

‘Start Where You Are and Do What You Can’

In September 2017, I started a six month secondment with Community Justice Ayrshire. The opportunity to work in a completely different environment to the one I was used to and gain new experiences was one that I relished.

Coming from the operational side of Policing, I will be honest and say I didn't have much knowledge of Community Justice Ayrshire. However, I quickly found their work plan titled 'Beginnings, Belonging, Belief,' which I found extremely interesting. The insight it gave me into the work that was being carried out across Ayrshire made me believe a secondment would be a worthwhile and positive experience.

At the very start, I wasn't quite sure what to expect after working 9 years in a Policing environment. However, having met Alice, I was given a great insight into the work being carried out. My first challenge was to get up to speed with the various thematic groups and what their work stream was.

The first board meeting for CJ Ayrshire came only a few weeks after I first started, and I was tasked with looking at the reoffending / reconviction stats within Ayrshire. I researched these and prepared a report which I presented to the CJ Ayrshire board. This was a challenge and put me out of my 'comfort zone' as such, as it was something that I hadn't had much experience of. However, it was a challenge I relished and learned from doing this. The report I presented to the board highlighted the challenges that we faced in Ayrshire.

Throughout the time I have been here, I have participated in and learned from various thematic groups and areas of work such as; Violence against Women Partnerships, Prostitution Research steering groups, Alcohol and Drug partnerships, Whole Systems Approach for women and various other action groups.

I have also had the opportunity to attend various conferences over the time, including a National Digital Justice Conference, Stalking conference, National Community Justice Scotland conference, Staying Alive in Ayrshire (looking at reducing drug deaths in the area) and many others. All of these conferences have been excellent and gave me a great insight into various aspects of ongoing work. Taking things away from each of these conferences will shape my mind-set and will have an impact on the rest of my career within Policing.

One of the main things that I believe I will take away from the entire secondment with CJA, is an awareness and greater knowledge of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).

In September, I attended a screening of 'Resilience' at the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow which was followed by a panel member question and answer session. This was hosted by the First Minister of Scotland. On the panel was various experts such as Dr Suzanne Zeedyk and Mary Glasgow, amongst

others. I will be completely honest – I had zero knowledge of ‘ACES’ before I had attended this screening. However watching the film and looking at the research of Vincent Felitti and work of Nadine Burke Harris, it all seemed to ‘click’ into place straight away. The research made complete sense and I immediately knew that this would have an impact on how I looked at situations differently in the future.

Following on from this, Community Justice Ayrshire had decided that we would have our own conference to raise awareness and understanding in Ayrshire about ACEs – ‘Start Where You Are and Do What You Can.’ Working with the enthusiastic team of Alice and Claire, we knew that the conference would be popular however we didn’t quite realise how popular. As soon as it was advertised we received over 300 expressions of interest for only 150 delegate places. The work, planning and preparation going into this conference was second to none and there were many things that I personally learned from this experience. Thankfully we had made the decision of having the conference filmed, and now through a series of web posts, we are spreading the message further through social media and continuing the momentum.

At the conference itself, the speakers were really engaging and they provided a great insight into various aspects of ACEs. One of the speakers was James Docherty who is a development officer for the Violence Reduction Unit, amongst the many roles he seems to do. I could have listened to his insight and experiences all day. James was brought to the conference to bring the ‘theory to life’ and he certainly did that. Listening to all of the experiences and challenges that he has faced and what he has overcome to be where he is. The insight into the ACEs that he has faced, everything that he has said in the various inputs will always remain in my mind and will affect the way I deal with incidents.

Ayrshire Police Division under the leadership of Chief Superintendent Main has announced that it will be the first Trauma Informed Division within Police Scotland. Therefore the information and knowledge I have learned through my time at CJ Ayrshire will stand me in good stead for any future developments within the Police.

I have faced various challenges in my six months there, but I have relished every one and have learned and developed new skills as a result. Having experienced partnership working in various areas at Pan-Ayrshire level, there is a lot of great work going on across the area by Partners to help strengthen our local communities. I have realised that we all have a part to play in this, and that I can personally do my bit by “starting where I am and doing what I can” to ensure I contribute positively to the collective aim of supporting people in Ayrshire and keeping them safe in whatever role I am in.

Sergeant Graeme Smith