

YOUNG ADULT ADVISORS ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE:

HEARING FROM YOUNG ADULTS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

**FINAL REPORT
APRIL 2020**

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**



**CHAMPIONING
SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR 100 YEARS
1920-2020**

feels like another world
you're on a visit... you
forget you're in prison"

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"We need to be acknowledged and
listened to. We need more people that
understand what we are going through
and relate to us"

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LAURA

"I wanted to make a change so everything that happened to me when I was younger doesn't happen to the next generation. I was treated badly due to my mental health issues, like being put in an isolated cell and a suicide suit. Being on the Young Advisors project I've gained confidence, a great team of friends, and more knowledge of the criminal justice system. It's definitely changed me; now I talk a lot more and I'm much more willing to come out of my comfort zone."

INTRODUCTION

This report has been co-produced by Leaders Unlocked and young adults with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system.

The Young Adult Advisors on Criminal Justice are a national group of young adults aged 18 to 25 years with various lived experiences of the criminal justice system. The group uses the power of lived experience to inform changes in policy, service design and delivery.

Leaders Unlocked established the Young Adult Advisors group in 2016, with support from the Barrow Cadbury Trust. After a successful pilot in 2016, the Young Adult Advisors expanded to recruit more young adults to join the project and to conduct peer-led research on a broader range of priority topics.

From start to finish, the project has been driven by the Young Adult Advisors, enabling them to lead the research, gather the findings and put forward solutions to the problems they identify.

The Young Adult Advisors project aims to:

- Equip young adults with lived experience to play a leadership role working with policy-makers and others involved in reform
- Take a peer-led approach to gather and represent the views of young adults on the criminal justice system
- Produce youth-centred reports capturing the views of young adults on the criminal justice system
- Act as a sounding board to inform the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance
- Present insights and recommendations to policy-makers and others working on reform.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on peer-led engagement with **over 500 young adults** across the country. Each section features verbatim quotes from young adults and outlines the main recommendations the advisors have put forward for agencies and decision-makers to consider.

This report is intended to act as an unmediated, reflective record of what young adults have told us through this peer-to-peer research process. It is also intended to be the starting point for further thought and action on the part of policy-makers and practitioners.

Please note: This research was carried out and the report drafted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic will clearly have a significant impact on young people in the criminal justice system. It will put further strain on young adults and the voluntary and community organisations that support them. It is important to take account of the views of young people in this difficult time.

WHAT WE DID

RECRUITING YOUNG ADULT ADVISORS:

We worked proactively through partner organisations across England to recruit a diverse cohort of 20 young adults with a wide range of lived experience including youth

custody, adult prisons, YOTs, community sentences, arrest, stop and search, and police custody.

SELECTING PRIORITIES:

Working together, the Young Adult Advisors identified a shortlist of topics they were keen to address through their peer-led research and collaborative work with policy makers.

This shortlist was based on what the group was passionate about changing, and what they saw as urgent priorities affecting other young adults in the justice system.

The Young Adult Advisors chose to focus on the following 5 priorities:

- Racial Disproportionality
- Sentencing Young Adults
- The Care System
- Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System
- Employment and Life after Prison

DESIGNING TOOLS FOR PEER RESEARCH:

The Young Adult Advisors co-designed tools for peer research to address each of their 5 priorities. The group decided to use two research methods for their peer research, as follows:

Peer-led workshops to gather in-depth, collective responses from groups of young adults. The workshops were facilitated by the advisors and supported by a member of Leaders Unlocked staff. They involved interactive exercises to identify common

issues and potential solutions. The workshop exercises included standing debates, fictional character-based scenarios, and mind-mapping.

Structured surveys to gather individual responses to a range of quantitative and qualitative questions. This method was useful for enabling young adults to offer insights they were not comfortable sharing in a group workshop setting.

DELIVERING THE PEER RESEARCH:

Over a 12-month period, the Young Adult Advisors conducted peer research across England with over **500** other young adults affected by the criminal justice system. The Young Adult Advisors led the process, thereby creating trust and rapport with the young adults who participated.

This peer-led process engaged young adults between the ages of 14 and 25, in a range of settings including prisons, Youth Offending Institutions (YOIs), Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), and voluntary/ community organisations connected to the Criminal Justice System.

PRESENTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

In November 2019 the Young Adult Advisors held a showcase event in London at which they presented their key findings and recommendations in relation to the 5 priorities to an audience of approximately 50 key stakeholders from the justice sector including Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation

(HMI Probation), Youth Justice Board (YJB), Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), and leading justice charities such as Clinks and Prison Reform Trust. The response to this presentation was hugely positive and delegates identified 'pledges' for future collaboration with the Young Adult Advisors group.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS:

Over the 2018-19 period, the Young Adult Advisors also worked in collaboration with a range of public and charitable bodies to provide advice, challenge and insight from a young adult perspective. Some of these collaborations included:

- Work with **HMPPS** on their 10-year strategy for prisons and probation;
- Work with **MoJ** presenting insights and solutions in relation to racial disproportionality in youth justice;
- Being guest speakers and panellists at events held by **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons)** and **Unlocked Graduates** to reach their current and future workforces;
- Work with **Revolving Doors** to inform an initiative to improve approaches to policing vulnerable young adults;
- Work with the **Howard League for Penal Reform** to inform new sentencing principles for young adults.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of national partners who have allowed the Young Advisors to consult with the young adults in their organisations. Thanks go to:

HMP & YOI Askham Grange

Barnet YOT

HMP & YOI Brinsford

HMP Brixton

HMP Bure

HMP Bronzefield

HMP Hatfield

HMP & YOI Isis

Leeds Youth Offending Service

Midland Heart Foyer

Nacro (Peterborough Centre)

HMP Pentonville

Salford YOT

HMP Stafford

Staffordshire YOT

St Giles Trust

HMYOI Werrington

HMP Wormwood Scrubs

We would like to thank the T2A Alliance and the Barrow Cadbury Trust for their continued, invaluable support of this work. We would also like to thank HMYOI Werrington and HMP & YOI Isis for allowing us the opportunity to establish young advisors groups within their settings to undertake peer research with larger numbers of young adults in their care. Thanks also go to the Ministry of Justice, HMPPS, and HMIP as well as Revolving Doors, the Howard League for Penal Reform and Unlock Graduates, for providing the group with opportunities to contribute to their ongoing work on criminal justice development.

A special thanks goes to the Young Adult Advisors who have worked tirelessly to co-produce this report. These include: Ntale Eastmond, Sarah Hack, Nadine Smith, Sadia Begum, Laura Wenn, Romaine Murchison, Fatmata Jah, Samia Hersi, Jodie Beck, Elijah Mochia, Jhanzab Khan, Joshua Kilembeka, Fardowza Ali.



RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

WHAT WE DID

Our work on the topic of racial disproportionality follows our work feeding into the Lammy Review in 2017. As HMPPS and other agencies are currently working on implementing the recommendations of the 2017 Review, we wanted to revisit those recommendations and gain a greater insight

into the issues facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) young adults experiencing the criminal justice system. We consulted with over 300 young people on this topic, in a broad range of prisons, working with Youth Offending Teams and Young Advisor Peer Networks.

OUR FINDINGS

There is a lack of BAME representation in decision-making roles throughout the criminal justice system.

Young people told us that, on their journey through the criminal justice system, the decisions being made about them were made by people that did not reflect the communities they came from. This contributed to BAME young adults feeling that their background, where they came from, and their support needs, were not understood by decision-makers. This had the effect of alienating BAME young adults from the criminal justice process, making it difficult for them to engage in and understand what is happening to them.

"We have nothing in common with the officers and there are hardly any ethnic officers – this doesn't make me feel comfortable here. It feels like they only cater to one race"

"Not enough black officers hired in the justice system"

"Some judges target you but when you have a judge that understands, your experience can be more positive in courts"

BAME youths feel like they are repeatedly targeted by police officers, which can be traumatising.

In our 2016 report, Race and the Criminal Justice System, we found that young BAME adults felt targeted by the police in their local areas. The subject of police targeting came up again in our 2018/19 workshops on racial disproportionality, with most participants expressing that they felt repeatedly targeted by the police. The fact that this kept on happening created permanent disaffection and, in some cases, had the effect of triggering past trauma.

"Targeted in key areas around Birmingham – stopped and searched 11 times in less than 24 hours"

"When you're young and black, you face automatic suspicion"

"The more you're arrested, it's like going back in time and [it's] re-traumatising"

In court, BAME young adults feel instantly judged due to race and/or religion.

Most participants felt that there was an instant judgement made about them in court due to their race and/or their religion. This was particularly damaging for BAME young

adults who were also religious as stereotypes regarding their race and religion intersected, creating a particularly uncomfortable experience for them.

"If you're a black guy in tracksuits, it don't look good for you"

"The word 'terrorist', people think Muslim and black people... white people, if they do something wrong, it goes to mental health"

"You feel judged by 12 people who know nothing about you which gives you so many emotions"

"White co-defendant got half the sentence of a mixed race male even though charged with same offence and the white co-defendant had previous similar convictions"

"I think Black and Asian [people] are unfairly targeted with a lot of things ranging from police stop and search to being unfairly judged by mainly white juries"

BAME young adults' experience in prison depends on their relationship with prison officers.

BAME young adults reported having mixed relationships with officers. Some felt that, if they had a good relationship with an officer, they received greater privileges, but felt that such privileges could easily be withdrawn. We received mixed responses about whether race or religion made a difference to relationships with prison officers. Some felt that their white peers received preferential treatment, particularly in relation to prison jobs and opportunities. Some felt that they were

wrongly perceived as intimidating, aggressive or gang affiliated. Some spoke about being split up from their peers who were of the same racial or ethnic group. The location of the prison also had an impact. Young adults in prisons located in rural areas with small BAME populations felt that treatment by officers was worse than in inner city prisons with higher BAME populations.

"The more intimidating you look, the more differently you get treated"

"[Black prisoners] are picked less to help out and are stereotyped to be gang members or a cause of trouble"

"Relationships with officers play a big role in how you are treated here - if you have a good relationship then you get more privileges than others"

"Some officers treat White prisoners better"

"White people have better jobs and have better relationships with staff"

"BAME young adults are treated differently when it comes to Govs giving out IEPs (Incentives and Earned Privileges) or resolving situations between Govs and prisoners"

Young Muslims experience unequal treatment throughout the criminal justice system.

When we spoke to young adults in prison settings, a number of young Muslim men said that they struggled to practice their faith in prison due to the way they were treated. The experiences shared ranged from a perception that they were being searched more regularly before going to pray compared

to white Christians and prison staff raising the subject of recent terror attacks during prayer. Being unable to practice their faith, or uncomfortable about practising it, negatively impacted on the mental health of young Muslims in prison.

