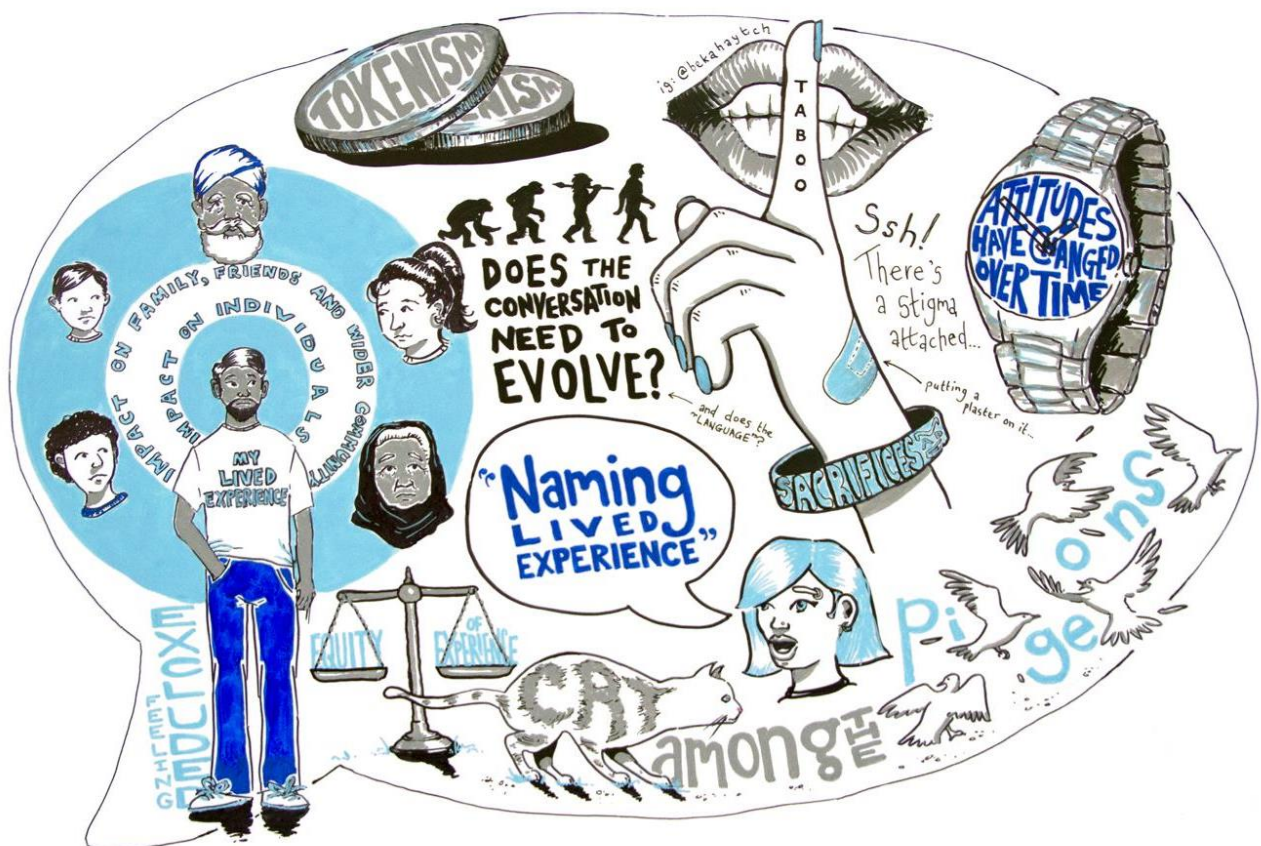


Lived Experience in Criminal Justice

This report seeks to inform the wider community about the recent Lived Experience in Criminal Justice event organised by a group of lived experience folk and academics working in this area. The symposium took place on Wednesday, 15th March 2023, hosted at the Sheffield Workstation.

With thanks to <https://bekahaytch.uk/about/> for awesome visual minutes



Introduction

Recently, we as a group of individuals came together interested in different perspectives of lived and learnt knowledge of the criminal justice system to reflect on the current upward trend of lived experience work in criminal justice. The organising committee was Paula Harriott (Prison Reform Trust), Max Dennehy, Danica Darley, Rob Ferguson (student committee), Rod Earle (Open University), Andi Brierley

(Leeds Trinity University), Shadd Maruna (Queen's University Belfast), Gill Buck (University of Chester), Nicola Carr (University of Nottingham). Before going any further, a shout out to Dave Maguire, whose input formulating this committee which first came together in Warrington in January 2023, was one of the driving forces behind this movement. With the dust settled on a fantastic event in Sheffield, bringing together a broad group of individuals interested in lived experience in criminal justice. Thank you to all attendees and those who unfortunately couldn't make it; you were missed, and we hope you get involved in subsequent discussions to steer the future direction of this work.

Lived Experience in the Criminal Justice System

In criminal justice, lived experience has become a buzzword as of late, and we can see this 'concept' currently being played out in prisons, probation services and the voluntary sector supporting the criminal justice system.

