

# LET'S TALK ABOUT STOP AND SEARCH

**Bringing together students, the police and community members in Tottenham**

Catherine Russell, Sophie Hostick-Boakye and Tricia Hackett



THE  
YOUNG  
FOUNDATION  
THINKING  
ACTION  
CHANGE

## **ABOUT THE YOUNG FOUNDATION**

We are The Young Foundation and we are determined to make positive social change happen. We pioneered the field of social innovation with The Open University, UpRising and Studio Schools. We work closely with individuals, communities and partners building relationships to ensure that our thinking does something, our actions matter and the changes we make together will continue to grow.

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# FOREWORD

Stop and search is a hot topic, especially amongst many of our students since the summer 2011 riots.

In the wake of the riots, we were involved in work commissioned by the Tottenham Community Panel and run by The Young Foundation to understand the impact of the riots on the local community and views on how to move forward. The workshops highlighted strained relationships between young people – including those at our college – and the police in Tottenham, particularly when it comes to stop and search.

Early last year we were approached by the Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group with the idea to survey our students on their experiences of stop and search. It was important to us that we further explored our students' experiences and understanding of stop and search, whilst increasing their knowledge and improving relations at the same time. One year on from the riots, workshops run by The Young Foundation provided a vital space for us to do this.

This work powerfully demonstrated that when we listen, young people have a lot to say. Too often they are not given the opportunity to have their voices heard by the people who have the power to make a difference. Opening up these discussions helped to build bridges between young people and the police. Involvement from local police officers and the Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group also allowed us to build on relationships in the local area.

I hope this work will act as a catalyst for further discussions between young people and the police to ensure relationships continue to improve.

Paul Head

Principal and Chief Executive  
College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London.



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We would like to thank the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Haringey Police and Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group for their involvement in workshop planning and their vital input into the workshops. We would also like to thank the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London for commissioning the work and arranging the workshops.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the students at the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London who volunteered and took part in the workshops. Their enthusiasm for sharing their experiences, exploring difficult situations and coming up with ways to improve stop and search was inspiring.

For more information on those involved, visit: [conel.ac.uk](http://conel.ac.uk), [stopandsearchgroup.co.uk](http://stopandsearchgroup.co.uk), [content.met.police.uk/Site/stopandsearch](http://content.met.police.uk/Site/stopandsearch).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relationships between young people and the police can be tense and are often exacerbated by difficult stop and search encounters.

The aim of our work with students at the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London, MPS Haringey Police Officers and Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group was to:

- explore the impact of stop and search on students
- help students better understand stop and search
- consider how to improve relations between students and the police

Over a number of workshops, we asked students for their opinions and experiences of stop and search.

**Students understand the need for stop and search**, particularly when it comes to tackling knife crime or protecting their families and the community, but **it has to be done right**. There is a strong sense that **looking or dressing a certain way results in more stop and searches**, as the police often stereotype young people. This is compounded by a feeling that **people don't always know why they're stopped**, as officers often give little information or vague reasons for stopping them. There is a belief that some police officers act too aggressively and abuse their authority. These bad experiences prevail in people's memories. Thus, **the way the police treat people during a stop and search is very important**. But, most young people feel it's **also up to the individuals being stopped and searched to act responsibly**, primarily for the benefit of the individual. Nevertheless, remaining calm isn't always a natural or easy reaction and **being stop and searched can leave people feeling** inconvenienced, victimised or humiliated.

When it comes to stop and search, **some people know their rights, others aren't too sure**. Students gain their understanding of stop and search rights from both reliable and unreliable sources, so misconceptions are common. This, along with bad experiences, can lead people to **lose trust in the police**, with some even being fearful.

Drawing on these experiences of stop and search, young people provided a number of tips for police officers conducting stop and searches:

- avoid assumptions
- be transparent
- be respectful
- act considerately
- remember you are in a powerful position

However, interactions between young people and the police shouldn't be limited to stop and search. Relationships need to be built upon in safe and creative spaces, such as workshops, sport, social media, police open days and awareness sessions.

Every interaction counts and so we must make sure the positives outweigh the negatives.



