



Challenging Justice Inequalities with Children in Conflict with the Law

A Graphic Adaptation

September 2026



Research Team

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First and foremost, we must acknowledge the significant contribution of our Youth Advisory Group (YAG) to this project, and therefore this comic.

The YAG was a group of nine children who helped shape the Challenging Justice Inequalities project from the outset. They formed the heart of the project, and helped to design the research and materials, undertook fieldwork alongside project researchers, helped develop the initial coding frame for analysis, and provided their reflections and commentary for this report.

Thanks also to our funder, the Nuffield Foundation who were supportive and flexible as we navigated the complex realities of co-production. The advice, support and guidance provided by our Interdisciplinary Advisory Group, a group of 10 practitioners, policymakers and academics who gave up their valuable time to support this project, is also acknowledged. Lastly, thank you to all of the children, young people, police officers and organisations who took part, or contributed to this project in some way.

The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social wellbeing in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research.

The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

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Artwork by Jem Milton & Sid McLeod

IN SCOTLAND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM CAN INVOLVE THE POLICE, YOUTH WORK AND SOCIAL WORK ORGANISATIONS, THE CHILDREN'S HEARINGS SYSTEM, CRIMINAL COURTS...



... AS WELL AS PLACES THAT RESTRICT LIBERTY SUCH AS SECURE CARE CENTRES.

SOME CHILDREN ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE CONTACT WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM,



ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO FACE ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES AND ADVERSITIES.

THAT CAN INCLUDE CHILDREN WHO ARE FROM RACIALLY MINORITISED COMMUNITIES, WHO ARE NEURODIVERGENT, WHO LIVE IN DEPRIVED CIRCUMSTANCES, WHO ARE IN CARE, OR WHO EXPERIENCE TRAUMA AND ABUSE.



THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THESE CHARACTERISTICS OR EXPERIENCES CAUSE A CHILD TO OFFEND...



... BUT THAT THEY CAN AFFECT HOW CHILDREN ARE VIEWED AND TREATED BY SCHOOLS, POLICE OR COURTS.

SOMETIMES THESE CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OVERLAP TO INTENSIFY EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION OR UNFAIR TREATMENT.



INTERSECTIONALITY IS THE TERM USED TO DESCRIBE AND UNDERSTAND THESE EXPERIENCES.

SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF CHILDREN ENCOUNTERING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM ARE PROTECTED FROM DISCRIMINATION BY HUMAN RIGHTS LAW.



THESE ARE KNOWN AS 'PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS'



THESE INCLUDE AGE, RACE, SEX, RELIGION, SEXUALITY, DISABILITY AND GENDER REASSIGNMENT.

BUT SOME FACTORS ARE NOT PROTECTED.



THESE INCLUDE POVERTY, CLASS, CARE EXPERIENCE OR ADVERSITY.

HOWEVER, THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC) RECOGNISES THAT ALL PEOPLE AGED UNDER 18 ARE ENTITLED TO ADDITIONAL RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR AGE.



THE CHALLENGING JUSTICE INEQUALITIES PROJECT WANTED TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCE OF PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS.

WE ALSO WANTED TO KNOW HOW CHILDREN THINK THESE CHARACTERISTICS AFFECT THEIR CONTACT WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM. . .

... SUCH AS BEING STOPPED BY THE POLICE, OR HOW THEY ARE TREATED IN CHILDREN'S PANELS OR COURTS.

WE ARE NINA AND KAYLEIGH. WE'RE RESEARCHERS FROM THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE.

OUR COLLEAGUES YVETTE, MICHELLE, ROBERT AND JULIA WORKED ON THE PROJECT WITH US. THEY ARE FROM EDUCATION, LAW, CELCIS AND CYCJ.

WE WANTED CHILDREN TO HAVE A BIG ROLE IN THIS PROJECT RIGHT FROM THE VERY START.

WHO BETTER TO DESIGN A RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT WHAT CHILDREN THINK ABOUT JUSTICE, THAN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THEMSELVES?

