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# Reconciling care and justice in contesting social harm through performance and arts practice with looked after children and care leavers

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## Abstract

The proportion of young people taken into the care of the state has increased recently and there is evidence that this social group suffer negative long-term outcomes that might be conceptualised by the emergent criminological category of ‘social harm’. Debates in social work around an ethics of care and justice offer different ways of thinking about responding to social harm. This paper reports findings from an innovative arts-based intervention with Looked After Children and young people and concludes that holding these competing value sets in creative tension is central to the success of the programme in helping young people to cope with and contest social harm.

## KEYWORDS

arts, care, justice, social harm, social work

## INTRODUCTION

This paper reports findings from a research project focused on an innovative arts-based intervention with Looked After Children and young people. The numbers of Looked After Children and young people have grown substantially in recent years. Research shows that this social group is more likely to have negative long-term social outcomes and that both instances of reported abuse and neglect, and engagement with care relate to inequality and poverty. Deploying an emergent concept in criminology,

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we understand this as ‘social harm’. Recent feminist debates on the role of services to support Looked After Children and young people problematise the role of an ‘ethic of justice’ in the organisation of some state services, and argue instead in favour of an alternative ‘ethic of care’. We suggest that the arts-based intervention we discuss here represents a complex but largely successful attempt to reconcile ethics of care and justice to contest social harm.

Our findings contribute new empirical knowledge about the use of arts-based interventions with Looked After Children and young people and care leavers, a combination which has received relatively little scholarly attention to date. The paper offers a novel treatment of the ethics of care and justice, suggesting one way in which the potential tensions between these can be reconciled. Insights from the feminist literature on the ethics of care are conjoined with sociological and criminological insights into the structural conditions which generate ‘social harm’. The deployment of the idea of social harm to understand the position of Looked After Children and young people is itself new, but we extend this to show how methods of reconciling an ethics of care and justice can contest social harm, helping vulnerable young people both to cope with, and challenge, structural inequalities and injustice. This is significant in the context of the interest of arts practitioners in expanding into social spaces hitherto regarded as social work or education; and because the context of austerity means that the social work and education sectors are increasingly reliant on contributions from non-statutory providers. While we acknowledge some significant risks in this process, our findings may be useful in shaping how such interactions between arts practitioners and statutory services might be best structured.

## AUSTERITY, ‘CARE’ AND SOCIAL HARM

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the numbers and proportion of children entering the formal care system and being referred for child welfare interventions. The number of child protection investigations rose by 60% between 2009–2010 and 2013 (Bywaters et al., 2016) and the number of Looked After Children and young people in England has increased steadily since 2008. As of March 2018 there were 75,420 looked after children in England, an annual increase of 4%. When a child is being assessed by children's services, a primary need is recorded; the most common (63%) being ‘abuse or neglect’ (Department for Education, 2018), though this discounts the reality that most families where a child is taken into care will be experiencing multiple forms of need. This is significant because the ‘low income’ category is rarely noted as a primary need and little data are systematically collected about the wider circumstances of these families.

It is difficult to explain the increased number of children and young people in care conclusively, but a combination of factors is likely to be important. First, social policy has become increasingly ‘disciplinary’ (Hargreaves, Hodgson, Mohamed, & Nunn, 2018; Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2017) over recent decades, especially towards families discursively constructed by the state as ‘problems’ (Lambert & Crossley, 2017). In this context a ‘responsibilisation’ process has seen families blamed for the wider social conditions which negatively affect them (Murray & Barnes, 2010). Both politicians (Gove, 2013) and high-profile civil servants (Wilshaw in OFSTED, 2016) have exhorted social workers to focus on households and families as a location for explanations of problematic parenting; a move which highlights ‘a noteworthy discursive shift—one that conflates families experiencing disadvantage with families that cause ‘trouble’’ (McKendrick & Finch, 2016, p. 316). This shift of emphasis diverts attention from the structural or societal explanations, despite the evidence that demonstrates poverty and inequality are strongly associated with both abuse and neglect and becoming engaged with the care system (Bywaters et al., 2015, 2016, 2018). The reason for this is both direct; families in need have less resources causing neglect, and/or indirect: inequality leads to greater stress on families

and households (2014). As Sayer (2017, p. 160) argues, poverty generates harm, and knock-on problematic behaviour.

