

Tasmania Police Edmund Rice Camp Evaluation

Final Evaluation Report

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List of main abbreviations and acronyms

ERC	Edmund Rice/Edmund Rice Camps
ERCT	Edmund Rice Camps Tasmania
UTAS	University of Tasmania
PCYC	Police Community Youth Clubs
TasPol	Tasmania Police
HSP332	"Contemporary Social Issues and Persons at Risk B" (Unit delivered within the recruit course, as part of formal training)

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Of course, this report would not have been completed without the thoughts and insights of Edmund Rice staff members, particularly those who we visited in the field and who answered our questions. Their enthusiasm in wanting to talk to us was appreciated.

Our final thanks go to those young people who took part in the camps. This initiative demonstrates that there is momentum to bridge the gap and generate understanding and more courteous relationships between police organisations and vulnerable people. There is hope that this report will contribute to cementing current efforts in strengthening police-community engagement initiatives, and in identifying the needs of some of the most vulnerable community members.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation was to evaluate several successive occurrences of the Edmund Rice Camp conducted at the Police Academy with police recruits, and gauge the camp's potential as an educational tool and community engagement exercise from the perspectives of police recruits and police officers involved.

The evaluation considered:

- a. The usefulness of the camp in exposing police recruits to vulnerability issues amongst young people,
- b. Pre- and post-camp police recruits' attitudes towards young people (the possible impact of ERC camps on police recruits' worldviews of vulnerability issues),
- c. The exploration of including such a camp into police recruit curriculum, based on the perspective of police teaching staff, and in consideration of the University of Tasmania's HSP332 learning outcomes.

The evaluation procedure, based on qualitative worldview research, consisted of a small literature review, mainly aimed at positioning the Edmund Rice – Tasmania Police camp within a range of similar initiatives, pre- and post-camp surveys with recruits, interviews with management, and one focus group with the first cohort to ever experience the camp. Funding for this analysis was provided by Edmund Rice Tasmania, via some of its funding partners.

After considering the pre- and post-camp attitudes of 76 recruits, findings indicate that the camp contributes to:

- a change in attitudes pre-/post- camp from police recruits towards young people's behaviour and life circumstances,
- addressing preconceived ideas amongst police towards young people and vulnerable people more generally,
- recruits being comfortable communicating with and approaching young people (following the camp),
- a shift in the general understanding of anti-social behaviour as a problem amongst young people,
- a significantly different understanding of hardships are faced by today's young people.

Specifically, it was found that:

- 85% of recruits either agreed or strongly agreed that the Edmund Rice police recruit camps had made them understand more about vulnerability issues,
- 47% agreed or strongly agreed they only had a marginal understanding of the kind of disadvantage some young people live with, prior to the camp,
- 94% of participants said they were more confident engaging with young people as a police officer after the camp experience,

- the camp experience either met or exceeded recruits' expectations, and that training through the Edmund Rice police camps can in fact increase recruits' awareness, understanding and confidence in interacting with the public.

Coordinators thought that the camp was a well-rounded experience, which covered a range of Tasmania Police modules, and addressed some of the fundamental skills and contextual practice in policing, specifically: communication; teamwork, morale building, confidence, persistence, and resilience.

The scheme would benefit from the consideration of six recommendations. These recommendations are mostly structural in nature, and in light of the analysis contained in this report, focus on the consolidation and cementing of the scheme within the broader Tasmania Police/University of Tasmania recruit curriculum.

Recommendation 1: That the Edmund Rice Camp be formally embedded in the recruit course, as part of Module 15, and as part of Tasmania Police community engagement activities with vulnerable and at-risk people and families.

Recommendation 2: That the Edmund Rice Camp be formally embedded in the equivalent unit under the University of Tasmania degree, as part of a community engagement and placement program, and as per authentic experiential learning framework.

Recommendation 3: That the CEO of Edmund Rice Tasmania and Tasmania Police Academy management staff meet to discuss a budgetary framework for the continuation of the camp (including the location of the camp), where the Edmund Rice Camp absorbs a portion of the costs of the camp, and where the contribution of Tasmania Police sits in the allocation of rostered time for the course coordinators.

Recommendation 4: That all recruits in all courses are offered the opportunity to participate in the camp, as opposed to one course out of two (in the current form of offering, only the 'Red' course has gone through the ERC).

Recommendation 5: That the briefing and debrief sessions are maintained for each camp held, with the following participating: Tasmania Police coordinators, Tasmania Police officer in charge of Module 15, and the appropriate University of Tasmania unit coordinator.

Recommendation 6: That in light of Tasmania Police's leadership reputation in tertiary education, and of this Edmund Rice Tasmania camp innovation, that journal article(s) be published in the proper community engagement, policing or education fora, with a feature in the local media.

Introduction and rationale

Policing literature insists on providing a more rigorous education to police (especially at recruit level) about vulnerability issues. As a result of many years of research, evaluation and advocacy, recruit training has significantly evolved, especially in Tasmania, and is inclusive of a number of topics relating to vulnerable people, cultural competency, critical analysis of vulnerability, and partnerships. Despite such progress, a number of steps remain in order to better familiarise future police officers with vulnerable people's life experiences. At the time this evaluation started, the key publication about policing vulnerability (*Policing Vulnerability*, Federation Press, 2012) offered a special contribution to literature about how to expose police officers at an early stage of their career to vulnerability issues, in the field, but also preferably at the point of training (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012).

There are various reasons why this has had limited feasibility, for example, insurance issues, risk to all stakeholders. However, Tasmania Police recently found a way to expose recruits to vulnerability issues in a non-confronting environment, using as a strength-based approach, and from the epidemiological principles of 'positivity in practice'¹. Since 2014, recruits have been participating in an Edmund Rice weekend camp (ERC), with some young Tasmanians from disadvantaged backgrounds.^{2*}

This project was an evaluation of the camp experience from the perspective of police recruits and police officers involved in the ERC at the Police Academy, across five recruit courses.

The evaluation considered:

- d. The usefulness of the camp in exposing police recruits to vulnerability issues amongst young people,
- e. Pre- and post-camp police recruits' attitudes towards young people (possible impact of ERC camps on police recruits' worldviews of vulnerability issues),
- f. The exploration of including such camps into police recruit curriculum, based on the perspective of police teaching staff, and in consideration of the University of Tasmania's HSP332 learning outcomes.

¹ According to its clinical definition, positivity in practice focuses on an experimental assumption, which requires that there be both exposed and unexposed participants at every combination of the values of the observed variables in the population under study.

² We acknowledge that this expression is not favoured by ERC, and that the vernacular used by ERC staff revolves around 'young people', 'young leaders', with no reference to vulnerability issues, in order to avoid harmful labelling and further stigmatisation of groups. The expression is used here for ease of writing, and to describe the situation faced by these young people on a daily basis.

The evaluation procedure for this research consisted of:

Pre- and post-camp surveys

All recruits participating in the camp were surveyed online twice. The surveys asked recruits their worldviews regarding young people and disadvantaged groups. The first survey was before the camp, and the second survey about one week after the camp, aiming to measure how recruits' engagement with young people changed their personal attitudes towards vulnerable groups. Each survey was about ten minutes in duration.

Worldviews are an overall perspective on life summarising what individuals or social groups know about the world, how they evaluate it emotionally and respond to it volitionally. From a macro-qualitative perspective, worldviews serve as a backdrop to understanding the context of social issues. They are often a preparatory process for research that is intended to study a particular phenomenon as they help locate the research in broader social contexts. Worldviews help bring perspective to an issue and usually highlight its complexity by positioning it against a complex system of understandings and vantage points. These vantage points provide a 'picture' of how people make meaning of their world and what they perceive as important.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with course coordinators and the ERC Executive Officer about their views about the camp, its logistics, and its impact on recruits, from an experiential learning perspective. These were semi-structured interviews about 30 minutes in length.

Focus group

One short focus group was conducted with the first group of recruits, asking them what they generally thought of the experience, how it was run, and how to improve on it.

Project background and description

Police education and vulnerable people

Police literature for the past 50 years has focussed extensively on the historically tense relationship between police and disadvantaged groups (such as young people, people living with a mental illness, cultural/visible minorities). A very large proportion of literature focuses on how these vulnerable groups feel about police, and very little research since the 2000s is specifically dedicated to police perceptions of these communities and how to pre-emptively address possible negative predisposition towards them. Training is a possible initial strategy for addressing social bias amongst police. However, educating police about vulnerability is a complex process, set against a longstanding background of entrenched stereotypes. Reiner (1998) suggested that police see vulnerabilities in others by way of social distinctions, including 'police property' (scum, radicals, gays); 'rubbish' (domestics); and 'disarmers' (worthy victims), and see themselves as 'macho'; that is, without vulnerability. This self-perspective of police is a prominent stereotype of police as warriors, resilient, without flaws or weaknesses, which is now slowly being deconstructed within and outside the policing industry. Police culture and past police education have contributed to these stereotypes. But when vulnerable populations are now said to represent about 75% of police encounters in the field, it is critical for police to effectively train for their role (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012)?

In this context, teaching cultural competence and raising socio-cultural awareness has been one of the steps taken to meet public demands for more educated, more understanding police. Despite initial enthusiasm, awareness raising is now acknowledged as insufficient (Grossman et al., 2013) with an acknowledgment that exposing police at an early stage to social disadvantage would trigger more empathy from police. Whilst agreed upon in principle this latter recommendation encountered many structural barriers and organisational obstacles, such as risk issues, insurance, and organisational liability. However, Tasmania Police recently opted for a strength-based, non-confrontational initiative that allows recruits at the Police Academy to better understand where social disadvantage comes from and how it impacts vulnerable individuals. This initiative seems to have been successful at first glance, and to have affected recruits in a positive way. These initial observations confirmed the need for a more structured evaluation of the initiative.

The Edmund Rice Camp as a vehicle for educational change

Edmund Rice Camps is a non-profit community-based organisation, operating all over Oceania. All Edmund Rice programs focus on supporting marginalised and/or minority groups to participate in fun and safe environments of acceptance, challenge, and growth (Edmund Rice Camps Tasmania, 2015). Programs under Edmund Rice Camps include initiatives to invite young people on a holiday experience they would not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in. In Tasmania, these camps are offered to young people aged 7–16, essentially from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds. The camps are run by young adult volunteers that strive to be attentive role models and mentors, who reinforce positive behaviour for the children whilst maintaining friendly, fair and supportive discipline (Edmund Rice Camps Tasmania, 2015).

In 2014, an opportunity arose for Edmund Rice Camps Tasmania (ERCT) to collaborate with Tasmania Police, with the suggested involvement of police recruits in the camps as part of their training. It was proposed that the initiative could have a dual impact, influencing both:

- the relationship of participating children with police in the usual ERC environment with the hope that the ERC could provide a venue to dismantle traditional negative perceptions of police, and to cultivate more positive association with law enforcement more generally (Tasmania Police, 2019), and
- the worldviews of participating police recruits about vulnerability issues (here, across the vulnerability attributes of general deprivation, youth, and possible other cross-sectional vulnerabilities such as sparse or lack of parenting, hunger, etc).

Executive Officer of Edmund Rice Camp Tasmania, Andrew Blackett elaborates:

“As many of these children’s families often have negative contact with the police, this mini-camp was both a positive interaction as well showing the new recruits the human face of children in need”
(Andrew Blackett, Executive Officer, 2014).

While the camps unfold according to usual ERC frameworks over 24–48 hours, the camps provide police recruits with a unique educational opportunity. The children experience a fun and activity-filled weekend while police recruits develop skills in engaging, communicating with and understanding young people. Recruits are given insight opportunity into the real life situations of children who are traditionally, and cynically seen as ‘problems’ or ‘future problems’ (Reiner, 1998).

A profound transformative rationale

The youth justice system in Australia has gone through significant changes over the past 30 years with such changes indicative of contradictory coexisting policies, that represent both a resurrection of the 'tough on crime' approach, and a more progressive aim to reduce the number of institutionalised young people (Birch & Sicard, 2020). As such, there is a growing focus in media on anti-social behaviour amongst young people that is often mistaken for delinquency (Pryor & Paris, 2005). With more research indicating that the Australian government views anti-social behaviour as an issue that lies within the criminal justice system, rather than something to be dealt with within public health frameworks, contradictory policies leave many practitioners confused about courses of action and operational protocols. Unfortunately, this contributed to a tense relationship between young people and law enforcement.