The harnessing of people's assets by engaging them in shaping service design and delivery comes in many guises, such as "citizen participation", "service user involvement", "user engagement", "experts by experience", "user-led", "co-production" and "lived experience" all illustrating the ambiguity of this notion. Lived experience work in this area includes (but is not limited to) prison and probation user councils, peer-led initiatives, peer-mentor schemes, expert panels, lived experience leadership driving policy, practice and research, academic work based on lived experiences through 'convict criminology' and the recent move to have peer researchers in co-producing research.

Non-governmental organisations, the charity sector, and others across the justice system have advocated and supported the notion of the inclusion of service users into policy and practice for some time. Several good practice guides and toolkits have been developed to inform services on this work's practicalities and collaborative nature.

The influence of these organisations (along with political and economic forces) may have contributed to policy guidance across the criminal justice system in England and Wales that encourages the engagement of service users as active collaborators in that service's planning, design, delivery, and evaluation processes. The rapid growth in lived experience work in this arena could signal a sea change, a shift in power relations, collaborative working culture and meaningful involvement for

all in the justice sector. Notably, this may be a good opportunity to pause and reflect on its current trajectory and future direction.

Lived Experience Symposium

So, by taking this all on board, the organisers recognised the influential work many in this area have and are undertaking. Hence, casting the net far and wide, an invitation was sent out to potential delegates, with the majority having involvement with the criminal justice system, both experiential and professional. We wanted to create a safe space to unpack questions about lived experience work in criminal justice. Along with sharing perspectives, thinking critically and broadening networks, this event was not to come up with solutions or to find answers but to start a conversation.



With this in mind, delegates of this event were invited to work in small groups to consider some proposed questions by engaging in three workshops throughout the day. These initial questions and other viewpoints were discussed, debated, and relayed to the group. A visual artist was present to sketch themes from the discussions. Below are the initial questions outlined in the workshops and some thoughts going into them.



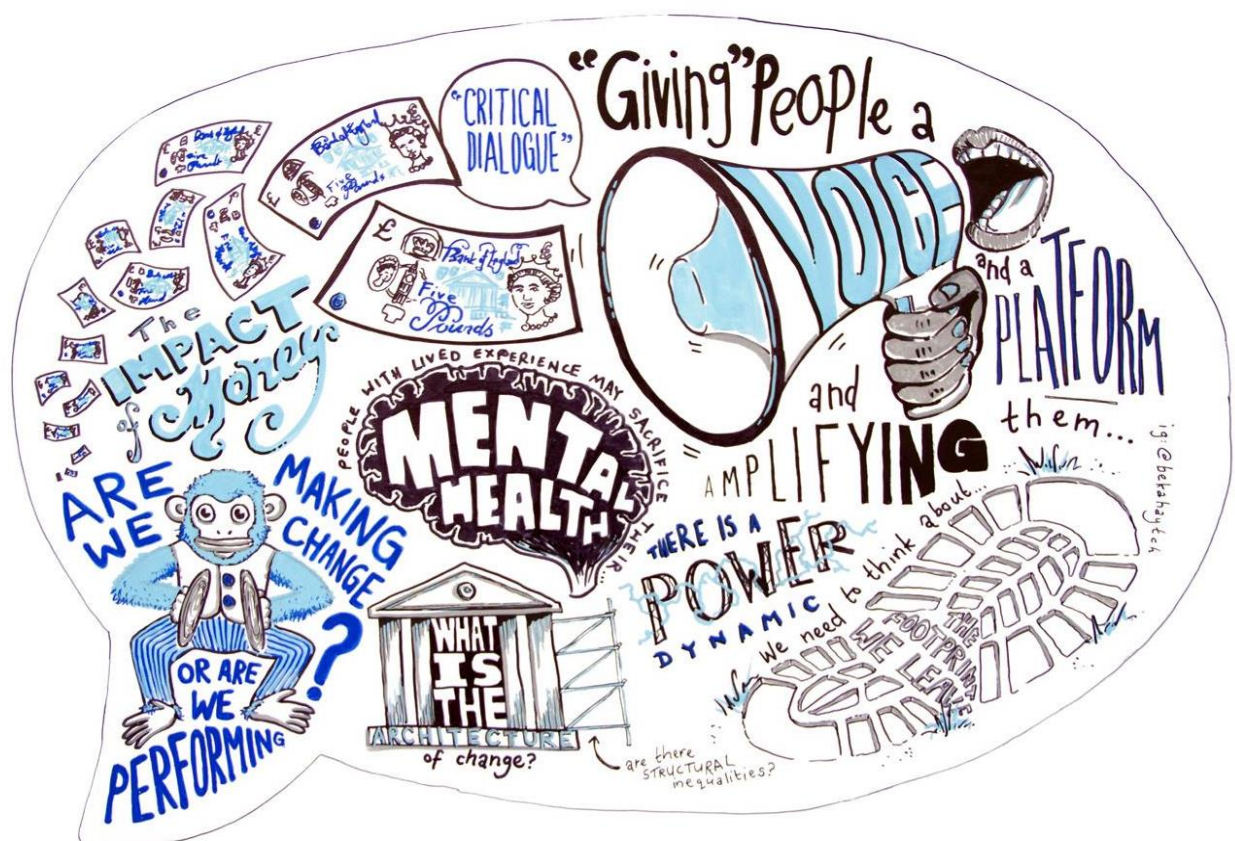
Workshop one

How do we define lived experience, and what is the value of lived experience?