# INTRODUCTION

## CONTEXT

Following the summer 2011 riots, the Tottenham Community Panel asked The Young Foundation to help them understand the impact of the riots on the local community. An important part of that work was involving young people, carried out in collaboration with the College of Haringey, Enfield, and North East London.

A strong theme emerging from conversations with young people, business owners, parents and council workers, amongst others, was tense relationships between young people and the police. There was a sense that the police could be overly confrontational, with some young people pointing to a ‘power mentality’ in police officers. Young people also often felt stereotyped because of their age, ethnicity or gender, for example. Stop and search was one of the key ways this relationship was manifested; it was a sticking point for young people and they often couldn’t see many ways forward.

Through other research and engagement projects, we have found that many young people are unsure of how stop and search should be carried out. It is a process which can leave young people feeling targeted and humiliated. Despite this, people are often unsure of how to, or are reluctant to, complain.

In 2012 the Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group<sup>1</sup> (HISSMG) approached the college with the idea of surveying students on their experiences of stop and search. The College was keen to build on its understanding of students’ experiences. It also welcomed an opportunity to bring together different groups to explore the issue in a collaborative way to build relationships locally.

## WHAT WE DID

The Young Foundation was asked by the College to address some of these issues. We designed and facilitated a **series of workshops**. These brought together students, the community-led HISSMG and MPS Haringey Police Officers (both probationary and veteran officers) to:

- **explore the impact of stop and search on students**
- **help students better understand how stop and search**
- **consider how to move forward to improve relations between students and the police**

Through frank discussions, group activities and role plays we explored students’ (the majority under 25-years-old) understanding of stop and search, how it affects them and the wider impact. The workshops included the following participants:

- **workshop 1a:** 16 males, 7 females
- **workshop 1b:** 13 males, 11 females
- **workshop 1c:** 19 males, 9 females
- **workshop 2:** 11 males, 7 females
- **total:** 59 males, 34 females

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<sup>1</sup> The Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group (HISSMG) is an independent community group with specialist expertise on the subject of stop and search.

For MPS Haringey Police, this process offered a valuable opportunity to understand how young people's perceptions of stop and search are shaped, and to test if and how people understand their rights. In the longer term, they are keen to explore how police training could be altered to reflect young people's feedback from the sessions.

For HISSMG, the workshops provided a space to survey students on their experiences of stop and search. The surveys aimed to build understanding of the nature of interactions between MPS and young people and the challenges faced.

# WHAT WE WERE TOLD

The following narrative reflects the voices of students in the workshops. Our conversations involved students from the Tottenham Centre of the College of Enfield, Haringey and North East London, MPS Haringey Police officers and HISSMG. However, the students' experiences discussed came from interactions with police officers in Tottenham, Haringey and further afield.

In line with the workshop objectives, the emphasis here is on the voice of young people, which is often lacking in debates around stop and search.

## STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR STOP AND SEARCH

*"Sometime it could save you. You never know who's carrying a weapon."*

Most students understand why stop and search is needed as a deterrent against and to tackle crime locally. Many welcome its use in areas with high levels of crime, particularly to address knife crime. A police presence helps some feel safer walking in certain areas at night, acknowledging that stop and search works to protect them.

*"Lots of people need to be searched to find the people that do certain crimes."*

The nature of stop and search means innocent people will sometimes be searched. More often than not, students, particularly male students, justify its use in terms of the safety of their family and community.

### I understand why stop and search is needed



## **BUT IT HAS TO BE DONE RIGHT**

*“I have no issue with stop and search if it’s done in a way where I’m treated fairly and they tell me why.”*

Many (including those in favour of stop and search) are able to share stories of inconsistencies between how stop and search should take place and how it is carried out in real life. Sometimes these stories are based on personal experiences, sometimes those of friends.

*“It’s not what they are doing, it’s how they are doing it.”*

Bad experiences with the police are more prominent in students’ memories than positive or neutral encounters. Opportunities to discuss experiences are very important, both to tell the police what they think is going wrong and to gain new perspectives on familiar situations.