"In jail, it's hard to do certain things. I haven't been to Jummah in 3 months which is affecting me in prison and my mental state. [The jail] doesn't support me enough - I have complained but nothing has been done"

"If you try and encourage other Muslims to pray with you, they [staff] look on you wrong"

"Muslim people are being treated different in jail and being searched on the way to prayers and not being allowed time out to pray five times a day"

"In my previous jail, prisoners were told they can't go to specific wings because there were too many of the people who believe in the same religious beliefs"

"They treat Muslims different. Muslims get searched before Friday prayers and those who go Church on Sunday don't"

"Staff members came to Jummah and started questioning us about New Zealand terrorist attack"

"Not liking Muslim people discussing their faith"

BAME young adults believe they face higher rates of recall due to stereotyping and being seen as 'gang members'.

Many of the BAME young adults we consulted in prisons believed that they were more likely to be recalled after release than their white counterparts. Some highlighted experiences of being recalled due to what they perceived

to be assumptions made by police or probation officers based on who they associate with and the perception that they are a gang member.

"More recalls for BAME people because we are stereotyped"

"People think because I am black I am a gang member"

"Yes they are stereotyped and usually not given a second chance and usually recalled for non-sense, which would most likely be brushed off if they weren't BAME people"

"Because the people hold the Parole Board meeting have one way of thinking and they judge you on your skin colour"

"Yes because the people who are doing it are predominantly white and look down on people in the system"

"Just because they think BAME [people] are more likely to commit crime again"

"Yes because the people who are doing the recalls are not BAME"

"Yes because they stop and search more BAME people"

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Represent the experience of BAME communities throughout the criminal justice system.

Based on the evidence gathered, we would like to see BAME role models and mentors with lived experience represented throughout the criminal justice system. This could happen by creating more opportunities for BAME people who have moved on from the criminal justice system to tell their story and provide support to BAME young adults currently in the system. We also recommend a stronger focus on partnerships with the voluntary and social enterprise sector, utilising the trusted relationships that these organisations have with young adults.

2. Recruit an ethnically diverse workforce by creating more pathways for BAME leaders in the criminal justice system.

We would like to see more BAME individuals in leadership roles by developing new courses and pathways for them to build a career in supporting young adults throughout the criminal justice system. For example: creating high level apprenticeships, and 'Teach First' style schemes for BAME graduates, and leadership coaching schemes for BAME staff already working within the criminal justice system.

3. Introduce cultural awareness training for staff in prisons.

We recommend cultural diversity training for prison staff. This training should cover how individuals from different cultures express themselves to generate better understanding and strengthened relationships between BAME young adults and staff in prison. We recommend that this training is co-designed with BAME young adults currently in prison to ensure it is shaped by their needs and experiences.

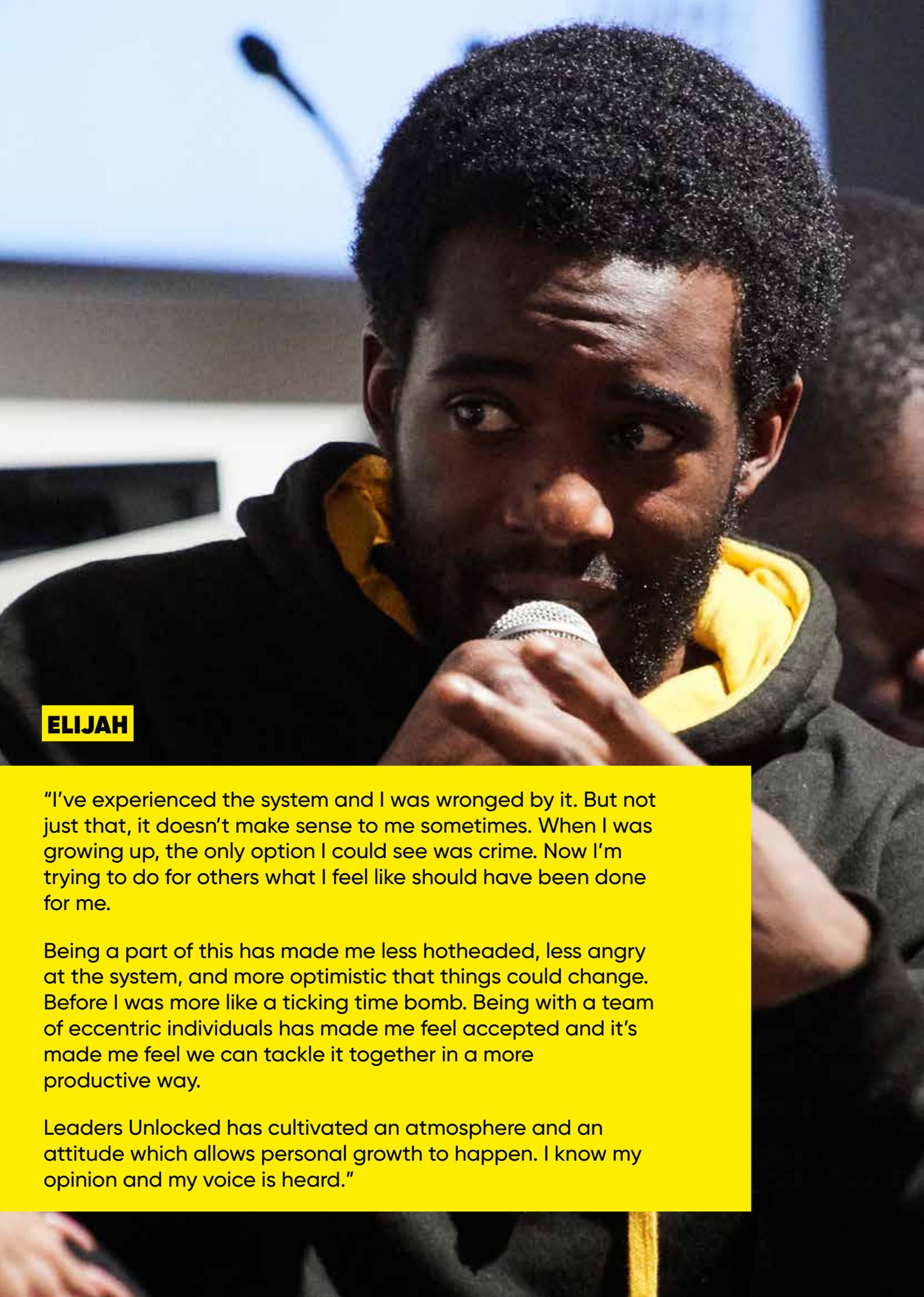
4. Put unconscious bias training to the test with real life scenarios.

