Therefore, this research involved a creative,
40 participatory approach to data collection.
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As online technologies have developed, including the internet and greater bandwidth, new
online provisions and technologies, have allowed for virtual platforms to support
methodological developments for data collection (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2017).

Design

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3 The methods ~~were~~ adopted were developed to draw on the young people's direct
4 experiences of the Covid19 pandemic whilst completing an order with the YOS. Participatory
5 approaches to research, recognise the need to accommodate different learning styles, as
6 well as promoting engagement. The research team collaborated with a second YOS₂ based in
7 a different county₂ to capture young people of different demographics. ~~This which has~~
8 allowed for the recruitment of more participants. Subsequent changes to the research₂ as
9 outlined here₂ received ethical approval in advance.
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17 The project adopted an innovative lyric writing session, facilitated by a creative artist, and
18 hosted on a virtual platform (Microsoft Teams). On a voluntary basis, the young people
19 were invited to take part in the session. The artist was ~~prepped-briefed~~ by the research
20 team about the aims of the project, and they designed an activity to focus and enhance the
21 lyric writing session. This method was developed to promote an approach that would
22 accurately ~~represent-capture their-the young peoples~~ experiences, perceptions and
23 thoughts whilst completing their order₂ during the Covid19 pandemic. Additional funding
24 from the University of Chester QR fund 2020/21 ~~has been was sought and~~ approved to
25 support dissemination by providing the young people with the chance to record and
26 produce their lyrics into an audio track.
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36 *Participants*

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38 There are 157 YOS teams across local authorities² (Smithson et al., 2021), however, they are
39 fragmented (Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2021). This study spanned across two YOS²
40 within different counties and therefore sought to understand the experiences of two
41 demographically different areas in line with the research aims.
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47 Participants were recruited via the two YOS² that had agreed to participate in this study.
48 Ethical approval (as outlined below) was granted for recruitment of participants aged 15 and
49 over, although both services involve younger individuals. All participants were currently
50 serving an order with the YOS at the time that they were recruited to participate in the lyric
51 writing sessions. The young people were able to read about the study and discuss the study
52 with their YOS worker or a member of the research team prior to deciding whether to take
53 part. Initially, young people were recruited via a gatekeeper within the YOS who shared the
54 participant information sheet and consent form with them by email. However, this
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3 approach to recruitment was ~~not successful~~ limited, as we did not recruit as many young
4 people as anticipated, and therefore the methods of recruitment were revised. It was
5 ~~important to revise the methods~~. Gatekeepers continued to inform young people about
6 stage one of the project, ~~instead~~ and directed ~~the~~ ing young people to a Microsoft Form site
7 which provided them with a short Survey. The is link to this form ~~could be~~ was shared by
8 text/WhatsApp ~~and~~, outlined the participant information and obtained consent more
9 efficiently. The form also provided the opportunity to collate additional data about their
10 perceptions and experiences of YOS before inviting them to the lyrics writing session should
11 they wish to participate. Importantly, it could be accessed via their mobile phones – a
12 means ~~in~~ by which they could otherwise engage with their YOS worker and order.
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23 *Ethics*

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26 Ethical approval was received by the University of Chester Institute of Policing. The
27 application was revised on two occasions, firstly, to allow for the inclusion of those aged
28 from 15 rather than 16 years as it was felt by the original YOS that this may increase
29 participation. Despite this amendment, there were still challenges presented in recruiting
30 young people and the opportunity arose to recruit from another-an additional YOS. This
31 allowed us to widen the parameters of the research to include a broader representation of
32 demographics. The artist and the research team completed DBS checks prior to the
33 research beginning.
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42 The sessions themselves had to be virtual due to social distancing measures. These sessions
43 were held in a private Microsoft Teams meeting between the young person, the artist and a
44 member of the research team who was present in the background at all sessions. Whilst the
45 young person was aware of the research team member's presence, they remained muted
46 with camera off to avoid ~~providing~~ any distraction. After discussing the second stage of the
47 research with a member of the research team and providing consent, the young people
48 were informed that the session would not be recorded but they would be requested to
49 share their anonymised lyrics at the end of the session with a member of the research team.
50 Fieldwork notes were also captured by a member of the research team present on the call
51 and are cited to demonstrate techniques used by the artist to engage with participants. The
52 young people were given a £20 E-voucher as a thank you for their participation.
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Materials and Process