## **LOOKING OR DRESSING A CERTAIN WAY RESULTS IN MORE STOP AND SEARCHES**

*“The description always fits me.”*

There is a strong sense that appearance – clothing, skin colour or even a particular hair style – affects how likely people are to be stopped and searched. This leaves people feeling singled out or victimised. One young man has resorted to changing the way he dresses to avoid unwanted attention from the police.

*“If you’re tall and black you’re asking for trouble.”*

Many feel black and minority ethnic people are stopped and searched more often than white people. Some, particularly those who have been stopped many times, feel the police stereotype the sort of person they are. This leads to accusations of discrimination and racial prejudice.

## **PEOPLE DON’T ALWAYS KNOW WHY THEY’RE STOPPED**

*“It should be a two-way dialogue. We’re both adults...if they have a good reason I would like to hear it.”*

Bad experiences of stop and search often boil down to relatively simple communication issues or misunderstandings. These have an incredibly powerful effect on shaping people’s opinions about stop and search and the police more widely.

Students are not clear on the differences between stop and talk, stop and account and stop and search.<sup>2</sup> Often police officers fail to provide them with information on why they are stopping them and under what category.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix for a definition of the different encounters.

In addition, many do not understand why they are subsequently searched and may simply be told they “*looked suspicious*”. Those singled out within a group, or those stopped lots of times, are left with strong feelings of injustice. Invariably, a lack of explanation exacerbates their worries about being victimised or stereotyped as a criminal.

*“Everyone unconsciously has their own prejudices. We need more information as to why [people are] stopped.”*

Students are divided on whether the police should use their instincts rather than rely on solid evidence. Some feel the police should use personal judgment when stopping people, whilst others think this is risky.

*“It’s a fine line between instinct and stereotyping – you can’t always rely on instincts”*

## **THE WAY THE POLICE TREAT PEOPLE DURING A STOP AND SEARCH IS VERY IMPORTANT**

*“Sometimes you are treated as guilty until proven innocent.”*

Stop and search can be a fraught procedure. Situations can easily escalate. Students see this as clearly linked to how the police treat people they stop and search. They feel police officers have a key role to play in preventing situations getting out of hand. Positive body language, good communication and a calm manner are basic starting points. Many students instinctively respond to people in the same way they are addressed. So, if they feel threatened or are treated aggressively or like a criminal, they are much more likely to “*lose their cool*”. Police restraint is seen as acceptable only as a last resort, for example to protect passers-by.

*“It’s all about respect, if they come at you in a nice way, it’s fine.”*

There is a belief that some police officers act too aggressively, unnecessarily escalate situations or fail to fully explain procedure during stop and search. Students see this as an abuse of authority, or in some cases “*brutal*” in how the police conduct themselves.

*“I remember a police officer laughing when he searched me. Some police officers feel like they can do anything they want and they don’t have to give detail.”*

Many students searched have not committed a crime.<sup>3</sup> Where this is the case, those who receive acknowledgement of their time, a thanks or an apology after being searched, are much more positive about their experiences.

*“If they apologise...then the damage would be limited. But the police cannot always apologise.”*

Those without English as a first language believe their hesitation in responding to questions when stopped by the police can be mistakenly interpreted as a reluctance to cooperate.

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<sup>3</sup> The Metropolitan Police Service has a 20 per cent positive outcome target, which means that 20 per cent of stop and searches should result in an arrest or cannabis warning.

*“It was the first time in the UK and I didn’t really understand the language... Here they speak fast and they think you are hiding something if you can’t answer or because you pause. He told me to lie on the floor, I was in a white t-shirt and it was raining.”*

## **BUT IT’S ALSO UP TO INDIVIDUALS BEING STOPPED AND SEARCHED TO ACT RESPONSIBLY**

*“Everyone needs to work together to make their communities better places to live.”*

The majority feel both the police and those being stopped and searched need to act responsibly. Primarily, this is for the benefit of the person being stopped; cooperation results in a shorter search, leaving them free to get on with their day. Some see they also have a role to play in helping police with their investigations.