We propose that real life scenarios are embedded into unconscious bias training to bring to life the various ways in which bias manifests itself, particularly in a prison setting. Like our previous recommendation, young adults that are currently experiencing prison should be directly involved in the creation of this training. This can be done by utilising prisoner council networks.

5. Focus on building relationships between officers and BAME young adults in prison

We recommend the creation of initiatives that enable young adults in prison to build relationships and improve communication with officers. There is already existing best practice such as prisoner councils where individuals in prison are able to share their concerns directly with staff. Creating spaces like this, with a particular focus on the experiences of BAME young people, would improve communication between officers and prisoners.





ELIJAH

"I've experienced the system and I was wronged by it. But not just that, it doesn't make sense to me sometimes. When I was growing up, the only option I could see was crime. Now I'm trying to do for others what I feel like should have been done for me.

Being a part of this has made me less hotheaded, less angry at the system, and more optimistic that things could change. Before I was more like a ticking time bomb. Being with a team of eccentric individuals has made me feel accepted and it's made me feel we can tackle it together in a more productive way.

Leaders Unlocked has cultivated an atmosphere and an attitude which allows personal growth to happen. I know my opinion and my voice is heard."

SENTENCING YOUNG ADULTS

WHAT WE DID

On the subject of sentencing young adults, we spoke to over **300** young adults in a variety of prisons, YOIs and YOTs. We sought to find out whether young adults felt their sentences were fair and proportionate, and why. We

wanted to find out about young adults' experiences of the sentencing process and what they wanted to know about sentencing and court procedures, to make this process easier to understand.

OUR FINDINGS

Young adults do not feel in control of their defence in court.

Young adults reported experiencing difficulty in communicating with their solicitor, feeling powerless and a lack of control over their defence. Some detailed instances where they felt misled by their solicitor in relation to the sentence they thought they would receive compared to the sentence they actually received. This feeling of not being in control was coupled with a feeling of unpreparedness. Some young adults said that they did not know the basics of what they should or should not bring with them if sentenced to prison.

"I was told by my solicitor that I was going home, but during my trial, I was sentenced to custody and I was really unprepared for it. The judge gave me a big sentence and I feel like I was misled by my solicitor"

There is a lack of accessible information on the court process.

There were widespread feelings of unfairness on the subject of sentencing. This perception of unfairness was exacerbated through the lack of information given to young adults on how the court process works, what the different sentences mean etc. Where information was given, it was full of legal jargon which was viewed as inaccessible and difficult to understand for many of the young adults we consulted, many of whom were experiencing court for the first time. This lack of accessible information not only created feelings of unfairness but led to a lack of understanding, confusion, uncertainty and anxiety for young adults.

"When I was in court, I didn't understand anything about my case, just when I got sentenced"

"Struggle to understand court language"

"The majority of [young adult] prisoners did not feel prepared for their sentence"

"Prisoners do have access to sentencing information but may not understand it"

The court process has a negative impact on young adults' mental health.

Young adults we consulted said that they experienced anxiety, panic attacks and depression during the sentencing process. This impact on mental health was made worse in instances where the young person did not have family members or friends to

support them through the court process (e.g. care-leavers) leading them to feel isolated and alone. There was also a feeling that this negative impact on mental health was not accounted for during sentencing.

The court process offers young adults no opportunity to tell their story, leaving many important factors ignored.

Many young adults told us they would value the opportunity to tell their story during the court process. Whilst there is some opportunity for a young person to tell their story through probation's pre-sentence report, there is no space for this to happen during the court process. Some young adults felt that probation workers may 'pick and choose' what to put in the pre-sentence report, which directly affects how the young person is viewed by the judge. Many felt that if they had the opportunity to tell their story in court the outcome would have been different, as the judge would have had a clearer understanding of their background, what happened and why.

