



Gloucestershire Constabulary

ECHOES#2





Neighbourhood Policing Teams and partner agencies in Gloucester took part in a series of workshops in 2017, which focused on a different way of solving problems in communities. Much of this involved focussing on what's good about living in a community and what residents would like to get involved in to build on those strengths. Following the workshops, a small group of agency representatives put into place some of what they have learnt in Coney Hill, Gloucester. In October 2017, the council and some of the PCSOs that work within Coney Hill were interviewed regarding their work to date. Their story is represented in the pages that follow...



We wanted ideas to come up with a project to benefit the Coney Hill community. At the beginning things were a bit hit and miss. We struggled to find partners to help alongside us.

We went to the shops around the schools. We had a meeting with GCH and other organisations up at the Compass centre, I was the council element, but it all seemed to fall by the wayside. There was another meeting before that at Waterwells, a tenants day, a street searched type thing. We turned up to that and they didn't ...

Then there was a meeting with really good attendance across all the agencies.

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A fundamental mistake in making contacts at first was approaching people at the school gates, they were busy trying to get the kids in, they were rushing. Then they're rushing coming out, so there's a massive influx of people and we were only having a meaningful conversation with a few of them. But those small conversations were actually really good and elicited some really powerful answers. Then we tried a different approach where we saw them all together.



That generated some good conversations. They responded more positively to a different questioning style. Starting off with questions, like 'Whats good about this area?' positive led sort of questions. There were times where it was spun around though, it turned into 'What are the police going to do about this?', that type of thing. We did turn it around though, we reined it in and reiterated that we were there to discuss what we could do with the negatives ... perhaps we shouldn't have been in uniform. But yeah, we managed to twist things round.



There was a strong degree of having to be honest and up front about what we were offering. The police are there to do policing, tackling drug dealing and problems with mini motos, things like that. We acknowledged the fact that there were certain things for the police to do, but actually we wanted a conversation about what they wanted to get involved in. The problem that would come was if by putting yourself out there and them telling us stuff, you would still need to fall back on the police thing, if you're given information to act on, such as investigation enforcement. But that's part of the messaging isn't it.



For us, what the message is about is what's sustainable for the community, what can the community do moving forward? Does it require policing? What does that do for us? Should we be doing these nice things that give us a warm glow, or should we actually be going 'The community can do that, we can use our warranted powers to get on and do this'. It's a balance and I think they got that when we said 'We want to support you in doing stuff for yourselves'. People said at the meeting 'When are you gonna do this? When are the council gonna do this? When are the police gonna organise this event?' and we just said to them 'Well no. When are you going to organise it? We can facilitate if you like, we're not going to do it all for you'. So that changed some perceptions. It was really quite challenging at times.



Then we did the World Cafe meeting with the children to get the youth side. Plus we went into school, well . . . I ended up taking two kids out of school and issuing them with ASBO's! But we went into the year six class, asking what they would like to see where they live, what activities would they want to be involved in.

They wanted machine games, they wanted more fast food outlets . . .

but one of the outcomes of both the children and the adults was that the kids needed somewhere to go.



They had a youth club already, but in 2010 funding was pulled, then it slowly kind of stopped. It had been run by an agency called Prospects, not the community. There was one lady, Julie, a youth worker, but she had to cover the whole of the forest area as well as the whole of Gloucester. Prospects were well behind our plans. Initially we were going to do a fun day, so we could see who would be interested in supporting to set up a youth club session. But unfortunately that was a wash out, the weather was bad. But people did turn up. I was on my day off but took my four kids along, had my four year old clearing up litter. Unfortunately somebody had a bereavement which also affected the turn out.



But we had six residents saying 'We're dedicated, this is what we want to do', they met every Thursday at the youth club with Julie to talk about how to run a session, paperwork required and things like that. We had some contact with a chap called Simon who used to be a youth worker but now owns his own company, he offered to provide the insurances needed through his business, so we've had no barriers to cross like that, no costs involved. First aid training is free, because it's volunteering work. So the six residents were dedicated to attend every Thursday through summer and we had the first open session on the 21st of September. Off their own backs they sourced free food from the local supermarkets, free tuck shop grub and free football equipment. All these things bought the youth club forward.