Studies that have examined the relationship between age and attitudes towards police, consistently find that young people generally hold more negative and critical attitudes towards law enforcement and are less likely to trust and support police compared to other age groups (Hurst & Frank, 2000; Friedman, Lurigio, Greenleaf, & Albertson, 2004; Chow, 2011). An Australian study from 2008 found that informal contact with police (understood as casual contact outside formal police operations, for example, engaging in educational workshops, mentoring, or other activities not in a professional capacity) can enhance young people's attitudes towards police in general (Hinds, 2008). A more recent study from Canada found similarly (Leroux & McShane, 2017): the impression towards police that young people form during adolescence can not only determine whether or not a young person chooses to engage in specific, deviant or otherwise, activities, but can also impact long-standing perceptions of police legitimacy. Police legitimacy was identified as the biggest predictor of young people's willingness to assist police. The studies also found that willingness to support police improved for young people that took part in police mentoring-based activities, irrespective of their prior judgement of police legitimacy (Hinds, 2008; Leroux & McShane, 2017). This is an indication that program such as the ERCT police recruit camp, which introduce a mentor-based structure where young people and police can interact in an informal and positive manner, can positively influence the attitudes of young people towards police. However, the ERCT police recruit program does not only aim to enhance young people's attitudes towards police, it also intends to improve the police recruits' attitudes and understanding of young people.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a paucity of research relating to police perceptions of young people, and how to pre-emptively address possible negative police associations. However, some research shows that young people are approached more often by police, or over-policed, compared to other age groups. In 2005, an article from the United States (US) Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that

residents in the age groups of 18–19 and 20–24 had the highest rates of contact with police in the US; with about 1 for every 3.1 persons and about 1 for every 3.2 persons, respectively (Durose, Schmitt & Langan, 2005). Contact rates for US residents at the age of 50 or older were about 1 person for every 7.1 persons. Labelling theorists have argued that publicly accusing or confronting delinquent behaviour only serves to exacerbate the issue, by ‘categorising’ young people (Lemert, 1951; Becker, 1963; Akers, 1985; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989; Goffman, 2009). This can cause a downwards spiral of self-fulfilling prophecies, where labelling troubled young people may result in adoption of a deviant identity, social exclusion and seeking out others in similar life situations, which all can lead to further reinforcement of that deviant behaviour (Akers, 1985; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989; Goffman, 2009). A recent US study looked into the specific relationship between formal police contact and young people’s propensity towards deviance, which presented a clear correlation between the two (Wiley & Esbensen, 2016). The findings from this study confirm that simply being stopped by the police may inadvertently have negative consequences for young people and can actually contribute to increased delinquent behaviour and attitudes. This is concerning, particularly in light of the aforementioned statistics suggesting that young people experience more formal contact with police than other age-groups (Durose, Schmitt & Langan, 2005).

The need for better ways for police to engage with young people (as well as other vulnerable groups) is undeniable, and is based on the idea that to better serve their communities, police should understand and appreciate vulnerability-specific issues. In the context of this project, closing the gap between young people and the police, solely focusing on young people’s attitudes towards police was not going to be sufficient. Rather, addressing the complicated and challenging relationship between law enforcement and young people required mutual and cooperative effort. As described in Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton (2012):

“If [police] students are to appreciate the ways in which the ‘other’ is framed, they must recognise the complexities of social interaction and the difficulties of achieving mutual understanding”.

This report examined the uniqueness of the ERCT police recruit program, and the benefits of its dual impact approach to resolve this long-standing issue.

Camp logistics

The ERCT police recruit program involves a two-night long camping trip at the Police Academy (the camp was moved elsewhere in 2019) where each recruit is partnered up with a child/young person, based on a mentoring structure. While this ‘buddy system’ is within the standard ERC model, this is also, incidentally, recommended in literature (Hinds, 2008).

To reinforce the informality of police contact, and to accommodate the above recommended approaches, the children participating are initially unaware that they are paired up with leaders who are actually police officers in training. This goes on until the last day of the camp, where the recruits eventually march onto the Police Academy parade grounds in their uniform (Andrew Blackett, 2015; course coordinators, 2015).

In the same way, the police recruits are not informed of any specific circumstances around the participating young people's upbringing or personal circumstances in an effort to avoid or minimise any preconceived labelling or predispositions. The recruits participate in an ERC briefing, run by ERC leaders, the ERCT Executive Officer, their course coordinator, and one of their lecturers from the Police Academy (who is in charge of delivering the curriculum on vulnerability). The recruits are made aware of the fact that these are disadvantaged young people, without any further detail. The briefing, which usually goes for about 1.5 hours, introduces recruits to the specifics of the ERC objectives and motivation, policies, procedures, and general guidelines. During the recruit briefing, recruits are invited to discuss expectations and consider important factors, barriers, and opportunities for positive outcomes from the camps.

A few days after the camp, recruits participate in a debriefing session to discuss the camp in detail, get further feedback on the children (which usually triggers some level of emotions amongst all) and reflect upon the experience. Both of the briefing and debriefing components of the program are essential. The pre-camp briefing prepares the recruits for the challenging task of supporting potentially vulnerable young people, while the debrief enables feedback and to work through and acknowledge any emotional reactions or questions emerging from the experience. During the debrief, recruits also discuss how the experience and associated learnings can be utilised in their future work as a police officer.

The camps complement the Police Academy portion of the recruit course that teaches recruits about vulnerability and how to engage with vulnerable and underprivileged people.

Literature review:

Positioning the Tasmania Police Recruitment Camp program

The following section presents a literature overview of similar programs to position the ERCT police recruit camps in the context of comparable police mentoring initiatives for young people. The review includes the most relevant projects in Tasmania and broader Australia, as well as pertinent programs in the US. This is done for the purpose of comparing and contrasting, as police mentoring programs are not common in Australia, while the US offers a broader range of programs involving police and disadvantaged young people. This comparison to the ERCT police recruit program is presented to contextualise the program and highlight its unique features. The structure of each program review focuses on the following: the structure of the program, the target group of the specific program, and the main aim and motivation behind the program. The overview solely includes programs involving at-risk young people and police where the approach is mentoring-based, or camp-based police-youth projects, structurally similar to the ERCT police recruit program.

Police-Youth programs similar to ERCs

The PCYC and Project Booyah, Tasmania, Australia

Police and Community Youth Clubs (PCYC) is well-known in all states of Australia and represents the largest youth organisation in the country. In Tasmania, the clubs offer a wide-range of supportive activities for young people and communities, and outreach programs to remote locations and identified areas of need. Although PCYC Tasmania presents various programs aiming to support disadvantaged young people and enhance the relationship between young people and police, they currently do not offer programs involving mentorship with police. PCYC did however develop a program incorporating adventure-based learning, mentoring and individual support, which was offered in Tasmania from 2016–2018. Project Booyah consisted of a 20-week program with support from police officers, TasTafe teachers, an Adventure Intervention Worker, and a Save the Children Youth Worker. The project was designed to help at-risk 16–19-year-olds reconnect with family, community, and education to avoid or halt cycles of anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, self-harm, and crime (Tasmania Police, 2016b). Unfortunately, despite being perceived a very successful program by all involved (Tasmania Police, 2016a). The program was shut down in 2018 due to lack of continued government funding, combined with an incident where a lot of the program's equipment was stolen (Tasmania Police, 2018).

Project Booyah, Queensland, Australia

Project Booyah is also offered as a police mentoring program in Queensland, and supported by a partnership between Queensland Police Service, the PCYC Welfare Organisation, and various government and business partners. The project offers a 16-week support program twice a year to identified 'disconnected' young people at various locations in the state. The main purpose is to help participants regain a sense of their own self-worth, build resilience, and enable them to feel a connection with their local community and police. Project Booyah is similar to the ERCT police recruit program in relation to the mentoring-based approach, where police officers or recruits act as role models for the participants. The ratio of young people and police officers, as well as the specific mentoring approach, varies between the two programs. Fewer police than young people take part in Project Booyah, in contrast to the one-to-one contact in the ERCT police program. The two projects also differ in terms of timeframe. The ERCT police program is a 3-day immersion, intensive camp, whilst Booyah is a 16-week program with weekly activities. The dual impact approach at ERCT also differs from Project Booyah, which focusses solely on the young participants. This is most evident by the fact that police officers managing the projects have all signed up for the project themselves, in contrast to the police recruits partaking in the ERCT camps who participate as part of their education plan (Project Booyah, n.d.).

Blue Light Alternative Strategies for Teenagers (BLAST), Australia

The Blue Light Alternative Strategies for Teenagers (BLAST) program is probably most closely comparable to the ERCT police recruit camps, and similarly offers a 3-day/2-night camp experience for young people (Blue Light Camp, 2020). The program has been delivered in multiple communities in Victoria for several years, and offers an early intervention and prevention model, which aims to reduce the costs of courts, incarceration, and post release support. The program is described as "*an ideal alternative option for 'at-risk' young people*", although all youth age groups from all factions of society are invited to take part in the camps. BLAST activities are aimed at providing participants with strategies to improve their self-esteem, confidence, problem-solving skills, and sense of belonging in their community. The program seeks to foster rapport between young people and participating local police members. It is also the only program, other than the ERCT police recruit program, that intentionally aims to impact both the young people and the police officers participating in the camp. BLAST is thus presented as an opportunity to increase awareness and understanding of the young people in the local community and challenges they face, from a police perspective. However, an important distinction between the two programs is the voluntary nature of police officer involvement in the BLAST

camp. Therefore, unlike ERCT, the BLAST program does not reflect a collective police training intent, but simply an opportunity for willing officers.

Indian Youth Explorer's Police Academy, US

The Indian Youth Explorer's Police Academy (IYEPA) program is, similarly to the ERCT, a sleep-away camp program. It is specifically focused on Native American law enforcement and is managed by the Nez Percé Tribe's police department in Idaho. The camp invites young people, both Native Americans and non-Native Americans, to participate in a weekend where they will be introduced to police procedures, while also engaging in sports and other outdoor activities. The activities incorporate many components of police academy training, to promote Native American law enforcement amongst young people. The purpose is to provide a fun weekend for the children, but it is also a cultural introduction with the aim *"to foster a new generation of Native law enforcement leaders and strengthen bonds with young people in their community"* (Police Youth Programs, 2020). Although this program is similar to the ERCT program in its camp-structure, the aims differ as the projects target different issues. Where IYEPA reaches out to a broad range of young people from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, ERCT is exclusively offered to disadvantaged young people, who would not have the chance for a holiday experience otherwise. However, overall, the main aim of both programs is to bridge the youth-police gap and dispel predispositions and labelling.

Police Athletics/Activities Leagues (PALs), US

PALs is another project worth noting. Similarly to the ERCT police recruit program, the PALs program is based on mentoring principles. Its main focus is youth crime prevention through engagement in sports, outdoor activities, education, and arts (Police Youth Programs, 2020). This program is offered in different communities in collaboration with local police to cultivate positive attitudes towards law enforcement. The PALs program differs from project to project, but usually revolves around some sort of activity where local disadvantaged children and young people get involved with volunteers from either law enforcement agencies or community-based not for profit organisations. The ratio of partaking police officers and young people differs from program to program, and the mentoring is built up around contact through the specific activity, rather than focussing explicitly on relational connection as with ERCT police recruit camps. Again, the focus is solely on impacting the young people.

Badges for Baseball, US

Badges for Baseball is a collaborative partnership between law enforcement agencies, schools, and youth organisations. This is based around activities where at-risk young people get paired with mentors from law enforcement, who aim to teach 'life lessons' and help children build resilience, self-esteem and learn to cope with other challenges through team sport involvement. At times, this project takes the same rare one-to-one approach as ERCT police recruit camps, strengthening the relational, interpersonal component. However, in contrast to the ERCT police recruit camps, the focus is singularly on impacting the young people, and the partaking police mentors have chosen to be part of the program out of their own initiative (Police Youth Programs, 2020).

Dream Court, US

Dream Court is also a sports activity based mentor program. Although this predominately revolves around basketball, the structures of the program are the same as for Badges for Baseball (Police Youth Programs, 2020).

IF, US

IF is centred around the in-person interaction between law enforcement and young people, referring to the 'what if' question that often follows when 'choosing' an unlawful path. This project is managed by the Tacoma Washington Police Department's Juvenile Unit, and collaborates with schools, juvenile court, and mental health providers. The program is aimed at at-risk young people and their families. Young people are put in contact with ex-offenders and relevant social services, as part of a mentoring program, while the children's parents or guardians receive guidance from police officers. This approach is rather distinguished from the ERCT police recruit program, as it clearly focuses on primary crime prevention. Of all the initiatives presented in this report, the IF project is the only program that includes ex-offenders. With this approach, the IF program is, in contrast to the ERTC recruit camps, not envisioned as a 'fun' engagement, but one that points out the seriousness of bad decisions (Police Youth Programs, 2020). This direct approach is interesting, in light of the debate on whether singling out or labelling 'at-risk' individuals, actually promotes delinquent behaviour, rather than prevent it (Akers, 1985; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1989; Goffman, 2009).

Cops Camp for Kids, US

The Cops Camps project is set up as a camp experience (MNCPPC, 2020). The Maryland-National Capital Park Police host a week-long camp for children aged 9-12, twice a year. The camp is open to all children in that age-group and is not specifically aimed at at-risk or vulnerable young people. The purpose of the camp is “*to bring law enforcement and the local community together*” (MNCPPC, 2020). Activities offered at the camp mainly revolve around different aspects of the law enforcement profession, such as visiting a Secret Service facility, attending a juvenile court session, demonstration of police office skills, and participation in a staged crime scene and trial. In that sense, the aim of the camp revolves around the presentation of the police profession, rather than supporting the participating children, or improving police approaches. Therefore, the Cops Camp and the ERCT police recruit camps have little in common other than the camp-model structure.