"System let me down – felt like my side wasn't being listened to, felt very judged. Didn't give bail"

"Give young people a chance to talk"

"Your mental health should be considered"

"[Find out] why they committed the crime, what's the root cause"

"[They] pick and choose what to put in your pre-sentence report"

"In court you should have a 1 to 1 with the judge – you can't really speak your mind for them to understand"

Sentencing plans do not consider ambitions, goals, skills and talents.

Young people we spoke to felt shut out of the process of building their sentence plan, resulting in plans that do not reflect their

personal ambitions, goals, skills and talents. This meant young people felt like they could not make the most of their sentence.

"If I was given the opportunity to be involved with the process of sentence planning and programmes, they will reflect and enhance my talents and skills and will utilise my sentence time"

"Prisoners feel sentencing plans don't take enough account of their goals, skills and talents"

"Prisoners feel they are not involved in the building of their sentence plan"

"Prisoners who are low risk do not have an Offender Management Unit (OMU) which means their sentence plans (if any) were not drafted by OMU but by the prisoner themselves – this may lead to a lack of motivation towards progression"

Alternatives to prison and reform of the recall system are needed urgently.

The regular use of short prison sentences and high rates of recall were felt to be creating a revolving door for the young adults we spoke to. This makes it difficult to move on from the

criminal justice system, particularly for young adults who experience difficulty in securing housing, recovery from substance misuse, finding employment etc.

"The age of the person [should be taken into account] because prison makes younger offenders re-offend"

"The people they are sentencing are still young and deserve a chance to change before getting trapped in the system"

"[Younger offenders] have a future in front of them and sending them to jail for little or long can affect that"

Many young adults we consulted with recommended alternatives to prison sentences. Suggestions from the young adults attending our workshops included apprenticeships, alternative and non-classroom based education, increased use of

community services. There were also specific proposals linked to the use of recall. Young adults we spoke to who had experienced recall suggested that young adults should not be recalled for non violent and low risk crimes.

"Not just punishment...figure out how and where it's going wrong"

"Commitment to help improve this and contacting organisations who can make changes to the recall system and find out what alternatives can be put in place to improve the recall process"

"Explaining to young adults and giving them jobs on trial instead of community service"

"Increase YOTs and community sentencing"

"Community service, voluntary work – gives you more lifetime skills to learn"

"System to help prevent people being re-called for non-violent/ low risk crimes, i.e. if you have 2 and a half years on license, after 1 year your recall process should be reviewed"

"Apprenticeship's (work for them and given a trial and put on tag)"

¹On 31 December 2018 there were 6,065 recalled prisoners in custody in England and Wales for breach of their license conditions. People on recall average 33 years old, 2 years younger than the sentenced prison population. The most common reason for recall is 'poor behaviour – non-compliance'

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop information resources for young adults to access before and during the court process

We recommend the creation of information resources specifically focused on young adults experiencing the sentencing process. We also recommend the creation of resources for young adults who are remanded in prison, including information such as their rights on remand, relevant phone numbers and information on how to access courses. These resources should be co-designed with young people who have experienced the sentencing and remand process.

2. Make support services available for young people during arrest and sentencing

Based on our findings, we recommend increased investment in and growth of support services for young adults experiencing arrest and sentencing. These services should be broad in scope, covering a range of support needs such as legal support, mental health, substance misuse, housing and employment. Good work is already being done in this area by organisations such as Just For Kids Law and the Howard League who provide a range of legal advice and advocacy services for young adults being sentenced. There is a need to look at support specific to arrest, and support specific to sentencing, as distinct areas.

3. Sentencing plans should focus more on helping individuals – including their goals, skills and talents

We recommend the creation of sentence plans that are focussed more towards the individual needs of the young adult. This would mean incorporating the personal goals, skills and talents of each young adult. We think young adults should have an allocated support worker to help them create their plan.