They've applied for various funding, ASDA have been really helpful and also Chris has been a whizz with filling out forms, he knows exactly what to do, he met with Carly and Simon, the chair and the treasurer, a husband and wife, who applied for the funding. One of the local councillors had a pot she could provide from. Kate Hey offered to give some, to pay for a bouncy castle that got cancelled in the end . . . but the funding's still there. It'll get used to cover equipment and materials, as well as advertising.



So at the moment it runs on Thursdays. For the first session we had it open for 10 to 12 year olds which was 19:30 till 20:45 and we had 11 children turn up. There were loads of younger kids outside saying 'We wanna come in, we wanna come in'. I spoke with Julia and said that we need to expand it, you know we can't just stick to that 2 year age group the 10 to 12 year olds – so for the second week we opened it up for 8 – 12 year olds from 17:00 to 18:30. We had 33 kids turn up and then last week we had 40 kids turn up. Now we have over 140 children on the books.

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For every single session as well, there's a sports activity going on, there's an arts and crafts session going on and there's a cooking activity, every week. So last week it was my turn and we made homemade burgers, all very healthy, made from scratch, you know. So that's where some of the funding goes as well, to cover the costs of the food ingredients. Half term we've got our Halloween disco fancy dress. So decorations, DJ and things like that. The perfect thing about it is, they're doing everything, they're doing it all themselves. Apart from the fact that we go along to help, Chris and I, as volunteers, in our own time so that they have got enough staff. We go in plain clothes. In doing that it has the added bonus of proving how committed we are to the area.

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In relation to the community the 6 volunteers all have their own children, all have family lives but they are dedicated every Thursday. Luckily the kids are all the age that they can come too, so one of them has a 13 year old, she comes and volunteers and helps out with the tuck shop, their kids are involved with it very much. There's a training session coming up and I think it's going to be run by Simon, the guy whose covering us with the insurance, but a Saturday is the only time he's available so they're like 'Okay, great, When we had the fun day?'. Carly and Simon were away with their kids on holiday and they came back a day early so that they were there for the fun day, because they'd put so much time and effort in to get everything ready and running. Their passion and dedication to provide something for the kids, is ridiculous, they are very very dedicated.

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When I first started in Coney Hill, I was on foot patrol for seven hours, on the three main streets. Everyone was constantly saying 'Come here, come here', they want to know who you are. After a while you build up a relationship with them, so it becomes something more, you're invited into their homes. I now know family histories, stuff going back to when their kids were growing up, there's that community aspect towards each other and they've kind of involved us in it. You don't normally get that in every area. It's one of those places where they've had to rely on each other over the years. It's a well known fact that as you become more affluent we become more separated, your houses become bigger and you disconnect from what's around you. We know we are happier and more connected when you are embedded in the community. It's a trust thing as well. It used to be that the community wouldn't trust police officers, but they did with us.

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At one point some of the families we had down there ended up moving out because of their criminality, but I think at one point they might have thought PCSO's cant do a lot, they don't arrest us so they don't do anything. But because we're having that kind of engagement with them, when we have to do the enforcement thing it's not so much 'Why are you picking on my family?' but we can approach them more with a 'We've got to come and speak to you, what's been going on?' manner. We can be straight with them.

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This process has been good because Carly and Simon have been saying for years that they've wanted to do this and this process, I think, pushed them to do it. They didn't know where to start, what to do, where to go. So the agency role in this was creating the opportunity for them, It was giving them the helping hand and guidance. Now they don't need us there, but we're still a big part of it and it's great to be there. Now we can use it as the asset that it is, to engage with the kids, because there are now 40 children out there not causing problems, which is a benefit to us. That's crime reduction, so this asset has given us a massive boom in that area that's being supported by their community. Those 40 kids are going to grow up to become adults in Coney Hill.

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We're able to up our numbers to 65 kids, around 8-10 per volunteer. We did a quick walk down the street one time to ask if people would be prepared to volunteer and cover a session, we had 28 say yes, so we've got them on file. If anyone can't make it one time and we're short staffed, we've got those people to fall back on. It's like a new generation waiting to take over when the current six can't do it anymore.