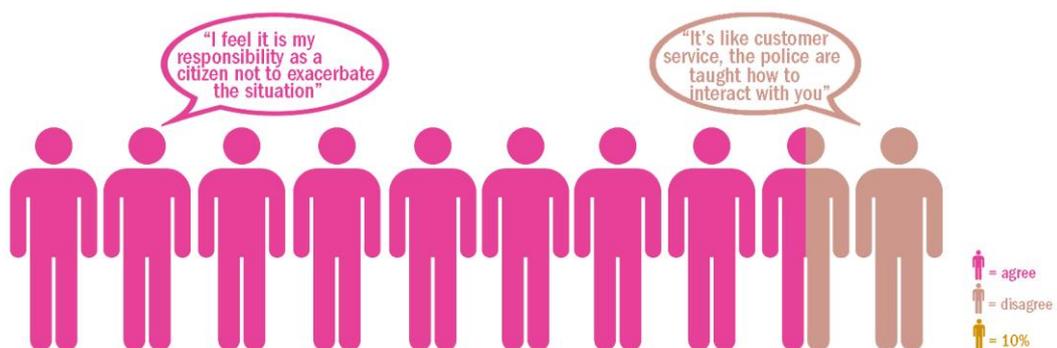
*“You can be on your way a lot sooner if you don’t shout and kick. Communication is so important.”*

However, remaining calm isn’t always a natural or easy reaction for people, especially if they feel victimised or have been stopped multiple times, and more so if by the same officers. This is a decision young people have to make consciously, and may well go against their immediate response.

Students also feel that sometimes young people don’t help themselves. For example, individuals acting defensively during a stop and search can easily increase rather than decrease a police officer’s suspicion.

*“[the police will think] they must be hiding something... People should just take their hands out of their pockets.”*

### **Both police and young people have a duty to act responsibly during stop and search**



## **BEING STOPPED AND SEARCHED LEAVES PEOPLE FEELING...**

At best, inconvenienced. It takes up part of your day or makes you late for work, college and friends. More commonly, it is upsetting. Students are left feeling victimised, questioning themselves and how they appear to others.

*“You feel confused and think ‘am I looking wrong?’”*

Being stopped and searched is seen to imply guilt and there is real worry that friends, family or passers-by might jump to the wrong conclusion about the situation. Students can be left angry, humiliated and embarrassed, feeling that they have to justify themselves afterwards. Those who have been searched many times are often particularly affected.

*“When they search me my neighbours are seeing me, people who are passing are seeing me, even my friend is seeing what’s happening to me. After that I don’t feel comfortable.”*

## **SOME PEOPLE KNOW THEIR RIGHTS; OTHERS AREN’T SO SURE**

*“Informing people about their rights in stop and search can lead to more calm stop and search [sic].”*

Students gain understanding of their rights in stop and search in different ways – sometimes from reliable sources and sometimes less so. Some refer to their human rights as opposed to stop and search rights, whilst others get their knowledge by word-of-mouth or from television shows. Some have official materials such as the “Go Wisely” wallet card provided by the Metropolitan Police Authority<sup>4</sup>, but many misunderstand their rights.

*“I know my rights because I keep them with my bus pass.”*

Misconceptions are often common and widely held. These include a belief that the police work to targets for the numbers of people to stop and search and that the more people an officer searches and arrests the more likely they are to get a promotion. Some feel the police actively discourage people from knowing their rights and that being knowledgeable could make situations worse.

*“There’s certain things [the police] say they can do and it just intimidates people from knowing their rights.”*

Many resent being asked for their details during a stop and search, especially when they haven’t done anything wrong. Often, students are unaware they are not obliged to provide personal details and worry their details will be held on record if provided, labelling them a troublemaker.

Police officers are concerned about the flip-side to not giving personal details. That is, if young people choose to withhold details it makes investigating complaints very difficult. It

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<sup>4</sup> All students received information on their rights in relation to stop and search in the workshops.

also rules out opportunities for monitoring disproportionality<sup>5</sup> in terms of who is stopped and searched.

When it comes to complaining about stop and search experiences, there is an interesting gap between those unhappy with their experiences and those who are willing to complain.

