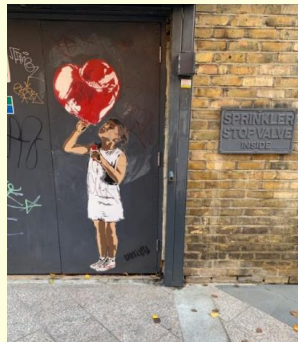




## Exhibition Report

# REFORMED Photovoice: A visual narrative of a peer led crime prevention approach.



Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022,

Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre, Liverpool 8.






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## Introduction

The Reformed Photovoice exhibition was held at the Kuumba Imani Millennium Centre on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2022. The event resulted from work by [Reformed](#) crime prevention organisation and Dr Gill Buck at the University of Chester who have been researching the work of lived experience leaders in criminal justice. The focus of the exhibition was to share findings from the research and consider how social and community workers could create more inclusive practices. The event was attended by 50 representatives from the local community, including residents, community leaders, social workers, and university staff.

## About the research team

	<p><b>Kemi Ryan, Reformed Co-founder, and outreach manager</b></p> <p>To see change we must believe in it. It is so unreal to be living in the shoes of a Black female ‘ex-offender’ in the 21st century. Trying to hold on to the last bit of hope to make it back to being a citizen. Change is possible with the help of real opportunities, not flawed opportunities that set people up to fail.</p>
	<p><b>Natasha Ryan, Co-founder, and mentoring manager</b></p> <p>After serving an 8-year custodial sentence for drug offences, I wanted to turn a negative into a positive. I tried to gain employment, but soon experienced discrimination. Life was difficult, but I lived in hope. My passion was to deter young people from crime. I work with people like myself, who want to make a change but were prevented by convictions.</p>
	<p><b>Gill Buck, Social work lecturer and Criminology researcher</b></p> <p>Over the last decade I have been learning from the lived expertise of <i>Reformed</i>. Kemi and Natasha teach social workers to work <i>with</i> people, rather than doing things <i>to</i> them. They place survival of stigma and discrimination at the centre of their work, and offer practical ways to build collaborative helping relationships, taking account of people’s histories.</p>

## Summary of content

4pm	Arrival food and drinks
4.15	Kemi and Tasha: welcome
4.20	Gill: the research project
4.25	Foster carer perspective
4.35	Words from young people
5pm	Performance – Where is the love?
5.05 – 6pm	Enjoy exhibition and food and drink

Kemi and Natasha Ryan opened the conference, explaining the work of *Reformed*, which started life as a crime prevention organisation, mentoring and supporting young people, but has adapted over time, as '*what comes with crime prevention is a whole lot of other issues*'. Their work has included financial advocacy for mothers in poverty, feeding local children, offering a place for older people to socialise, working with whole families when one person is struggling, facilitating counselling for people who are traumatised and alternatives such as voluntary work if people are not yet ready to process. *Reformed* now support people from a range of backgrounds, challenging negative stereotypes and perceptions and building hope and aspirations.



Gill Buck then explained how the research was designed. The 'photovoice' study invited people who had worked with and for *Reformed* to take photos of what the project means to them. Research methods that include people in their own story were selected, to shift the research lens away from a 'deficit view' of communities as disadvantaged, and learn from 'the array of knowledge, skills and abilities possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized' (Yosso, 2005: 69).



Participants were 'hand-picked' based on their knowledge of the *Reformed*. 1 researcher, 4 staff members and 4 people who have used the service volunteered to take part. The process (adapted from Wendel at al., 2019) involved:

1. Research team met to co-produce a photography 'up-skilling' event.
2. Research team facilitated 'up-skilling' events with participants discussing research purpose, image composition and photography ethics and safety.
3. Participant group (n=9) took photographs inspired by the prompts: *Why is Reformed needed?* and *What does the work of Reformed mean to you?*
4. Participants each selected 4-5 images to discuss in online focus groups (using images which offered the best insight into the work of *Reformed*).
5. In focus groups, each participant narrated their chosen photos and discussed others' photos. Common themes were identified as a group.
6. Principle investigator wrote this report for the teaching partnership.
7. Research team presented findings to the British Society of Criminology Conference, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and the Chester Institute of Policing conference, September 2021.
8. Public exhibition held in Liverpool, May 2022.

After Kemi, Natasha and Gill introduced the event, three people who had used the *Reformed* service explained how their work helps people feel valued and included and how they provide help with problems from housing to family relationships. To represent the theme of love for individuals and communities, someone who has worked with *Reformed* performed a moving rendition of *Where is the Love* by the Black-Eyed Peas.