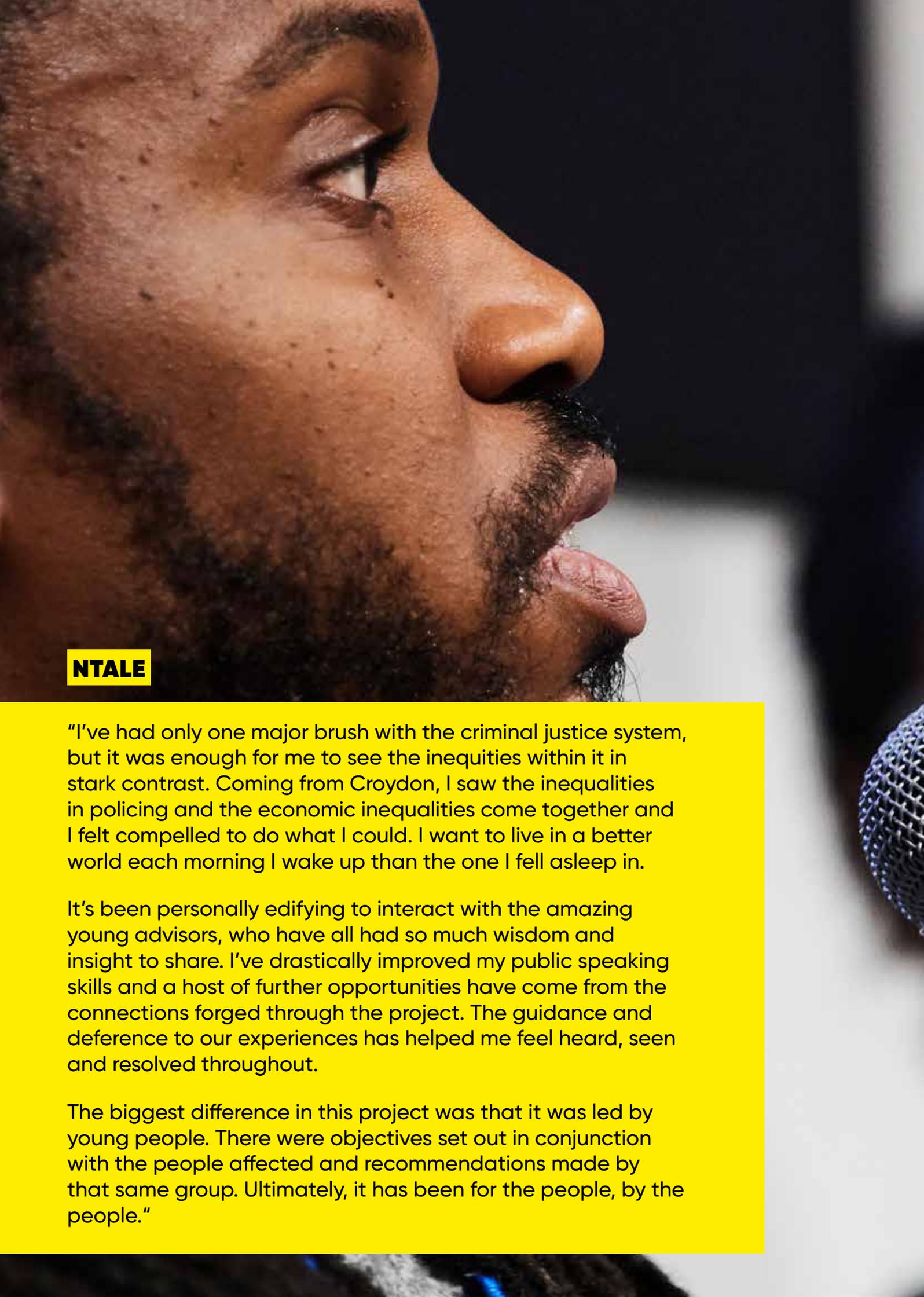
4. Pre-sentence reports should be developed for all young adults in a consistent way

A pre-sentence report should be in place for all young adults. There should be ongoing guidance for professionals about how to write these reports to a consistent standard. There should be oversight of this process and service users should be involved in quality assurance.

5. Conduct more research on recall and consider a 'community alternative'

We recommend that more research is undertaken to explore young adults' experiences of recall to prison and their journeys before, during, and after being re-called. There is little published research about the process and experience of recall in the UK. This is an area we feel the Young Advisors could contribute to.

We also recommend that the feasibility of a 'community alternative' to recall for young adults should be explored, preventing the multiple potential negative impacts of returning to prison, and focussing on supporting the young adult to develop a sense of purpose and direction through community-based projects and activities.

A close-up, profile view of a Black man with a beard, looking slightly upwards and to the right. He is speaking into a silver mesh microphone. The background is dark and out of focus. The bottom portion of the image is overlaid with a bright yellow rectangular area containing text.

NTALE

"I've had only one major brush with the criminal justice system, but it was enough for me to see the inequities within it in stark contrast. Coming from Croydon, I saw the inequalities in policing and the economic inequalities come together and I felt compelled to do what I could. I want to live in a better world each morning I wake up than the one I fell asleep in.

It's been personally edifying to interact with the amazing young advisors, who have all had so much wisdom and insight to share. I've drastically improved my public speaking skills and a host of further opportunities have come from the connections forged through the project. The guidance and deference to our experiences has helped me feel heard, seen and resolved throughout.

The biggest difference in this project was that it was led by young people. There were objectives set out in conjunction with the people affected and recommendations made by that same group. Ultimately, it has been for the people, by the people."



JOSHUA

"I wanted to do something to change the criminal justice system because I've seen first-hand how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic young people are treated unfairly by the system. I wanted to be a part of changing that, and to empower young people to use their voices.

The project has given me the confidence to speak up and challenge professionals to do better for young people.

The unique thing about the project is it gives us the chance to run workshops with young people who are currently in prisons and young offenders institutions and to make sure their voices are heard at the highest levels."

THE CARE SYSTEM

WHAT WE DID

On the subject of the care system, we engaged with over 100 young adults across a range of settings. Most of the evidence came from young adults being supported by YOTs and community organisations. We sought to consult care-experienced young adults about how their experience of care affected their experience of the criminal justice system. We wanted to find out what could be done to better support and meet the needs of care-experienced young adults with experience of the criminal justice system. Through doing this, we have developed a set of findings for policy makers and practitioners to inform their approach to care-experienced young adults in the criminal justice system.

"Care system was an important topic for me as I was aware of the stigma surrounding young people in care and the assumed correlation between care and prison. I wanted to explore this further."

"It was important for the group to focus on this as our unique peer-led approach has enabled us to get to the crux of how the system has at times failed young people" - Young Adult Advisor

OUR FINDINGS

There is a stigma associated with being a young person in care.

From the workshops we conducted on the care system, it was clear that young adults with experience of the care system experienced stigma. Young people in care felt that they were assumed to be "problem children" who are untrustworthy and undeserving of empathy. Participants said this stigma impacted how professionals interacted with them. They felt there was a judgemental approach from the beginning.

