



U R Boss: Campaigning for change

the Howard League for Penal Reform

- Early consultation with young people identified policing as a key priority for U R Boss
- The establishment of the role of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the elections to that position created a significant opportunity to develop a participatory campaign to promote young people's interests and child-friendly policing policies
- The campaign developed by U R Boss employed a variety of participation strategies including targeted engagement with young people in certain areas, commissioning a campaign film, media activity, promotion of a pledge to be signed by PCC candidates, lobbying at party conferences and online activity
- Four sites were chosen for more intensive campaigning activity in the North East, North West, East and West Midlands. The U R Boss participation team worked with young people in each area
- Over 190 young people were involved in the campaign. The pledge was signed by 50 per cent of PCC candidates: half (23) of the successful PCC candidates had signed the pledge
- U R Boss young advisors worked intensively on the campaign, and they felt that it had convinced opinion formers that young people had something credible to say, and attracted more young people to campaigning
- The experience of the campaign also gave the young advisors the encouragement to go on and develop a broader Manifesto to support fair treatment of young people in the justice system.

The Howard League established U R Boss as a participatory programme of work in 2009, aimed at improving processes and outcomes for young people in the criminal justice system. Funded by the Big Lottery, the programme objectives incorporated six key outcomes, focusing on different areas of work sharing the common goal of achieving change through involving young people and putting their voices at the heart of the process. The explicit objective of U R Boss was 'to change national policy and practice in the statutory and voluntary sectors' and change 'public attitudes to children and young people in the legal system'.

The specific focus of this evaluation report is the development of a campaign to promote young people's interests in the criminal justice system and child-friendly policies to coincide with the establishment of the role of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the first PCC elections in November 2012. As U R Boss developed, policing appeared to lie consistently at the centre of young people's concerns. The PCC election process and the interest surrounding it provided a timely opportunity to articulate these concerns and to try to secure a positive dialogue with those soon to be taking up a democratic role at the head of local policing arrangements.

This report explores the origins of the U R Boss PCC campaign, its organisation and delivery, its achievements, and the specific role of U R Boss young advisors and other young people in the campaign and associated work on policing. It is based on a review of relevant documentary sources: interviews with Howard League staff (U R Boss team members and others), interviews with U R Boss young advisors; observation of campaign events involving young people; and additional information collated by the Howard League and based on responses to the campaign and its impact.

The origins of the campaign

U R Boss carried out a number of consultations with young people in the criminal justice system on their views about their experiences of the justice system, both in custodial settings and in the community. These have produced consistently negative findings, and in particular, young people were found to express strong concerns about the police:

In every group we worked with children and young people consistently spoke of their negative experiences of and relationships with the police. There was a pattern across the country that once a young person was known to the police they were labelled, criminalised and drawn further into the system. (Life Outside, Howard League, 2012)

In light of these concerns, and arising from the work of U R Boss, the Howard League reassessed its strategic objectives to include improving the quality of contact between young people and the police (*On our side?*, Howard League, 2012). The creation of the PCC role in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 seemed to present an ideal opportunity to initiate a new phase of work, focusing on an issue consistently identified as a major area of concern by young people. The Howard League recognised that the PCC elections could provide an effective vehicle for the promotion of young people's interests, while acknowledging that it would involve 'a change of direction for U R Boss' (Howard League staff interview) to become involved in a much wider campaigning role. However, it was also believed that there was a need to develop this aspect of the project, as there was an emerging view that opportunities to speak up and promote the voices of young people were not being utilised fully: 'we were publishing reports and then not doing very much with them' (staff interview). In order to achieve a wider reach, and the impact sought, a different approach would be necessary, including a more active use of social media, and a more central role for young people in initiating and driving campaigning work.

While the PCC campaign was directed by the concerns of young people, the idea to utilise the PCC elections as a vehicle originated with Howard League staff in light of their own prior knowledge and criminal justice horizon scanning. This concerned some of those involved with U R Boss as to them it did not represent a wholly young people led campaign: 'they weren't involved from the beginning with the decision making' (staff interview). This tension between principles of participatory action and the realities of organisational dynamics is not new. However, once the idea had been introduced, U R Boss young advisors recognised the potential value of getting involved:

For me the PCC campaign and the children and police conference [in December 2012], it was really important just for the fact that it was getting out there to professionals and people that were actually working with young people in positions... to make changes that in a sense motivated me. (Young Advisor, interview)

The initial plan for the campaign in summer 2012 set out a number of objectives:

- *We want to improve interactions between young people and the police, built on a base of mutual respect. Key to improving relationships is the need for regular and meaningful engagement with young people*
- *The landscape for policing is changing dramatically with the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). This is a unique opportunity to make sure community voices, especially those of young people in contact with the criminal justice system, are heard, listened to and acted on*
- *We are asking local PCC candidates to commit to our campaign pledge to consult with young people in contact with the criminal justice system when developing their police and crime plans.*

(On our side? Howard League, 2012)

The pledge stated: 'I will run a clean campaign which avoids stereotyping or using negative language about young people. If elected, I will consult young people when developing my police and crime plan, especially those with direct experience of the criminal justice system'.

