



Hi, I'm Ruth Kerracher, Youth Justice Participation Lead at [Staf](#) and [CYCJ](#), I lead on Youth Justice Voices, which is a national participation project for care and justice experience young people. Today I'm going to talk about Inside Out, which is our steering group for care experienced boys and young men in HMYOI Polmont, and we run that in collaboration with Barnardo's Youthwork Team. Before I go on to talk about Inside Out in more detail, I'll just give you an overview of Youth Justice Voices.

So we are a national participation project for young people aged 16, to 25, of experience of the care and justice systems in Scotland. And we've been going since 2019. And we were formally funded by the Life Changes Trust. And now we're in the fourth year of our project funded by the National Lottery. All the work that we do at Youth Justice Voices is completely led by young people. So that means they set the agenda, they help shape the projects that we work on. And ultimately, we work on the creative ways to help them amplify their voice. The groups are led by Youth Just Us, which you've maybe heard me talk about before in the community. And we've got a wee bit of our portfolio going on over there. So I can catch up with people about that afterwards. But we've also got Inside Out, which is a group in Polmont for care experienced boys and young men, which I'm going to focus on today. And within the projects, our aim as I said is the creatively amplify voice. But it's also about having that sort of national presence. So yeah, we might take part in some sort of consultations and national discussions. But ultimately, what we're wanting to do is get the right people around the table and create opportunities where young people can directly influence change. Also, what we like to do, as I suppose provide the platform and share our learning through National Implementation groups, like youth justice, implementation groups, and practice and policy groups that CYCJ are often oversees. So at Youth Justice Voice, as within all our projects, we take a youth work approach. So that means we basically we

start where young people at and the main focus is really about building positive relationships with young people, working alongside them to develop projects, which meet their aspirations and needs, and also about working in creative and fun ways. So as much as it's important about young people having that platform and space to talk about the issues that are important to them, our young people have also talked about it being really important that it's a safe space for them to get together with people with similar and different experiences, and gain skills and rewards to the process. For us, it's been really important that young people need to know that their views do matter. And we're not just less than we're actually going to act upon that. They need to know as well, that taking part is going to make a difference. And I think that's particularly been important for our group - boys within Polmont. Because often unfortunately, they've been through the care system at a very young age, been in and out of secure maybe been in and out of Polmont, many time. And they've often been asked the same questions, seen little action and don't see any feedback, or they're involved in things which seem really outwith their daily life. So they want to feel that they impact and change what they're going to feel and their peers are going to feel in the future. So I have put "Engage on their own terms" there with a question mark, I would say that people do engage on their own terms, but that are more challenges when you're going into a locked environment. So we've got to think about barriers around just being in a prison environment, the systems which are in place, checks, procedures, people not being booked people being in demand and booked for different things, challenges between what people have got going on in their daily life, whether that's court cases, mental health issues, substance use, and as well the organisational protocols and systems and staff shortages and COVID. So we've had a lot to battle with, it's not been an easy process. But what I would say is, the young people do choose to take part and there's no sanctions if they don't come to the project. So the young people we've had involved, have all expressed an interest in wanting to be a part of this and wanting really to drive change. So we've made it really important that that's actually what we do. I think as well, another thing, I talked about when I said that change is led by young people through meaningful participation processes. Having sort of hierarchical and traditional type participation opportunities can all serve their purpose, but for our young people, they want to feel like things they do relate to their everyday life. So the activities that we're doing have got to be relatable. And we've also got to be upfront and honest about what's achievable as well. But what we're really trying to change as well is for participation to become the norm within the justice system, because there seems to be a sort of belief that a fear about bringing young people together for one aspect, but also attaching responsibilities to rights and attaching responsibilities to participation, so for us, regardless of a young person's behaviour, they must have a right to participate in opportunities and activities in which are important to them.

So I said we took the youth like approach, we wanted to take the same approach as we took with Youth Just Us in the sort of locked environment and the set up of ,effectively, a prison. So in order to do that, with all our projects, what was really important was to build really good partnership. And so that was with Barnardo's Youthwork Team. We were really lucky because they actually do a phenomenal amount of work within Polmont in terms of how they support young people. They believed in our project, I think we were lucky that we've had good reputation between Staf and CYCJ, and the work that Youth Just Us had done before. But also, which was really important to us as they took a youth work approach. So they worked in the same ways as we would. And they also valued the real importance of relationships and knew what young people would be interested in and how they might engage. So once we got Barnardo's, on board, it was their sort of role I suppose is gatekeeper so we

