

The wider community benefit of youth employment: An interview with Police Scotland

Interview with Colin Convery, Chief Inspector for Scottish Safer Communities Division, Police Scotland.

Colin.convery@scotland.pnn.police.uk



POLICE
SCOTLAND

About the interviewee

Upon graduation from university Colin worked for the Enterprise Network focusing on creating and maintaining safe environments for new and growing businesses. In this role, Colin was responsible for community and business development, and grant processing. Colin has been in the police for 21 years. For the past 18 months, Colin has been working as the Chief Inspector for Scottish Safer Communities Division, Police Scotland. He is responsible for a diverse range of issues, including all issues to do with young people policy and youth justice; other than child protection. Importantly his remit covers mental health and suicide prevention. Colin also leads work on missing people and is the head of the National Missing Persons Unit.

Introduction

Youth unemployment is a social challenge. During the EAWOP Small Group Meeting, we heard from Police Scotland more about why youth employment is important for reducing crime and improving community well-being. I interviewed Colin Convery, Chief Inspector for Scottish Safer Communities Division, Police Scotland, to hear more about initiatives Police Scotland are involved in that support youth employment. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the interview took place online and lasted about an hour. This is a summary of my conversation with Colin Convery.

The interview

Belgin: *Why is youth employment important for Police Scotland?*

Colin: In modern day policing the importance of youth employment is primarily about the wider community benefits and impact that employment brings. This would include, for instance, community well-being and values, as well as tackling poverty and factors that affect criminality, for instance substance abuse. A lot of the work we engage in is preventative.

Youth employment is important because it creates the leaders of the future, those who can lead communities or businesses. Youth employment and volunteering provides people with a lot of strong values, that they can then take into supporting themselves, their families, and their community.

Employment brings a lot of support for young people. It brings moral support (e.g.,

instilling work values) but also financial support and health benefits as well. Through employment young people can start to get an understanding of the working life and enhance their opportunities. Specifically, from a policing perspective, employment also gives young people opportunities to overcome some of the factors that might lead to offending, which could include mental health issues or substance abuse. For instance, young people in employment are arguably more likely to avoid substance abuse or to seek treatment.

Belgin: *How does Police Scotland support youth employment?*

Colin: There are a number of ways through which Police Scotland supports youth employment, some direct, some indirect. Police Scotland employs young people; you can become a police officer or part of the police staff at the age of 18 years. We also have a significant number of recruits aged 21 years and above.

Focusing particularly on young people who have been brought up within the social care environment (we call this group *care experienced* young people) our trauma-informed approach to policing is important for supporting youth employment. Care experienced young people refer to ‘*looked after*’ children and those who have left social care (care leavers), and they often have poorer life experiences and outcomes, including education and employment outcomes. The Promise, the Independent Care Review published by the Scottish Government in 2020, also emphasises increasing opportunities for care experienced people to access employment, training, stable housing, and support.

More specifically, we are currently focusing on our National Corporate Parenting Plan (see Police Scotland, 2018). Police Scotland joined other public bodies and organizations in Scotland to become a corporate parent to improve the lives and futures of Scotland’s care experienced young people. We have a specific strategy which sets out how we will work with and support those who are care experienced. Our strategy recognises the trauma that they have experienced in previous life and the unique challenges that they face, being in care. We work closely with a range of organizations to stay informed about issues that could have a negative impact on care experienced young people.

One of these organizations is Who Cares? Scotland, who are the national champions of care experienced people throughout their lives. One of our ongoing objectives as part of the National Corporate Parenting Plan is to help care experienced young people become successful learners, and confident, responsible, and effective contributors. For instance, we are promoting volunteering opportunities within Police Scotland Youth Volunteers.

This is a group consisting of young people who volunteer to support their communities. These young volunteers are provided with training from the police but also from our partners. This offers invaluable opportunities for young people to volunteer, develop skills, and become part of our team. Similarly, we work with the Prince's Trust in order to engage with the hardest to reach young people; with the aim of diverting them away from crime and anti-social behaviour. With this partnership, we try to promote positive relationships between officers and young people in local communities.