Police-Youth Engagement Project (PYEN), US

The PYEN is managed by the non-profit organisation The Policing Project, which is an administration committed to strengthen the relationship between police and communities. The PYEN project is a nationwide offer for communities with “*tension between youth and police*” (Friedman, Berenyi, Kinsey & Heydari, 2020). The program is usually presented to schools in different forms, adapted and adjusted to the specific needs and capacity in each area. It varies in duration and intensity, but typically follows a school year and occasionally takes place during school hours. It differs from the other programs, including the ERCT police recruit program, in its approach to engage young people and patrol officers around police policymaking. The aim is to teach young people that their voice matters and to enhance their willingness to engage in community matters. The program also aims to improve mutual engagement between citizens and patrol officers, and is in that sense, somewhat dualistically intended, similar to the ERCT police recruit program. However, the police officers in the PYEN program are, again, participating out of own initiative.

The ERCT Police Recruit Program

A few things make ERCT unique in its approach, and in its fostering of personal connection between police and young people.

Double aim

The ERCT police recruit camp is not just intended as a one-way mentoring opportunity for young people. It is intended to illustrate, as a critical part of the police recruits' training where the recruits are introduced to young people, a social cohort who are statistically more likely to engage with police in the future (Durose, Schmitt & Langan, 2005; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Police officers taking part in the other presented projects can undoubtedly still experience an unintentional impact on their own attitudes towards society and their profession, but the idea to specifically influence attitudes, stereotypes, stigma and future interactions between both groups is a fundamental distinction for the ERCT police recruit program. Furthermore, the one-to-one ratio forces all recruits to actively engage and work on their communication skills; this also fosters the feeling of being seen and heard for the young person. From a teaching perspective, all recruits receive the experience of personally engaging with vulnerabilities, therefore actively building their cultural and social competence (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). Longer term, this can help improve community engagement practices, at a time where police seem to have less capacity to engage in such activities (Bartkowiak-Théron, 2011b).

The risk of labelling young people

When offering programs like these to a specific cohort, the risk of labelling needs examination (Wiley & Esbensen, 2016). Even the recommended informal contact through mentoring programs can potentially cause harm when they are a targeted one-way approach from police towards young people. However, the ERCT police recruit program is not a one-way approach where the police seek to change the attitudes of young participants. It is a programme of work where both parties have the potential to receive, consider and change their attitudes, understanding, and even appreciation of each other. An important element of the program (the knowledge of the 'buddies'' affiliation with law enforcement) remains undisclosed until the last day of the camp. Relationships (usually positive) have already begun to develop in that absence of knowledge, and this fosters a 'meet-in-the-middle' approach that enhances feelings of understanding and interpersonal acknowledgement. Such an informal setting, initially non-police specific, is deemed as crucial for forming positive attitudes towards law enforcement (Hinds, 2008).

Training vs. volunteering

The ERCT police recruit program is not a volunteering program, but rather a training initiative which is mandatory for all recruits in a specific course stream. All other programs presented above are based on either volunteers, or a few select police officers (one would therefore assume that these officers are already favourably inclined towards young people, or have a passion about young people's issues). Police officers volunteering for mentoring-programs usually have knowledge or interest in acquiring a deeper understanding of young people and youth-specific problems. But from a macro-perspective, attempting to scratch the surface of disentangling the long-standing, complicated relationship between deviant or anti-social young people and police, there is a need for a change in the general perception amongst all police officers. The ERCT initiative sits within that intent of dismantling stereotypes around young people living in situations of deprivation, disadvantage, and a wide range of other types of situational vulnerabilities (Bartkowiak-Théron & Asquith, 2021).

It is necessary to understand, according to literature on police culture (Reiner, 1998), that it is easier to implement these changes *before* the police recruits adopt old standards deeply rooted in police culture. In a study of Australian police recruits learning through community placements, it was found that placements had a major impact on their self-positioning in professional practices (Layton, 2004). For some, the exposure to real-life social vulnerabilities changed the way these recruits perceived their prospective police role, manifesting a greater social awareness and empathy. The extent of changes in police recruits' worldviews through this placement was largely related to the characteristics of the police organisations in which students were placed. It was further concluded that failure for recruits to change their behaviour was attributed to a strong allegiance to stereotypical understanding of what it means to be a police officer (Layton, 2004). Police organisations are often viewed as a highly masculinised occupation, where vulnerabilities are generally shunned both amongst law enforcement and other community members (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). However, just as young people do not necessarily fit stereotypical labels of anti-social and delinquent behaviour, police similarly do not necessarily fit these 'macho' archetypes. While some community placements in the police placement study blocked rather than provided opportunity to learn about vulnerabilities, others served as ideal learning contexts (Layton, 2004). Either way, there is a strong incentive towards introducing exposure to vulnerabilities early in the training/career of a police officer.

EVALUATION FINDINGS: Recruits

To analyse the effect of the camp on participating recruits' social perception and potential engagement with vulnerable young people, all recruits were asked a range of worldview questions, before and after the camp. Participants were asked to either select all answers that applied to them personally, or rating the extent they agreed with specific statements. For most questions, variable answers were presented. This following section presents a consolidation of pre- and post-camp survey answers, and analyses the diversity of answers before and after taking part in the camps.

Demographics

Table 1 shows the overall demographics of survey respondents. It is important to note that the majority of recruits did not have children at the time of participation. Most of these recruits had little or no experience with communicating with young people in any kind of authority capacity prior to this program. Gender is well-balanced, with only a slightly more women participating in the pre-camp surveys. Of those who participated in the pre-camp survey, ten recruits did not participate in the post-camp survey.

	Recruits partaking in total	Women recruits	Men recruits	Average age	Partaking recruits with children	Partaking recruits without children
Pre-camp surveys	76	40	36	27.6	26	50
Post- camp surveys	66	33	33	26.3	18	45

Table 1 - Recruit demographics

On Approaching young people

The first question participants were asked was “When you see young people congregating in the street, you would automatically...”. Participants were asked to select all the options they felt applied to them for this

question (see Figure 1). When looking at the consolidated answers across all years, there are some noticeable differences between answers from the pre-camp survey to the post-camp survey.

- **For the pre-survey responses, the option “Not mind and keep doing what you are doing” is the most dominant answer** with 50% selected. In contrast, **the response “Go and have a chat to them”, was the most prevalent answer in post-camp surveys, which was selected by 75% of respondents.**
- It is also worth noting the response “Not mind and keep doing what you are doing” decreased to **38% in post-camp surveys.**

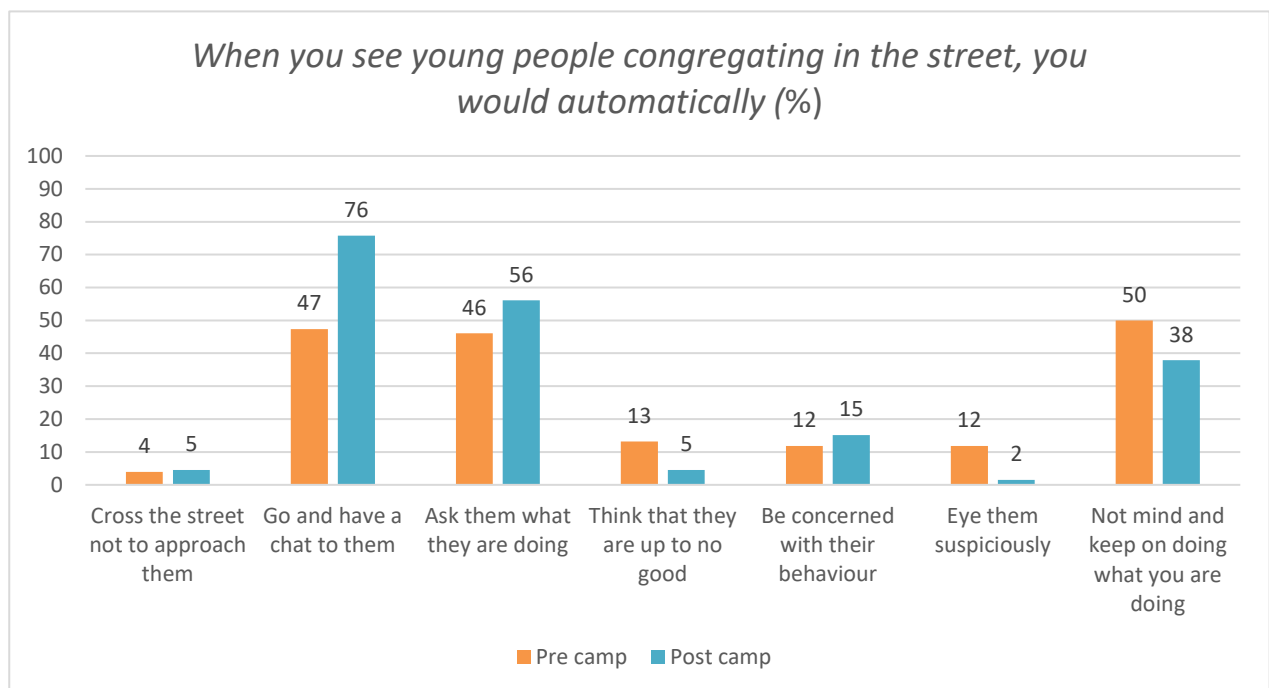


Figure 1 - When you see young people congregating in the street, you would automatically...

Note: All figures throughout report rounded to nearest whole number.

Several recruits seem to have changed their presumed approach after participating in the camps. The differences are pronounced, and suggest that **recruits are more comfortable communicating with and approaching young people following the camp**. One police recruit comments on this:

“In a police capacity, I would make the effort to speak with the youths, not just to find out what they are doing but to take the opportunity to talk to them and hopefully start building rapport, which may be useful in future” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

The results, combined with this kind of personal reflections, further suggest that recruits have gained some understanding of the benefits of establishing good relationships and rapport with disadvantaged young

people in the community. There is also a strong drop in the negative initial worldviews of 'eyeing young people suspiciously' and 'thinking they are up to no good'.

On Anti-social behaviour

Participants were asked the degree to which they agreed with specific statements regarding young people (a fundamental aspect of worldview research). One of the most noticeable variations between the before/after answers is in regard to the statement "*Underage anti-social behaviour is a problem in today's society*" (see Figure 2). For the pre-camp survey, 11% of the participants said they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this, while 64% either agreed or strongly agreed. For the post-camp survey, only 3% disagreed, no one strongly disagreed, and 74% agreed or strongly agreed. This indicates ***a shift in the general understanding of anti-social behaviour as a problem amongst young people***, as a result of spending a weekend with young people potentially displaying signs of anti-social behaviour: after all, the camp plays a part in raising awareness of the kinds of incidents police would be presented with in their daily profession. After 48 hours co-existence with young people who might or have displayed anti-social behaviours, it is only natural to observe a heightened awareness of young people's potential anti-social behaviour, and an acknowledgment that anti-social behaviour is a concern in Tasmania. It is however more important to note that this acknowledgement came through first-hand interaction with young people (and via a forum of non-judgemental, informal confidential chats with ERC leaders), who in some circumstances were already displaying anti-social behaviour or certain characteristics often associated with this behaviour as opposed to stereotypes wildly agitated by social media or TV shows. Mild forms of anti-social behaviour are strongly associated with future types of delinquency, and therefore should be highly relevant in all crime prevention work. These results could indicate the recruits have gained a clearer understanding of the concept as more individual problematics, rather than a general issue with young people. This is an important distinction in relation to preventative police work, as this attitude change has the potential to shift the overall approach when dealing with young people on the street. As such, it fosters an incentive to consider causes behind specific actions, rather than viewing actions as isolated incidents.