Microsoft Forms Survey

Participant information sheets and consent forms (initially shared via email but later through a Microsoft Forms) included contact information for the research team should the young people have any questions. This survey was set up to gather the initial views of the young people about their experience of engaging with the YOS during the Covid19 pandemic and social distancing requirements. The Microsoft Form was developed and saved in accordance with measures to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Once completed, the young people were invited to share contact information, e.g., mobile phone number or email address, with the researchers if they were interested in participating in the project.

Virtual lyric writing session

The lyric writing sessions were between one and two hours in duration and co-delivered by the artist and young people. When the young people entered the space, there was no pre-set structure to the sessions. The format of the session was prompted by the information the young person shared with the artist within informal rapport building conversation. This ensured sessions were led on an individual basis by the young people, featuring aspects of their lives important to them, thus promoting a bottom-up rather than top-down perspective (Poplewell and Hayman, 2012). To facilitate the lyric writing, the artist used an open reflection activity to capture how the young people viewed themselves and how they think others perceive them, followed by a word generation exercise and then devising the lyrics.

The artist was closer in age to participants than the research team and spent time getting to know the young people before moving into the main session (typically around 30 minutes). The artist instantly built a rapport by asking questions that were not too probing and establishing areas of shared interest or identity, for example, music, names, family background etc., and in doing so, the young people were responsive and interacted with the artist on a more personal than professional level. The research took place across two YOS', one was close in locality to the artist and so familiarity was established more quickly in these sessions due to common geographical references. This was also typically because the

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3 artist had links with the YOS in this location and some of the young people had previously
4 attended a music studio to work on music with the artist's manager.
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8 The trust and rapport building was ~~significant-important, and~~ allowinged the young people
9 to take ownership of the conversation and participation in activities. The artist was
10 empathetic and would also share information about himself such as where he grew up or his
11 family. As such, he adopted a role-model stance (Creaney, 2020). The artist engaged the
12 young people by using slang and was familiar with slang terms used by young people such as
13 "peng". The level of familiarity created more of a peer like level interaction, removing an
14 authoritative stance, unlike other typical relationships that the young people experience in
15 their lives (e.g., YOS workers and professionals). This removed the hierarchies of power,
16 allowing the artist to be 'on a level' with young people. Despite the researchers experience
17 with this population, social differences, and power imbalances frequently evident in
18 research may have inhibited the responses. By engaging them with an activity they were
19 passionate about, the young people were able to express themselves and lead the narrative
20 in a way that was meaningful to them. In addition to engaging young people, this
21 demonstrated a desire to respect and capture their social reality, personality, and identity
22 (Drummond, 2018). Taking time to learn about the young people, their likes, interests, and
23 experiences whilst relaying his own, broke down systematic hierarchies often present within
24 research and criminal justice settings (Smithson and Gray, 2021).
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40 The artist asked the young people about their music preferences, this was frequently a
41 common ground as it already formed part of their day to day lives (Smithson and Jones,
42 2021). With all the young people, the artist recognised and was aware of their music
43 interests discussing artists and genres that they were interested in. At times he would
44 search for music they recommended on YouTube and listen to it – having a shared
45 experience of the music and demonstrating a willingness to listen to and learn from the
46 young people. The conversation flowed freely and allowed the artist to introduce the
47 research to the young people by highlighting their approach to lyric writing. The young
48 people connected with this by being open and honest about personal experiences in their
49 lyrics. The following part of the session involved the artist asking the young people about
50 their experiences of YOS, such as how often they had appointments and how they found
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3 them. In these interactions, the young people often resorted to short, one-word answers.
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5 Reverting to the dialogue at the beginning of the meeting, the artist would probe them in a
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7 jovial and relaxed manner with more open questions. At this point, as the rapport was
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9 established, the young people would elaborate on their responses. When the artist moved
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11 the session onto the lyric writing he reminded the young people that he was interested in
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13 their perspectives and feelings. He encouraged them to articulate their experiences:

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15 *Fieldwork notes: 'It's just talking about your life, you know, talking about yourself,*
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17 *but if you can, talk about your experience with the YOT, how they've helped you, just*
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19 *an honest point of view about how they've helped you in what way, if they've helped*
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21 *you'.*

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24 Where the young people showed hesitation or uncertainty, the artist guided them through
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26 the lyric writing process by continuing to ask them questions about themselves. The artist
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28 also mentioned he was dyslexic apologising for the time it took him to write, another
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30 common ground often established between him and the young people. The rapport built
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32 through this exercise allowed the artist, in some cases, to recognise some of the
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34 frustrations of the young people:

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37 *Artist: 'You're smiling because I think it looks that you've got some good ideas'.*
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39 *CYP4: 'I've got loads for the outside, but for the inside I've got nothing [...] If you go*
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41 *back to high school, I can give you loads of stereotypes people gave me'.*

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44 Taking the approach of being empathic and encouraging towards the young people
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46 encouraged an authentic relationship between them (Creaney, 2020) and moved away from
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48 processes of stigma this population are frequently subject to (Deakin, Fox and Matos, 2020).
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50 This better facilitated the co-produced data. The young people were not asked to share
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52 anything personal within this session but at times would share personal information about
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54 drug use, offences and family circumstances. The artist did not endorse negative
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56 behaviours, nor condemn them. Instead, he sought to reassure and inspire them,
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58 highlighting positive aspects in their skills and passions, often also drawing on his
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60 experiences of working with individuals in prisons:

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5 *Fieldwork notes: 'There's guys like you; they go through what you're going through,*
6 *but they're banged up, that's why I encourage you to continue with your music, it*
7 *helps you release your stress and that, do you find it helps you when you do music?'*
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12 Some young people relayed their experiences of prison to him, an example of how the
13 empathy had been developed between them through the sessions. Having knowledge of the
14 criminal justice system allowed the artist to identify with the young people and be
15 supportive to encourage positive change (Creaney, 2020). The artist recognised their
16 strengths (Kelly, 2017), for example, resilience which was then framed within the lyrics. This
17 is important as young people within the youth justice system are frequently subject to
18 negative, rather than positive labelling (Deakin, Fox and Matos, 2020; Dodsley and Gray
19 2021).
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29 At times, the young people struggled to identify words and phrases when lyric writing, and
30 there were pauses as they sought to identify an appropriate word. The artist encouraged
31 them by focusing on aspects of their dialogue. For example, if the young people used a
32 particular word or phrase to define their experience, they would support them to find
33 another word that rhymed with it and then work back to devise the line of the lyrics it
34 closed. By making these suggestions, based on their previous discussions, it ensured that the
35 lyrics developed, were authentic to those participating. The artist adopted the slang and
36 language the young people used to ensure the lyrics were authentic to them (Daykin et al.,
37 2017; Caulfield et al., 2020). Throughout, the artist was encouraging, giving them confidence
38 in their writing. They were keen to hear what the young people had written and supported
39 them by stating how talented they were. As the young people produced their lyrics, they
40 were then given the opportunity to choose a beat and practice performing their words.
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52 By this point in the sessions, the artist had gained an understanding of the young peoples'
53 experiences of lyrics writing. As such, they made a judgement about how to support them
54 through the process. At times they would play a backing track to guide them but due to
55 internet connections, this was sometimes affected, requiring young people to find one using
56 YouTube to assist. Some young people were keen to simply write, and they provided a quiet
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space to enable them to do so, at times writing lyrics whilst waiting, again engaging with a shared experience. The artist encouraged the young people by recognising their strengths for identifying their feelings of writing lyrics, this “cultivated young peoples’] self-belief, helping to shape new positive personal and social identities” (Creaney, 2020: 31).

