

HIDDEN INSIGHT 16:
A DIFFERENT APPROACH
TO LEARNING



This insight considers the different approach taken by MutualGain in how they deliver their training, recognising the differing styles of training preferred by individuals MutualGain endeavour to provide a varied, flexible and enjoyable learning experience that provides staff with the knowledge and skills to deliver community engagement with confidence. It provides them with the knowledge to collect, record and analyse data from communities enabling them to make informed decisions about how to best work with local communities to build social capital.

*#A different approach to learning #Enjoyable learning #Flexible learning #Building social capital
Reflective training #Community engagement*

A Flexible, Fun Learning Approach

‘The police are the public and the public are the police...’ Unlike teaching and nursing it is still unnecessary to have a degree level qualification to enter the profession. When training and supporting work based learning, the approach must meet the needs of all students. The police frontline consists of those with GCSEs to Masters Qualifications (from school classroom experience to university lecture hall). The diversity results in a range of expectations in terms of preferred learning style: some people like pictures, some like facts, some like to read and some like to be told. The learning approach therefore has to be flexible.

This insight will consider the experience found following the delivery of one MutualGain programme within a police force. Comments made after the training included;

- *“We did an exercise yesterday where we used craft materials. It was a different way of learning but it got everyone involved...”*
- *“It’s been really good, really dynamic. There’s been a different person delivering the training each day which I think has helped”*

It is easy to forget that some officers and staff have recently left full time education which did not provide a positive learning experience. The MutualGain programme is designed to bring training, work based learning and supported delivery together so that the learning experience is full and meaningful, embedding knowledge and skills in the daily experience of the learner. The training is provided by a variety of trainers using different styles that incorporate video, practical exercises and creativity. This enabled those who did not feel comfortable in a classroom environment to feedback, and ensured the programme was tailored to suit them.

After the training a core group of students committed to engage in six months of action learning and reflection. It is here where much of the learning took place: a challenging process of self reflection which altered their outlook, approach and delivery of community engagement. Training alone does not provide that experience – the combination of peer support and challenge with a critical injection of expertise, created a powerful resource to do things differently.

The insight here is to ensure that learners have fun. Learning about ourselves can be difficult, but in a supported lively and fun environment it becomes essential to transforming organisations - people will take in the information if it is delivered in a fun and relaxing style. This was the rule that was followed throughout the programme and the impact could be seen within the staff on the programme.

A Confident Workforce

Frontline officers are blessed with the confidence that their uniform provides – its authority often leads people to make assumptions about the skills and confidence that sit beneath it. Comfortable in their day to day conversations with the public and peers, this programme provided an opportunity to develop leadership, and more formalised presentation skills, so that the findings of good community engagement could be confidently re-presented to senior officers.

Throughout the programme the participants were given an opportunity to develop and hone their presentation skills. This included formal presentations; ‘elevator pitches’, planning exercises and an understanding of their ‘social style.’ As time progressed the style and delivery of the presentations improved and knowledge embedded. Visibly enhanced confidence was demonstrated by participants, as was their creativity. When asked to prepare presentations on specific community engagement methodologies the group unleashed their creative skills and supported it with an in depth knowledge.

Permission to learn (success or failure) encouraged the group to test their new found knowledge and skills, and undertake a new way of delivering community engagement. The success can be seen in the videos elsewhere in this pack. Their energy and passion had generated a new way of thinking and doing, and they wanted everyone to know about it! They had become ‘expert practitioners’. After two days of residential download of learning the group prepared to present to senior officers.

They rehearsed what they wanted to say, how they wanted to deliver it and invited their peers to act as critical friends. The presentations demonstrated the journey that the group had been on. They wanted to tell the Senior Leadership Team (Superintendents and above) what they had learned and, importantly, how they had used their new knowledge and skills to engage with communities. Watching the teams plan and prepare for their ‘moment’ was interesting as there was a balance of confidence and concern. Who was going to say what? Who speaks next? Who is going to answer the questions?

