# CJS Workshop 8: Promoting Community Justice

Learning report

August 2026

# Context

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On Wednesday 12 August 2026, Community Justice Scotland held an online discussion session focusing on the topic 'Promoting community justice'. Using Priority Action 13 from the National Strategy for Community Justice as a starting point, this session sought to explore approaches to improving public and workforce understanding of community justice, reduce stigma, and build confidence in community justice through effective communication, engagement, and partnership working.

> *"Priority Action 13. Support integration and reduce stigma by ensuring the community and workforce have an improved understanding of and confidence in community justice"*

The session was hosted by Rose McConnachie from the CJS Engagement and Improvement Team, with 60 participants, and included inputs from:

- Rebecca Worrall, Head of Comms, Community Justice Scotland
- Ainya Taylor, Community Justice Coordinator, Moray
- Kirsty Brophy, Partnership Manager, Community Justice Ayrshire Partnership

This report summarises the key points from the presenter inputs, participant questions, answers, discussion and practice sharing. The views and opinions expressed in this report reflect those raised during the event and are not necessarily held by CJS.

# Key Themes

### 1. Building Confidence Rather Than Awareness

A recurring theme was that awareness of community sentencing is relatively high, but confidence in its effectiveness is much weaker. There was a general view that we need to make sure that we're demonstrating that **community solutions work.**

Key points included:

- Public support increases when people understand what community sentences involve.
- Communications should focus on demonstrating outcomes such as accountability, rehabilitation, reduced reoffending, and community benefit.
- Visible examples of successful unpaid work help strengthen confidence in community justice.

### 2. Evidence-Based and Audience-Focused Communication

Speakers emphasised the importance of using research and audience insight to shape communications.

Discussion highlighted:

- Communication should begin with understanding the audience rather than selecting communication channels first.
- Different audiences require tailored approaches.
- Older adults (45+) were identified from market research as a key audience group with lower confidence levels regarding community justice who are accessible through channels such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Some research indicates younger people may be more open to influence about new ideas and receive information through very different platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, streaming services and online content.

### 3. Visibility of Community Justice Activity

Participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of making community justice tangible and visible, and that community solutions work.

Examples included:

- Demonstrating the impact of unpaid work through before-and-after images such as the current CJS 'Serving the Community' campaign
- Open days at community justice facilities (such as the polytunnel in Moray)
- Community projects and local success stories showcased in accessible formats (like the Community Justice Ayrshire website)
- Videos and films showcasing lived experience and practical outcomes.
- Accessible visual resources and infographics.

There was broad agreement that people understand community justice better when they can see its impact in their local communities.

### 4. Lived and Living Experience as Central to Engagement

A major theme throughout the workshop was the value of incorporating lived and living experience into promotion and communications activities.

Key discussion points included:

- Co-designing resources and communication materials
- Using personal stories to build empathy and understanding
- Establishing feedback loops so contributors understand how their input is used and what impact it has had
- Developing formal commitments around engagement with lived experience, using principles of honesty, trust and inclusivity
- Recognising increasing concerns about "consultation fatigue" among individuals repeatedly asked to share experiences.

There was recognition that community justice should continue exploring ways to gather insight collaboratively with other sectors, particularly Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADPs), to avoid duplication and participant fatigue. Partners should identify opportunities to join up with other communication channels to enhance impact and efficacy of communications, e.g. recovery communities, third sector partners, and community planning partners.

### 5. Internal Promotion Is as Important as Public Promotion

Several speakers highlighted that community justice partners themselves often have limited understanding of all aspects of the system.

Examples included:

- Developing induction packs
- Delivering basic awareness sessions on a regular basis
- Explaining key justice concepts such as bail, MAPPA, unpaid work and community sentences
- Producing briefings and simple resources for partners and wider workforces

The view emerged that improving workforce understanding is essential for building broader public confidence.

### 6. Simplicity and Accessibility

Participants stressed the need to make information more accessible and easier to engage with.

Approaches discussed included:

- One-page summaries
- Infographics
- Easy-read materials, and decommissioning “hard to read” documents where possible
- Films and visual communications
- Short, engaging content rather than lengthy reports

There was particular discussion around moving towards universally accessible formats rather than maintaining separate "easy read" versions.

7. Trust, Authenticity and Credibility

A significant discussion centred on trust.

Participants noted that:

- Authentic communications build greater confidence than highly polished campaigns
- Acknowledging system challenges can improve credibility
- Communities are more likely to engage where relationships and trust already exist
- Honest conversations about system limitations can strengthen confidence rather than weaken it

# Challenges

### Public Perception and Media Narratives

Participants noted:

- Justice issues often receive sensationalised media coverage
- Television dramas, documentaries and social media shape public understanding more than official messaging
- Community justice often struggles to compete with negative narratives

### Social Media and Misinformation

Concerns were raised about:

- Online misinformation
- Community "outing" activity
- Escalating public concern through social media platforms

- Difficulties communicating nuanced messages in highly emotive environments

### Resource Constraints

Many participants identified challenges relating to:

- Limited communications resource
- Lack of dedicated budgets
- Partner capacity
- Difficulties maintaining websites, social media and engagement programmes without dedicated support

### Measuring Impact

Participants found it difficult to demonstrate:

- Long-term attitude change
- Increased confidence
- Wider community impact
- Behavioural change resulting from communications activity

### System learning from audience feedback

Participants noted:

- Some planned activity to promote community-based initiatives can result in strong negative feedback and criticism
- It can be challenging to translate feedback into improvement and activity

## Emerging Discussion Topics

Several themes emerged for further exploration:

### Gender and Community Justice

- Whether communications should adopt a stronger gender lens
- Understanding different experiences and perceptions of women in the justice system

### Community Concerns and Public Confidence

- Addressing concerns about shoplifting, antisocial behaviour and public safety
- Balancing legitimate community concerns with community justice messaging

### MAPPA and Public Understanding

- Challenges of communicating public protection arrangements
- Potential value of national resources to support local conversations

### Cross-System Learning

- Better integration of insights across community justice, community planning, public protection, health, recovery and ADPs
- Viewing an individual's experience holistically rather than through single-service perspectives

# Key Conclusions

The workshop highlighted that successful promotion of community justice requires more than communications campaigns. Success depends on resources (including financial, human, logistical and technical), sustained relationship building, audience understanding, authentic storytelling, partnership working, and active involvement of people with lived experience.

Participants agreed that:

1. Communication must be evidence-led and audience-focused
2. Visibility of outcomes is critical to increasing confidence
3. Lived experience should remain central to community justice promotion
4. Strong partnerships and collaboration are essential
5. Trust, authenticity and credibility matter more than polished messaging
6. Community justice messages must reflect the complexity of people's lives and experiences
7. Continued opportunities for shared learning between partnerships are highly valued and should be expanded

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