Second, the recent politics of austerity have exaggerated both the material reality and the discursive effects of long-term patterns in inequality and poverty (Jupp, 2017). Local authorities have seen very significant reductions in their budgets since 2010, including reductions in support for families, children's centres (Smith, Sylva, Smith, Sammons, & Omonigho, 2018), the loss of other early intervention services (Action for Children, 2018) and youth services. Therefore, there may be good reason to think, like the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS, 2017), that austerity policies are at least partly behind the rise in the numbers of children and young people being taken into care. The reductions in supportive and preventative services and increased economic hardship for families may generate greater need for support, and use of services of last resort.

Third, the ongoing reorganisation of social services under managerial and neoliberalising reform agendas has left the social work profession less able to support families with preventative measures and more focused on ensuring child protection. It is widely argued that modernisation and increased public scrutiny (Jones, 2018; Parton, 2014) have emphasised performance and risk management, constraining some more relational aspects of the social worker role (Ferguson, 2014; Webb and Carpenter, 2012). The consequence of this is that the social work profession is under extreme pressure and many in the workforce experience stress and burnout (Department for Education, 2018; Maslach and Schaufeil, 2017), generating recruitment and retention problems in the sector (Perraudin, 2019).

The increases in children in the care system and these potential explanations are significant given the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of state care for children. Wherever one sits on the debate over whether the care system causes or merely fails to fully mitigate the long-term problems that Looked After Children and young people often face, (see for e.g. the debate over care and educational attainment Berridge, 2007, 2017; Jackson, 2007, 2010; Jackson & Höjer, 2013), the evidence is clear; Looked After Children and young people have: lower educational attainment; lower employment levels; have negative health, mental and physical well-being, and are more likely to be homeless and become involved in the criminal justice system (Bellis et al., 2018; Department for Education, 2017; Hughes et al., 2017; Mannay et al., 2017; O'Higgins, Sebba, & Luke, 2015).

While not reducing abuse, neglect or post-care outcomes to social conditions or the care system, we suggest that these negative outcomes might be understood as 'social harm'. Social harm is a term coined by criminologists (Hillyard & Tombs, 2007; Pemberton, 2016) to describe the injuries done by social, political and institutional structures of inequality, and state responses to it, on individuals, many of whom may be subject to enforcement rather than protection by the state. Harms in this view are preventable in that human institutions and behaviour might be redesigned to mitigate, offset or eradicate them (Pemberton, 2016, p. 34) and include physical, economic, emotional or psychological, cultural and environmental harms. Negative or unequal outcomes that result from human behaviour (such as abuse and neglect) or that could be mitigated by social structures or institutions (such as the care system) can be considered 'social harm'. By contrast, different social and institutional structures such as collective cultures of care or welfare institutions, including family support services, might constitute 'harm reduction' regimes. The findings below suggest ways in which micro-practices in participatory arts practice might contribute to 'harm reduction'.

Neoliberalising policy initiatives, responsabilisation and austerity-inspired cuts to public services are argued to be specifically 'harmful' by proponents of the idea of social harm. The state has a central role in creating the conditions for inequality and poverty over the medium term of 'neoliberalisation'

(Nunn, 2019) and in the current context of austerity (Nunn, 2016) and in organising the care system. It has focused its attention particularly on educational outcomes and securing employability as the central mechanism to help Looked After Children and young people to take responsibility for their own long-term well-being. As such, the concept of 'social harm' seems particularly apposite for this group of children and young people.

## FEMINIST THEORIES OF ETHICS AND JUSTICE

Barnes (2007) outlines competing rights-based and paternalistic justifications for welfare interventions and argues instead in favour of a feminist 'ethic of care'. Drawing on prior feminist research (Gilligan, 1982; Sevenhuijsen, 2003; Tronto, 1994), she reviews the role of children's advocacy workers and social work professionals who might be thought of as influenced by rights-based and paternalistic professional cultures respectively. In this discussion, an ethic of justice is related to fairness, appeals to individual rights and their formal application. In the way we apply it here we suggest that an ethic of justice might also be to advocate for the extension of these rights, access to services and principles of equality of opportunity.