"Being a child in care carries a negative stigma"

"Once they know we're in care, they act different"

"They don't trust us as much"

"They associate children in care as "problem children""

"Never want to admit you are in a children's home"

"Never given no empathy"

Young people in care feel they are 'over-reported', which makes them more likely to enter the criminal justice system.

From our consultation with care-experienced young adults, it was clear that there are often numerous agencies involved with a young person's care, all of whom are involved in recording and 'reporting on' aspects of the young person's life. For some young adults, the interventions from various agencies had a significant impact on their contact with the criminal justice system. For example, one participant that attended one of our workshops in partnership with a Youth Offending Team spoke of the difference between their "corporate parent" versus their "biological parent":

"You have your corporate parent (social services) vs your biological parent. Every-time you do something wrong your corporate parent writes it down, it goes on your report. By the time you get in front of a judge, they have all this evidence and 'risk factors' mounted up to justify their sentence - thus you are more likely to obtain a prison sentence as more reports are taken into account whereas, when you have a biological parent, where social services are not involved, they have no reports to go on to determine your risk factors."

Young adults in care feel institutionalised instead of feeling in control of their lives.

As a result of having numerous agencies involved in their care, we found that young adults felt they were becoming institutionalised. This had the impact of young adults developing a greater reliance on institutions and agencies rather than developing their independence and feeling in control of their lives. This translated into different behaviours such as the adoption of language used by professionals around risk with some young adults explaining that they would often have conversations with peers about whether they were 'high risk' or 'medium risk'. Conversely, for some young adults we consulted, this created feelings of not being cared for despite the number of agencies involved in their care.

"Care system is seen as an institution similar to prison. Care users/leavers are becoming institutionalised just as we see prisoners. Relying heavily on services only available if they commit crime, and defining themselves using the same terms as professionals e.g: 13 year olds referring to "break down in relationship" not using language of children"

"When you are everybody's responsibility, you are nobody's responsibility. People pass the buck and lose interest"

"You're not involved in any decisions about you"

"You're not informed of what's going to be happening to you"

The over-policing of young people in care damages prospects and self-esteem.

The care-experienced young adults we worked with spoke of their regular interactions with the police. Specifically, we found that there was often heavy and unnecessary police involvement for minor issues. Where young adults obtained a criminal record as a result of police involvement, this damaged their career

"Police just label you as 'care kids' then treat us all the same"

"Care homes love to call the police over nothing"

"If you're from care, it's always going to be worse"

"Care worker/foster carer call police on you for little things then get you a criminal record then you look at your future and think what's point now"

"1st time I was arrested I wasn't even in care, then got in more and more trouble for silly things like "breach of the peace" - your mum wouldn't call police if you were being noisy at home or accidentally elbowed her"

prospects and self-esteem. Due to the stigma associated with being a young adult in care, the police automatically viewed young adults in care as troublemakers and were reluctant to approach situations with any empathy or understanding.

"Nobody can say where you are on roll (on school roll) then police get called, you are kept in a cell"

"Calling the police for issues to do with looked after children is increasing police interaction and experience with children in care. Not everything the police should have to deal with"

Young adults report feeling automatically 'cut off' from support services when leaving care at 21.

In relation to the support received by young adults in care, participants explained that they felt 'cut off' from support when they left care at the age of 21. The young adults we consulted said they experienced no continuity of support and where they had built positive relationships with support workers, these were lost. This, combined with the feeling of being institutionalised whilst in care, created feelings of isolation and loneliness among the young adults we worked with on this topic.

"Making sure the services put in place to assist you are actually working. Have social worker or 'personal advisor' check in on you every 6 weeks to fix/assist with any issues you are still having. Have a record of services that are failing me and ones doing well"

[My idea for change is a] Life Long Links initiative. The care system should be offering life long relationships, like extended family"

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Re-think police interventions to recognise the impact for young people who have experienced trauma**

We recommend that professionals re-think police interventions based on a recognition of the impact of police interventions on young adults in care, many of whom have experienced trauma. Solutions from the young adults we worked with include creating a Professional Engagement Team which intervenes, instead of the police, when an incident occurs. We believe there could be a staged process with getting a specialist care team in the police who will make decisions on whether to charge, etc.

2. **Recruit staff members based on their values and promote staff with lived experience**

We recommend the creation of more opportunities for professionals with lived experience to work within the care and the criminal justice system. This could be made possible by making pathways to the care profession more accessible by taking a 'values-based' approach instead of relying heavily on academic qualifications.

3. **Agencies involved in a young person's care should use information in a smarter and more transparent way**

We recommend introducing smarter and more transparent information sharing processes by the support services to ensure that the needs of the young person are at the centre of the care being provided. We recommend the introduction of processes that enable young people to see what information is being held about them should they ask for it, and to challenge that information where necessary. We also believe it would be useful to have training, co-designed by care-experienced young people, around information sharing to ensure that the information gathered is used transparently and non-judgmentally.

4. **Provide training for professionals around trauma experienced by young people**

We recommend training for professionals working with young adults in care, particularly around trauma and how professionals can engage with young adults in care in a way that is not retraumatizing. Participants especially recommended that young adults who have experienced or are experiencing care are involved in the creation and facilitation of the training. This would enable professionals to learn from young adults and their experiences directly.