Despite all the passion and learning that was exciting them, they were concerned about having to present to senior officers. In their rehearsal the energy was suppressed, and the MutualGain programme described in terms of process and tasks rather than learning. The learners ‘reverted to type’ and behaved as they believed senior officers would have expected. Collective reflection highlighted their discomfort in being the subject matter expert and their deference to rank. After some discussion they developed the confidence to present using an authentic voice – the realities of their own experience. The result? Interesting, powerful presentations which kept senior leaders fully engaged and wanting to learn more. All partners on the programme used their knowledge to challenge audience comments, and used evidence from their experience to show how the senior officers could take a different viewpoint. Permission to learn and permission to be honest with peers and senior officers resulted in a positive learning experience for all.

The presentations drew a round of applause and very positive comments from those present;

- *“breath-taking”*
- *“A really good use of my time today”*
- *“we need the patience and foresight to carry this on”*
- *“clear evidence of personal development has taken place”; ‘we need to give this more care and consideration’*
- *“blown away with the passion and ability to deliver”*
- *“wanted to hear honesty today and I’ve heard it”*
- *‘an industrialised version of Dixon of Dock Green’*

Recording and Analysing Data

When we prepare a statement we listen to a person's story and probe where we need clarity. The same is true of community engagement. How we handle that information, code it and analyse it is central to ensuring the data can influence service delivery. When we write a statement or a report we tend to use templates, standards and organisation specific requirements. The same is true of community engagement, but officers generally don't receive training in how to capture, code and analyse community stories and often dismiss them as 'anecdote'. Community stories contain hidden insights into crime and anti-social behaviour which can act as a trigger to identify emerging issues, and if ignored can be the key to reduced confidence.

Data collecting techniques were used throughout the programme to listen to the stories from communities and from learners. The simplicity of 'pinpoint' or 'Post It' notes grouped together to identify emerging clusters and themes helped groups of residents and learners clarify their stories and experiences. The outcome was the same in each instance; just like a statement of evidence the information was refined and filtered to the point that a coherent document could be put together.

As people tried this process it built their confidence. For example, the data from two key events in was recorded on table cloths and flip charts. This had to be analysed and presented in a document in such a way that it represented what people were saying to the police. Those involved in the programme received specific training in information handling, data analysis and coding data. Whilst this sounds very dry, it is exactly what the police do from the point that a crime is reported. Someone has to analyse the content of the call and code it onto a call handling system, someone is deployed and listens to the story of the victim/witness and analyses the information to decide whether a crime has been committed. The evidence is filtered, refined and recorded in a file of evidence to allow someone to make a decision on next steps. The MutualGain process uses the same principles but collects the data using different techniques. Officers analysed, coded and documented the data to a standard which enabled decisions to be made on next steps.