JUSTICE

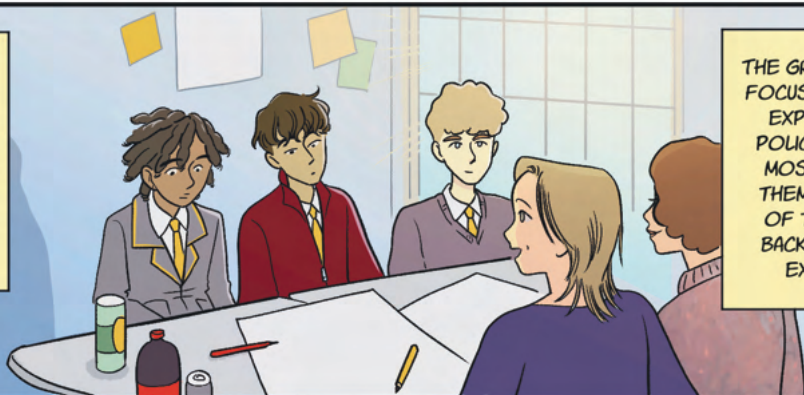
FIRST, WE HELD 11 GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH 42 CHILDREN AGED 14-17 ABOUT WHAT THEY THOUGHT ABOUT PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AND JUSTICE.

WE WORKED WITH CHILDREN WHO IDENTIFIED AS LGBTQ+; WHO WERE FROM A RACIALISED MINORITY; WHO LIVED IN LARGE CITIES, OR SMALL TOWNS. . .

... AND MANY OTHERS, WHO ALL HAD DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES OF JUSTICE, FROM CAMPUS POLICE OFFICERS TO LIVING IN SECURE CARE.

NINE CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES DECIDED TO JOIN OUR YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP (YAG) AND BECAME CO-RESEARCHERS ON THE PROJECT.

THE YAG REVIEWED THE INFORMATION FROM OUR GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND WORKED TOGETHER TO IDENTIFY KEY THEMES AND TOPICS TO EXPLORE.



THE GROUP CHOSE TO FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF POLICING, THE ISSUE MOST FAMILIAR TO THEM, REGARDLESS OF THEIR DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS AND EXPERIENCES.

WHEN THE YAG STARTED READING ABOUT THE TOPIC, WE REALISED THERE WAS QUITE A LOT OF RESEARCH ON THIS ALREADY.



TO ADD SOMETHING NEW, WE DECIDED TO INVOLVE POLICE OFFICERS, TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES OF PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS.

AND HOW THAT AFFECTED THE WAY THAT THEY POLICED OTHERS.

FIRST, WE HELD 5 GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH 31 CHILDREN AGED 14-17 TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY THOUGHT ABOUT PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AND JUSTICE.



IN THESE WORKSHOPS CHILDREN CREATED A ZINE (A SHORT INFORMAL BOOKLET) ABOUT THEIR THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE POLICE.

WE THEN COMBINED ALL THE LEARNING INTO ONE BIG REPORT THAT IS AVAILABLE AT WWW.CHALLENGEJUSTICE.ORG

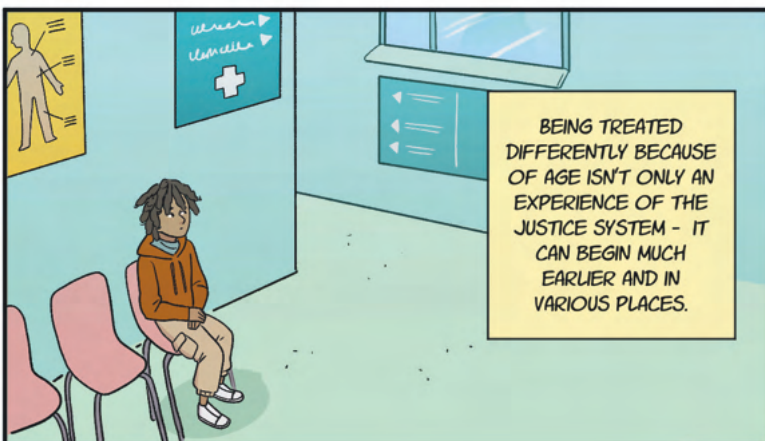
THEN THE YAG INTERVIEWED 10 POLICE OFFICERS, USING THE ZINES AS PROMPTS TO SPARK A DEEPER DISCUSSION.



THIS COMIC IS A SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS.



AGE WAS A COMMON THEME IN DISCUSSIONS AND WAS OFTEN VIEWED AS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC



BEING TREATED DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF AGE ISN'T ONLY AN EXPERIENCE OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM - IT CAN BEGIN MUCH EARLIER AND IN VARIOUS PLACES.