Among children's rights workers, Barnes found strong evidence of rights-based advocacy and this was often moderated by 'care', it was this 'care first' approach that young people valued the most. She draws attention to the ways that rights can be constructed in a context specific way and in relation to others. This view sees an ethic of care as being distinct from an ethic of rights-based justice in that it "emphasises people's interdependence" (Barnes, 2007, p. 143). As Holland (2010) defines it, an ethic of care:

*...recognises care relationships that are often hidden or marginalised in public life. It emphasises interdependency in relationships and a recognition that we are all care-receivers and caregivers ... it de-stigmatises and normalises care ... It disrupts the boundaries erected between the public and the personal and between decision making that is disinterested and distant and that which recognises the local and particular.*

This definition emphasises the importance of being attentive to the needs of others, taking responsibility for meeting these needs and demonstrating competence in doing so through empathy, integrity and sensitivity to the context in which care is constructed (Tronto, 1994). It also suggests that care be seen as the product of mutuality in relationships (Cockburn, 2005). Both Barnes (2007) and Holland (2010) argue in favour of combining ethics of care and justice, but Holland finds that the emphasis on the latter in the formal care system has devalued the former. For example, the focus in policy agendas on education for Looked After Children and young people has emphasised the right to equal educational outcomes. This is itself situated in a thoroughly individualised context of emphasising education as a means of competing for places in an unequal social hierarchy. As Holland (p. 1667) notes, the irony here is that Looked After Children and young people are paternalistically acknowledged to be in a deficit position in this competitive process, but historically at least, has been expected to make the transition to 'adult independence' at a younger age than most other young people.

Holland's study with a small group of Looked After Children and young people found that they had complex networks of caring relationships but that these did not extend to social workers; with the telling finding that this was often because these relationships changed so much that it was impossible for them to move beyond a bureaucratic focus on form filling and procedure. She argues strongly in

favour of matching an ethics of justice with those of care and for valuing interdependency and mutuality alongside independence and autonomy.

The findings we report are illustrative of one way in which ethics of care and justice can be brought together as a means of contesting and reducing social harm. Conceptually, an ethic of justice is regarded as appeals to greater fairness and equality in the distribution of resources and opportunities in the way that social and institutional structures mitigate or eradicate social harm. An ethic of care might be thought of as the way that human relationships, supported or hindered by social and institutional structures, help people to cope with the degree of social harm that is present. An ethic of justice challenges the structures that generate harm while an ethic of care helps to protect individuals and groups from the worst effects of harm.

## METHODS, DATA AND THE 'INTERVENTION'

There is some evidence that interventions that take a creative approach help to support engagement among young people. Peeran's (2016) systematic review of studies focusing on arts interventions with Looked After Children and young people found that they may lead to increased: confidence and self-esteem; emotional resilience and coping through the sharing of experiences; that they help young people to build and maintain networks, including with people who share their experiences and to explore new activities which might themselves have ongoing positive impacts. The review emphasises the importance of creative ownership by young people and the cultural fit between art forms and the young people's lives.

Just as creative interventions support participant engagement among young people so too do creative methods in data collection (Mannay et al., 2017; Robinson & Gillies, 2012). Cahaman-Taylor and Siegesmund (2017, p. 5) see the unique nature of art as its ability not just to 'record data but to make it', in this sense it is 'generative and searching'. Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2008) argue that performance can be both a research method and an emancipatory activity; that it is 'particularly useful for studying narratives of identity of marginalised groups as well as for illustrating perceptions and experiences of social positionings and power relations in and outside community groupings'. Similarly, O'Neill (2008) argues that biographical story telling facilitates understanding of self, others and the relations between them. A range of studies (Angell, Alexander, & Hunt, 2015; Bamford, 2006; McLellan, Galton, & Walberg, 2014) argue that artistic methods can facilitate safe spaces in which lived experiences and emotional responses to social exclusion can be surfaced (Ryan & Flinders, 2018). Such methods have positive effects with a range of social groups such as offenders (Goodwin, 2013; Kelly, Foster, & Hayes, 2015; McHugh & Smithson, 2017), refugees and asylum seekers (Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008; O'Neill, 2008). However, relatively few studies (Mannay et al., 2017, 2019; Peeran, 2016) have explored these methods with Looked After Children and young people. This study therefore contributes empirically and methodologically to a small, if growing, literature on arts and social inclusion for this specific social group. The intervention on which this paper focuses seeks to engage and support Looked After Children and young people in a range of creative projects and therefore the research too aimed to evaluate the intervention in a way that did not disrupt but rather modelled the creative approaches with which the young people were familiar.