ultimately were looking to see if they had knowledge of who was care experienced within Polmont, what young people might be interested in taking part and what barriers and things they might face. So the group was established in 2019. And we've had memberships change throughout, because that's the nature of the participation, but also within Polmont it's quite a challenge because young people can be on short sentences that are in demand might dip in and out and different things going on. So I was really key to keep an art who's on board with us, and I suppose get the word out about the project. And when we first started as well, we were keen, I suppose to provide opportunity to some of the boys and young men who might have been perceived as having more challenging behaviour. So they had to do quite a lot of work behind the scenes to get things okayed and in terms of sort of policies and procedures. But what we did find is, the boys got up got involved in this space, and they were just totally into it. So I the early stages of the project was about taking that youth back approach, doing really sort of fun and creative activities, making sure that the boys could build trust, and knew that we were going to act on what they said. But also they were going to have control over that because there is concern for young people sharing what they're sharing within the environment of a prison, how's that going to impact on them? So it's really important to work alongside them to think about how we would do that. The way that we've worked as well as I would base myself there the whole Friday morning, so as well as doing focused activities and like I said, early stages could all be about team building, we then work towards boys actually designing the sessions that they want to take part and the activities they want to take part in, and the issues which are important to them. But also what's just as important is it's a safe space where we might, because it's in just work activities, we're really lucky as a good space, we can have access to things like table tennis, pool, board games, all that sort of stuff, which has been really important. And I think making sure that we work in really creative ways for people to express themselves has also been key. So as a group, we started off very sorry, earlier stages, like I said, doing lots of fun stuff, team building, looking at different things were important to the groups. What became really clear was that the boys wanted to focus on rights. So this came about for a number of reasons. You'll see here in the bottom right hand corner. This is the prison rule book, which has hundreds of pages and which is really difficult to understand. A lot of the boys talked about how really challenging that was, particularly for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties. They talked about needing a law degree to understand basic rules and entitlements. And similar things to what Amy was saying as well, about policy and things really affecting their lives, but they're not involved in it. And it doesn't seem relevant to them. So they decided that they wanted to focus on rights. And we did that and early stage again, in creative ways. So things like mapping out Polmont, where there might be rights issues, what different things are going on. And we had alien invasion landed on Polmont, where young people would talk through the process, through their experiences. And then we brought in different ways to educate and learn about rates and entitlements. But ultimately, it was me learning from the boys because they've had that firsthand experience, so they could tell us what other people need to know. So through that, they've been really keen that their focus would be about helping all young people in Polmont to understand their rights and entitlements, and look into work in creative ways to not rewrite the present rulebook. Yeah, maybe that might be in the future, where they can develop it with young people, but there's obviously going to be certain policies and things they have to stick with them. But what they want to do is create guidance that young people understand and I'll help them through the journey. The other things they've been really keen to do is they want to support other young people. They want to use your negative experiences to make things

better for others. And they also want to highlight the importance of youth work and the different opportunities which are available, as well as it is a multitude of issues which they're currently facing.

So some of the work we've been involved in is during lockdown. Like I say, we had challenges, there was a period of time where I wasn't in Polmont at all, but we did look at different ways to engage. So whether that was through like email a prisoner, sharing information through workers and doing that over the phone. But ultimately I had to have a bit of a break, which was really unfortunate. But when we did get back in, one of our first opportunities that we had was obviously recognising that during the pandemic, lots of people's rights could be infringed upon, but particularly when you're in a locked setting where you might be locked up for 23 hours a day. So one of the first things we worked on was with the Children's Commissioner and CYCJ, to work with the young people involved in Inside Out to create some guidance for young people. So they knew what their rights were under the UNCRC when they were in custody. And we worked to, I suppose, review the language to put a few weeks making it more accessible. And also the boys really enjoyed that process too, because they could see something tangible that the end so eventually, the flyer was designed that went out to everybody in Polmont. But what was really important to them was they also looked, which I should have mentioned earlier obviously, there name is Inside Out, and they worked on designing a logo at distance with a designer, so that was quite a difficult challenge. But I would go back with pictures, take it in and out, in and out. And then they designed their own logo. So it was great for them to see this leaflet with their own words and their identity, they could actually see that up there in Polmont and they were starting to make a difference. I'm just going to talk through some of the things that I suppose we are involved in now and, and to give ideas, I suppose we still take that approach. So I think what's been really important for our young people as well is that they might be interested in taking part in a more national consultation. So one of the big things was Bail, Remand and Release, The Children's Care and Justice Bill, they've also fed back around lawyers and care experience. I'm also doing work just know with Clan Childlaw, and Claire Lightowler about designing child friendly and young person friendly legal service. What they want from that is to work and do it in creative ways. So things like Clan has worked well because we have worked with Youth Just Us to design the workshops and then go in. Whereas what we are facing is the same challenges that in consultations, it's taken workers so much time to actually make that accessible, and young people being able to participate in it. But they want to see feedback and changes. So as well as doing the external stuff, what we've been really keen focus on is internal things as well. So we've looked at different ways that the young people could express themselves. And I can remember, often, when you'll see ideas about what you're coming in my session plan, people have a sort of perception that the boys wouldn't be interested. But I had talked about the idea of poetry and I could see people sort of pooh poohing it. But what we used was poems, which adults had written in the justice system, written during COVID when they've been in prison. We'd ask them who their favourite rappers were. So we would bring in different lyrics and things like that. And that was a really good way to talk about the issues which were important to them, but in quite a safe way, and a way to express themselves. So then the boys wanted to combine that to showcase some of their work, but also they thought of really clever things like, whilst the boys were most isolated during COVID, how could they interact with other boys? So they decided to create a newsletter. So that showcased their poems raps, we had daft workouts, interviews about different opportunities people had been involved in, and interviews about the project. And then that went out to everybody in Polmont. And again, for them, it was really important see the logo on it, but also that we could work with a comms team to make something that looked really