EVEN JUST WITH DOCTORS, IT'S HARD TO GET AN APPOINTMENT FOR CHRONIC ILLNESS AS A YOUNG PERSON BECAUSE THEY DON'T SEE AS MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESSES.



CHILDREN TOLD US THEY WERE OFTEN TREATED WITH SUSPICION WHEN THEY WERE OUT WITH FRIENDS IN THE COMMUNITY, IN PARKS, SHOPPING CENTRES, RESTAURANTS AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES.



SOMETIMES THIS MEANT INCREASED MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE BY SECURITY GUARDS. AT OTHER TIMES CHILDREN WERE ACTIVELY EXCLUDED FROM PUBLIC PLACES.



PARTICULAR LOCATIONS OR COMMUNITIES APPEARED TO EXPERIENCE THIS MORE THAN OTHERS.



THIS PREDOMINANTLY AFFECTED DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES, BUT ALSO LOCATIONS WHERE GROUPS OF CHILDREN MIGHT WISH TO VISIT, SUCH AS CITY CENTRES, PARKS AND BEACHES.



THEY JUST ASSUME WE ARE DOING BAD THINGS. IT'S BASED ON PORTRAYAL IN THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF GROUPS.



FUN FACT. SEE MCDONALDS AND THAT, THEY'VE STARTED REFUSING ENTRY TO THOSE UNDER 16.

KFC DO THAT TOO.

IT SEEMS LIKE IT'S MORE ACCEPTABLE TO EXCLUDE PEOPLE BECAUSE OF AGE.



BUT IT'S COMPLEX...

CHILDREN RECOGNISED THAT SOME CHILDREN DID CAUSE ISSUES FOR RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY PREMISES, OR IN THE COMMUNITY.

SCHOOLS WERE OFTEN LOCATIONS WHERE EARLY INJUSTICES OCCURRED.



CHILDREN DESCRIBED EXPERIENCES OF BULLYING, EXCLUSION OR HARM WITHIN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT.



...BUT TYPICALLY FELT THAT THEY RECEIVED INADEQUATE RESPONSES FROM TEACHERS OR AUTHORITY FIGURES WHEN REPORTING HARMS OR CONCERNS.

THIS INCLUDED BREACHES OF TRUST, DISMISSIVE ATTITUDES, LACK OF FOLLOW-UP ACTION.



...AND, AT TIMES, WHAT WAS PERCEIVED TO BE DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT.

SCHOOLS WERE ALSO WHERE MANY CHILDREN FIRST CAME ACROSS THE 'JUSTICE SYSTEM', IN THE FORM OF CAMPUS OFFICERS.



THEY WERE MORE LIKELY TO BE PRESENT IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES, LINKING EARLY POLICE CONTACT WITH PLACE, POVERTY AND CLASS.

MANY CHILDREN SAW CAMPUS OFFICERS AS AN IRRELEVANT PRESENCE IN THEIR SCHOOLS, WHO DID LITTLE TO ENGAGE WITH PUPILS, AND WHOSE PURPOSE WAS UNCLEAR.



BUT IT'S COMPLEX...

THE PRESENCE OF CAMPUS OFFICERS RAISED ANXIETY IN OTHER CHILDREN ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR OVERREACTION OR ESCALATION FOR EVERYDAY ISSUES AND INCIDENTS THAT INEVITABLY OCCUR.

INCIDENTS THAT ONCE MIGHT HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH BY FAMILY OR TEACHERS COULD BE PROBLEMATISED, ESCALATED AND, POTENTIALLY CRIMINALISED.

IF YOU WERE TO GO TO A POLICE OFFICER AND YOU WERE TO TELL THEM HOW YOU ACTUALLY FEEL, THEY WOULD LIKE GET THE TEACHERS IN, LIKE GET YOUR MUM AND DAD IN.



SO LIKE PEOPLE OBVIOUSLY DON'T WANT TO TELL THE POLICE STUFF BECAUSE THEN THEY THINK THAT THEY JUST LIKE CALL A WHOLE RIOT TEAM, YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING?



OVERALL, CHILDREN'S EARLY EXPERIENCES OF CAMPUS COPS NEGATIVELY SHAPED THEIR PERSPECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS OF POLICE.

CHILDREN DIDN'T
KNOW A LOT ABOUT
THE JUSTICE SYSTEM.



