

Grey Cells and Prison Cells Conference Report 2018

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1. Introduction

Organised by the Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice (CYCJ), the Grey Cells: Meeting the Neurodevelopmental and Cognitive Needs of Vulnerable Young People conference, took place on March 7, 2018 at the University of Strathclyde.

Given the strong link to offending behaviour, the focus of the event was identifying and working with children and young people who have neurodevelopmental and cognitive needs. The conference allowed attendees to hear from five specialists in the field:

- Dr Gill Robinson (Professional Advisor for the Young People's Strategy, Scottish Prison Service) discussed what we know about the needs of young people in Polmont
- Dr Judith Piggot (Consultant Psychiatrist, NHS Forth Valley, Lead Scottish Government Funded SMARTS Project) introduced Neuro-Developmental Disorder: The SMARTS approach
- Simon Glen (Project Co-ordinator, Headway Glasgow) highlighted the cognitive changes after Acquired Brain Injury: Effective approaches
- Carole Murphy (Interventions for Vulnerable Youth (IVY) Project) examined the impact of traumatic experiences on the brain and approaches to improving attunement
- Mary Sharpe (Advocate, Chief Executive Officer, The Reward Foundation) discussed the impact of pornography on the adolescent brain: Approaches to prevention and recovery

This was combined with participant's attendance at two workshops from a possible choice of four:

- Helping young people to understand brain development and the impact on behaviour (Hamish Maclean, Police Scotland Community Safety Liaison Officer and Rebecca Dawson, (CEA) Domestic Abuse Support, HMYOI Polmont)
- Identifying neurodevelopmental disorders: The complexity of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) (Lorna Fulton, NHS Ayrshire and Arran Foetal Alcohol Advisory and Support team)
- Using the Neurosequential Model in Education to promote Readiness for Learning (R4L) in pupils (Lesley Taylor, Educational Psychologist, Clackmannanshire Educational Psychology Service)
- The SMARTS approach in practice: An example from the IVY Project (Consultant Psychiatrist, NHS Forth Valley, Lead Scottish Government Funded SMARTS Project and Clare Neil, Clinical Psychologist)

The presentations and materials utilised at the event can be accessed [here](#).

There were approximately 80 delegates who attended from a diverse range of agencies concerned in the field of Youth and Criminal Justice in Scotland, including Police Scotland, social work, local authority, education, health and third sector organisations. The following report represents an accurate account of the responses received from delegates who completed and returned evaluation forms provided within their conference packs; over 70% of the attendees completed evaluation forms.

2. Evaluation Feedback

2.1 Prior Knowledge

Attendees were asked to describe their knowledge and understanding of this topic prior to the conference. The chart below shows that the vast majority had prior knowledge before the event. Over half had existing good knowledge on brain development and offending behaviour by young people, with 62% of attendees strongly agreeing or agreeing with this statement. A small proportion of attendees felt they had little knowledge prior to the conference, a total of 13%, with 21% stating that they neither agreed or disagreed.

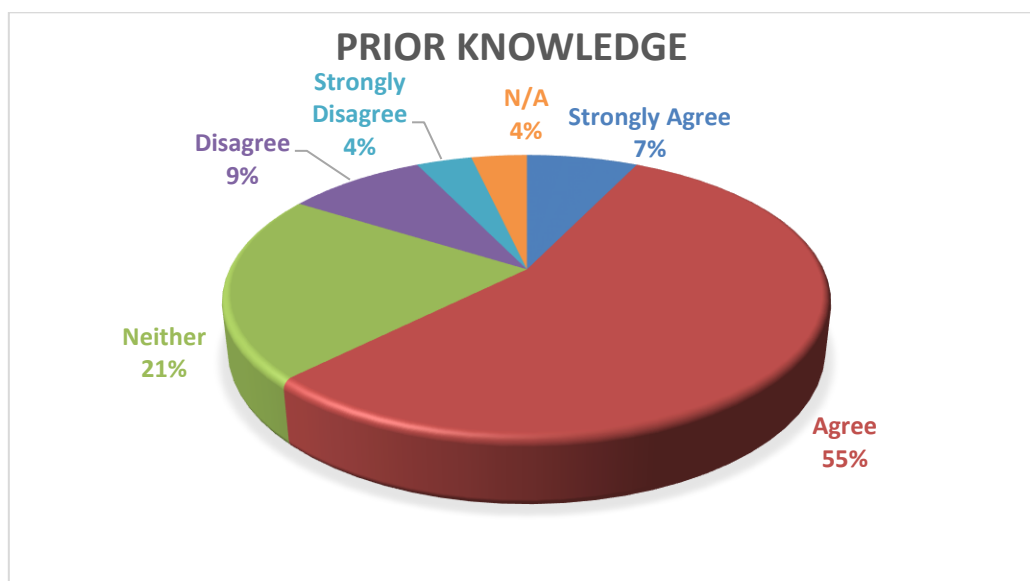


Chart 1, prior knowledge

2.2 Previous Experience

Attendees were asked to describe their previous experience of working with young people with cognitive needs before the conference. The chart shows that the vast majority (over 90%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they had previous experience whilst 5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the other 2% stating neither.