Our research focused on 'The Plus One' intervention which sits as part of a suite of programmes operated by Derby Theatre and the wider Cultural Education Partnership and are informed by a 'learning theatre' model.<sup>1</sup> The essence of the learning theatre model is to involve people in a process of cultural production of place through involvement and engagement in the creative process, including a specific focus on inclusion of groups often under-represented in theatres as both audience and artists.

The Plus One scheme engages young people in care from the age of about 8 years old through to care leavers who may be in their early 20s. The scheme typically involves 3- to 4-day workshops during school holidays in which small groups of young people come together to engage in mixed-arts activities. These might involve storywriting, poetry, performance, music making, film and photography, visual arts and dancing. Each set of holiday activities is coordinated by the Plus One creative team, which includes a creative drama producer and an administrative coordinator in addition to a wider range of professional artists specialising in one or more art forms who support particular holiday workshops. Workshops typically involve several art forms and result in the production of an artistic output. While these may be discrete for each workshop, they occasionally stretch across several holidays so that there are a series of linked artistic outputs such as performances, story booklets, paintings and drawings, musical recordings and films. In addition, several of the older participants engage as 'Ambassadors'; they help to structure the content and activities of the workshops, engage in outreach, recruitment and fundraising. Ambassadors and some of the wider group of participants are also involved in dissemination activities where performances, films or other outputs are shared with a wider audience, including their carers but also sometimes care system professionals such as Virtual Heads, social workers and other professionals.

Apart from these practical elements, there are several additional noteworthy features of the scheme. First, the cohort comprises young people all of whom have experience of the care system. This is potentially controversial but enables the substantive content of the scheme to focus on the young people's own experience. Second, there is a frequent emphasis on experiences of the care system in the artwork and stories. Third, the scheme is small in terms of both participants and the number of professionals involved. In 2016, 15 young people participated in 21 sessions; in 2017, 18 young people participated in 26 sessions; and in 2018, 23 young people participated in 33 sessions. The small numbers enable sustained and deep personal relations between the adults and the young people involved who frequently engage with the scheme for several years.

The Plus One Scheme is also a form of ongoing artistic and practice-based research as part of the Theatre's wider strategic emphasis. The work of the creative team seeks to increase the cultural opportunities available to Looked After Children and young people. Other programmes use a similar approach with broader groups of disadvantaged young people.

This research was developed in collaboration with the creative team to ensure that data collection methods would not disrupt the young people's experience. Consideration about the high level of interventions from professionals and the formalities of those processes were a key consideration in our methodological approach; we sought to avoid a positivist approach that could reinforce categorisation and limit the participants from expressing their feelings and experiences in their own words. It was crucial to the research team that we were not perceived as 'another clipboard'. For example, Wood and Selwyn report that the Looked After Children and young people in their research 'were 'fed up' with answering questions and completing forms that made no difference to their lives' (2018, p. 24). An interpretivist approach combining creative activities and qualitative discussion recognised that young people are 'capable of providing expert testimony' about their own lives (Mannay, 2016, p. 49).

Our research was driven by careful consideration of the ethical challenges and potential issues that could arise from our presence. The researchers' status as unknown adults, needed to be justified. We opted to become participants ourselves, engaging in the creative processes, working alongside the young people and the creative team over the period of a year. Evaluating the activities and participating in them could have created tension, or blurred boundaries, but we were honest with the young people about our purpose and demonstrated through our participation that we also were learning new skills and taking on daunting tasks. Kushnar (2000, p. 68) writes of

the ‘novel ethical places which are characterised by uncertain gestures, nervous asides, a looking out for revealing signs...’; the research team was perhaps more prone to this than the participants. However, for those participants who were new to the activities and indeed the research team, it became clear that this was a ‘friendly ethical parlour’; one which was ‘kindly to the vulnerable’ and where we as a research team and the participants knew ‘whose parlour we were standing in’ (Kushnar, 2000, p. 68).