Reasons for this include firstly, not being fully aware of rights leaving students less likely to complain as they don't know understand when something is or isn't done to protocol. Secondly, there is a fear that complaining about a stop and search will result in them being targeted in the future by the officers they complain about. Thirdly, that it would be a stressful experience, and so putting bad experiences behind them and moving forward is a better option.

## **IF STOP AND SEARCH ISN'T DONE WELL, PEOPLE CAN LOSE TRUST IN THE POLICE**

Stop and search is one of the main ways students interact with the police. It is clear stop and search has a powerful impact on people's perceptions of the police. This is true for those searched and also those who witnessed others being searched. Bad experiences can easily lead to a loss of trust in and respect for the police.

*"You need to be able to turn to the police when you need help. If stop and search is done badly then the respect won't be there and you will feel less able to turn to them."*

Some have little faith in the police. Others who have had particularly bad experiences have been left fearful of the police.

*"I don't feel safe when I see them."*

Students' wider observations of the police also shape their opinions. Some have seen the police fail to intervene in difficult or violent situations which they perceive as cowardice.

*"There were two guys just beating the crap out of this guy, and the police just watched and walked away. The police don't do nothing [sic]."*

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<sup>5</sup> Disproportionality monitoring is keeping track of the over or under-representation of certain groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) in stop and search.

# PRIORITIES

In the final workshop we shared with students what we had heard from them in the previous sessions. We then invited students to vote on the issues they felt were most important. They voted:

- 1. SOME FEEL LOOKING OR DRESSING A CERTAIN WAY MAKES YOU MORE LIKELY TO BE STOPPED**
- 2. IF STOP AND SEARCH ISN'T DONE WELL IT CAN CAUSE YOUNG PEOPLE TO LOSE TRUST IN THE POLICE**
- 3. COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT; YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHY THEY'RE STOPPED**
- 4. SOME YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW THEIR RIGHTS; OTHERS AREN'T SO SURE**
- 5. THE WAY POLICE TREAT YOUNG PEOPLE DURING A STOP AND SEARCH IS VERY IMPORTANT**
- 6. IT HAS TO BE DONE RIGHT**
- 7. BEING STOPPED AND SEARCHED DOESN'T LEAVE YOU FEELING GOOD**
- 8. IT'S ALSO UP TO YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACT RESPONSIBLY**

Students reiterated many of the issues raised at the previous sessions, discussing poor communication in particular.

*"It would be better if they could improve communication."*

# MOVING FORWARD

Although many students have had bad experiences of stop and search, most think that stop and search is an important police power, which needs to be done right. Training is a key way to ensure that.

## The police's stop and search powers should be removed



Students and police officers collaborated to plan and 'run' a training session for the police addressing the three top themes:

- some feel looking or dressing a certain way makes you more likely to be stopped
- if stop and search isn't done well it can cause young people to lose trust in the police
- communication is important; young people don't always know why they're stopped

Each group tackled one theme and fed back their thoughts in creative ways such as role plays, TV chat shows and role reversal. Their suggestions for improving stop and search were remarkably consistent across the different groups, and focused on the impact of communication and manner of police officers.

Here are the students' suggestions and top tips to police officers:

## AVOID ASSUMPTIONS

- Don't stereotype me because of my age, race or the way I dress.
- Don't assume young people in groups are up to something.
- "[Don't] judge everyone the same."

## BE TRANSPARENT

- Make sure I understand why I am being stopped and under what category (i.e. talk, account or search) – "I was telling them why and asking them to correspond [sic]".
- Don't be vague; tell me how I fit the description of someone – "One day I could fit the description, for example a black woman in blue. But tell me that".
- Speak slowly, use plain English and check I understand what's happening.

## **BE RESPECTFUL**

- Be calm, polite and friendly – *“I expect people to reply in the same way as I spoke to them”*.
- Don’t ask accusatory questions.
- Treat me as innocent unless you prove otherwise.

## **ACT CONSIDERATELY**

- Being stopped and searched can easily intimidate and upset me – *“try to calm [people]; make sure they’re not scared”*.
- Remember I’m worried about being judged by others on the street, people might think I’m a criminal.
- React appropriately – sometimes you might need to restrain or arrest people, *“but only if they’re violent”*.