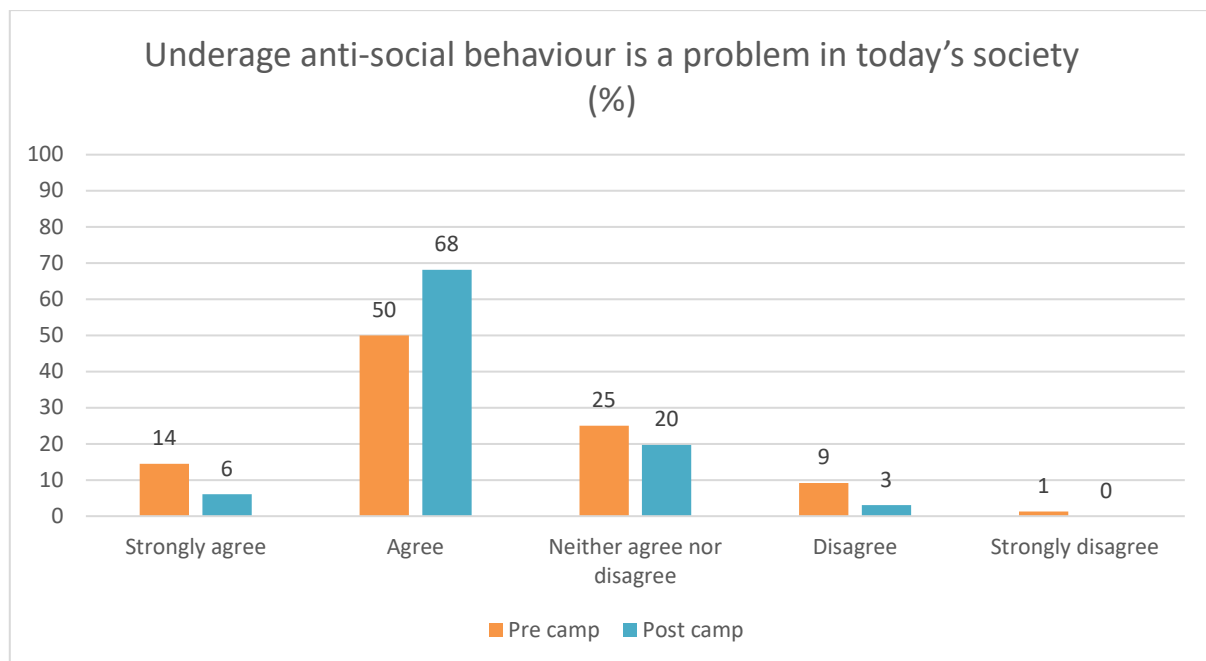


Figure 2 - Underage anti-social behaviour is a problem in today's society

In saying this, the following questions bring some nuance to these improved levels of awareness. When participants were asked how they related to the statement *“All young people will display some form of anti-social behaviour; we can’t do anything about it”*, most selected that they disagreed with this, both in the pre- and post-camp survey (see Figure 3). This most likely suggests that the recruits consistently believe that anti-social behaviour is not a common problem amongst **all** young people. Yet, it is acknowledged as an issue that **needs to be and can be addressed**. Interestingly though, both the number of recruits strongly agreeing and disagreeing with the statement, *“Young people under 18 are likely to engage in dangerous behaviour”*, increased after taking part in the camp (see Figure 4). This is an indication of different perceptions of the experiences with the young people in the camp. Some might have formed the opinion that ‘kids will be kids’, which to some extent will naturally include seeking danger and pushing boundaries. However, others may have attributed any ‘dangerous behaviour’ to other personal circumstances, such as vulnerabilities and disadvantages.

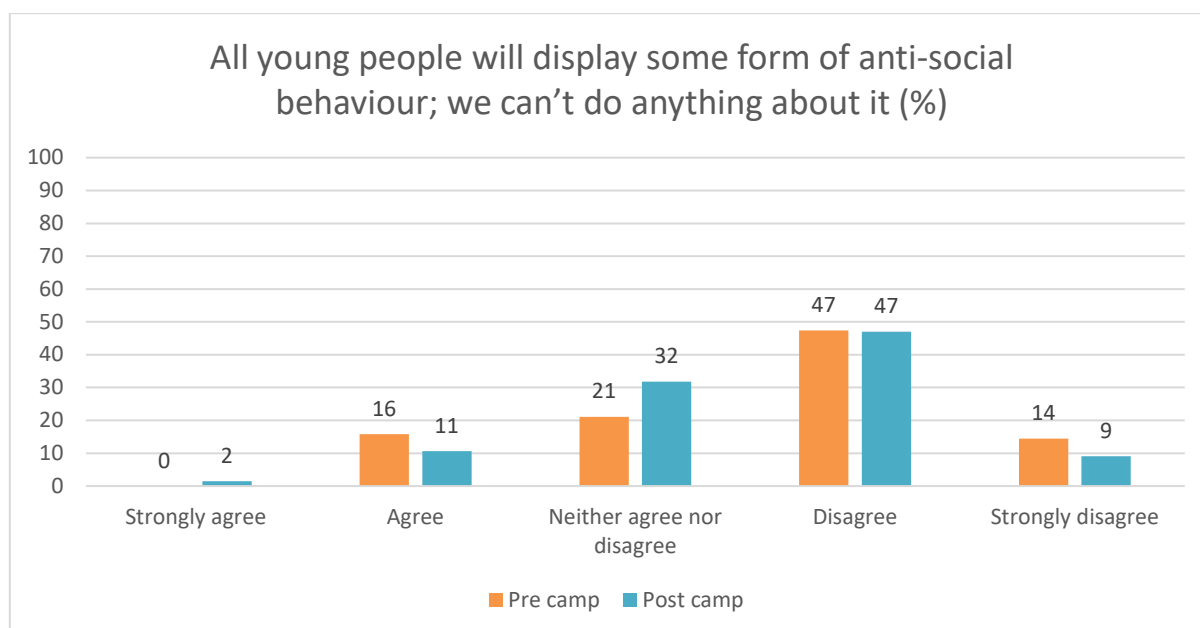


Figure 3 - All young people will display some form of anti-social behaviour; we can't do anything about it"

From the pre-camp survey to the post-camp survey, about 8% fewer picked "neither agree nor disagree": for some, the camp made an impact on their perceptions of young people's behaviour in general. It is unclear whether this was a case of pushing recruits towards prior inclinations, or more of a confronting re-evaluation of young people's behaviour, or perhaps both.

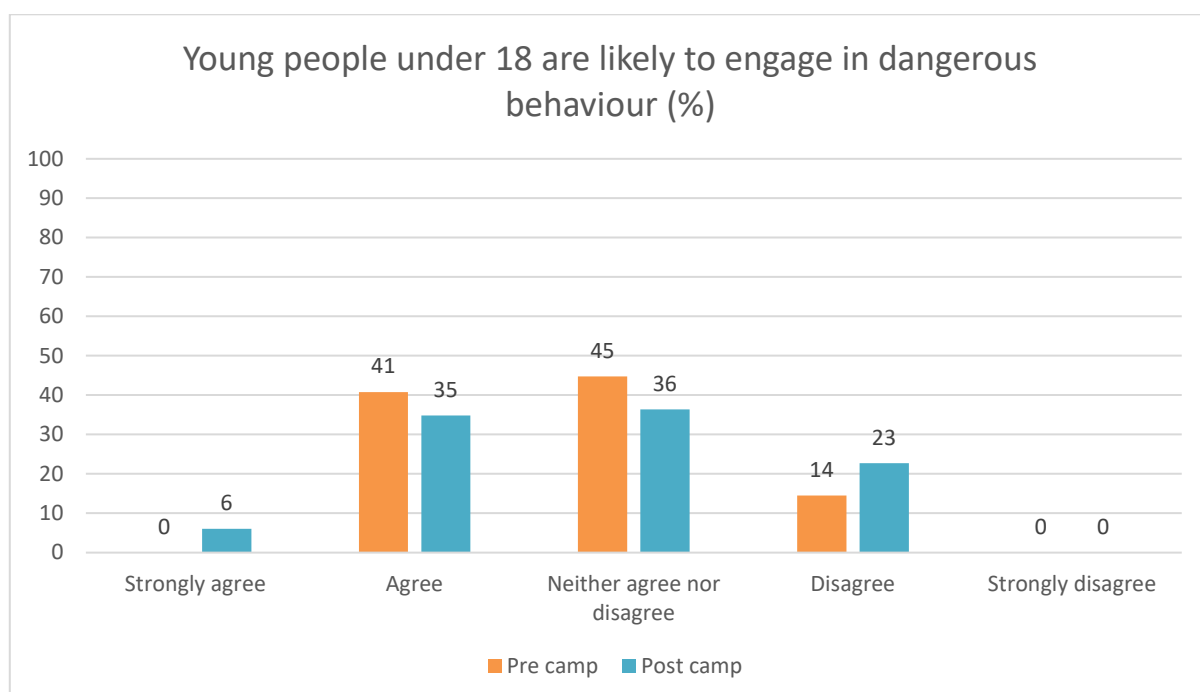


Figure 4 - Young people under 18 are likely to engage in dangerous behaviour

Two recruits commented on young people's behaviour:

“It is good to hang out with these great kids. I believe there is no such thing as a bad kid, and it is good for some people to maybe break down these barriers” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

“The experience gives us some perspective on the life circumstances of a percentage of the youth population in Tasmania and also shows that at the end of the day, kids are just kids” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

On understanding and communicating with young people

In reactions to the statement “*I understand what hardships are faced by today’s young people*”, 11% did not think they understood the hardships of today’s young people, while 72% believed they did prior to the camps (see Figure 5). **After the camp, 0% disagreed with the statement, while 88% either agreed or strongly agreed.** This demonstrates the program fulfils its objectives to teach police recruits to better understand and recognise disadvantaged young people. This change in knowledge can be linked to question 2 of the survey, where police recruits became more aware of the extent of young people’s anti-social behaviour and delinquency: in question [number], recruits are able to better contextualise how constant exposure to hardship can influence the life-course of a child into older age, and also influence possible criminal careers.

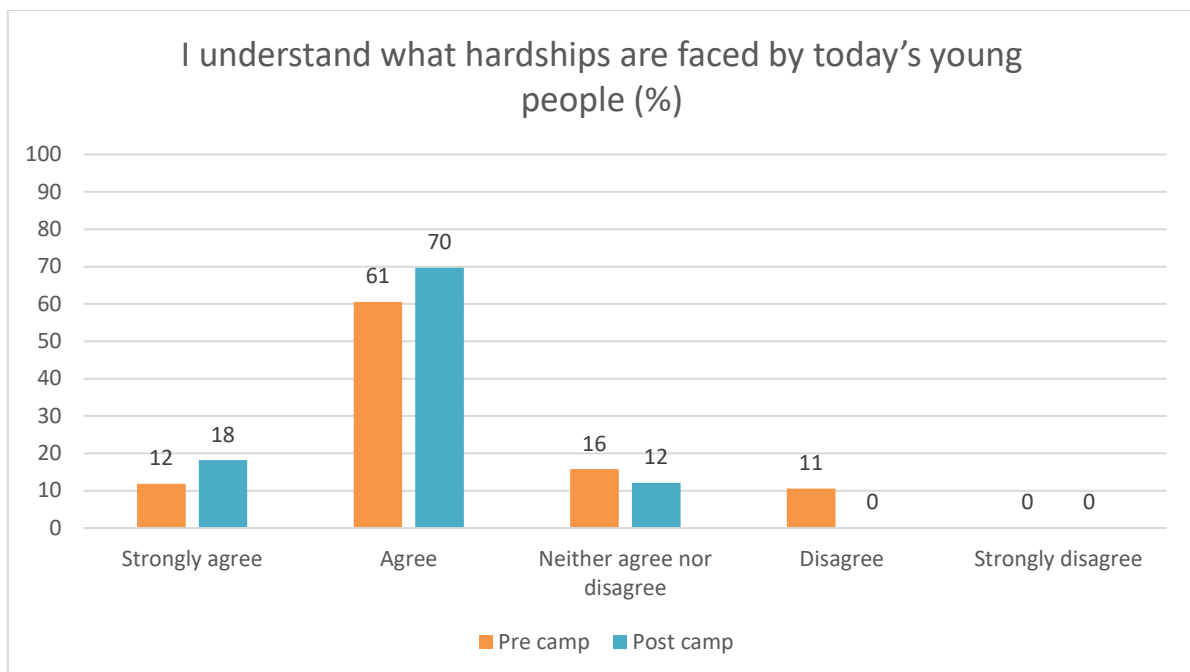


Figure 5 - I understand what hardships are faced by today's young people

All participants were asked whether the camps had specifically helped them with this understanding. In total, **85% either agreed or strongly agreed that the Edmund Rice police recruit camps had made them understand more about vulnerability issues**, and only 5% disagreed with this (see Figure 6). Further, **47% agreed or strongly agreed they had only a marginal understanding of the kind of disadvantage some young people live with prior to the camp** (see Figure 7). Below too, are further comments from participants:

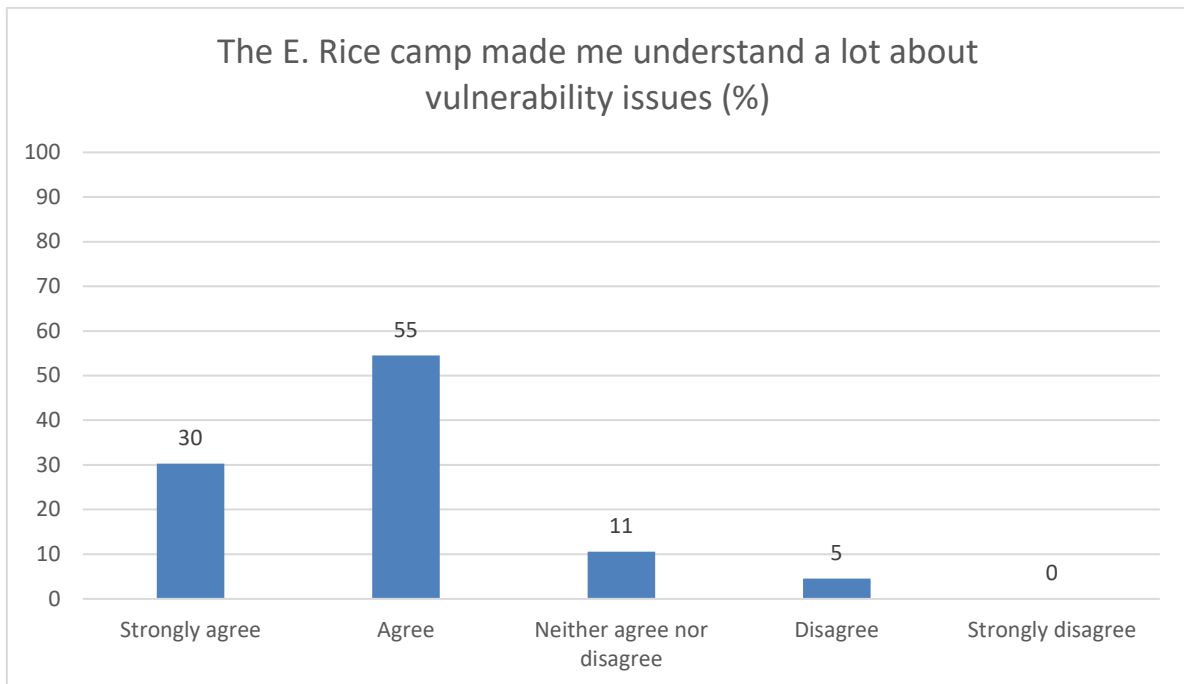


Figure 6 - The camp made me understand a lot about vulnerability

“It allowed me to understand youth's views towards police can be due to parental opinions. So this camp shows a youth's view can be slightly swayed if positive interaction is achieved” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