Our research in part aimed to explore participants' experiences of their involvement in the Plus One creative workshops and the perceived influence of their experience on their attitudes and aspirations in relation to their hopes for the future. We were also interested how significant others involved in these young people's lives perceived any benefits of the participants' participation. A further element of the research explored how those involved in delivering the project conceived its aims and objectives, and the underlying theory of change. Our overarching research questions were:

1. How do those involved in delivering the Plus One activities conceive its aims and objectives, and underlying theory of change?
2. How do beneficiaries experience the project(s) and with what impacts. Specifically, how has participation affected beneficiaries' aspirations for, and attitude towards, educational decision-making and progression to Higher Education?
3. How do significant others understand the projects to have affected beneficiaries?
4. What factors affect participation in the project(s), including the home lives of beneficiaries and the ways that other services and service providers interact with the project(s)?

Data collection involved a variety of methods. Participant observation began after a period of building familiarity. We engaged with sessions with the conscious and open (including seeking permission from carers and the young people themselves) objective of recording what we saw *via* a process of debriefing at the end of each day and drafting field notes. This allowed us to discuss and agree findings and to work collaboratively in an action-oriented way with the creative team delivering the programme. We also undertook semi-structured interviews with project staff ( $n = 4$ ), partners and stakeholders (8) and carers (6). We designed a process of automated data collection with young people (an Ipad game where young people could anonymously choose what questions they wanted to answer), but in the end the young people ( $n = 6$ ) themselves suggested that we just asked them questions in a more traditional manner. These were undertaken with both carer and young person consent and we were sensitive for the scope to do harm with some of the questions, such as asking about their responses to the construction of the cohort and the frequent focus on care experiences in the nature of the activities undertaken. We also undertook a group discussion with older participants based on photo/video elicitation; analysis of the artwork produced by Plus One activities and analysis of project documentation and evaluation data. The video elicitation exercise was particularly successful at generating rich data and deep insights. It involved simply showing one of the film outputs created by the young people back to them and repeatedly freezing the frame to pose questions about the story. The discussion generated by this was revealing; it helped elucidate the creative process underpinning the video but also the young people's wider experiences of Plus One. The interim findings were presented back to the partnership and some of the young participants at a ‘Culture Cares’ symposium. The evaluation report was shared and discussed with the participants and they were asked to consider whether they felt their contribution had been fairly represented. This process allowed for verification of our findings but importantly it was integral to our ethical approach, which valued the young people as co-producers of the research and not merely research subjects.

## FINDINGS: RECONCILING AN EFFECTIVE ETHIC OF CARE AND JUSTICE IN AN ARTS-BASED INTERVENTION WITH LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

### Negotiating competing pressures

At the outset, the creative team had a set of social justice objectives related to their understanding of the specific needs of the target group of beneficiaries. However, these have developed as new funders, staff and stakeholders have become involved and as practitioners have learned more about young peoples' needs. Some of these multiple objectives are easy to align, while others are in tension with one another. Since funders often require particular evaluation activities associated with these objectives, this has practical implications such as young people having multiple pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to complete.

The Plus One creative team clearly recognised the complexity and tensions in the multiple objectives and theories of change that they confronted. They recognised and responded to the dominant 'employability theory of change' mandated by some funders:

*supporting care leavers ... so they've been prepped ready to become more independent so developing those life skills like confidence, self-esteem, communication skills ... employability ... there's different ways people break it down and usually communication and confidence will come as a subset of employability....*

*(Plus One Creative Team)*

However, they also recognised weaknesses in this, based on their experiences of the specific needs of participants and they therefore held these different objectives in creative tension:

*working with an individual that's, who is not in school, is resisting, refusing, excluded and actually working with them on a very slow process of personal development that actually will help them ... become more ready to take the steps in terms of the formal route.*