## **REMEMBER YOU ARE IN A POWERFUL POSITION**

- Stop and search, even at the best of times, does not leave me feeling good.
- You are in a powerful position, but don’t take advantage of that.
- My one or two interactions with you will shape my opinion of the police service as a whole, whether they’re positive or negative.

# THE BIGGER PICTURE

Stop and search is only one of many types of interaction between young people and the police.

Students' perceptions and views were challenged by the workshops and the chance to spend time with the police in a different context. One young man who had bad experiences with the police asked how to become a Special Constable at the end of the workshop. A young woman, who began the final workshop very apprehensive of the police, was soon planning a visit to see the police horses with one of the officers.

MPS Haringey Police is keen to engage with young people in new ways to continue to improve relations and change opinions. With this in mind, in the final workshop we ran an ideas generation session with the 18 students to address this asking, **how can we increase and improve interactions between young people and the police?**

We used the following as prompts to help ideas flow:

- with £10, then £100
- within the college and other places you go
- by using technology
- in other ways

We have grouped the students' suggestions into five areas:

## TECHNOLOGY

- create a young people focused website for questions and information
- set up an email service
- set up a text message service
- use the College log-in page
- use social networking sites to share information and engage young people, especially Twitter, Facebook and YouTube
- use MSN Messenger or BlackBerry Messenger (BBM)
- design an app or game around the police and issues facing young people
- make a DVD

## FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT

- sports: football matches and basketball games
- police v. public games
- police-run boxing sessions
- set up youth clubs around mutual interests
- paintballing trip
- go-karting
- a quiz
- theme park trips
- cinema trips
- Tottenham Carnival
- young people could join the police cadets
- a competition for the best ideas about how to improve relationships between young people and the police – with a prize

## **THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS**

- art projects for younger children in primary/secondary school to build up relationships from a younger age
- assemblies in secondary schools to talk to young people
- give input into Citizenship classes, e.g. a stop and search component
- police working through school/colleges, especially new recruits
- use the college as a public access base
- one-to-one chats in the College