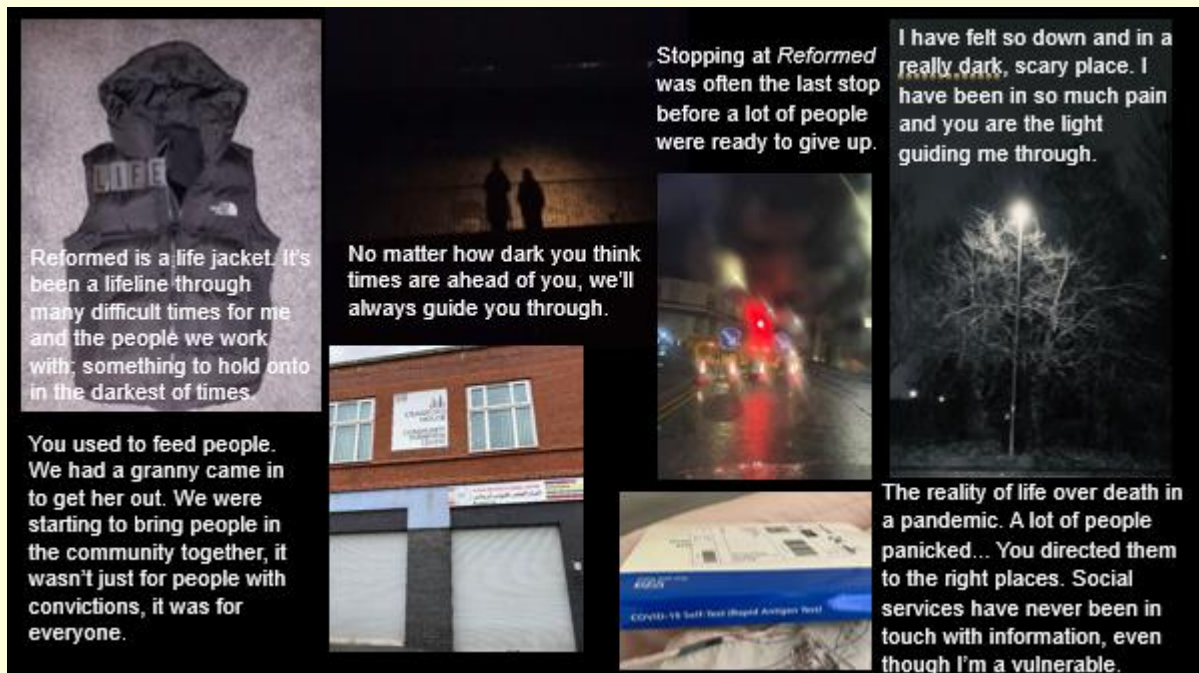


The evocative images produced by the group were then showcased, revealing how in contexts of suffering, social exclusion, and negative expectations, forms of hopeful, loving, inclusive, community praxis can be life changing.



The *Reformed* approach involves building positive relationships, listening to communities, and taking social action. Five clear messages emerged from photos and discussion groups: **Safety, Love, Community, Hope** and **Rippling effects**.

## Safety



People valued having somewhere to go in the worst of times, including ill-health, poverty, inequality, and crime. Staff recognised this, and it informed their descriptions of their work as a 'lifeline/ something to hold/ a guide'. The starting point for doing this work was to offer a service to people who feel on the margins or that no-one else will help. The *Reformed* founders knew the value of this because they understand what it is like to feel unworthy of support:

We were in the 'hard-to-reach' box when we got released from prison and I was the easiest person to reach, I was begging everyone to help me! So, I couldn't understand. We put people in these boxes, *she's hard to reach because of the colour, she's hard to reach because of the length of sentence...*but actually it stops interaction with organisations (founder).

Not labelling people as 'hard to reach' is vital, as is designing services *with* those who have lived experience of feelings excluded, so that services do not repeat this exclusion.

## Love



The *Reformed* project has been nurtured like a child and people felt that staff treated them with love, care and high expectations despite their flaws or struggles. One man spoke of staff seeing past his mistakes to his potential. A woman spoke of not wanting to leave the bed for weeks due to depression. *Reformed* called her regularly to listen and encourage her. One of the founders stated:

*Reformed comes with love. Many services can't provide love, it can be misinterpreted as sexual deviation, but love is not dirty. A lot of Reformed service users have not been loved but exploited...They are looking for kindness. Not intimate love, but genuine support. People feel our kindness and love and they trust us.*

Black feminist and relational philosophies (from Audre Lorde, 1978, to bell hooks, 2016, to Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019), all recognise love as creative power and care and connection as routes to human excellence. The 'love ethic' in social work (Godden, 2017) is a model of relationship-oriented activism encompassing dialogue, nonviolence, interconnectedness between people and between people and nature, shared power, and solidarity. These features were central to the *Reformed* approach.