WHILE EVERYONE WAS
AWARE OF THE POLICE,
MOST WERE UNFAMILIAR WITH
THE OTHER PARTS OF THE
CARE AND JUSTICE SYSTEM,
SUCH AS THE CHILDREN'S
HEARINGS SYSTEM...



...UNLESS THEY HAD
DIRECT EXPERIENCE
OF THEM.

CHILDREN KNEW ABOUT
RIGHTS AND THE
UNCRC, OFTEN BEING
TAUGHT IT IN SCHOOL.



HOWEVER, THERE WAS LESS
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW TO
USE THEIR RIGHTS IN JUSTICE
INTERACTIONS, SUCH AS DURING
STOP AND SEARCH.



EVEN THOSE WHO KNEW THEIR
RIGHTS FELT THAT IT WAS RISKY TO
TRY AND ASSERT THEIR RIGHTS, AS
THEY COULD BE PERCEIVED AS
CHEEKY OR OUT OF ORDER.



POLICE CAN GET
QUITE PATRONISING
THOUGH, THINKING
YOU'RE BEING
SMART.



AS CHILDREN GOT OLDER,
THEIR PERSPECTIVES OF
THE POLICE CHANGED.

IN YOUNG CHILDHOOD
THEY VIEWED THE POLICE
AS HELPERS BUT WHO
COULD ALSO BE SCARY.

ADOLESCENT
PERSPECTIVES WERE
ALMOST ALWAYS NEGATIVE,
SHAPED BY PERSONAL
EXPERIENCES, GLOBAL
ISSUES AND THE MEDIA.

CHILDREN RECOGNISED THAT
POLICE ARE HUMAN TOO AND HAVE
AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN
TERMS OF PUBLIC PROTECTION..

..BUT THERE WAS AN
OVERALL SENSE YOU
CAN'T TRUST POLICE AS
AN INSTITUTION.

THERE'S GOOD OFFICERS
AND THERE'S BAD OFFICERS
OUT THERE. I WOULDN'T LET
ONE EXPERIENCE IMPACT
YOUR PERSPECTIVE OF ALL
POLICE OFFICERS, BECAUSE
WE'RE NOT ALL THE SAME.

THE POLICE DID NOT MAKE
CHILDREN FEEL SAFE, EVEN
WHEN THEY WERE ACTING
OUT OF CONCERN FOR
THEIR WELFARE.

THERE WAS THIS ONE
TIME I WAS COMING
HOME AT LIKE 11:00
AFTER HANGING OUT
WITH MY FRIENDS.

I'M WALKING OVER THIS BRIDGE AND
I DROP SOMETHING AND IT FALLS
INTO THE BRIDGE AND I LOOK
DOWN AND THEN I TURN AROUND..

..AND THIS POLICE CAR
SWERVES OVER REALLY FAST
AND A BUNCH OF POLICE
OFFICERS GET OUT AND
START SHOUTING AT ME.

BUT IT'S COMPLEX...

CHILDREN RECOGNISED
THAT THE POLICE WERE
NEEDED, THAT THEY HAD A
COMPLEX AND DIFFICULT
ROLE AND WERE AT TIMES
TRYING TO PROTECT
THEM; BUT POLICE DIDN'T
MAKE THEM FEEL SAFE.

THE WORLD WOULD BE
A MESS WITHOUT
POLICE, BUT IT'S ALSO A
MESS WITH BAD POLICE.

MANY REPORTED EXPERIENCING
AGE-BASED DISCRIMINATION ...



... FREQUENTLY RESULTING FROM
WIDESPREAD STEREOTYPES AND
MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE.



FOR EXAMPLE, LIKE IF THE
POLICE SAW ALL OF US OUT ON
THE STREET AT NIGHT TIME.
THEY'D AUTOMATICALLY THINK
THEY'RE CAUSING TROUBLE.



CHILDREN DIDN'T FEEL THE POLICE TOOK THEM
SERIOUSLY WHEN THEY REPORTED CRIME.



THERE WAS A FEELING OF BEING
OVERLOOKED ON ONE HAND...

... AND OVERPOLICED ON THE OTHER.



**BUT IT'S
COMPLEX...**

IT WAS ALSO RECOGNISED THAT
DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT BASED
ON AGE COULD ALSO ACT IN A
YOUNG PERSON'S FAVOUR ...