## **VISITS AND OPEN DAYS**

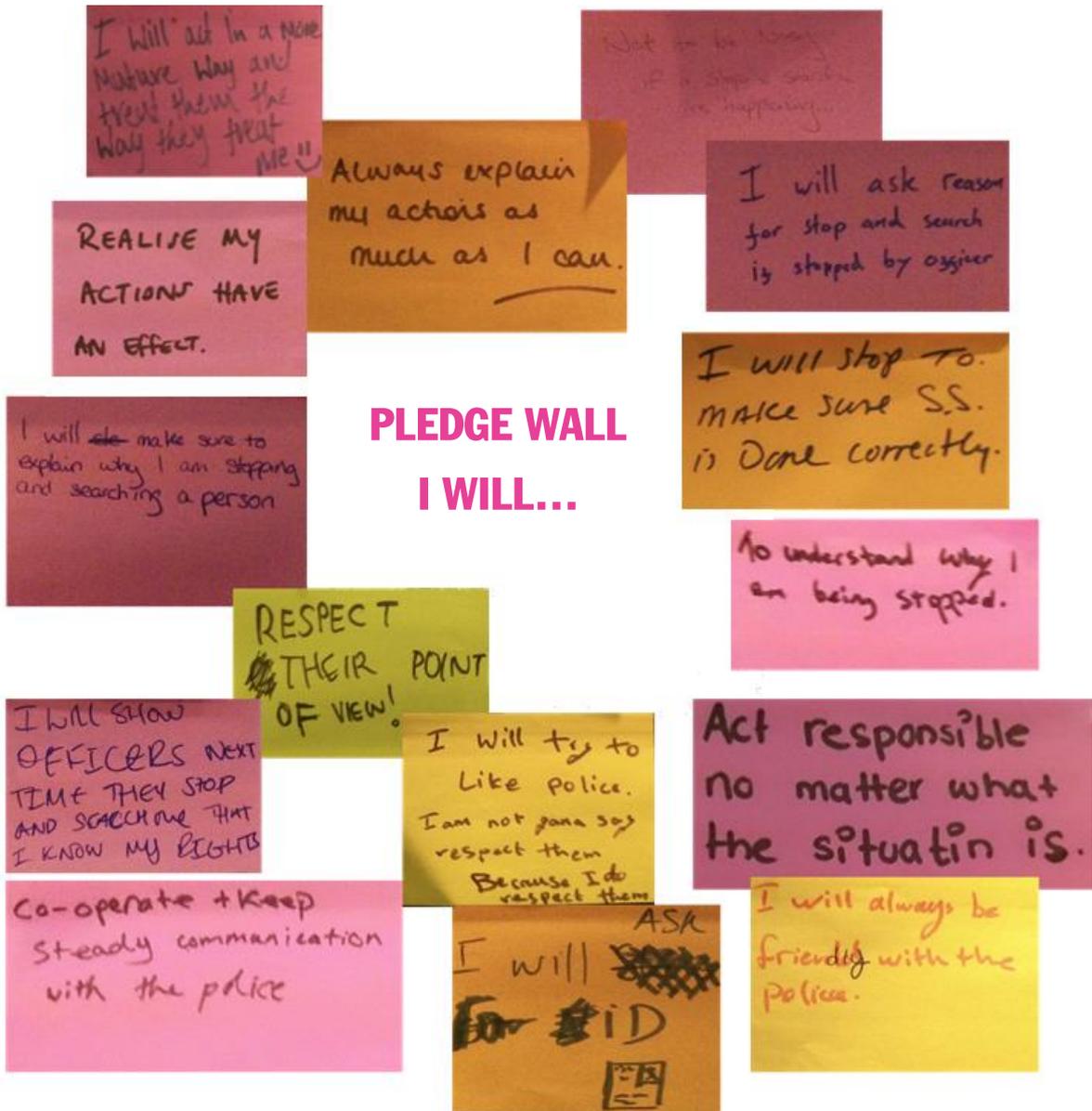
- open days at the police station
- visit the police horses
- tours of the police station
- getting a go in police cars
- experience being locked up in a police van and in a cell to see what it's like

## **OUTREACH**

- set up a telephone helpline
- informative hand-outs, leaflets and posters
- an open forum and use money to buy sweets and coffee and tea
- police to have a stand at careers fairs
- go to community centres
- drop In sessions
- more workshops
- positive photo displays
- do a survey to find out experiences

# PLEDGES FOR THE FUTURE

As participants left the final workshop, we invited them to contribute to a pledge wall. We asked them to reflect on the workshops and make a pledge for the future about stop and search. They were free to write anything they wanted and comments were posted anonymously. The following pledges were shared:



# REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Bringing together young people and the police in different situations has clear benefits in increasing understanding, addressing problems and improving relationships.

Following the workshops, we took time out to reflect. We considered the content of the sessions, how students, police officers and HISSMG responded to different activities and what different participants took away from the experience. This was useful in helping us consolidate our learning from the process.

*“It’s good to break down barriers.”*

## **Stop and search is a hot topic**

Stop and search tends to provoke heated discussion and debate. People often hold strong opinions about the topic and will passionately defend their beliefs. Many students were very sensitive about the issue, especially where they felt their dignity or pride was compromised. Frustrations often related to concern about passers-by making misjudgements about them or being wrongly labelled as a criminal by the police.

## **But it’s good to talk about it**

Some were very willing to speak openly, while others needed more encouragement. But, frank discussions about stop and search between students and the police worked well. Talking through real-life scenarios helped participants to consider tricky issues from different perspectives and allowed them to draw on personal experiences if they felt comfortable to do so.

## **Breaking down barriers between young people and the police is really important**

Simply bringing students and the police together around a table was powerful. Before the workshops even started participants were finding common ground, discussing music, police horses, even officers’ own experiences of being stopped and searched. Many were talking to plain clothed officers without realising they were police officers. As one young man commented, *“now I understand that police [officers] are people too”*.