*(Plus One Stakeholder)*

The complexity of this creative tension was enhanced by practitioners' attempts to recognise still further objectives and motivations. These included their own professional and personal commitments to the intrinsic value of artistic and creative endeavour and motivations associated with an ethic of justice—to challenge social norms, and these were even occasionally reflected in external funder requirements. For example, one arts funder had prioritised 'social action' over individual transformation. Practitioners also recognised one final set of objectives and motivations—those of young people themselves. We explored this with both practitioners and the young people. While some of the older beneficiaries did recognise instrumental 'employability' motivations, most expressed their primary motivation as to have fun in their school holidays in an environment that is supportive, warm and friendly:

*It's very ... everyone's very cheery ... everyone gets on with each other ... it's all very sure ... planned ... my favourite thing was playing to the music and singing....*

*(Paul)*

There are clear tensions between some of the external and internal objectives that motivate the programme. At least three positions emerge; one which attempts to recognise the immediate motivations of

individuals themselves, a second which is motivated by an attempt to help individuals adapt themselves to the realities of unequal social structures, and a third which seeks to challenge those unequal social structures. Holding these different positions in positive tension is challenging and practitioners showed considerable skill and creativity in doing so. In doing this, their actions reflected findings from wider literature on the ways that frontline social policy workers marry external policy motivations to their own intrinsic values and the interests of service users (Barnes & Prior, 2009; Dobson, 2015; Hargreaves et al., 2018).

## An internal ethic of care

One of the principle themes in the data coming from young people themselves was that they viewed the programme as creating a caring, supportive and positive environment. For some this was expressed merely in the context of a holiday club activity. For others—typically older and engaged with the programme for a longer period—this was more substantive. They used words such as ‘family’ to describe the relationships between young people themselves and the adults involved in the programme. They felt that these relationships simultaneously created and resulted from a sense of feeling valued and welcome, but also because relationships were sustained over a long period of time:

*it has created a little family, when you are in the care system, when they say a safe environment it is a lot different to what Plus One sees it as, our safe environment; we are able to have laughs about it and one-to-one discussions....*

(John)

These were not one-way relationships. Young people cared for each other and for the adults involved in the programme:

*I just feel like I can be myself ... I know that if I ever need to talk to anyone or need anything Plus One members and you as well ... I have got you guys.*

(Simon)

*I've got this fear of telling 12-13 year olds in care of what it's like leaving care because I'm scared that if I tell them they're going to run off crying ... they need to be prepared for it but you don't want to scare the living daylight out of them.*

(Sarah)

Both the young people and adults involved in the programme suggested that these positive relationships helped young people to develop complex social and emotional skills such as negotiation of creative tensions over often complex and emotional subjects:

*The hardest thing is ... you've got so many young people and everybody's care story is very different. So ... we end up with a ginormous story ... but it always turns out to work quite well ... That's when we were eliminating scenes....*

(Jennifer)

*...It's really difficult at the start of it, eliminating scenes, int it? Because you don't want to upset people by like feeling like you've pushed their part out but just trying to explain to them we just need a broader overview of care.*

*(Sarah)*

Another young man reported that he had developed supportive peer relationships that helped him to broker the crucial and challenging double transition from the care system to independent living and from education to work:

*It has also helped planning for when leaving care, and hearing other people's experiences as well, people who were older and already through the care leaving system and allowed me to get a lot more of an understanding of what changes were coming up as well....*

*(John)*

Young people valued the chance to problematise and make sense of the meaning of 'care'. They shaped story writing and performance around their experiences of care, allowing them to see relationships through the eyes of their characters. They reported that this allowed them to explore what different types of caring relationships might look and feel like. This was clearly a product of feeling safe in the company of others with whom they already had trusted relationships. Mutuality and trust were core components, as illustrated in this exchange between young people involved in the programme:

*...You know, because you often are like amazing acting, I'm sure we're all great but you are fab ... Do you get anything out of acting the roles?....*

*(Sarah)*

*...Definitely learned from some of the things in the role like if I'm reading a character out and they feel like I feel deep inside....*

*(Eve)*

## **Challenging social structures through an external ethic of justice**

While the predominant internal ethic is one of care, externally the programme presents a more challenging face. The art produced through the programme is frequently intended for dissemination, in a variety of ways. In the period we engaged with the programme, there were several events at which outputs were disseminated to a carefully selected audience. One of these involved a semi-private film screening and another a major symposium at which several different outputs were performed and disseminated.