... AND THAT ADULTS COULD BE TREATED
MORE HARSHLY...

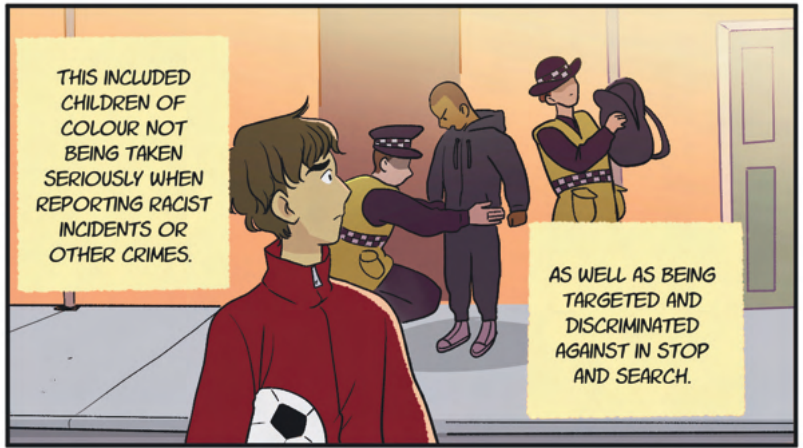


... BECAUSE THEY WERE MORE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR
ACTIONS WITHIN THE LAW.

MOST CHILDREN AGREED THAT GENDER AND RACE WERE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS AND MANY FELT THAT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY POLICING, WAS SHAPED BY BIAS, PREJUDICE, AND WHAT WERE OFTEN SEEN AS RACIST PRACTICES.



THIS INCLUDED CHILDREN OF COLOUR NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY WHEN REPORTING RACIST INCIDENTS OR OTHER CRIMES.



AS WELL AS BEING TARGETED AND DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN STOP AND SEARCH.

I THINK PEOPLE OF COLOUR CAN'T ESCAPE FROM THE POLICE, THE POLICE WILL JUST ASSUME THEY ARE DOING SOMETHING UP TO NO GOOD.

PEOPLE THAT AREN'T OF COLOUR, IF THEY STAY AWAY, THEY'RE GOOD.



MOST AGREED THAT BOYS DREW MORE SUSPICION, RESULTING IN UNWARRANTED CONTACT OR UNWANTED TREATMENT FROM THE POLICE.

THIS WAS PERCEIVED BY MANY AS BEING DEEPLY UNFAIR.



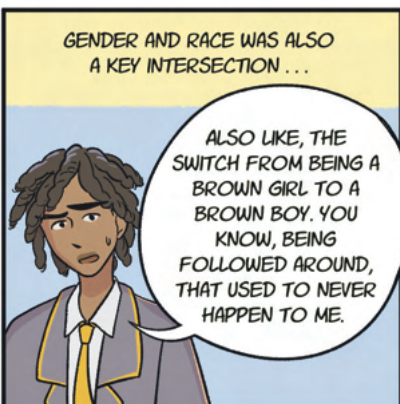
BUT IT'S COMPLEX...

THERE WAS RECOGNITION THAT SOME CRIMES, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF A VIOLENT AND SEXUAL NATURE, WERE MORE LIKELY TO BE COMMITTED BY BOYS AND MEN.

THIS MUDDIED THE WATERS ABOUT WHAT WAS FAIR AND UNFAIR IN HOW PEOPLE WERE TREATED AND TARGETED.

GENDER AND RACE WAS ALSO A KEY INTERSECTION...

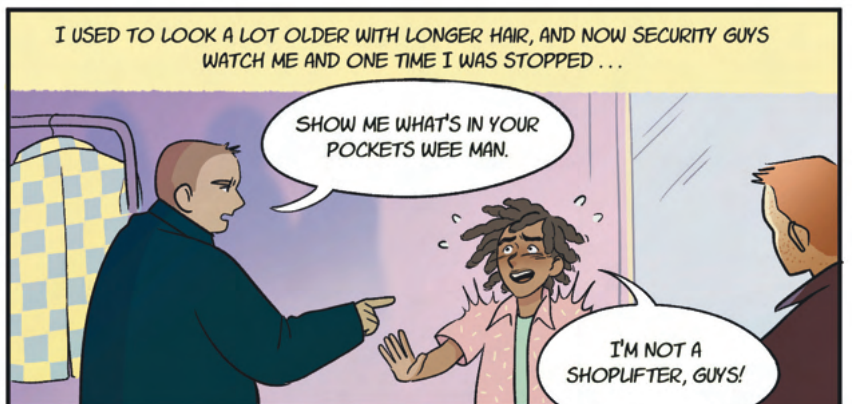
ALSO LIKE, THE SWITCH FROM BEING A BROWN GIRL TO A BROWN BOY. YOU KNOW, BEING FOLLOWED AROUND, THAT USED TO NEVER HAPPEN TO ME.