## **Working together to explore issues and think about practical actions**

Activities putting young people and police on a level playing field helped people relax into the session and encouraged everyone to take part.

Working in small groups to think practically about police training was a useful process. The planning and discussions themselves were of equal value to the final performance to the whole group, as was being set a challenge and the laughter that followed.

## **It's important to have our perceptions challenged from time to time**

Having an independent party present (HISSMG) to question and at times make controversial statements added value to the process overall. For example when discussing whether young people, as well as the police, have a duty to act responsibly during a stop and search stating that “[young people/ community members] don't have to live up to that... we don't have a responsibility... If you're getting paid now, it would be part of your terms and conditions.” Interestingly, as can be seen in the findings above, most young people disagreed and concluded that young people did also have a duty to act responsibly. For every issue, we heard different perspectives – from those who carry out stop and search and those in favour of the process as well as those who are more cautious of stop and search powers. This gave students exposure to different sides of argument.

## **Even the strongest opinions can be changed**

Some of the most vocal and opinionated students showed us that opinions are not set in stone. Many spoke of changing their viewpoints on stop and search and the police as a result of the workshops. Sometimes the loudest voices prevailed and students had adopted a particular viewpoint without considering their reasoning. Bringing together a diverse range of students also allowed participants to take a step back and see the range of opinions that existed amongst their peers but outside immediate social groups.

In general, students appreciated the chance to be heard and to discuss different perspectives. However, it is important to manage different groups of people and their motivations and to be aware of the power dynamics between the students, police officers and members of HISSMG.

## **Every interaction counts**

Students tend to form their views of stop and search and the police from a very small number of interactions; sometimes simply through witnessing others being stopped and searched.

It was evident that every single interaction matters – whether it is a discussion in a workshop, a stop and talk, a stop and account or a stop and search – and shapes how students perceive the police service as a whole. Clear communication by police officers is key.

# CONCLUSION

Many young people have bad experiences of stop and search or have heard about bad experiences from others. These impact strongly on their opinions of the police and can lead to damaged relations.

Despite this, many young people believe that the police stop and search powers are necessary to keep their families and the community safe. However, bridges need to be built, understanding needs to increase and behaviours need to change. By bringing together students, police officers and members of HISSMG in a neutral and safe environment, the workshops went some distance towards achieving these aims.

The importance of good communication underpinned nearly all of our conversations. It is a key issue and must be built on. Police officers should avoid making assumptions, be transparent, act considerately and remember they are in a position of power. At the same time, both officers and young people need to be respectful and act responsibly to ensure stop and searches run smoothly and young people don't feel targeted and humiliated.

Safe and creative spaces for interaction need to be invested in, such as workshops, sport, social media, police open days and awareness sessions.

Every interaction counts in shaping young peoples' opinions and so we must make sure the positives outweigh the negatives.

# APPENDIX

## DEFINITIONS

### Stop and account

Stop and account is when a Police Officer or Police Community Support Officer stops a person in a public place and asks them to account for themselves, which may be their:

- actions
- behaviour in an area
- presence in an area
- possession of anything

### Stop and talk

Stop and talk is a casual encounter where police officers stop and talk with the community about anything. Individuals are not searched or asked to account for their presence. There is no potential power to detain, it is simply a police officer talking to the community.

There are plenty of occasions when you might talk to police officers and most of these do not qualify as either a 'stop' or 'stop and search'. You have not been officially 'stopped' if, for example you:

- stop an officer to ask for directions or information
- have witnessed a crime and are questioned about it to establish the background to the incident
- have been in an area where a crime recently occurred and are questioned about what you might have seen

### Stop and search

Stop and search is when a police officer stops and then searches you, your clothes and anything you are carrying. You may be stopped as the officer may have grounds to suspect that you are carrying drugs, weapons, stolen property or items that could be used to commit crime or to cause criminal damage. The police officer should explain this to you and must be searching for items that could be used in connection with violence.

The grounds the police officer must have should be based on facts, information or intelligence or could be because of the way you are behaving. There are times, however, when police officers can search anyone within a certain area, for example where there is evidence that serious violence has or may take place. (Section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994)