The young people themselves were clearly proud of these outputs and spoke about the importance they placed on retaining control of the messages conveyed by the work. For example, discussing the film project, one young person commented:

*Yeah and that was just a one-off example, there were quite a few bits where we had discussions about everything didn't we? It took us hours just to describe what looked like the most pointless bits in the film had very interesting conversations about them. But it was nice because that meant everyone got a chance to shape it and it wasn't just a worker*

*going right let's involve drugs in this, well no we don't want that ... it was definitely led by us I think.*

*(Sarah)*

It was clearly important to the young people to present a positive image of themselves. In one discussion they explained that they felt that young people in the care system were often regarded negatively. The film project was partially funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner and had a crime theme, but the young people were concerned that they should not be presented as criminals. Their narrative was a carefully told story of social harm and the negative behaviours it may generate, but also the ways in which caring relationships might reduce harm. The film explores the experience of a young person who is moving between care placements. It starts with a sequence in which the young person is presented as lacking control, being in the back seat of a social worker's car, with the doors secured by child locks while her life is 'presented' to her new carers. The young person tries but fails to be able to take control of the situation by opening the door. Later in the film she is on the street when 'befriended' by a gang who trick her into assisting in a robbery; she is caught by the police. In the final scenes, the new foster carer realises what has happened and there are symbolic signals of trust and understanding as she returns the young person's phone and emergency money. The young people contrasted this example of their creative control with a past experience when they had felt an artist had not listened and had created a story that had fetishised their difficult circumstances, and to which they had objected. They explained that, learning from that, they and the creative team, had been concerned that the main character should not independently engage in criminal activity; it was important to them to contextualise the loss of control that made her vulnerable to becoming simultaneously a victim and perpetrator of crime:

*We spoke about shifting perceptions, ... You know when we spoke initially during production about the kid in care getting into drugs and you stood up and said 'no I don't want that, I'm sick of kids in care being perceived as going straight into drugs....*

*(Jennifer)*

*...we don't talk like that, we didn't act like that and it was quite offensive really, I was just having none of it. You know, we're not all on drugs, we all don't swear, we all don't have that type of attitude.*

*(Sarah)*

The finished output represents a renegotiation of funder objectives and mobilises a clear ethic of justice in challenging ideas and social structures. It also takes aim at what the young people regarded as the bureaucratised elements of the care system which they regarded as unjust and harmful. The audience for the film screening largely comprised professionals in the care system:

*...the audience who were mainly care workers, after care workers and ... there was quite a lot of discomfort when we were showing it. They were at points very uncomfortable I think....*

*(Sarah)*

*...A lot of apologies afterwards....*

*(Jennifer)*

*...For me personally, I had a lot of people coming up to me and say we're so apologetic  
... I think it had hit home....*

*(Simon)*

The challenge to the care system itself though was often subtle. This was not necessarily a critique of individuals or personalities, rather what the young people felt were system and resource issues that depersonalised relationships with social workers:

*...it [care] can lose, personal touch, is that the right word? You can completely lose your identity because to some workers you are, not everyone, but to a lot of them, with really high case load, you're a piece of paper effectively, and it's not about them being nasty or not being nice or not being good at their jobs, it's just that they've got that many, you are a piece of paper, they read your file, oh right ... and then they read another file....*

*(Sarah)*

The effect of the film on an invited audience suggests that the external ethic of justice is effective. At the symposium, an audience of 120 people from the arts and care system were exposed to a range of outputs produced *via* this programme and other similar ones. The research team was also present at this event and used it to disseminate early findings from the research. Thirty-two audience members completed a short qualitative survey. The vast majority of respondents suggested that they would change their practice as a consequence of what they had heard. The very small number who did not indicate this, suggested that they would *sustain* their existing work with Looked After Children and young people. The next most prominent theme was about learning more about the experience of care and leaving care. Specific changes of practice in relation to professional care services included (in order of prominence): increased partnership working, incorporating creativity or the arts in care practice, attempting to lower case-loads and increase young people's ownership of their own care planning, ensuring that services reflected a stronger ethic of care. Participants from the arts also focused strongly on increases in partnership working but four respondents suggested they wanted to establish a similar scheme to Plus One. One individual was motivated to volunteer in a personal capacity in arts interventions for Looked After Children and young people and another suggested that they would apply to become a foster carer.