At the same time, the campaign would ask child and youth focused organisations and individuals like Howard League for Penal Reform members, students and the public to support this goal by endorsing these aims explicitly. The campaign plan also specified the aim of engaging more young people in the election process, so that they would feel empowered to take a fuller part in influencing change 'over time'. A number of activities were planned to support this goal, including targeted engagement with young people in certain areas of the country, commissioning and promoting a campaign film, mainstream and online media activity, promotion of the pledge to candidates, lobbying at party conferences, and post-election work; including a Howard

League sponsored Children and Policing conference, following up initial PCC interest and continued monitoring.

This was an ambitious schedule, and it required an extensive commitment from paid staff and from young people associated with U R Boss. One young advisor described his involvement in a substantial programme of activity including local events, party conference presentations, panel membership at the national policing conference, and a significant amount of 'behind-the-scenes' work with the young advisors' group.

Organisation and delivery

The PCC campaign necessitated a sustained level of commitment to a particular task beyond U R Boss' previous experience, which was further complicated by continuing instability in the staff team. Nonetheless, the major planned elements of the campaign were all put into place, although there was less activity at the local level than had originally been intended.

- A campaign film was commissioned and produced, involving input from young people in the scripting and production: 'Young people wrote questions and interviewed their peers for a film about the police' (*U R Boss End of Year Report, 2012*)
- Young people supported the development and format of other campaign materials and designed the look of the social media used
- Other campaign material was produced and widely disseminated which included the manifesto-style pamphlet *On our side?*, and a poster designed by young people to attract others to the campaign. These accompanied the request to PCC candidates to sign the campaign pledge, which was launched at a parliamentary event on 2 July 2012. This was subsequently endorsed by thirteen additional national voluntary organisations, and the 'Youth Charter' group of 26 voluntary organisations which was conducting a parallel campaign prior to the November elections
- A series of fringe events was organised by the Howard League at the leading party political conferences in September 2012, attended by a number of the young advisors, as well as senior Howard League staff. Young people were able to play a

central part in telling their stories and getting the message across at the meetings which, in total, were attended by around 170 delegates. The young advisors clearly valued the activity, relishing the role of being spokespeople for the wider group of young people involved with the justice system:

And a lot of the feedback that I did get was really interesting, 'it was great having you there'. And I think it's something, especially in those situations because it's so formal they don't expect a young person to be there and to be able to [express themselves]... actually, I don't think they expected that level of communication from someone who has come from that background. So I like to think regardless it would be educational, it makes people think.

(Young Advisor, interview)

- Four sites were chosen for more intensive activity in the North East, North West, East and West Midlands), where the U R Boss participation team spent time in each area, meeting young people, generating interest in the PCC campaign and organising events at which local young people could get into dialogue with their candidates. These events varied in format, but again did secure considerable interest among young people and willing participation from at least some of the candidates themselves. The following extract from Frances Crook's blog gives an overview of local activity:

In Hartlepool, Cleveland and Knotty Ash, Merseyside, [the U R Boss participation team] organised a screening of our campaign film made with young people about their relationships with the police. Young people got involved promoting the event locally and distributing leaflets about the project. PCC candidates attended these events or met with the team in advance to make sure they heard the points raised by young people and were encouraged to make a commitment to the campaign pledge.

[U R Boss team members] also attended a voluntary sector hustings held in Leicestershire and lobbied candidates, with all but one signing up. ... [Team members] also met with the Leicestershire youth forum to debate the issues; young people felt very passionately about the campaign and committed themselves to raising it in their annual debating event.

The Howard League students and the Nottingham student union organised a hustings session at the university... [E]ach candidate signed up and Nottingham was the first police service area where there was 100 per cent sign up from candidates. (Frances Crook's blog, 26 Nov 2012)

The events organised as a result of the work of U R Boss participation staff certainly provided a forum for active engagement between young people and PCC candidates. It was clear that young people welcomed the opportunity to get their opinions across; for example, stressing their experiences as potential victims of crime, as well as their frustration at being stereotyped as the cause of all ills.

To complement the direct work, online campaign activity included blogs posted by Howard League and U R Boss staff, and an active U R Boss Twitter presence. One of the project's young advisors underlined the importance of using Facebook to share 'experiences and ideas' (Young Advisor, interview).