Another youth employment initiative we engage with concerns specifically young offenders. We have a police officer who works with Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institution in Polmont whose role is to promote positive lifestyle choices for young men in prison. They work with small groups along with a range of other partners to promote good choices. Part of this programme is also about supporting young people when they return to their communities. For instance, young people may have been in prison at 16 years old and are released at 22 or 23 years of age. This means they missed out on a significant period for development and maturity. So, with local partners, we work towards supporting young people to make better life choices when they return to communities. The success of this, of course, depends on the individual and on the services that are available or third sector provision to support them through that process.

We are also reviewing our recruitment processes to allow easier access for young people to apply for positions available in Police Scotland (including information on police officer, special constables, and support staff roles). We are trying to promote the police as a legitimate, realistic, and also rewarding career for young people to pursue. A career in the police may be one young people may not consider because of misconceptions about previous offending, which does not necessarily stop them being eligible candidates for employment by the police.

In terms of the indirect work, we are part of the Community Planning Partnerships across Scotland. These partnerships bring together all public agencies (e.g., local authority, fire, police, National Health Service) and charities for the general benefit and development of the community, including employment and the economy. They all have different priorities and objectives depending on local need. Supporting young people into employment is often in the objectives of most partnerships. We have a key role to play as a strategic partner in all the Community Planning Partnerships, with senior officers from Police Scotland as part of the partnership. We may not lead these initiatives; but we will certainly support local partners.

Belgin: *What do you think makes good youth employment?*

Colin: I would say that any youth employment is good; any opportunity that employment brings can only be good for an individual. Specifically, for the youth, there are certain characteristics that make it particularly good. These would be work that will give young people skills and develop their skills further. Jobs where they will be able to get meaningful experiences that are perhaps transferable to other industries, to other jobs.

Belgin: *What do you see as the key challenges or key issues in youth employment?*

Colin: I think it is about creating an environment where youth employment can happen; where employers will give young people a chance, whether it is taking them on without any experience and particular skills or helping them to further develop their skills. This will depend on what training and development opportunities there are in place to develop a young person's skills in the workplace, in education, or in volunteering. Some of it is also about how we let people young people know about the opportunities available to them so they can take advantage, and make choices, about what they want to do.

Relatedly, resources are needed to support employers to provide opportunities for young people and take away some of the risk that comes with employing someone who has little/no skills or experience. I mentioned geography as a barrier to accessing work earlier. We need to consider how we can get young people (who may not be able to drive) to a place of employment; and what public transport may be available to them. It is important to think about this in a community to enable sustainable access to work.

Conclusion

We are grateful for the insights Colin has shared with us in contributing to this *Special Issue* on youth employment. This interview clearly highlights the importance of public safety nets for those young people who are most disadvantaged in society and in labour markets. Moreover, the initiatives and the challenges discussed by Colin shows that just as 'it takes a village to raise a child', it takes a whole community approach to tackle the youth employment challenges, including support from the policymakers, public sector bodies, employers and non-governmental organizations.

Inclusion and diversity was a key theme in our *Young People's Work, Employment and Careers* Small Group Meeting. Within the workplace, work and organizational psychology (WOP) research informs diversity and inclusion policies (e.g., for cultivating better

workplace relationships). This interview shows that our research has further significant potential impact on those members of society who are furthest away from work and labour markets, such as young offenders and care experienced young people. Mimicking the community-based initiatives Police Scotland is involved in, WOP research would be most impactful if it can incorporate views from multiple stakeholders who have intrinsic interest in tackling youth employment.

References

- Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institution, Polmont. Retrieved from <https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Prisons/Polmont/HMP-YOI-Polmont.aspx>
- Police Scotland (2018). National Corporate Parenting Plan. Safer Communities. Retrieved from <https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/n3cg3c14/corporate-parenting-plan.pdf?view=Standard>
- Prince's Trust and Police Scotland Partnership. Retrieved from <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/support-our-work/uniformed-services-support/police-service>
- Scottish Government (2020). The Promise. Independent Care Review. Retrieved from <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf>
- Who Cares? Scotland. Retrieved from <https://www.whocaresscotland.org/>