## CONCLUSIONS

The criminological concept of social harm can help to understand the origins and implications of the long-term inequalities impacting on Looked After Children and young people. The Plus One scheme helps to contest and mitigate social harm in two respects. First, the internal ethic of care helps young people to develop social, relational and emotional aptitudes, which might help them to be resilient to these harms. At the same time, Plus One also contests these social harms by challenging the social structures and behaviours which generate them, especially by promoting a stronger ethic of care in other services. In the content of the artworks young people produced, they described some experiences of the care system as uncaring and alienating. They complained of changing care placements and relationships with social workers. They recognised the influence of bureaucratic processes, risk management and the impact of stretched resources in shaping what they felt were depersonalised interactions. That is, they themselves directed some of their critique at the social and behavioural structures underpinning social harm; the Plus One scheme helped them to do this and to identify how caring relationships might mitigate these harms. Of course, there are risks that processes that seek to

challenge social inequities fail to do so, and dishearten or further compound social harm among those experiencing it, and the Plus One scheme is no exception to this. It is significant that the creative team does not raise expectations about the likely effectiveness or overly direct the justice-oriented activities. Rather, it is important that they help young people to use their own voices and have control of the artistic process. Being in control and being taken seriously as creative directors of the process were clearly something that the participants welcomed and was central to the ethic of care.

In this way our findings related to a small-scale holiday scheme might contain wider lessons for other services. They stress the importance of balancing an ethic of care and justice and suggest ways in which they might be advanced simultaneously. Indeed, they suggest that an ethic of justice requires an ethic of care to be fully effective. These findings are significant because of the clear interest of the arts and creative sectors in becoming more active in delivering services for marginalised social groups and austerity-impacted statutory services looking for other (externally funded) forms of service delivery. Our findings have several practical implications for the expansion of artistic and performance-based practice into spaces traditionally occupied by statutory services. We suggest that there are limits to the 'scale-up' that is possible in individual programmes and that attention and resources are required to ensure continuity in high-quality relationships between participants themselves and with adults. Replicating the positive aspects of the programme means small scale and long-term programmes with sustained staffing, and working hard to maintain contact with participants whose lives may make this difficult. Further, not just any artistic practitioners will be able to successfully build these relationships. They require a very specific skill set and character attributes which emphasise care and working slowly to build relationships, trust and young people's ownership of the creative process. Our findings do not though suggest that such programmes are in any way a replacement for wider social services. They suggest that there is a need for more resources and greater attention to the relational aspects of social work and the emotional well-being of Looked After Children and young people.

The findings are also significant because they suggest that creative and artistic methods can be useful ways of generating data about the day-to-day lived experience of processes underpinning social harm. By adopting an interpretive and action-oriented research approach, we were able to support the development of the programme and work collaboratively with the creative team delivering it. This helped to build relationships with the young people and to enter the caring relationships sustained through the programme, generating richer data in the process. However, it also generated significant challenges, especially ethical ones associated with what experiences could and could not be turned into research data. Young people developed trusting relationships and occasionally discussions over lunch or while engaged in workshop activities, revealed experiences and feelings that we decided not to use as data on the project. We discussed these collectively with the creative team as part of the safeguarding processes in operation. Ultimately, judgements about what was included were deferred to the young people themselves—the process of verification with them was extremely important and we would strongly recommend this to other researchers contemplating similar methods. It is also why 'the Plus One Community' is listed as authors. Safeguarding concerns mean that we cannot give full authorial credit to each young person, but we did feel it was important to recognise their contribution as authors of the data that we report here.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>We chose not to try to anonymise or pseudonymise the intervention or its location because the authors' names would enable internet searches to identify these aspects anyway. We also wanted to give some authorial credit to the young people involved, without revealing their individual identities.

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