Choices did have to be made about the form and scope of campaign coverage given limitations of time and staff resources. For example, the logistical challenges of preparing for and delivering fringe meetings at the party conferences probably had the effect of reducing capacity elsewhere, and it could be argued that this adversely affected the potential for engaging and enthusing young people 'on the ground' – perhaps something which would be less dramatically 'visible' but might be more likely to have a continuing impact (see case study on next page).

When interviewed, Howard League staff felt that under the circumstances (low level of general interest in the PCC elections externally, staffing changes internally) the campaign maintained a high profile, reflected in both the level of direct engagement with candidates, and also the number of those (91) who subsequently signed the campaign pledge. While the campaign had success in securing a positive response from political parties, PCC candidates and others during the run-up to the elections, Howard League staff and the young advisors recognised that to secure substantive change further activity would be necessary to hold PCCs to their earlier commitments. Therefore, young advisors were afforded a substantial role in the *Children and Policing* conference (December

2012), where they engaged with senior figures in local and national policing.

In addition, the Howard League provided support by initiating a monitoring exercise and maintaining a steady dialogue with commissioners particularly through correspondence and meetings. Young people have been less involved in this aspect of the continuing campaign, in part due to young people deciding to move onto a new topic, and also reflecting their view that initiatives should come from young people, and the Howard League should fulfil a support role and 'just make it happen' (Young Advisor).

Assessing the achievements of the PCC campaign

In determining whether a campaign has been successful and against what criteria, it is important to distinguish between whether or not it is deemed to be well run, and whether or not it achieves its substantive objectives.

The campaign, as originally designed, was ambitious in scope; demanding a significant amount of input across a number of domains. In one sense the scale of activity identified and the response achieved must be considered a success. In process terms there are a number of significant indicators of achievement: substantial attendance at party conference events involving

U R Boss young advisors; a significant sign-up for the campaign pledge by 23 successful PCC candidates; an effective platform for young people at the *Children and Policing* conference; significant media interest (print, broadcast and online); several highly successful local campaign events; and a well-produced, impactful short film.

Equally, it is clear that young people were extensively involved in the process and that they were at the centre of most of the organised activities associated with the campaign. Around 30 knowledgeable and assertive young people were able to engage in conversation with candidates in Hartlepool, for example, reflecting the energy and skill of the U R Boss team involved in facilitating the event.

It is more difficult to assess the continued role and status of young people in local decision-making about the delivery of police services following the initial period of intense activity. However, two PCCs included explicit reference to the Howard League and the campaign pledge in their initial crime plans, including one representing an area where U R Boss had been particularly active. In a number of other areas, there were clear signs of commissioners taking a positive approach to young people, although clearly U R Boss alone could not claim the credit for these developments.

Cleveland: A case study

One of the four regional sites chosen for the U R Boss PCC campaign was Cleveland, where the U R Boss participation team was actively engaged in promoting young people's involvement in the campaign. Two days' intensive activity culminated in a meeting between candidates and around 30 young people, who presented the campaign film and then spoke to the candidates about their own hopes for policing in the area.

The successful candidate took part in this meeting, and indicated his support for young people. He was also one of the signatories of the U R Boss campaign pledge. On election, he undertook a number of concrete steps to follow through on his commitment, referring explicitly to the Howard League in his policing plan:

I pledge to engage with young people in custody and involved in the criminal justice system. I support the campaign launched by the national charity 'Howard League for Penal Reform' which asked all Commissioners to sign a pledge to consult with young people when developing future plans. I have also pledged to 'listen to the experts' when it comes to making decisions on services for young people. I fully support the Young People's Strategic Planning Group and will work with partners to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people.

(Cleveland PCC Crime Plan 2013-17)

He has also continued to seek dialogue with young people in the area, engaging in online forums and other face-to-face meetings; and he has committed himself to supporting the development of criminal justice interventions, based on restorative justice principles, which are in turn linked with ideas of inclusion and participation.

The young advisors had a realistic view of the campaign's achievements, recognising that it had provided an opportunity to get young people involved and indeed to be heard. They appreciated that it was a continuing task, but there were signs that 'our hard work is paying off' (Young Advisor, interview). The experience of the campaign certainly gave some of the young advisors a much greater sense of belief in themselves, and it seems to have acted as a stimulus to encourage more young people to get 'actively involved' (Young Advisor, interview) with U R Boss and the Howard League.

Reflections: U R Boss, young people, campaigning and participation

The PCC campaign offered some useful insights into a participatory approach to campaigning. The Howard League's desire to develop a more proactive approach for U R Boss led to the PCC campaign initiative. This was not something which the young people involved with U R Boss had thought of as a suitable opportunity, but once it had been presented to them, they did identify it as a vehicle for making public their concerns about the problematic topic of the relationship between police and young people. In its various elements (notably party conferences, the social media campaign, and local events) the campaign made good use of the opportunities created, and there was a general feeling of satisfaction at all levels about its impact. It represented a distinctive attempt by the Howard League to draw on the experience of U R Boss and incorporate youth participation in its own wider work, embracing the challenge of engaging young people who have experienced the criminal justice system in its own campaigning activities more extensively than it had done previously.