The artist positioned themselves as an advisory figure, to guide them through the process that they ultimately delivered. When one of the young people demonstrated flair for lyric writing, the artist informed them that they were ‘one of the best they had heard’ and was more talented than them at that age. The artist acknowledged their skills and experience and also encouraged ownership in the lyric writing:

Artist: ‘I am going to challenge you, I know you’re used to spitting bars bro but we’re going to write 16 bar [lines]... just an honest point of view about how [YOT have] helped you in what way, if they’ve helped you. I’m going to leave this sheet up as you write the bars to encourage you but it’s for you to write your story’.

The sessions built upon the young peoples’ skills and the artist was vital in building their confidence in lyric writing (Smithson and Jones, 2021). The artist encouraged the young people with their skill and aspiration and built upon this by advising how to write in third person and develop their style. At the end of the session, the young people were asked to share their anonymised lyrics with the research team. They relayed what they had written to the artist who praised their talents using encouraging sounds or colloquial phrases: ‘that’s cold!’ and asked them to repeat it. This process allowed the young people to also recognise their strengths and promote positive growth (Kelly, 2017) which demonstrate the value of arts and music-based approaches with this population.

It was clear that some felt a real sense of achievement by the end of the session, for example, within 20 minutes of one session ending, the young person emailed across the entire song he had written. This was reflected in communications with their YOS workers also:

Fieldwork notes: [CYP6 has] had a bit of trouble at school, resulting in a short-term exclusion. In light of how well [CYP] opened up to [artist], I’d really like to see this through if at all possible.

Manager upon seeking to schedule a future session: [CYP] a good rapper but is really struggling to write something that’s not promoting offending behaviour so I’m hoping a session or two with [artist] will really help.

To ensure the research had a meaningful outcome (Caulfield et al., 2020) for the young people engaged within it, the opportunity to record their work is being explored.

Analysis approach

Goodwin (1994) argues that the interpretation of information in research is dependent on the lens used, and if used incorrectly, it can disempower participants (Radhermacher and Sonn, 2007). It was important that the researchers' lens was not solely used in the project to maintain collaboration. The analysis of data occurred in two stages. The first stage, in an attempt to empower young people, involved the young people reflecting on and analysing the lyrics they had produced. They would read and reaffirm what had been produced, adding meaning and context to the artist when necessary. This ensured that the information produced was authentic to the young people, avoiding inferences and assumptions being made by the researchers. The second stage of analysis was conducted by the researchers. This was important to 'make sense' of the data produced by young people, supporting Groundwater-Smith et al's., (2015) observation that the involvement of young people in the analysis is not always preferable or productive. It is important to note that analysis is based on the research teams' interpretation of the young peoples' lyrics, the artist was consulted to clarify meaning for some of the slang terminology used (see examples of lyrics in the findings section below).

Throughout this research, the young people were granted opportunities to reflect and discuss their lives in ways they had not considered previously. Through a co-produced, participatory approach, the young people participated meaningfully and had the opportunity to construct knowledge that was representative of their experiences. Participatory principles have inspired this work from the outset and the importance of addressing the power imbalance in traditional research processes as well as ensuring the data gathered was authentic to the lives of young people, was important. This research has demonstrated a degree of fluidity in research with young people suggesting participation and emancipation in research as a guideline within which to frame research with young people rather than research on young

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3 people. Therefore, the emancipatory and participatory approach to the research and the
4 involvement of young people from the bottom-up rather than top-down, was achieved.
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8 **Findings / project reflections**

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11 The research approach gave young people a voice in the services that they were involved in
12 and their day to day lives. By engaging them using music and lyric writing, – the research
13 could generate deeper and more authentic responses from the young people that might
14 have otherwise been obtained within a more formal setting of interview with a researcher
15 or YOS workers. This is important, as such an approach seeks to reduce the stigmatising
16 power imbalances keenly felt by young people throughout their lives, not least when
17 involved in statutory services (Deakin, Fox and Matos, 2020; Smithson and Jones, 2021).
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25 Selection of lyrics produced by the young people who took part in the project:
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30 Cyp7: Trust me i'm a rising star roll in a [Mercedes] benz with me and my dog.
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32 Cyp12: I'm only a teen that's trying to chase his dreams, They label me a bad [...] But I
33 get referred to the youth team.
34
35