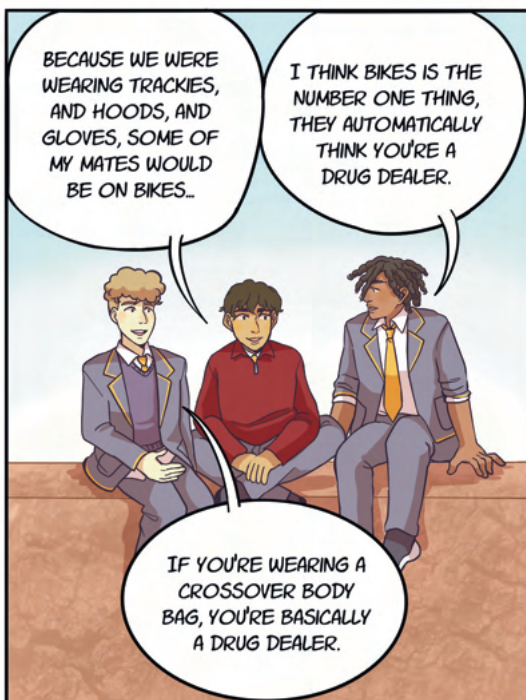
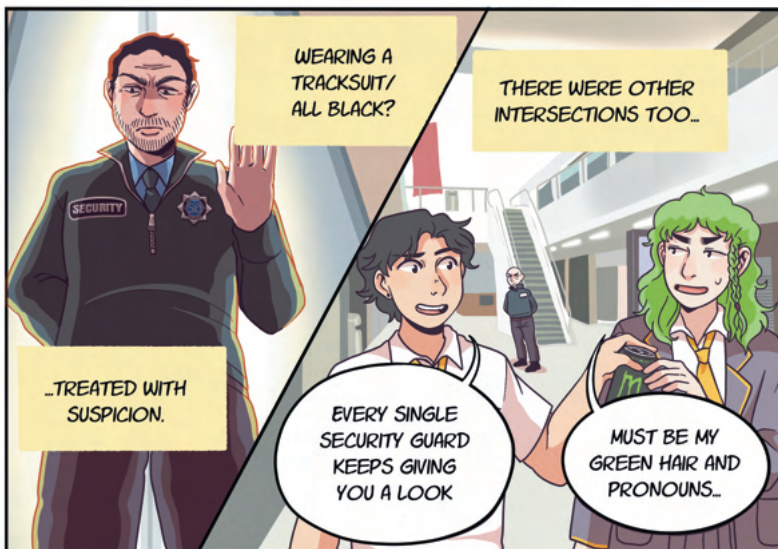
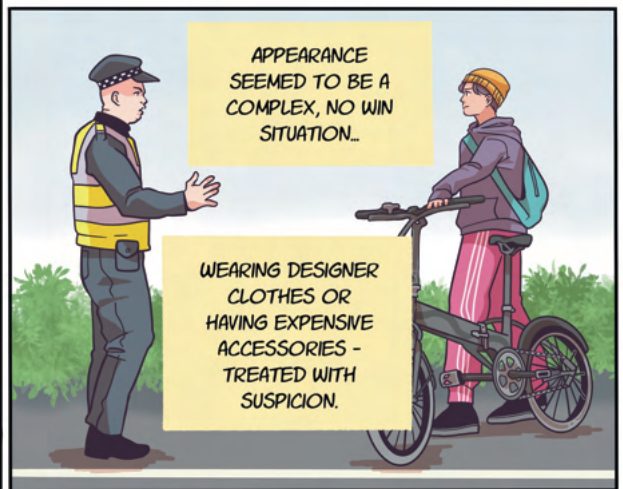
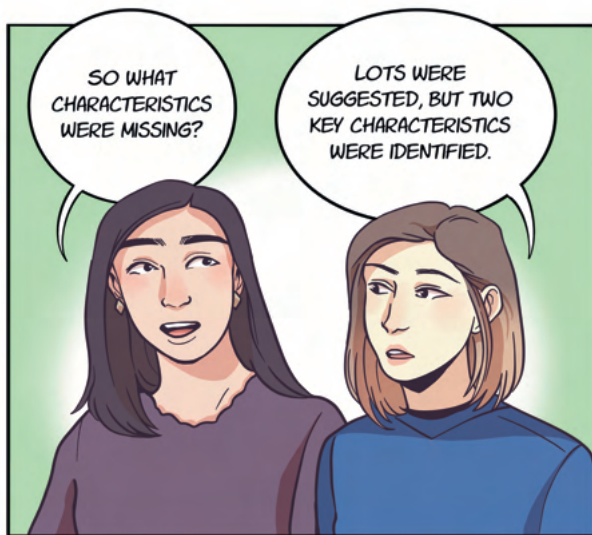