“It challenges us to deal with 'troubled', 'misbehaved' or 'at-risk' children. It allows us to have a better understanding of why children act or behave in the way they do. For example being influenced by their family/suburb/friends. Just because children are from bad areas, they are deep-down really good kids that just need support and good role-models” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

“It really puts it into perspective what some children are going through. My buddy was polite, smart, and a really lovely girl. From speaking to her over the course of the camp I would not form the assumption that she has been through any hardships, or is from a vulnerable family. This helps me to realise that there can be something more than meets the eye. The children who were withdrawn, and

did not want to build relationships or talk would be the children who don't want to talk to you when you are a police officer. So if I talk to a child and they don't respond or they are rude it gives me more insight into why they are like that because they wouldn't be like that for no reason” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

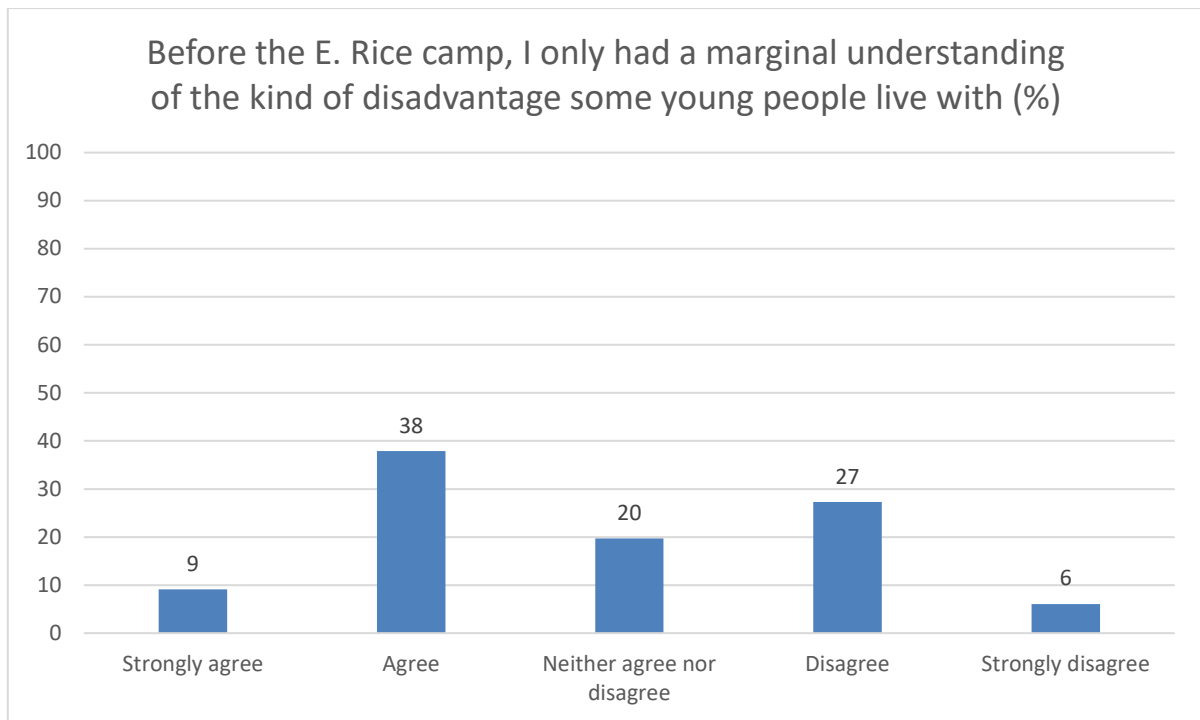


Figure 7 - I only had a marginal understanding of the kind of disadvantage some young people live with

“I had a good understanding of young people to begin with, but this camp highlighted my weaknesses and areas I need to work on” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017).

“It gives a great background into some of the difficulties that these kids have faced in their lives and gives some explanation of the actions they take. Compassion is important for police to build strong relationships and I think this camp developed that. It also helps us improve our communication skills and feeling comfortable having casual conversations with youths that may not have the best beliefs about police” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).

On Confidence

These results and comments indicate the program’s initial success in educating police recruits in relation to disadvantaged young people. As stated early in this report, it is suggested that exposure to this particular demographic is essential to preparing police adequately for their professional encounters with vulnerable

populations (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). Such exposure helps minimise predispositions and stereotypical labelling from police, but also promotes a more empathetic approach towards marginalised and vulnerable people. Helping the police recruits increase their awareness and understanding of disadvantaged young people through the ERCT police camps represents a valuable addition to future police training. However, knowledge and awareness are only one part of the process in preparing police for these encounters. Another central component is making sure the police recruits actually *feel confident enough* to apply this knowledge to communication skills, as well as their operational protocols.

In the survey, participants were asked to relate to the statement “*Talking to young people is easy*” (see Figure 8): 45% agreed and 20% disagreed with this before the camps, **while 52% agreed and 17% disagreed after**. Although the recruits might have increased their understanding of young people’s struggles, most still acknowledged that talking to young people is not always easy, but that the camp allowed them to start developing communication techniques. This suggests that for police to actually be *able* to utilise this new-learned understanding in a professional capacity, they also need to be *confident* in applying this in practice. Part of the survey specifically considers the program’s impact on the recruit’s confidence and perception of their own capabilities in communicating with young people in a police setting. In the post-camp survey, **94% of participants said they were more confident engaging with young people as a police officer after the camp experience**. The remaining 6% said they felt as confident after the camp, as before. This is an overwhelming indication that **training through the ERCT police camps can in fact increase recruit awareness, understanding and confidence to utilise this in practice**.

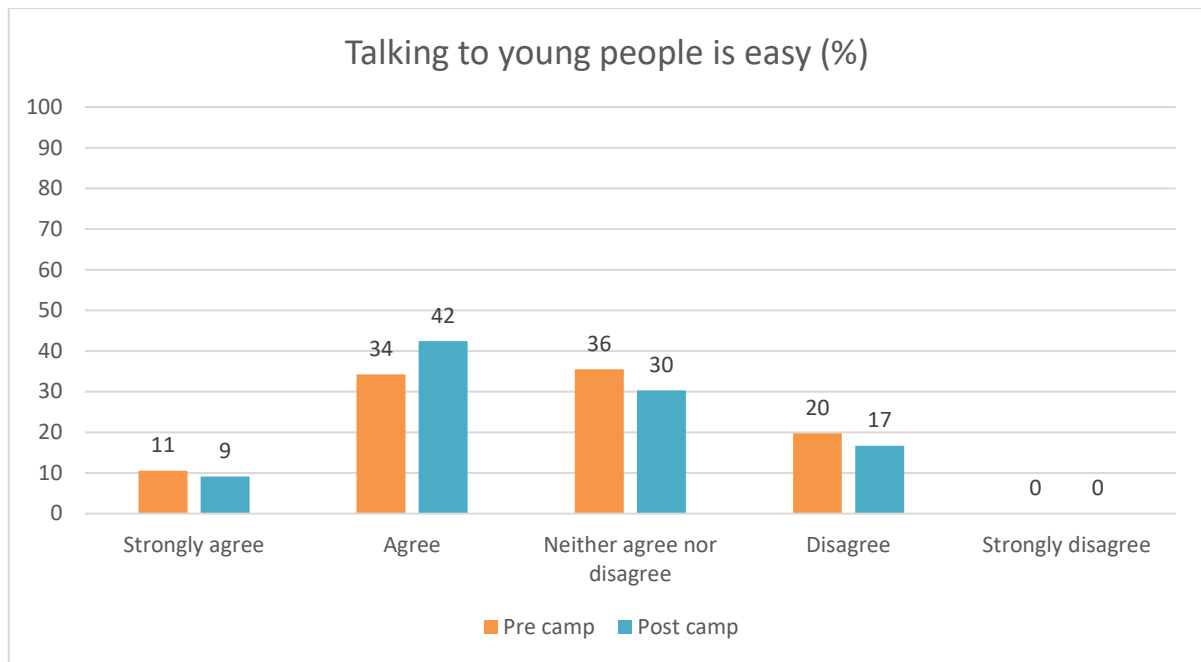


Figure 8 - Talking to young people is easy

Below are some of the comments from participants supporting this:

"I am more confident [communicating with young people] because I saw an array of different situations from all the children that I had never really thought about before" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

"Exposure to vulnerable young people naturally helps people better understand their difficulties and how [to] factor that into communication" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

"I have a better understanding of how to approach youth as a result of the camp" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

"Eddy Rice gave me the opportunity to engage with children that I wouldn't otherwise talk to, allowing me to gain perspective into how they react when they are engaged with" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

"I am more confident [communicating with young people] because now I have a greater appreciation for them and their situations as well as knowledge and even patience. I also know not to take it to heart if they do not want to cooperate with me and that if I do make even the slightest break through with them, then this is a great achievement" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

“The interaction with the children really teaches you how important a role model in their life is and how they like to be engaged when spoken to” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017).

“Other than learning how to talk to certain types of children, I now have an appreciation for those children that I will encounter—though they hate me and will try to get under my skin, I know they in reality they are most likely a really switched-on kid. I also do appreciate the fact that some kids really have not been taught how to socialize and this is not their fault” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

On Expectations vs. reality

For the purpose of looking at the efficiency of the camp, participants were asked to list three expectations, before the camp’s commencement. A total of 186 expectations were listed. Below, these were grouped according to generic theme, and the related distribution is in the below charts (see Figures 9 & 10):

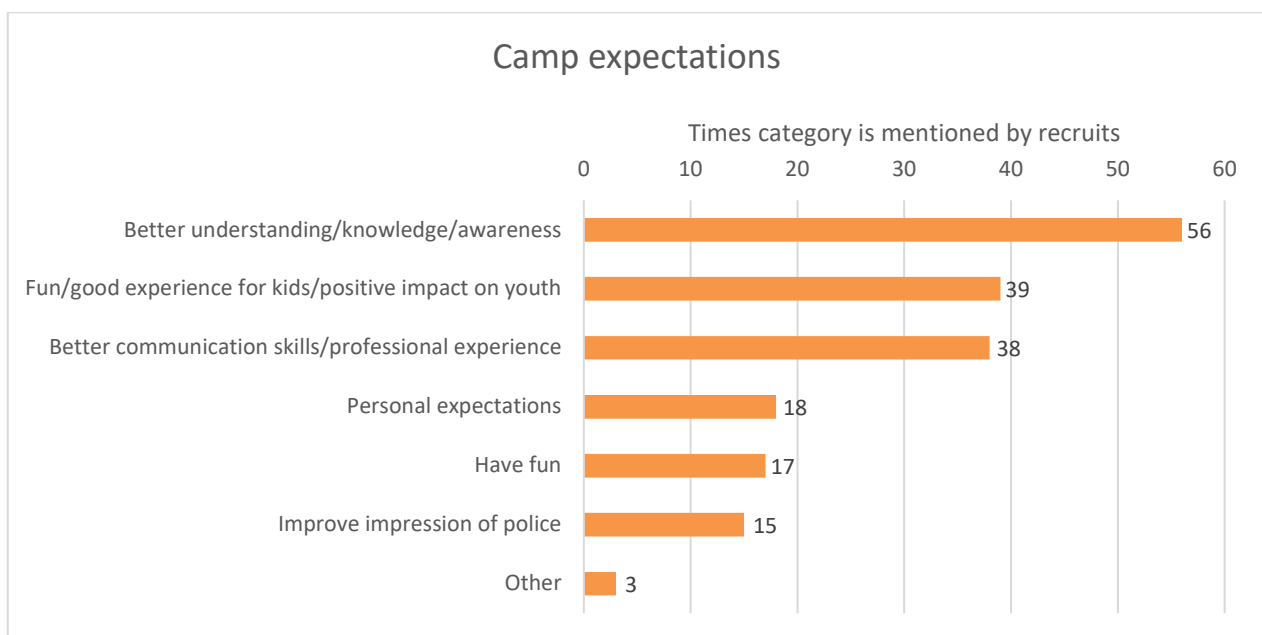


Figure 9 - Expectations about the camp A

These figures point toward the pre-camp briefing being overall successful in presenting the aim of the program as a police training experience, rather than a ‘charity’ or something done ‘just’ for the young people. As put by the Executive Office of ERTC: “This is not poverty tourism, this has a purpose for you and for those kids”. Almost a third (30%) of all presented expectations were related to improving understanding, knowledge and awareness of disadvantaged young people, and 20% related directly to improving police

competences in interactions involving young people (for example, communication, approach, how to deal with). Around one fifth (21%) of expectations included making a positive personal impact on the youth participants, while 8% directly mentioned wanting to enhance young people’s perception of police. These responses paint an overall picture where 50% of recruits’ expectations involved training and self-improvement of competences, while roughly 30% involved impacts on the participating young people. This aligns with the overall ambition of the camp as an essential component of police training in addition to teaching cultural competence and raising socio-cultural awareness.