36
37 Within the sessions, the distance from the YOT, due to the independence and commonality
38 with the artist, meant young people expressed their perceptions of the service:
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41 Cyp10: I know i'm tapped (re YOS), But this is the life I live its mad.
42

43 The lyrics written by the young people demonstrate how the use of arts-based methods
44 allowed them to engage with a positive activity, particularly given their challenging
45 backgrounds:
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47

48 Cyp6: My life is movie, If i told you the shit that i been through [...] I wanna change but
49 i feel like i can't because of my past .
50

51 There was evidence that they continued to struggle with past identities, but the experience
52 allowed them to consider more positive futures:
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56 Cyp5: I remember the days i was always down i couldn't pick up the phone and call no
57 one everybody acting very long now you got me singing this song.
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3 Cyp8: First and foremost I want to thank you, If it wasn't for studio I wouldn't be doing
4 much, I had a rough life.
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7 Cyp9: You gave me some studio time, If it wasn't for that I'd be in some unusual
8 sides.
9

10 It was evident that YOT and subsequent lyric writing research were also considered to be a
11 welcome experience for some young people:
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14 Cyp11: I'm trying to be a real cash earner, Now making music shout out to my YOT
15 worker.
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20 **Research limitations**

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23 Whilst the limitations of participatory research have been highlighted elsewhere, due to the
24 validity of research and resource issues (Kim, 2016), the flexibility of this approach was felt
25 to ~~highlight~~ elicit richer data from the young people whilst also demonstrating to them the value
26 of their perspectives. It has previously been reported that almost half of young people
27 within YOS were found not to have access to digital services or an internet connection,
28 severely disrupting their ability to engage with schooling and the YOS (Criminal Justice Joint
29 Inspectorates, 2021). Regrettably, this issue would have had implications for this research
30 project, impacting upon their opportunity and accessibility to participate in the research
31 during the strictest periods of lockdown. Each YOS could provide data for young people who
32 had suitable devices and when restrictions allowed, gatekeepers facilitated access for young
33 people to complete the session at local authority facilities. Similar to previous studies, at
34 times there were issues with young people not attending sessions, the project team sought
35 to maintain contact with them and provide further opportunities to attend sessions
36 (similarly to Smithson and Jones, 2021 study) this had some success.
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50 **Practical implications**

51 This research highlights the value of using digital and participatory methods with young
52 people for both accessibility and engagement (see Steward and Shamdasani, 2017; Costa,
53 2019). The transition to an online survey, whilst not to reduce the role of the gatekeepers,
54 and allowed for a more direct and accessible means for young people to review participant
55 information and provide their consent. The addition of questions about their experiences,
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3 through this weblink once young people had provided consent the form, allowed for more
4 data collection including from those who did not necessarily wish to be involved with stage
5 two. The research allowed young people to use their voice more so than more traditional
6 methods. The approach taken within this research allowed for young peoples' meaningful
7 participation and influence upon the future of services that they are involved in (Smithson
8 and Jones, 2021). Using creative and participatory methods ensured that the perspectives of
9 the young people participating in the research were central to the knowledge production
10 (Harding, 2020). The methodology engaged with young people in a way that reduced power
11 imbalances (Harding, 2020) and produced data that ensured their narratives became
12 dominant (Crockett Thomas et al., 2021).

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22 During the covid-19 pandemic there were concerns about the loss of services that could be
23 provided for young people (Harris and Goodfellow, 2021; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of
24 Probation, 2020; Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates, 2021). Whilst this research sought to
25 explore the implications of this, in doing so it enabled young people to engage with an
26 activity that might have had numerous social and emotional benefits and as such, provide a
27 coping mechanism (Kelly, 2017) during this challenging time. It also allowed for an
28 additional experience within the YOS which may have promoted young peoples'
29 engagement within (Caulfield et al., 2020) at a time where services were limited. Utilising an
30 artist who could identify with the young people to a greater extent than the research team
31 also created a distinction from the YOS.