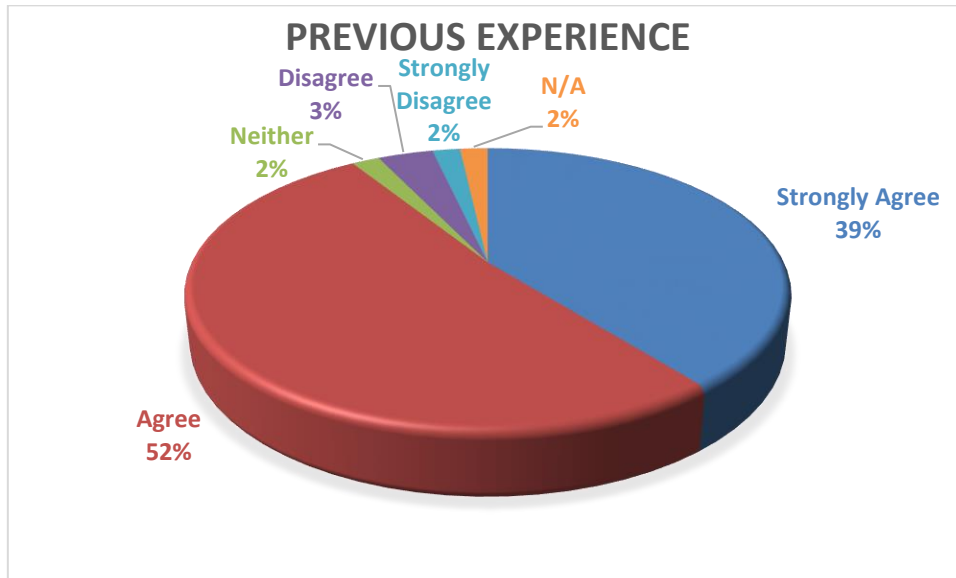


Chart 2, previous experience

2.3 Gained Understanding

The chart below illustrates the vast majority of people gained a greater understanding from the event. 94% of attendees stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed that they gained understanding whilst a small minority (4%) stated neither and the last 2% that this question was not applicable.

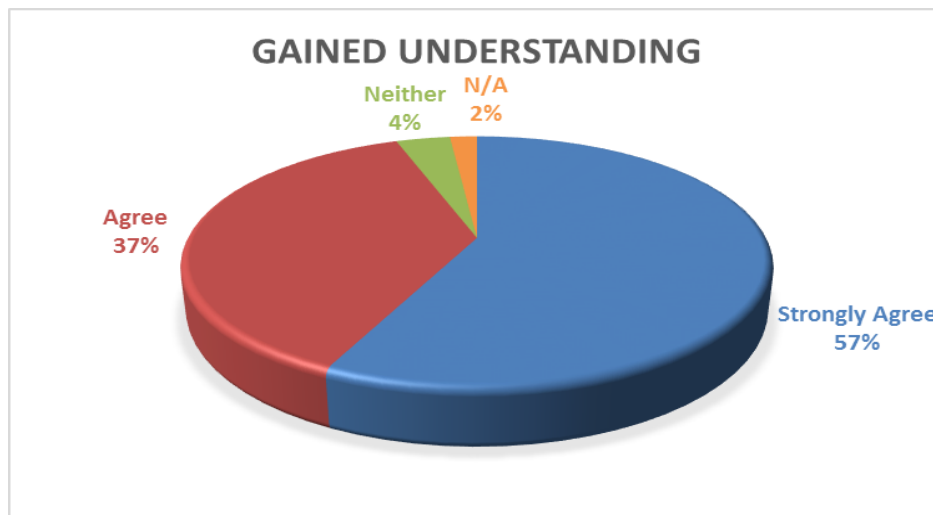


Chart 3, gained understanding

2.3 Gained Knowledge

The attendees were asked if they gained any knowledge from the event that would impact on their practice, as illustrated in the chart below. The vast majority, 93%, either agreed or strongly agreed that they gained knowledge from the event.