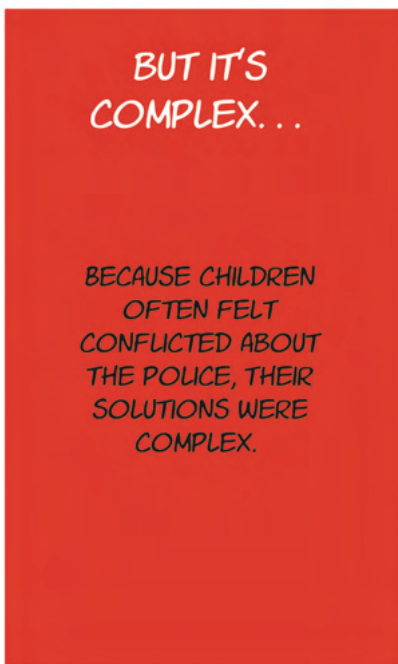
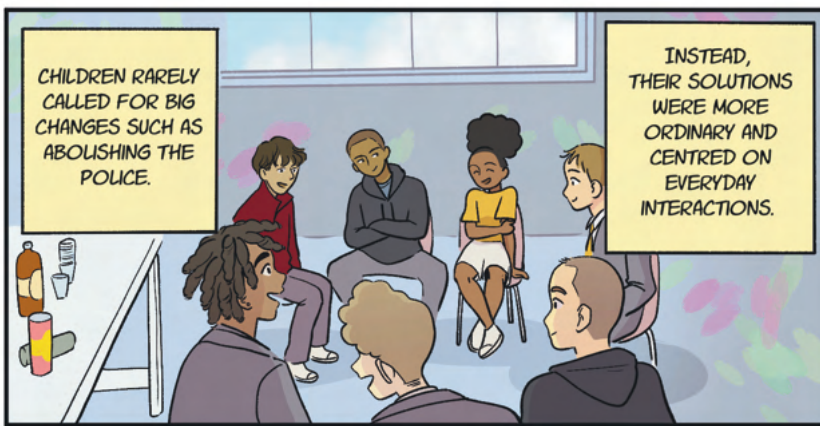
I USED TO LOOK A LOT OLDER WITH LONGER HAIR, AND NOW SECURITY GUYS WATCH ME AND ONE TIME I WAS STOPPED...

SHOW ME WHAT'S IN YOUR POCKETS WEE MAN.

I'M NOT A SHOPLIFTER, GUYS!







ENSURE HUMAN RIGHTS LAW ADEQUATELY PROTECTS CHILDREN FROM AGE-BASED DISCRIMINATION.



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

PROVIDE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN SCHOOL ABOUT THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND RIGHTS.



REVIEW THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF CAMPUS COPS SO CHILDREN ARE NOT POLICED AND CRIMINALISED IN SCHOOL.



TRAINING FOR POLICE IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND IN RELATION TO THE UNCRC AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS, PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AND INTERSECTIONALITY.



SUPPORT POLICE, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MINORITISED COMMUNITIES, TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AND THEIR CONTEXTS AND CONCERNS.