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41 By identifying with the young people, their interests and lived experiences, the artist
42 developed a rapport with participants which generated greater insights than would have
43 otherwise been obtained by traditional methods (Van der Vaart et al., 2018). The research
44 approach advocated for a child first approach (YJB, 2018) that focused upon their right to be
45 heard and provide views that would be heard in the services they are involved in. Youth
46 consultation and youth voice (Becko, 2014) was achieved by breaking down power
47 imbalances to generate a sense of an equal and invested relationship (Smithson and Gray,
48 2021). The artist promoted their confidence in lyric writing allowing them to drive the
49 narrative and whilst providing guidance about how to translate their perspectives into lyrics
50 (Daykin et al., 2017; Millar et al., 2020). By using this approach and building understanding
51 of each young persons' individual skills and strengths, the artist captured the experiences of
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3 participants who might otherwise be deterred from services due to low literacy levels
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5 (Caulfield, Wilkinson, and Wilson, 2016).
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7 Wider literature has highlighted the potential for participatory methods used between
8 children and young people and criminal justice agencies might generate positive contact and
9 improve relations (Payne, Hobson, and Lynch, 2020), this research furthers these findings
10 and the value in these approaches which are often overlooked. In addition to building social
11 skills of the young people (Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008; Miles and Clarke, 2006), the research
12 has broader social implications for participants. This was a key feature of the motivation for
13 the research method employed. The researchers intended for the research to capture young
14 peoples' experiences but also provide a positive opportunity for them also. Given those
15 aged under 18 years, particularly within the criminal justice system, find their voices are
16 absent from the policies that affect them, actively disseminating the research in this way
17 seeks to empower participants (Heath et al., 2009). Additional funding received from the
18 University of Chester QR funding provides the opportunity, where possible, for young
19 people (should they wish) to record and share their music as part of the broader
20 dissemination strategy.
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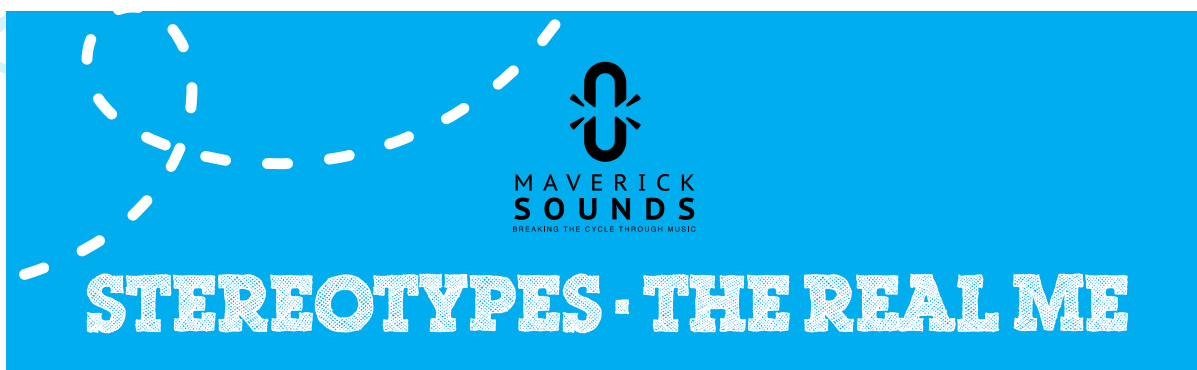
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Appendix 1 – the ‘real me’ activity



Write what people think of you on the outside and the real you on the inside.

A large, simple silhouette of a person is centered on the page. The silhouette is composed of a circular head and a rounded, rectangular body. The text 'The real me' is written in a small, grey font inside the head area. To the left of the head, the text 'Stereotypes (What people think)' is written in a small, grey font. To the right of the head, the text 'Stereotypes (What people think)' is also written in a small, grey font.

NAME