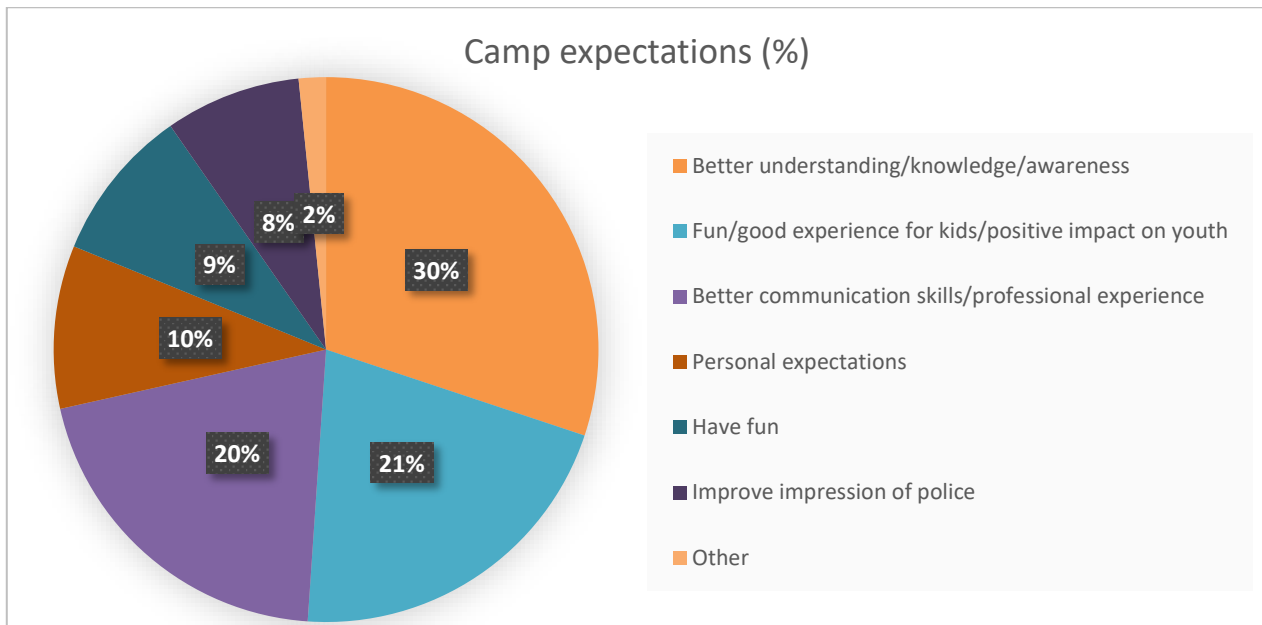


Figure 10 - Expectations about the camp B

However, the question remains as to how this picture aligns with the reality of the camp experience. The post-camp survey participants were asked to follow up on their three main expectations. **Most declared that the camp experience either met or exceeded their expectations.** Only a few comments related to unmet expectations: One recruit had anticipated that connecting with young people would be easier: *“It was a challenge, to build rapport with the child I was paired up”* (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017). Another had expected to be able to *“stay composed”* and not become *“too emotional”* during the camps but stated that this was *“not met”* (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015). A third recruit simply declared: *“I will not know [if my communication skills have improved] until I deal with children through work”* (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017).

A couple of participants had a more positive experience than expected: *“I did not think I would have so much fun”*, and *“I was expecting it to be trying and difficult, but I had a ball!”* (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017 & 2015). One recruit found the camp to be more emotional than expected: *“I did not think I would be*

so emotionally attached to these kids” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017). All other responses confirm expectations stated in the pre-camp survey. The following table provides a few additional benefits of camp participation (all post-camp survey answers).

Improved professional competences	Improved understanding & connection with young people	Personal gratification
<i>"Interacting with young people in the capacity of a police officer - this provided a bridging experience prior to our graduation" (police recruit, 2017).</i> <i>"Skills in dealing with vulnerable youth—yes the camp was great for this" (police recruit, 2015).</i> <i>"Improve my communication skills with young people—met to a high extent" (police recruit, 2015).</i> <i>"I think that I am now more confident with dealing with youths professionally because I know what may be happening behind the scenes" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"Experience. It was a good chance to get some hands-on experience with the children I may potentially be working with in future" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"Enhanced tolerance of anti-social behaviour based on understanding of difficulties, to apply Youth Justice Act principles consistently" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"To better my communication with troubled youth. Yes, my buddy was very challenging, but I was able to 'win' him over and by the end of the camp I felt we were quite close" (police recruit, 2015).</i> <i>"Skills. The opportunity to try different ways of engaging with the kids, to see what they were more receptive to" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"The camp helped me enhance my communication skills with young people. This was good to remind me they are just kids after all" (police recruit, 2017).</i> <i>"Knowledge/learning. Always thought I knew a lot about children and how to connect, learned even more by being part of this camp. Exceeded my expectations" (police recruit, 2017).</i> <i>"I wanted to work on my personal skills when talking to people in crap situations and not show vulnerability of my own emotions, which I achieved, but I was exhausted by it after" (police recruit, 2015).</i>	<i>"Have a better understanding of vulnerable children—this was met during camp" (olice recruit, 2018).</i> <i>"Better understanding of their needs. These kids came in all shapes and sizes and shared their stories in different ways but I definitely felt like everyone gained a better understanding" (police recruit, 2018).</i> <i>"Getting a better understanding of where my young person has come from and his story. Yes, he opened up to me and it was amazing to hear his story" (police recruit, 2018).</i> <i>"Connection/Rapport with children—exceeded expectations. Although it was known we were police to some, connection and friendship was still amazing" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"More appreciation of children behaviours and how they are influenced by parents and lifestyles. Very much achieved this" (police recruit, 2015).</i> <i>"I have a greater understanding that they have been brought up in certain circumstances that will reflect on their behaviour" (police recruit, 2016).</i>	<i>"I believe I got all the things I was hoping to get from the camp to the fullest extent possible in 24 hours" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).</i> <i>"I wanted to help my buddy have a good time. I saw obvious enjoyment on his face" (police recruit, 2017).</i> <i>"I achieved perspective. Although this is only a small portion of youths, my expectations of the children were different from what I came into contact with. Even though they were disadvantaged, majority still behaved like 'normal' children" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"I felt satisfaction that I helped create an enjoyable and memorable weekend for the children" (police recruit, 2015).</i> <i>"It was a very positive experience" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).</i> <i>"Positive relationship between police and the children, I think this was achieved" (police recruit, 2016).</i> <i>"I developed a relationship with my buddy, it was harder than I anticipated but very worthwhile" (police recruit, 2017).</i>

Table 2 - Benefits of the camp according to recruits

On whether the camp is a good idea?

The benefits of this program becoming a mandatory part of the curriculum have already been discussed from a teaching perspective, and as per the literature. It was important however to garner the views of the recruits themselves. In the post-camp survey, participants were asked whether they thought the ERCT police camps should become a formal part of the recruit curriculum. An overwhelming **89% either agreed or strongly agreed** with this, while only 3% disagreed (see Figure 11). Furthermore, every participant was asked, both pre- and post-camp, whether they thought the police recruit camp is a good idea. In total, **97% and 99% (pre- and post-camp, respectively) answered ‘yes’** to this. The only pre-camp ‘no’ was attributed to a recruit not feeling like they knew enough about the camps to answer. The only post-camp ‘no’ acknowledged that the camp is a good idea but did not think they should be compulsory to recruits.

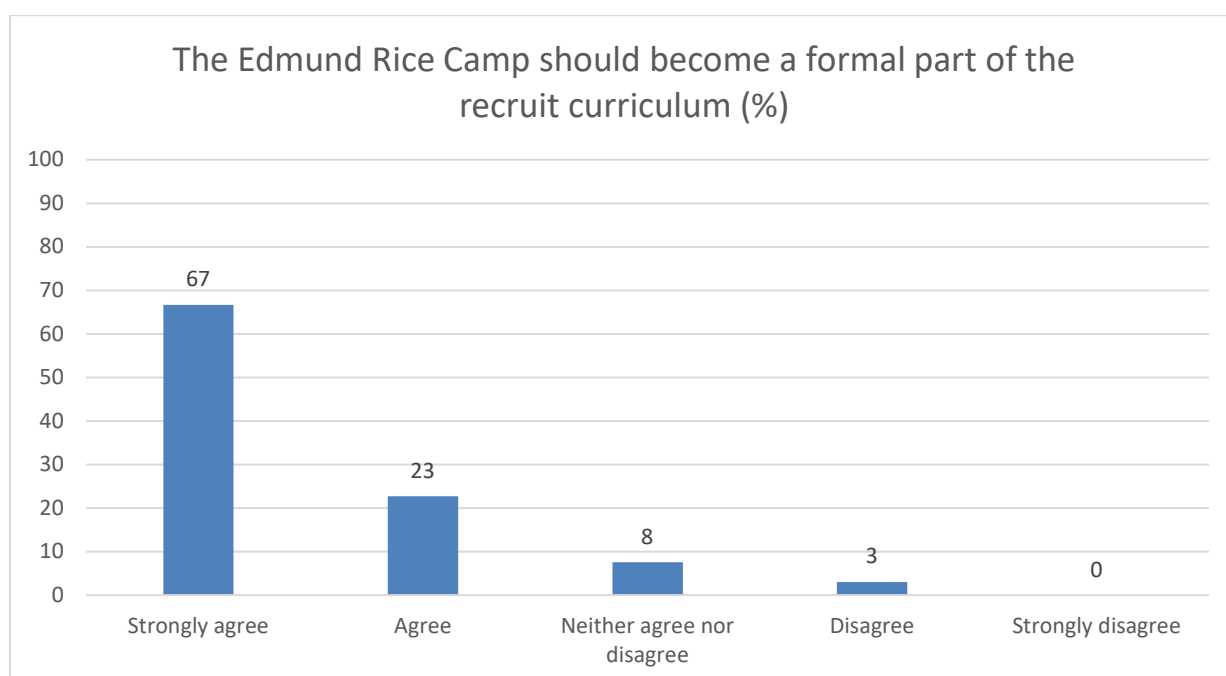


Figure 11 - The camp should be a formal part of the recruit curriculum

“This was an amazing 24 hours! It should definitely be incorporated into the curriculum”
(police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017).

“This camp should be made as a part of the recruit program and it was in the perfect time slot for us” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017).

“Very valuable experience—highly recommend. Even for people a bit hesitant and negative about it to start with” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).

"We do not have much other contact with youth in the recruit training program, though we do have lessons it is good to see the practical side of things" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

"Should be compulsory very worthwhile especially for recruits that have not had any dealings with children" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2017).

"Very valuable to both police and children" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).

Overall, these positive responses towards the camp experience itself reflect the optimistic attitude we found going into the camps. The initial positive attitude prior to the camps could stem from the introductory briefing, where the ideas and motivation behind the camps are presented and discussed openly. This is an important pre-camp element to ensure the recruits are well-prepared to take on the responsibilities that comes with running these camps and dealing with young people and their potential vulnerabilities. The following pre-camp comment from one recruit after the pre-camp briefing reaffirms the value of this element should not be underestimated:

"Sitting in this briefing presentation and listening made me want to be a part of what you are trying to achieve. I think this is an awesome idea as long as these kids continue to feel like they belong to something. What an opportunity to provide some happiness for these kids. This should not be left until the end of the course" (police recruit from pre-camp survey, 2015).

Although not all recruits were excited about participating prior to the camp, it is important to provide transparency behind the objectives, to help every participant be as comfortable as possible beforehand. A few recruits from the earlier camps expressed concerns about not trusting this to be a non-assessed activity (pre- and post-camp survey data, 2015). It has since been made absolutely clear during briefing, that participants will not be marked on this activity, which is also the reason for lecturers not participating in the camp itself. From the beginning of this program, it was decided that assessment had to be left out to allow recruits to comfortably and fully engage in the exercise, without feeling judged or watched. The study of recruit community placements suggested that the recruits to a high extent used the placement experiences to reflect on their own lives, and that these reflections were likely to affect the ways in which they conduct themselves as police (Layton, 2004). It is therefore important to enable the police recruits have this experience without the distraction of assessment, to allow for a process of self-reflection. Below are a few recruit comments in regard to this:

“The camp was a good distraction. One of my peers made a great point the other day about, when being a recruit you become so selfish in your bubble and it was nice to be able to feel like it wasn’t all about you or the academy for 24 hours” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).