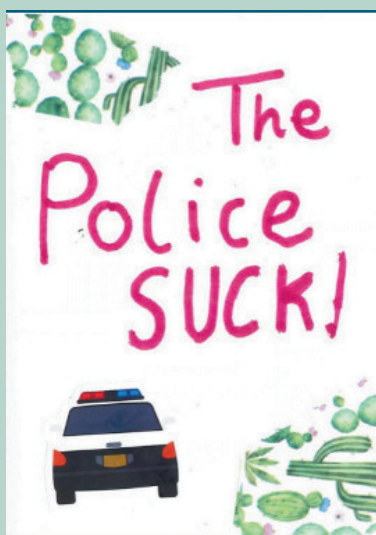
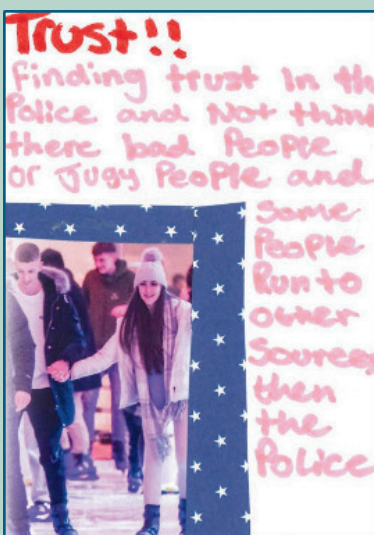
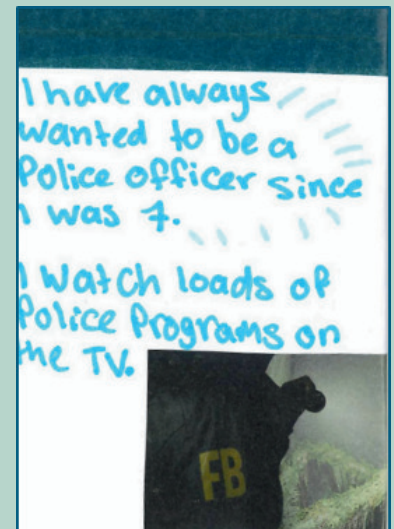
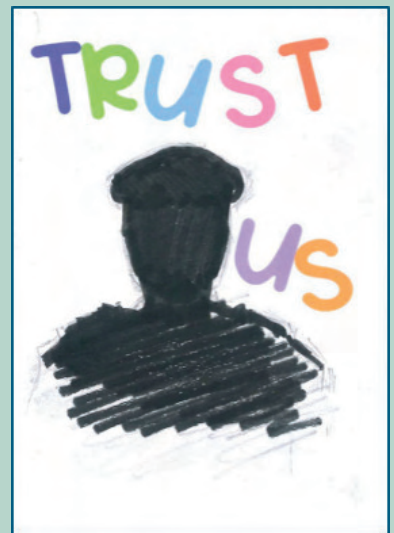
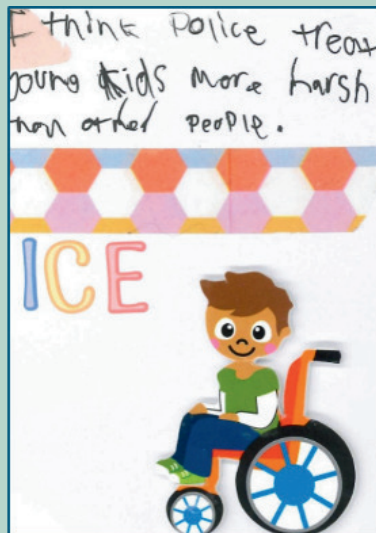
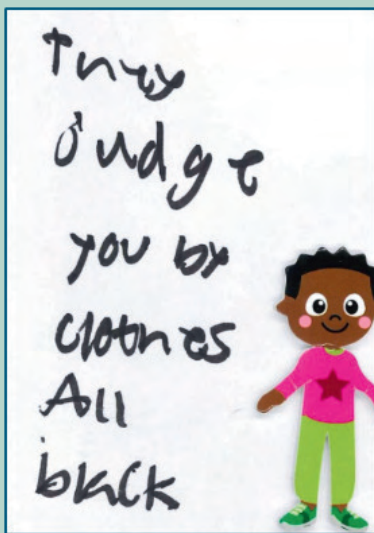
If you want to know more you can visit our website at
www.challengejustice.org
or email us on **challengejustice@strath.ac.uk**

CYCJ have a young person-focused website
<https://justtherightspace.org/>
that provides information on the justice system,
your rights and who can support you

www.cycj.org.uk



Children and Young People's
Centre for Justice



A snapshot of some of the zines created during the process.
The full collection can be accessed on the project website.