## Community



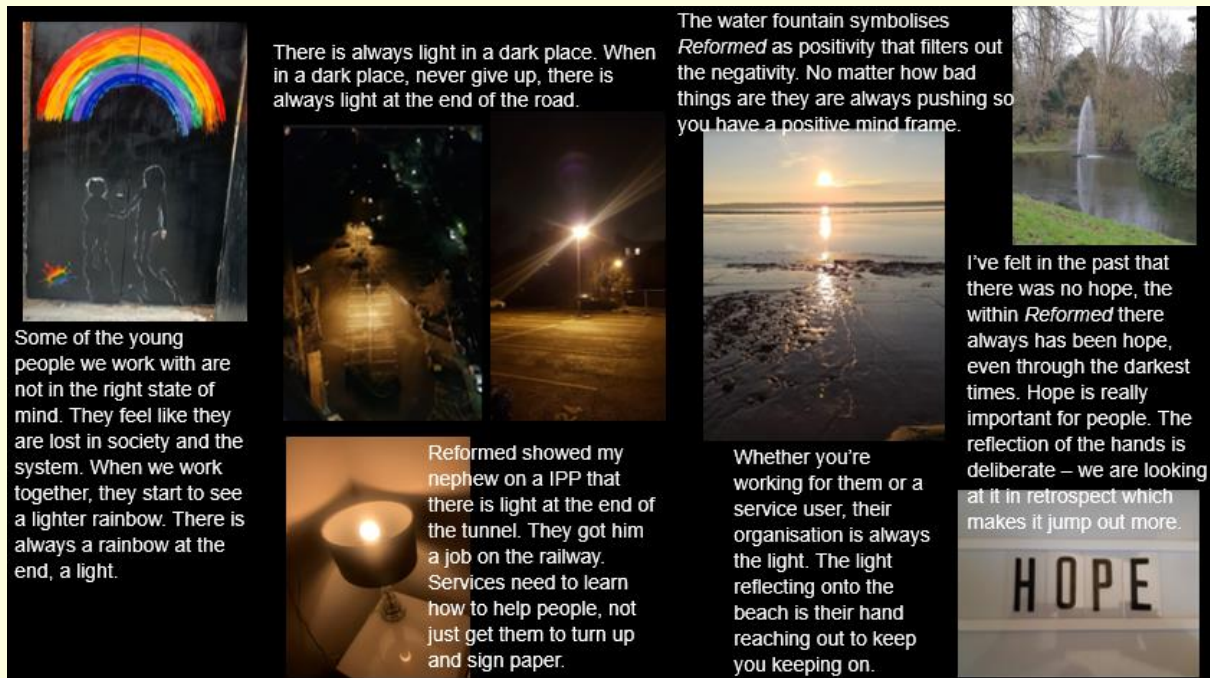
Community is vital to the work of *Reformed*. People spoke of their roots being valued and positive visions of community being created. Connections to social networks (e.g., friends, extended families, community groups) and places, so often overlooked in individualised interventions, were central to their work.

*Reformed* 'bring the community together, young, old, disabled, Black, White, Chinese people, those who feel that they don't fit in society, those who do' (founder). There is support for *all* community members, regardless of their original focus on young people.

*Reformed* understand that conflict and trauma, do not *just* affect individuals, but their families and neighborhoods, so this is where the work takes place. 'Community' was also broadened. People spoke of being shown 'a whole wide world', where they can achieve what they want to. *Reformed* reject labels such as 'disadvantaged or hard to reach' and communicate to people that they have value and potential. They encourage healing and aspiration because these things were often denied to them.



