It doesn’t have to be like this:
How an understanding of autism by the police officer can reduce the need of arrest.

AT-Autism Rough Justice Conference
13/12/18

Kleio Cossburn
About Me

* Former Police Officer
* Bachelor of Science
* Postgraduate Certificate in Autism
* Master of Criminology & Criminal Justice
* Research Interests: autistic individuals caught up in the Criminal Justice System; autistic user involvement in autism training for criminal justice professionals.
Implicit Bias, Explicit Bias & Police Decision Making
The police may be the first & only point of contact for a family.

Biases influence behaviour, judgment & decision making.
Freedom of Information Requests
June, 2018.
Who Designs the Autism Training?

- Designed by Police Trainer: 23
- Designed & delivered by external provider: 6
- Designed by external provider; delivered by Police trainer: 2
Does the Trainer Hold an Autism Qualification?
Personal Experience
Prisoner Reception Interview Team

- Communication Difficulties
  - Social naiveté
  - Restrictive Interests
- Arrest
How my Perspective Changed

Immediately Prior to the Incident
One

Immediately After the Incident
Two

During Police Procedure
Three

Your experience of the CJS is different depending upon which side of the desk you’re sitting.
Rural Beat Officer
Do I know or suspect this individual is autistic?

Some Police Forces have adopted an Autism alert/awareness card.
Do I need to apply handcuffs?

Has the individual been sprayed with PAVA?

Is a Spit-guard going to be used?

If yes, explain what is happening and why.
Incident One

Aaron (not his real name) arranged to meet a friend outside a sporting venue. The police approached him and after a short conversation searched his bag using section 47 A (3) of the Terrorist Act.
Suspicious behaviour?

Wearing a high visibility Jacket

Wearing a rucksack on your front

An autistic individual may have a perfectly logical explanation as to why they are doing something in a certain way.
Incident Two

Tom (not his real name) had a learning disability and a diagnosis of autism. He was reported to the police, by a family member, for being in possession of a Knife.
Incident Three

Jo (not his real name) was a looked after child. He was reported to the police by staff members on multiple occasions for ‘smashing’ up his room.

Jo was unable to negotiate with the other children and quite often became frustrated.
Future Research

What do autistic people who have come into contact with the Criminal Justice System say about these interactions?

- How might these interactions have been ‘improved’
- How can officers be trained to deal sensitively with autistic people
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