Who are the bearers of lived experience, and who benefits?

Lived experience work 'gives voice' to criminalised people across the justice system. Through direct experiences such as prison and probation, they use their narrative to endure the road of desistance, helping others along the way. This lived expertise can provide knowledge, insights, and wisdom, providing authenticity to this work.

Although a wide range of disadvantages can lead one to be impacted by this system, are these voices being heard? If so, who do we class as having lived experience in the broader scope of criminal justice, whose stories are we listening to, and are these the right voices to lay the foundations for others who will tread similar paths? How do we approach these challenges, concerns, and complexities in harnessing the lived experience label?



Workshop two

What are the ethics and potential harms of drawing on lived experiences within the criminal justice system? (Including appropriation, tokenism, and stolen legitimacy)

Using one's experiences may be challenging; the language and stigma, unconsciously or subconsciously, can have consequences that produce a lonely space one finds themselves. Does the 'emotional work' aid or hinder the 'wounded healer' in supporting others? How do we tailor support to their individual needs? Who is left to appropriate lived experience work, for whose gain and how much weight is given to it? With different forms of participatory representation, how can we strengthen the legitimacy it can provide? What is needed to keep it impactful and meaningful rather than a tick-box exercise that isn't departing from business as usual? What is classified as tokenistic, and by whom? Is it okay just to be an 'add-on' for criminal justice services, or is this merely exploitative and data extraction? How do we balance the system's socioeconomic inequalities and unequal power structures? Distributing power by providing a seat at the table to people directly impacted may help overcome these obstacles, challenges, and barriers that loom over this work.



Workshop three

How can lived experience identities be employed strategically?

With lived experience embedded in other sectors where active participation is intrinsically harnessed. Do we need to take examples from these around governance structures, power sharing and decision-making that create pathways for leadership opportunities? And if so, what is an organisation's 'right mix' of a lived experience and a "non-lived" experienced workforce? Is it already starting to transpire from the shadows across the justice landscape? If so, does this require a different direction, and who have we got to convince? Likewise, can the tables be turned by adopting these roles through organisational structures which give a more meaningful value to lived expertise?

Do we need a social movement?

A rallying call this may be, and the question may point to whether we are mere bystanders or catalysts of change. One step at a time, a social movement may be the only option that provides progressive moves. It may also require alliances with other lived experience movements. Do we need to build a campaign of lived experience to drive a cultural shift across the justice terrain? There was a definite recognition in the room during the event that coming together as a collective movement gives us greater potential and power to influence political agendas and reclaim the spaces that we so often find ourselves being talked about and not with. We may only have some of these answers. We only have our perspectives of what it should look like through our own eyes. Still, as a collective, we see, think, and grow together, bringing these values that form partnerships, collaborations, and alliances that create genuine outcomes that strive to get the right balance in the right spaces for the right reasons.

Of course, only time will tell. Suppose there is a movement towards a new type of justice innovation. In that case, it may be a slow and thorny one. Still, learning and reflecting will only enhance understanding in this area, allowing lived experience in criminal justice to blossom.



What's next?

We hope this event will be the beginning of further discussions from a critical and proactive lens. This will benefit the people who use their lived experience on the ground and the professionals working in this field to create a more efficient, effective and, more importantly, meaningful collaborative working culture for all. Developing on the messages and themes that emerged from the day the organising committee are now committed to expanding the group and are keen that we carry on meeting and grow our network to respond to some of the challenges that emerged from the

event in March. To this end we are suggesting that a meeting open to all will take place online on:

Monday 12th June from 2pm to 4pm. If you are interested in attending, please register at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/lived-experience-in-criminal-justice-tickets-636712914467>

The purpose of this online session will be to decide on the next steps for us as a group of people interested in furthering the involvement of lived experience in the criminal justice system. We hope to consider in this meeting the idea of developing a collective and are keen to hear your thoughts on how you would like to be involved.

The collective of lived experience leaders in criminal justice could:

1. Offer a database of network advisers and supporters who work in this area.
2. Aim to connect (sometimes isolated) workers who have lived experience of the criminal justice system.
3. Will hold an annual event
4. Will offer a vehicle for ways too:
 - a) Fight inequality
 - b) Challenge discrimination
 - c) Promote ethical engagement in research, policy and practice
 - d) Resist only traditional forms of knowledge

To develop these ideas, break out rooms at our next meeting will be themed:

- Building a network
- Connecting lived experience workers
- Holding an annual event
- Challenging inequality and discrimination
- Ethical research and knowledge production