It's £1 per session, first one's free, or they can sign up for a years membership for £10 and then pay 50p each week, which covers four evenings and that goes into the tuck shop. We've had some donations as well. There are loads of activities planned for up until December. Someone's offered to do a free Boxercise session, we're planning a session about cyberbullying and there's one outside agency who likes to do pottery painting. Whatever people in the community have to offer. What we're trying to arrange is that children who want to take part in painting a pot can pay £1 towards it and then the other £4 can be subsidised. Also, it will be nice to have a buffer in the funding, so if there's twenty children taking part in something and another one or two that want to do it but cant afford to we can use that money pot to help.



What would be good, is to maybe teach cooking, lessons around healthy eating, as opposed to getting things like Twizzlers from the tuck shop. Things like healthy burgers and spaghetti bolognese, skills for the future that they might not be learning at home. The tuck shop have decided to not buy fizzy drinks anymore, diet or not, they've switched to flavoured water and plain water. It's mindful, layering those elements of health into everyday life.



Most of the committee are residents, Jules used to run the meetings, she works with the youth support team as a youth worker. It will be Simon at the next meeting, who is chairman. We met the main six volunteers outside of the school, but we knew them from around the community anyway and they turned up to that initial meeting. They volunteer on the PTFA as well. It was all quite plain sailing, the initial set up, it just involved sending out lots and lots of emails. Julia said 'Yeah, happy days, let's go ahead with it', everyone met up on the day and it just went from there really. There's been no hurdles . . . touch wood.

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Thinking back to the start, the hard bit was stepping away. Not directing. It was tough in the initial meeting to just say, 'Right, what do you want to do?'. It was a strange process to sit down and let them discuss how they were going to do things. It's interesting when you think about it, it started as a fun day and it's ended up as something totally different, it's a prime example of how the whole thing's been. Originally when I sat down I thought it would be some sort of World Cafe, some sort of community budgeting, but no. That's not the way it went, because the community had involvement and led it. You have to accept that in the beginning you may feel quite uncomfortable, it's going to be chaotic. It's fantastic but it isn't what anyone envisioned.

We never sat round at the start and said 'lets get a community youth club going'.



They're now talking about doing more fun days in the nicer weather out on the park at the back of the centre, getting kids involved with the litter picking and keeping the outside of the club tidy, we're discussing putting hampers together for some of the residents, lots of stuff like that. Also with the litter pick we've had other local youngsters helping, the boys from the rugby club came over to help, so that's them taking ownership, hopefully that will continue. We're now working on introducing evenings dedicated to the older children, the youths, 13 to 17 year olds. There's been some anti social behaviour out the back, criminal damage, a bench was set on fire and they're likely to be the age group that were involved. So a session for them would be good.



The last youth worker was running quite a lot of Duke of Edinburgh Award type activities, so maybe we could get them involved in something like that. It's something to look forward to but it's not something we can say will be happening next week, because we're not there yet. Simons looking into funding to get a paid, qualified youth worker involved. We've had a bit of engagement with the older lot to see what they want.



There has been a notable positive impact for policing. There's some families and kids that we would never have had any involvement with before talking to us now. We've built up relationships with these kids you necessarily wouldn't have any positive contact with. There's a ripple effect, when you speak to families and extended families, they now say 'The police are actually alright', you know, we see a difference. It's still early days at the moment, it's breaking down barriers. Where people wouldn't do others in for anti social behaviour like mini motos on the street and things like that before, now something may be said. Those relationships are being developed.



Time will tell, hopefully we can get evidence of any positive impact by speaking to the parents and the young people who attend, to ask them 'What difference has it made to you?' and that will be where the power is in this story.

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Looking to the future . . . we are working on rebranding with the kids. The youth club is called Echos#2, because the first time round it was called Echoes. We've come up with different logos and things like that, there's going to be a competition. We already have staff T-shirts with names on, we're looking at getting kids ones now with the logo on as well. We want them to feel individual, but also part of the group as well. We need to discuss it further, but yeah, we're going to have our own brand that the kids have designed themselves. The whole package.