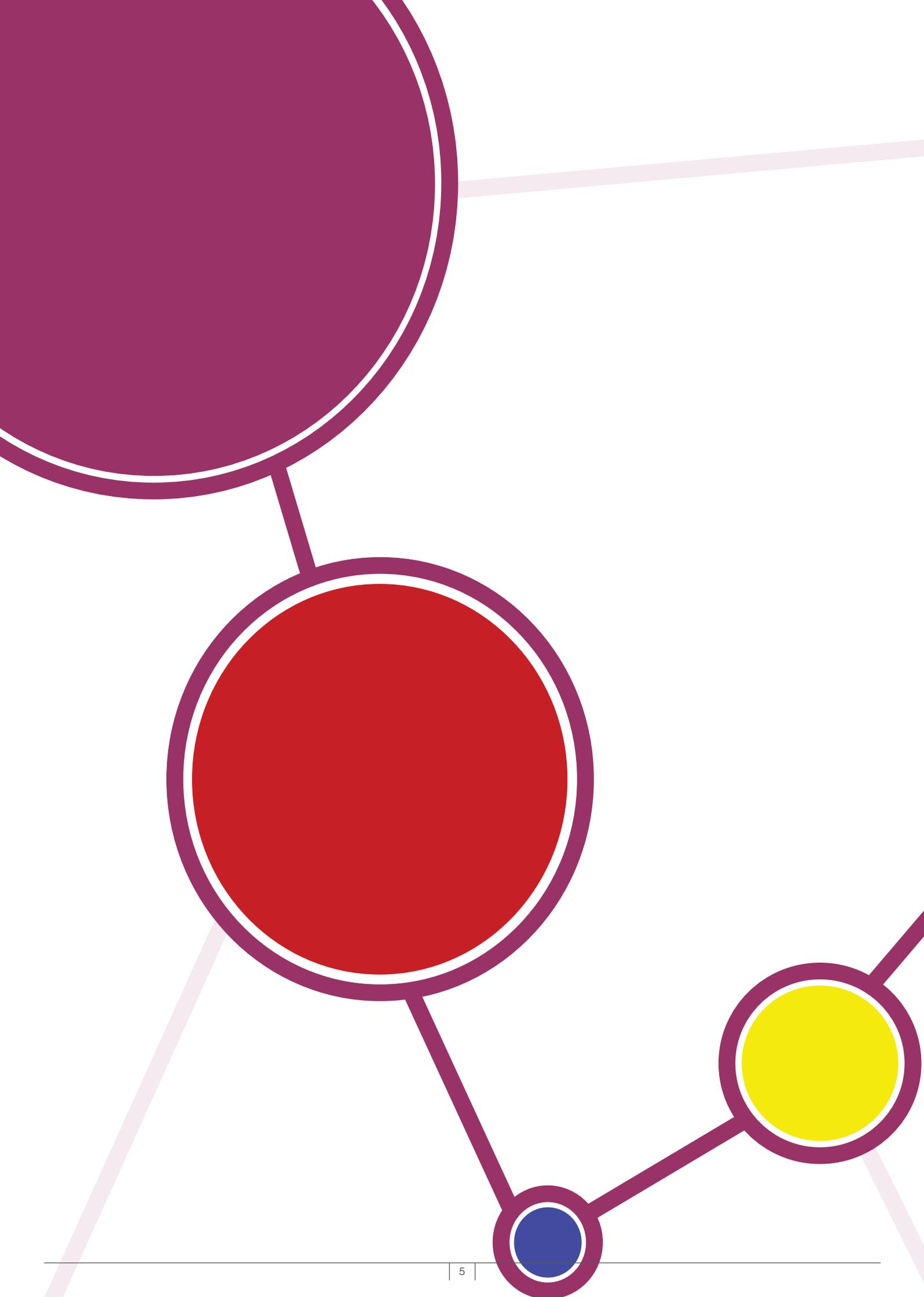
Training in police related issues is ongoing. New legislation, new policies, new structures, new teams, new divisions. All of which adds up to continual change. Commitment to reflective learning and experimental approaches will enable police staff and their partners to respond differently to communities. Participants in this process demonstrated clear growth in confidence. Just like giving evidence, once you have done it a few times it becomes easier.

The challenge for the police is to build on this for the future and sustain the learning. Opportunities for officers to be supported in their delivery and approach to community engagement can be drawn from within and outside the organisation. Since the conclusion of the programme a number of people have been recognised for their MutualGain training and have been tasked with developing new ways of engaging different communities;

- *"I was a bit apprehensive at first but going through the process I have learned a lot and I know what I have learned is sustainable. We can carry it on. You just have to be a committed individual and want to do it basically..."*
- *"I think over the last 6 months for me it has been personal development. I've become a lot more confident doing this course. I've also learned new skills that enable me to engage with the community on a day to day basis a lot better..."*

Those people are now demonstrating the value to the police and are playing a significant part in achieving the Chief Constable's promise: -

"we have made a promise to provide you with the best possible service and to work with you to make your community a safer place."



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