good and packaged up well for that was really well received. And just now we're working on our second edition, which is a summer edition. And it might sound really basic, but it will actually make a difference because the boys are talking about again, just how hot it is when you are in Polmont. So they're given ideas about how you can keep cool as well as sort of fun things as well so we're looking at that. You can see there's some newsletters up there. I don't have the Polmont ones because that's obviously that's a boy's thing. But these are newsletters Youth Just Us community group wrote during lockdown, so you can have a look at them. There's things that we're working on next, I suppose as really, how do we influence things within Polmont? And I'm pleased to see what we're in 2019 we are into 2020,

We're slowly starting to get that route. So next thing we've got planned is we've got our first session with the governor and senior management and what the boys will work on is developing a range of different ideas which I won't share, because that's for them to share, but they will present that to the governor. They're also going to present the idea of producing their own guidance, which was support young people when they enter custody. And it's really things that I think are totally missed in the prison rulebook and other things unless you've been through that experience. So it could be like how you use the telephone, the first thing you've got to know is that the person you're going to phone's got to pick up because you're going to put money in, etc, etc. So we've got a few different things lined up. And I feel that we are starting to see our difference and our hope and I suppose develop a bit more of an internal structure with the boys can gather views from their peers and feed that and it's well. The other things just to point on, I suppose, which has been really great, and I think a huge step forward as well for acknowledging participation, and I suppose acknowledging and the talents and the skills of the boys within Polmont was that they made it through to be finalists at the Scottish charity awards for the Pioneering Project of the Year Award. So that's great and I was really excited, but also makes you feel really disheartened because well, staff might go to a shiny bash, but the boys are stuck in Polmont, and it's their work that needs to be celebrated. So we worked with the boys for them to create a sort of Twitter campaign and social media campaign that could go out to others. But also what was key for us, as well as how do we actually mark their achievements and celebrate that within Polmont? I think it is about thinking outside the box. So we looked to get some agreement with the youth work team, they've already got a good basis, and with the SPS, so what we did was we used other areas within Polmont, and that's something that we are doing more as a reward because externally for participation, you might be paid for things you might receive these rewards for the boys they might receive food and some prizes, but they are not the same things. So what we did for this event was it we hired out life skills, and the boys decided that they wanted to cook up breakfast. And then they invited like the managers or youth work team along to showcase some of their work that we had our award ceremony. And then there's other ways I don't know if I maybe should be saying this, but we're getting creative about reward and so we are thinking, could, for example, we get an Amazon voucher for a young person, then youthwork staff might buy them essential items. So it's all these things, and that's the stuff but I'm trying to feedback as well to people who want to come in and meet with the young people. But also what we're trying to challenge to is gatekeeping, I think that is important. But we want to have young people direct and influence it. And it's not just to come and listen to as a group, it's about them influencing things within and outwith as well.

So some final thoughts, I just wanted to share, I suppose, what we've learned from the project or a more general is I think participation needs to be meaningful and relevant. It's got to be meaningful to their daily lives, it's got to feel like that's worth their time to come up for a morning and take part in

activities. They've got to feel that it's making a difference. And I think it's really thinking about, regardless of behaviour, that's got to be everybody's right. So how do we work in different and creative ways to make sure people have a voice? So whilst we might have that steering group, what I'm keen to look in the future is how can the boys include other people who wouldn't be involved in the group, and how do we expand that as well. But other big things I want to focus on is, I suppose whilst we hear a lot in the press just know about under-18s and trying to remove them from Polmont. I think that is really important and of course, the boys want to support that. But we've got over 200 people aged 18 to 23, who would often care experienced - don't forget about them, and involve them as well. That's me, but I'll be around for this afternoon. If anyone wants to ask any questions or hear more about Youth Just Us thanks.

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