“This was such a beneficial experience; I think a lot can be taken from the camp and I hope it continues. I would also love to volunteer in my spare time. It saddens me that there are children that are having to go through these things, and I will definitely make an effort while I am working to engage with youths and try to get an insight to if they need help, because the majority of the time police may not have any idea that anything bad is happening to these children. It is also important to have a good relationship with youths so they have someone they can go to for help. My favourite part of the camp was that they didn't know we were police. When they saw us, first they booed and called us pigs, but then they realised we were their buddies. This changed their negative perception altogether” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

On the camps’ potential as a breaker of stigma

The teaching of police recruits involves deconstruction of some negative attitudes, often rooted in stereotypical views on law enforcement as an occupation (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). These attitudes can consist of narrow-mindedness, prejudice, defensiveness, projection, and self-delusion. While it was important to collect the views from the recruits as to the place and role of the camp in the curriculum, the research team did not expect the kinds of deeply reflective comments of the recruits, *after* having taken part in the camps. Here are some recruits’ comments on the camp’s potential as a mandatory component of their training to become a police officer, and the role it can play in addressing issues of stigma, prejudice and stereotypes.

“Being aware of our own behaviour and actions around kids and any pre-conceived 'ideas' of what make them behave the way they do is worth challenging. It’s better to experience a short period outside your comfort zone with the full brief/debrief format in order to gain the appreciation and general understanding in dealing with young people (some very young) and considerations when approaching (in the uniform) people under 18” (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

"This camp is very beneficial for recruits especially recruits who do not know how to engage with youth. I personally found it an extremely emotional [experience]" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

"It reinforces a lot of the theory of what we have studied. ... for those that do not have a lot of interaction with children or people from low socio-economic backgrounds, I think the recruits benefit greatly from the exercise" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).

"It is a real eye opener as to the positive influence police recruits can have on disadvantaged children. The involvement of police recruits could have a significant impact on the way young people see and interact with police in the future" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

"It builds a positive image of and rapport with the police to the youth that we are most likely to have dealings with in the future" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2015).

"Positive impacts on children as well as the positive image portrayed of police. Not only the children but recruits benefit massively from this camp, it's fun, exciting, eye opening, and very conducive to future recruit learning and development" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

"It helps to put a face and personality towards some of the young offenders we will deal with to increase our empathy" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2016).

"It was beneficial to both parties. The children got to meet police and had the opportunity to build a relationship with them and for them to know that police are approachable and that they shouldn't be scared of them. It was also helpful for police to learn how to communicate with vulnerable people" (police recruit, post-camp survey, 2018).

EVALUATION FINDINGS: TEACHERS and MANAGEMENT

The usefulness of the recruits participating in these camps, as a way of introducing or exposing them to vulnerability have already been discussed throughout this report. Arguments supporting the benefits of the program have been presented, based on literature and a statistical summary of the pre- and post-camp survey data analysis. But the question remains of how beneficial the ERCT police recruit program is from a management and teaching perspective, and what the structural considerations are around formally including it in the curriculum?

For this part of the report, we will look into qualitative post-camp responses. Included in this analysis are data from the semi-structured interviews with course-coordinators (who have run most of the ERCT police recruit programs to date). Data from a focus group interview with five recruits after their participation in the very first ERCT camp is also included. The first four recruits were chosen at random, and one recruit, who had expressed doubts prior to the camps was intentionally invited to join. Lastly, a semi-structured interview with another camp-participant, not affiliated with the Police Academy but with the University (albeit not in a teaching capacity), was conducted to add an external perspective. This person was part of the whole program on the same level as the recruits, which included the preliminary briefing and subsequently debriefing. For the purposes of this section, we will address the following:

- 1) Breaking down learningbarriers
- 2) Learning by doing
- 3) What is learned?

Breaking down learningbarriers

Policing teachers or educators often have to deal with recruits' 'attitudes' as part of their teaching responsibilities (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). In courses involving policing and vulnerabilities, it is necessary to break through these attitudinal barriers to enable recruits to understand the full extent of their prospective role as police officers. Their future role includes the necessary ability to observe and identify signs of vulnerability, assess these signs, respond to emergencies, and refer to specialist agencies (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). The motivation behind the program, as well as the presumed benefits of participation are outlined to recruits during the preliminary briefing.

However, despite this briefing, a lot of recruits initially have doubts about the weekend. When asked about this in the focus group, one recruit simply said:

“I think we all knew that some of us were going to find it really hard. I don’t think we all thought that we were going to be like ‘touched’ in some way by it” (police recruit, focus group interview, 2015).

This suggests there might have been some anxiety or nervousness, as well as reluctance to participate, among the recruits leading up to camptraining. Both course coordinators refer to incidents prior to the camp, where recruits have expressed clear scepticism and questioned why they should engage in the program in the first place. The external participants, who observe the dynamics before, during and after the camps as objective third parties, provided their thoughts on the origins of the recruits’ uncertainties:

“For some, it was thinking that ‘well why do we have to go out and form those relationships?’. Sort of having like, the old school police officer view; ‘well that’s not our job. Our job isn’t to go and do this, our job is to arrest them if they commit a crime. We protect them if they need protecting, but why are we going to hang out with a bunch of kids?’...” (external camp participant, 2018).

Similarly, one of the course coordinators said:

“I think it was the more preconceived ideas that were locked in and having the view that ‘why do we bother’, because we’re not going to change these kids. And a comfort zone thing, too. I think it’s easy, as a defence, to say, ‘this is a load of [expletive]’. It’s easier to say that, than to actually turn it around and say, ‘I really don’t feel comfortable doing this because I’m not used to dealing with kids and dealing with kids from these backgrounds’. And I think that was the real reality of what it was ...” (course coordinator 1, 2015).

These examples reflect some of these stereotypical conceptions of police responsibilities, where vulnerabilities are downplayed and seen as weaknesses (Reiner, 1998; Bartkowiak-Théron & Asquith, 2017). As suggested by one coordinator, and consistent with the literature, this might stem from insecurities, fear, and narrow-mindedness (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). Despite these rather apprehensive attitudes, the feedback on the program has been overwhelmingly positive both from a teaching and recruit perspective. This implies that at some point during the camps, some of these

more sceptical recruits experienced a shift in their attitudes. One of the coordinators who also participated in the camp witnessed this shift:

“I watched two recruits, both quite apprehensive going into the course, but throughout the weekend, you could see these changes, and see them positively change. And then at the end I saw one of their buddies thank them, and when that happened, I could see the recruit stand tall. I think there was a lot of value in it for him. And if it had been voluntary, he wouldn’t have been there, I’ve got no doubt about that. That’s why I think it should be mandatory, because those that are probably having doubt, in my opinion are ones that probably need to attend it the most” (course coordinator 2, 2015).

The external participant and the second course coordinator both witnessed similar changes in the attitudes of the more apprehensive recruits throughout the camp. But what is it that triggers this change? It is well recognised among learning theorists that learning through experience is by far the most effective method (Dewey, 1986; Schön, 1987; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1996). However, one has to ponder the extent to which some recruits will be receptive to learning when they appear to be hesitant about the experience from the beginning. Brew (1996) introduces the concept of *“unlearning through experience”*. With this concept, she refers to the mechanism where other people’s actions or possession of new information radically challenges our own understandings. Ironically, this ‘unlearning’ typically kick-starts a profound learning progress that forces individuals to re-evaluate previous beliefs and views (Brew, 1996), and provides some validation of the worldview methodological framework under which this evaluation sits. For some recruits, the confronting nature of the experience forces them to let go of any expectations towards the camp and broaden their understanding of police roles and responsibilities. This personal reflection from one of the initially sceptical recruits indicates that this could very well be the case:

“A lot of us have never been exposed to that, and just having like an 11-year-old just blurt out hardcore swearwords with no real emotion... That’s just how her life is, you know? So, I’m just thinking; what’s she going to be like in three years’ time or whatever, when she’s got no real parental control, and she doesn’t know any better?” (police recruit 4 from focus group interview, 2015).

The recruit appears to have been surprised by the encounter with the specific cohort of young people in the camp, and moves on to say:

“So, you know there is potential that we can change stuff. Yeah, we have to stick to the book, but it is how we deal with them, and the comfort we can also provide in that situation. That’s probably the biggest thing I took away from it ... Yes, they’ve done the wrong thing, and I know that I might not be able to change the world or anything, but that one-on-one encounter that I might have with someone that’s done something wrong, like I might be able to do something, you know?” (police recruit 4 from focus group interview, 2015).

These are reflections from a recruit who openly expressed apprehension towards the camp, prior to the experience. This attitudeshift is comparable to the progress of learning by ‘unlearning’ and suggests that the engagement that occurs during the camp has the potential to impact recruits’ perspectives by confronting stereotypical ideas about the reality recruits will face when they graduate (Brew, 1996). At the same time, this process supports the diminution of attitude-barriers for learning, and can improve recruit preparedness for further educational development (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). It is important to mention, at this stage of the report, that issues of bias, stereotypes and prejudice are introduced earlier in the course, and therefore contextualise the camp experience. This is a necessary scaffolding component of the course, as it ensures recruits have some comprehensive understanding of what to expect, what is likely to unfold, and how to react. As Dewey (1997) explains, learning and growth happen through a dynamic relationship between the individual and the outside world, as well as through knowledge and experience. Both conceptual and experiential components of the course are equally important and dependent on the other. As will be discussed in the next section, this relationship between the two components was also something that was recognised as a consolidated theme by course coordinators and recruits.

Learning through experience

As indicated earlier, the benefits, and even necessities, of learning by doing are widely acknowledged in education research (Dewey, 1986; Schön, 1987; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1996). This is the case for most professions that require some kind of physical activity, such as police, but the importance of practice should not be underestimated for more theory-based occupations either. The process of ‘trying out’ studied practices in live contexts, and subsequently reflecting upon the experience, is what turns knowledge into competences (Dewey, 1986). Therefore, in the case of a university unit like

HSP332,³ which requires more critical analysis and fundamental knowledge around social diversity, and various forms of vulnerability (ontological, situational, iatrogenic and cross-sectional) than other courses, the need for a practical element is essential to demonstrate the applicability of learning outcomes. One recruit mentioned the need for a practical element for this course:

"I think there definitely needs to be some practical side to the vulnerable people side of things, because really there wasn't much else that was practical, and I think it was definitely beneficial" (police recruit 3 from focus group interview, 2015).

Community placement is one known type of practical training that appears to have a particularly powerful impact on recruits' nuanced understanding of vulnerability, and how to deal with these in a police capacity (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). In the following recollection of an event, the CEO of ERCT comments:

"There was this kid who came in, saying that they had forgotten their pillow, and that they might not be able to fall asleep without their pillow. I will always remember the change in the recruit who, when he saw that mum come back, bringing with her that extra pillow for her kid on camp... He remarked with genuine surprise: 'that mother actually cares about her kid!' This was a fundamental shift in this recruit's view of disadvantage. Those kids experienced specific disadvantaged, but some had good relationships with their parents. Being poor does not mean that your parenting experience is poor. There was some nuanced understanding unfolding at that very moment."

However, since community placements cannot pragmatically be included in all courses, the ERCT recruit program is an alternative worth considering. The observing external participant gave the following remarks about the camps capability to connect theory with practice:

"From what I could see, their eyes were open after the camp and it was sort of 'wow, this is what other people go through and this is the reality of it'. And I think it linked the practical with the theory. They were able to see, OK, well this is what we've been learning, and this is what it is in reality. So, I think there was a shift in understanding that they were working with a range of people who had a range of backgrounds and undertaking different considerations. I think it's a key component to their learning. It helps bring everything that they've been

³ Contemporary Social Issues and Persons at Risk B', the University of Tasmania Unit under which this camp took place.

reading in textbooks and been taught to life. And I think that it is so important that they interact with that, to support their learning” (external camp participant, 2017).

The course coordinators seem to agree that the camp experience is an efficient tool to link what is taught at the Police Academy with the practical and more authentic side of things. One of them explains:

“If we take the time out to do this in our curriculum, I think the learning outcomes would be far more significant long-term, because they’re not just something that we show in a PowerPoint and discuss in class; we actually get them to experience it and actually really go into a much deeper level of learning. We do not have to convince them, they experience it directly. And so that’s why I thought this would be of value. It is more than just a token thing. I think it becomes a lot more valuable when we can actually link it into the learning that they are doing as police officers, and as to why certain people behave in certain ways. And so, if we can understand that we’ll be better police officers” (course coordinator 1, 2015).