Given that this was a national time-limited campaign, and there were obvious limits to the ability to engage in every locality, there were inevitable difficulties in terms of capacity and coverage. Thus, targeted local activities were combined with media (conventional and social) and other activities, such as party conference events, in a way which did seek to maximise awareness and interest. Young people felt that they had a significant part to play, and they believed that the campaign did operate in a participatory manner; they felt engaged

and able to make their views known to PCC candidates and other key police interests.

Nonetheless, there remain challenging questions of sustainability, and whether or not the positive short-term response secured, in terms of the number of PCC candidates signing up to the 'Keep it Clean' pledge, would lead to more substantive change in the sense of the continuing inclusion of young people in decision-making and consultative processes. Likewise, questions emerged about the capacity of organisations like the Howard League to incorporate genuinely participatory ways of working at all levels of their activity. U R Boss was originally conceived as a participatory project, with young people at the centre, taking increasing responsibility for shaping its activities and determining its overall direction.

While it is unsurprising in the context of this particular campaign that the initial idea should originate with those who are aware of what is happening in the public policy sphere (Howard League staff), and in this case this was quickly endorsed as a key priority by young people involved with U R Boss, it should be acknowledged that this might not have reflected the most pressing concerns of young people in contact with the justice system. This is not necessarily a critical observation, but it does raise the persistent question of the nature and suitability of the compromises that we can expect to be achieved between 'pure' participatory principles and organisational and political realities. Choices have to be made, and perhaps the conclusion to be drawn here is that they need to be considered, principled, and subject to validation by those who are the central focus of participatory action; in this case, young people who have experienced the justice system. The establishment of the team of young advisors was an important contributory factor in this respect.

The campaign was important to the young advisors in its own right, but it also seemed to act as a stimulus to get more young people involved with U R Boss and the Howard League. Howard League staff regarded young people to be at the heart of the campaign, in its 'design and presentation'. The young advisors did not feel that they were fully in control, particularly at the start, but did feel that the campaign presented an opportunity

they could work with, which they managed to do '100 per cent' (Young Advisor, interview) given the time and resources available. This wider aspiration was to an extent realised through the community based work of the U R Boss participation staff, who were effective in engaging young people and facilitating locally-organised events. There was awareness, not least among the young advisors, of the challenge to translate successful one-off local initiatives into sustainable campaigns:

And now we are trying to get meetings to follow up on it. Because we have actually decided, I said when we were having our last meeting that I don't think we should just drop it. I don't think we need to be continuously running with it but I do think we need to show our face and dip our ear into and be like I hope you are sticking to the pledge, I hope you are using what it is you said to get the votes actually as a part of your policy. (Young Advisor, interview)

For the U R Boss young advisors, the opportunity to take part in this type of high profile campaign was beneficial because they felt that they had convinced opinion formers that young people had something credible to say. It also enabled them to attract a wider group of young people to get interested in campaigning, and in some cases to become active members of the team of young advisors. This could enable the group to take a more proactive role, encouraging the development of U R Boss 'hubs', and acting as a sounding board for young people in general, as well as highlighting specific interests such as girls in the justice system.

For U R Boss, as a time limited project, and for the Howard League more generally, it is incumbent on those associated with the programme to ensure that the increased levels of interest generated among (and about) young people through the PCC campaign is nurtured and further developed. The continuing challenges of embedding participatory approaches at the heart of the organisation's work will also require sustained effort.

About the authors

The Howard League for Penal Reform appointed a team from the Centre for Social Action at De Montfort University to evaluate U R Boss. This is the third interim report. It was prepared by Roger Smith, Professor of Social Work at the School of Applied Social Sciences, Durham University, Jennie Fleming, Co-Director of Practical Participation and Jean Hine, Reader in Criminology, De Montfort University.

About the Howard League

The Howard League is a national charity working for less crime, safer communities and fewer people in prison.

We campaign, research and take legal action on a wide range of issues. We work with parliament, the media, criminal justice professionals, students and members of the public, influencing debate and forcing through meaningful change.

U R Boss

Part of the Howard League for Penal Reform, U R Boss supports young people in the criminal justice system to secure their legal rights and have an impact on policy and practice. Cover image shows young people at a U R Boss PCC campaign event. www.urboss.org.uk/

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ISBN 978-1-905994-69-4



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ISBN 978-1-905994-69-4

2014