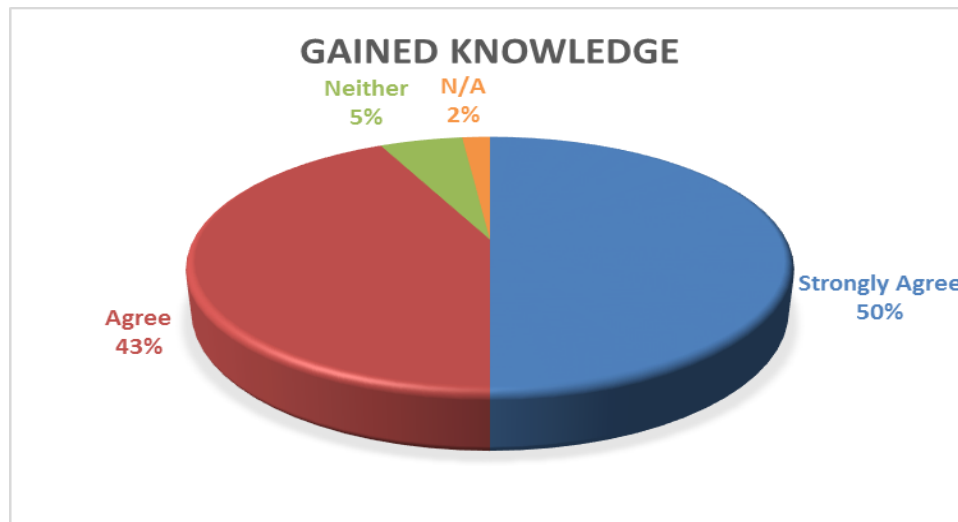


Chart 4 Gained Knowledge

3. Event Impact and Learning

On the whole, the feedback from the event was extremely positive, with most people commenting that the range of speakers and the topics discussed were good.

Respondents identified a range of different themes as being the most important learning they took from the event. The majority of respondents discussed the presentation by Mary Sharpe about the impact that internet pornography has on the developing brain of young people:

‘Mary Sharpe’s seminar was helpful to understand a particular case.’

‘The scale and severity of the impact of internet pornography on adolescents was a real eye opener.’

‘There is an increase in concerns around the use and access of indecent images, which, I had been struggling to fully get to grips with. The session on pornography has helped me with understanding the behaviours and motivations.’

In addition, many of the respondents expressed interest and highlighted learning from Dr Judith Piggot’s SMART’s intervention (Skills, Motivation, Awareness, Regulated, Thinking, stuff) model:

‘The input on SMARTs was very helpful’

‘SMARTs intervention and impact on pornography and adolescent brain.’

Numerous respondents also commented that the learning gained in respect of the impact of exposure to adverse childhood experiences and trauma on brain development, as well as the impact on behaviour, was extremely useful, as stated:

“The development of the brain, the impact ACE's have on functioning and decision making.”

“Impact and ACES, importance of preventing this.”

Throughout the entirety of the event, the opportunities to network, hear about collaboration across agencies, and possible interventions and services where support could be accessed was positively commented on. Respondents spoke about sharing this learning and knowledge with colleagues who were unable to attend the event and welcomed this opportunity for reflection on their own practice.

27 out of the 57 respondent's completed feedback on what worked well for the event. Respondents gave positive responses about the use of interactive workshops enhancing the learning experience, as well as the range of topics covered, the knowledge of speakers and the links to practice, as illustrated below:

“All lectures and workshops excellent.”

“Enjoyed the whole day and all the presentations. Very informative and useful to improve my work practice.”

“The whole event worked well, very good speakers who left me wanting to go away and read more about their subjects.”

“A very good worthwhile and informative and practice based day that is transferable to work places. That there was a thread and consolidation from speaker to speaker.”

14 out of the 57 respondent's provided suggestions on what could be done to improve future conferences/events, mainly focused on providing smaller workshops to aid interaction and consolidation of learning:

“Workshops smaller to enable more interactive with audience.”

“More availability of workshop places. I was unable to access workshops that I was interested in.”

One respondent however commented the only way the event could have been improved would have been to make it longer.

4. What next?

Attendees were asked if there was any further training or support that they felt they could benefit from following this event. Attendees stated that following Mary Sharpe's session on internet pornography, further information on this topic would be useful:

“Would like further sessions on internet safety, abuse, sexual offending, and pornography.”

“More info on internet offending and SHB.”

“Need to research on the links between sexual offending and the increase in prison population and the use of pornography in adolescence.”

The SMARTS approach was also received very well by the attendees and more training was asked for, along with looking at the whole concept in depth:

“SMARTs workshop - looking in depth at application of it.”

“As I am considering how to structure my own sessions with young people, I'd be interested in further training around using the SMARTs approach.”

There was some demand for training in specific areas of brain trauma and its effects on young people:

“Attachments links - to brain development/trauma - to offending. Low level neglects impacts/links to offending. How can we help YP to understand change?”

“Specific trauma informed practice training. More training around working with people with brain injury.”

Some of the attendees asked that the further information and resources be made accessible, particularly focused on the availability of community supports, the role of the police, and support to translate this learning into direct work with young people.

One person commented that there was “so much” on the question of what next?