What this course coordinator suggests can be related to what Schön (1987) describes as “*the practitioner’s ability for ‘reflection-in-action’*”. This concept, similar to the ‘unlearning through experience’, refers to a situation in which one’s prior understanding or ‘know-how’ is not sufficient, or gets challenged, and a need for new approaches presents itself. The way to deal with this situation is through reflection, either in the moment or in hindsight, and consider new options (Schön, 1987). Through that process, this reflection represents opportunity for individual development. The ‘ability for reflection-in-action’ represents the individual’s capacity to apply a reflection-process in the moment and adjust actions accordingly here and now. Schön (1987) recommends that all professional education should be centred around improving this ability, as it fosters strong problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and competences to reflect on action. Skills, that are also recognised in the official learning outcomes for HSP332 (UTAS, 2021). With strong reflection-in-action abilities, the capacity to continue learning and develop throughout the professional career will likewise be strong. From this perspective, participating in the camp is actually providing the recruits with an opportunity to practice facing real-life issues, test new approaches, make mistakes, seek more information, and discover solutions in a relatively ‘risk-free’ environment. That way, like the course coordinator describes above, the ERCT police recruit program has the potential to ‘create’ better police officers, by having a long-term effect. A couple of the recruits from the focus group interview, touched on relevant considerations:

“I had to constantly adjust. What works for one is not going to work for another, so you’ve got to just keep adjusting until you find something that works. I think I just learnt to be prepared for anything” (police recruit 3 from focus group interview, 2015).

“From our perspective, I think we’ve probably got more out of it, because it potentially has a more lasting effect for us. Like, the kids go back to their lives, whereas we kind of think about it, and probably talk about it for a really long time. Even on our stations, you deal with some stuff, and you get a little bit of an experience of what it’s going to be like, but not from a real youth perspective. Whereas this kind of really highlighted what some of the kids out there really do go through, and that you know, we’re quite privileged from where we come from” (police recruit 1 from focus group interview, 2015).

These recruits confirm the usefulness of the camp in practicing adjusting actions, as well as the potential of the long-term impacts of the experience. It further suggests that the program encourages recruits to enter a state of reflection-in-action and reflective learning, and try out different approaches until something works. Perhaps, as the recruits suggest above, this is because of the specific cohort of young people participating in the camp. To engage with many of these young people, many recruits have experienced that ‘normal’ know-how or familiarity with behavioural patterns will be insufficient, as the young participants will likely display different coping mechanisms or unprecedented reactions because of their individual vulnerabilities and experiences. Therefore, the recruits are forced to adapt to these new encounters. Since 75% of police encounters represent vulnerable populations, developing some sort of ability to adjust, or reflect-in-action, is crucial for police. These reflective skills, the capacity for lifelong learning, and the ability to continuously seek self-development in professional practice are important elements of police recruit training. The camp seems to contribute to acquiring these skills.

What is learned?

This report has extensively argued that the ERCT police recruit program is beneficial to learning, but there needs to more clarity about what specifically is learned and how it relates to the official learning outcomes of HSP332. A deeper understanding of young people and their complex vulnerabilities is part of the knowledge that recruits acquired during the experience. Furthermore, the camp cultivates an optimal environment for practicing communication skills. This course coordinator agrees with this, but further suggests that the scope of what can be learned through the camp reaches far beyond this:

*“Within the At-Risk module, I think it definitely covers that as far as people who are **vulnerable in the community**. I think it also covers **communication**; we’re teaching people to communicate to all different levels and different groups and types in society, and I think that communication is a big one. To actually be forced to have to relate to someone and communicate, and realise that different styles are important, I think that’s important. **Teamwork** is a big part of it. Not just as in **morale building** for the course, but realising that when someone might be struggling, for them to actually help out that person and do that in a team environment. I think that’s important too. And just the other, probably more unwritten things, like **confidence, persistence, and resilience**. All those are characteristics that they should have as police officers, and I think they’re important things they develop as part of this camp as well” (course coordinator 1, 2015).*

As previously explained, these skills are all valuable skills that can support each recruit in becoming a well-rounded police officer, and one that has the ability to continuously recognise self-development. However, in all interviews it was discussed whether or not the recruits were explicitly aware of the police training aspect during the camp, or if that was forgotten when the camp started. All recruits in the focus group interview agreed that they had forgotten all about policing when they started engaging in the camp (Focus group, 2015). This course coordinator, did not necessarily believe that this was true:

“So, firstly; they are to a degree thinking [like police], because that’s part of the culture that they’ve learnt for seven months. They haven’t really been dealing with the community in a policing sense much, so it’s probably hard for them to answer that really effectively, because the impact of that weekend will change them. And I would challenge any of them to say that it won’t change them just a little bit. And I think having that weekend, and understanding what these kids have gone through, they would have been far more aware and used their skills that they learnt, without even realising [it]. They’re presented with an issue, and what I’m saying to them is; that is policing. There’s a problem, and then they apply their skills and knowledge, and their experience, and they come up with a solution” (course coordinator 2, 2015).

The other interviewed course coordinator, to a certain degree, acknowledged there was a risk of losing sight the potential learning:

“I think that’s where, if we don’t bring it together in the right way, like in a debrief and information beforehand—if we just did it as a camp, with minimal information about how the

camp runs, I think we run the risk of it just being a nice thing to do. And I don't think anyone would argue that it's a nice thing to do, but if we want to get learning outcomes out of it I think we need to relate it to our police work, and [to] them as police officers before the camp, and after the camp, and I think that's where the real learning comes out of it" (course coordinator 1, 2015).

It is likely they are both right. As previously described, the experience of personally engaging with vulnerabilities helps build social competences and often causes the recruits to reflect on their own lives (Bartkowiak-Théron & Layton, 2012). These competences and self-reflections will most likely subconsciously affect the ways in which they conduct themselves as police, whether they are aware of it or not (Layton, 2004). However, supporting the recruits in these reflections and facilitating discussions directly linking the experiences to the police profession will certainly enhance the professional learning outcomes (Dewey, 1986; Schön, 1987). Further, for the experience to impact the way the recruits consciously understand their future professional role, it is necessary that the recruits do reflect on the experience. Therefore, facilitating the debriefing after the camp becomes an essential component of the program to ensure that *all* recruits have the best base for this reflective process to occur. As Dewey (1986) explains, the individual cannot learn from others' experiences, but must go through their own internalisation of new knowledge to translate it into practical skills. Furthermore, the briefing and debriefing of recruits will help the recruits' awareness and understanding of theories, policies and procedures presented during the HSP332 course by adding a real-life perspective. That way, it will additionally improve their abilities to consciously demonstrate, evaluate and apply knowledge of key concepts and policing theory under this course. These are all aspects of the official learning outcomes for HSP332 (UTAS, 2021).

LIMITATIONS

While the conclusions overwhelmingly support the embedding of the ERCT in the recruit curriculum, there are some limitations that need to be mentioned. Most have to do with the logistics of camp organisation and management of police recruits:

1. The course coordinators currently volunteer their time; there needs to be some discussion with the Commander of the Police Academy to discuss potential liabilities, time *in lieu* or rostering for the event. Arguably however, if the camp is included as a formal part of the curriculum, then specific time allocation can occur prior to the scheduling of the course.
2. The cost of the camp is currently mostly covered by ERCT. There is therefore a question of sustainability that needs discussing between all stakeholders, although ERCT staff seem confident the current scheme can continue.
3. The embedding of the ERCT in the police recruit curriculum effectively makes the University a stakeholder in the organisation and management of the camp; should the proposal of including the camp formally in HSP332 go forward, then the University will have to be formally involved in any further discussion.
4. The camp was run solely with one recruit course each year⁴. When the initiative went ahead, the other recruit course was not involved because the police course coordinator refused to be involved. There needs to be a discussion about the mandatory vs. voluntary nature of the camp for recruits, what this implies in terms of knowledge opportunity, knowledge gaps, and community engagement exercises for police.

⁴ At the time the camps were conducted, there are 2 recruit courses a year.

Conclusion

At the outset of the ERCT police recruit camp initiative, managers and instructors had formed the hope that the exercise had the potential to affect attitudinal change amongst recruits initially, with the broader view to influence the general policing of vulnerable people. After analysis, it was found that the ERCT police recruit camp represents a significant opportunity for experiential learning, which is currently lacking in recruit curriculum.

Based on this evaluative report, the following questions have been considered:

- a. The usefulness of the camp in exposing police recruits to vulnerability issues, specifically amongst young people
- b. Pre- & post police recruits' attitudes towards young people (possible impact of ERC camps on police recruits worldviews on vulnerability issues)
- c. The possible formal inclusion of such camps into police recruit curriculum, based on the perspective of police teaching staff, and in consideration of the University of Tasmania's HSP332 learning outcomes.

The ERCT police recruit program is unique in its structure and purpose as a training initiative for police recruits. Overall, the program is found to be highly successful on multiple levels.

From a recruit perspective, one positive outcome of the camp is its 'confronting' nature towards issues of vulnerability and to the overall circumstances of the children it hosts. It is argued that the camp is not just beneficial to recruits as a way of exposing them to vulnerabilities, but also because of the degree of this exposure. For many recruits, the experience impacted them in such a way that it changed their general attitude towards young people and vulnerability, as well as their overall perception of their role of a police officer. This was verified by both recruits' and course coordinators' experiences.

From a teaching perspective, the camp provides an important practical addition to the course, grounding contextual and conceptual elements of the course within reality, in a safe, relevant, and efficient manner. As an experiential learning exercise, the camp presents the opportunity to amplify the pertinence of formal learning outcomes by adding a real-life, hands-on and immersive component to the learning experience. Furthermore, there is little risk involved with the program, from a youth, recruit and organisational perspective: the camp operated within clear protocols dictated by Edmund

Rice policies, and usual policing formalities. More so, the trial-and-error process of learning to communicate and deal with disadvantaged young people is considered far less risky in a controlled environment such as the one presented by ERCT, than out on the street with no experience at all. Based on the analysis and discussion of the ERCT police recruit program, from an educational perspective, it is recommended to formally include the program into the official curriculum and thereby give *all* recruits a chance of developing crucial social competences around vulnerabilities. As this course coordinator optimistically puts it:

"I'm hoping it can inspire them to at least take that next step, so that when they're talking to a youth who might be in trouble, or potentially going the wrong way, they will spend that extra minute to actually engage and have a discussion, instead of having that shutdown approach that we might have had years ago. That'll be better policing. I want them to leave here knowing that it's a big, complex thing that they have to be aware of, and that as police we're only a very small part of the puzzle of fixing social issues, and that we do what we can, and we should keep striving to do more" (course coordinator 1, 2015).

It has to be acknowledged that the recruit course currently attempts to present the recruits with an experience of policing which is as close as possible to what they will encounter in the field. This is done, via the recruits' outstations experience, towards the end of their recruit course, where they attend a police station as a sworn trainee special constable, and through a variety of scenario exercises where police officers play the role of various members of the public, or where actors play a specific part. The camp presents elements of reality, however, which are not simulated. It is a fundamentally deep experience with actual members of the public, who are not playing a role at all. Such immersion allows for the development of empathetic skills and layered understanding, which is crucial for recruits to develop before they graduate.

From an organisational perspective, the camps have been extensively portrayed through mainstream media, and some of these clips are still available on YouTube. Such exemplars of police-youth relationships are a valuable instrument to promote police-community engagement activities, and to boost public trust and legitimacy for police. Embedded in the overall context of what Tasmania Police do to educate its officers, the camp also goes towards higher education best-practice, and consolidates the international reputation of leadership and excellence Tasmania Police is currently enjoying. This observation is of a similar nature for Edmund Rice overall reputation as a provider of educational opportunities for the teaching community.

Final recommendations

According to the preceding analysis and conclusions, and further to discussions with the manager of the program, the research team proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: That the Edmund Rice Camp be formally embedded in the recruit course, as part of Module 15, and as part of Tasmania Police community engagement activities with vulnerable and at-risk people and families.

Recommendation 2: That the Edmund Rice Camp be formally embedded in the equivalent Unit under the UTAS degree, as part of a community engagement and placement program, and as per good authentic experiential learning framework.⁵

Recommendation 3: That the CEO of Edmund Rice Tasmania and Tasmania Police Academy management staff meet to discuss a budgetary framework for the continuation of the camp (including the location of the camp), where the Edmund Rice Camp absorbs a portion of the costs of the camp, and where the contribution of Tasmania Police sits in the allocation of rostered time for the course coordinators.

Recommendation 4: That all recruits of all courses are offered the opportunity of the camp, as opposed to one course out of two (in the current form of offering, only the 'Red' course has gone through the ERC).

Recommendation 5: That the briefing and debrief sessions are maintained for each camp being held, in the presence of Tasmania Police coordinators, Tasmania Police officer in charge of Module 15, and the appropriate UTAS unit coordinator.

Recommendation 6: That in light of Tasmania Police leadership reputation in tertiary education, and of the innovation that is this camp of Edmund Rice Tasmania, that a (several) journal article(s) be published in the proper community engagement, policing or education fora, with a feature in the local media.

⁵ In relation to recommendations 1 and 2, we note that Edmund Rice Tasmania plays a similar 'placement opportunity' role for other educational institutions, where it provides 'hands on' experience to young people throughout Tasmanian schools and learning institutions.

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