## Hope

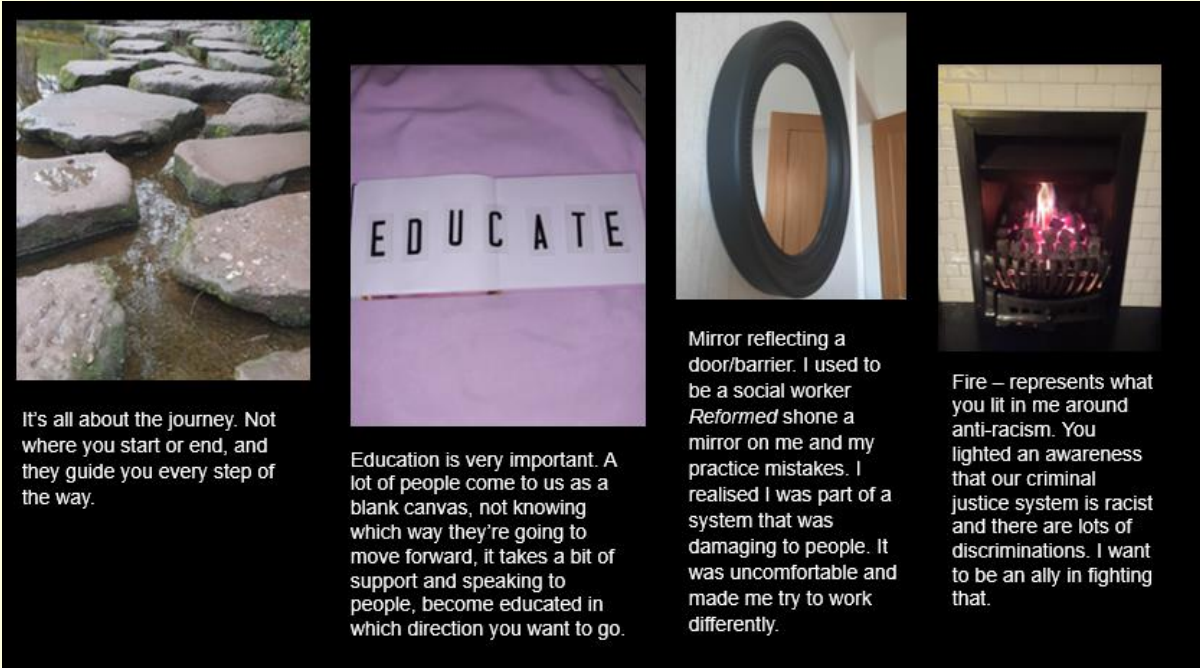


Hope was a clear theme in the images, often represented as light emerging from the dark or positivity filtering negativity. The people *Reformed* sought to help were all already in touch with social workers and probation officers but felt that these professionals were not hopeful for them or gave up on them. When workers at *Reformed* had hope, it strengthened people and enabled them to see themselves in new ways.

This phenomenon has been noted before. Maruna's work (2001: 96), revealed a 'looking glass recovery' process wherein at first (criminalised people) have no belief in themselves, but someone else believes in them and makes them realise that they do have personal value. Hope and hopefulness help people realise possibilities and build motivation, yet workers need to work persist and maintain hope through lapses and relapses (McNeill & Weaver, 2010).

The workers at *Reformed* understood the importance of hope because they had lived through its potential and the harms caused by its absence. 'Visibility' of people who have survived social exclusion and marginalisation is crucial for both providers and users of services to believe in and hope for change.

## Rippling effects



*Reformed* (seek to) influence change beyond individual and community support. The staff team aspired for people and society beyond meeting immediate needs. This involved advocating for a fairer society in which young people are not endlessly criminalised and stigmatised for past mistakes or experiences of exploitation and where Black people are treated with respect and fairness.

*Reformed* campaigned with educators and professional networks to challenge the racism and marginalisation impacting people's lives. At times they actively worked to redistribute resources including community facilities and food – although they were structurally limited in these activities by reliance on time-limited grant funding and philanthropy.

To fully realise the transformative possibilities of community organisations like *Reformed*, there is a need for more understanding and awareness of the important work they do – something we hope this study has contributed to – and for other organisational and individual allies to support their efforts.

## Exhibition feedback

Will you do anything different in the future, after the exhibition, and if so, what?

- Have a positive outlook on everyone in my community and show support for people in difficult situations
- Listen more to people I don't usually talk to
- Talk to people, smile at people, maintain a positive outlook even when the world situation is depressing and confusing
- Grow my relationship with Reformed
- Learn to use photographs like you have done in this exhibition
- Have empathy and compassion for others in my community
- Build better links to challenge the system
- Allow the person to be who they are not the label
- Think more about how to support people and remove professional barriers
- Smile and observe – see when people need help when out and about

*We would like to thank all the co-researchers and participants for taking part, the [CMSWTP](#) for their support and everyone who spoke at, sang at, or attended the exhibition. For follow up learning and questions, contact [g.buck@chester.ac.uk](mailto:g.buck@chester.ac.uk)*