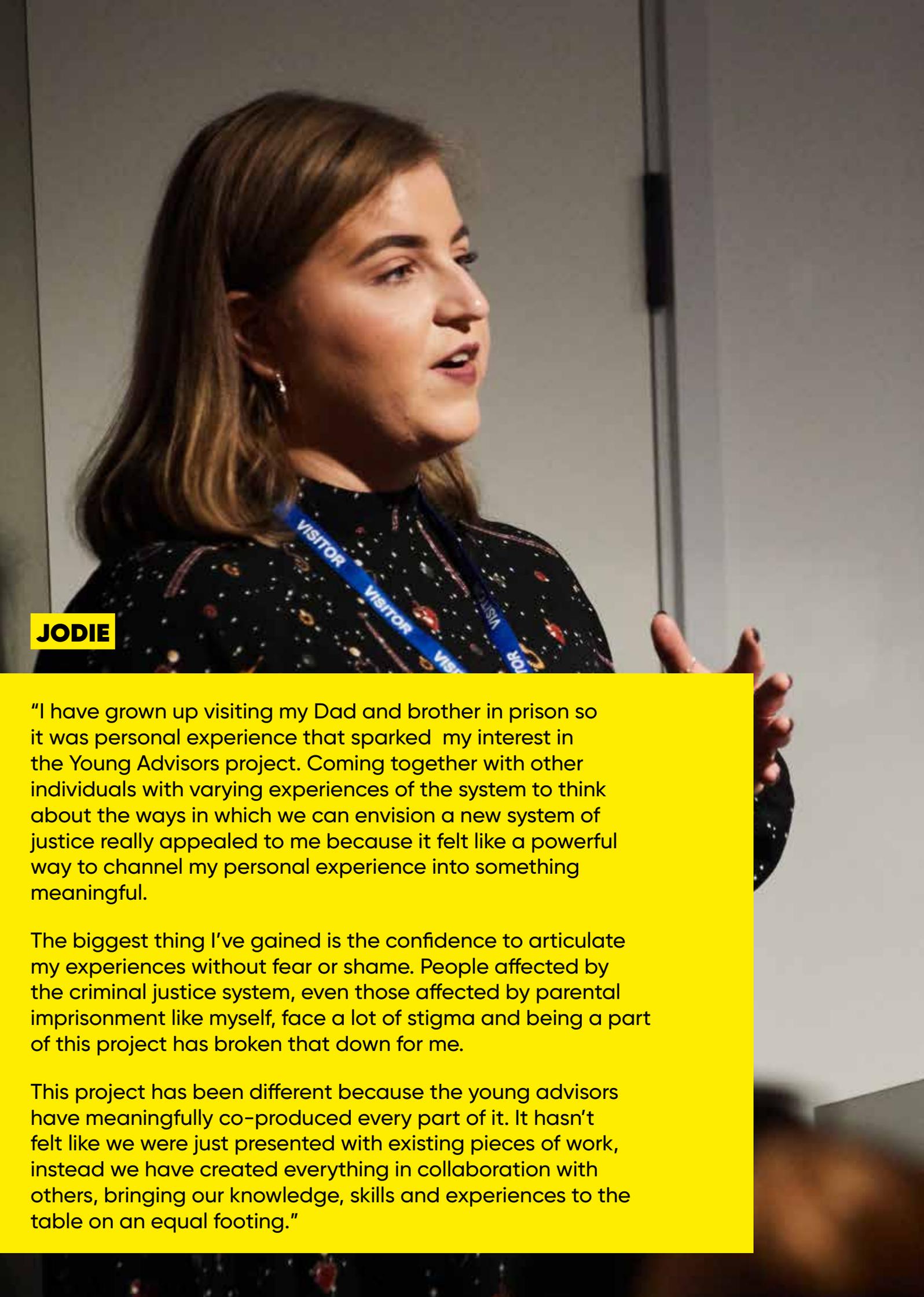
5. **Invest in 'YOT-style' support services to prevent young people from coming into contact with the criminal justice system**

We recommend investment in 'YOT-style' community based support services, particularly in relation to education and employment, to prevent care-experienced young people coming into contact with the criminal justice system. We have heard from young people about the vital support YOTs provide to help them to avoid entering the formal justice system, and we feel that this model of support would be hugely valuable if extended to cover care-experienced young people.

6. **Continued support for care leavers over the long-term**

We recommend the implementation of long-term support for care leavers who are making the transition from care to living independently. Young adults we consulted with suggested a 24-hour helpline, a support worker to check in with the person leaving care every 6 weeks, and a 'Life Long Links' initiative to maintain the supportive relationships built up with support workers whilst in care. We also believe there should be better coordination between prisons and social services, to avoid care-leavers missing out on the support they deserve during and after their prison sentences.





JODIE

"I have grown up visiting my Dad and brother in prison so it was personal experience that sparked my interest in the Young Advisors project. Coming together with other individuals with varying experiences of the system to think about the ways in which we can envision a new system of justice really appealed to me because it felt like a powerful way to channel my personal experience into something meaningful.

The biggest thing I've gained is the confidence to articulate my experiences without fear or shame. People affected by the criminal justice system, even those affected by parental imprisonment like myself, face a lot of stigma and being a part of this project has broken that down for me.

This project has been different because the young advisors have meaningfully co-produced every part of it. It hasn't felt like we were just presented with existing pieces of work, instead we have created everything in collaboration with others, bringing our knowledge, skills and experiences to the table on an equal footing."

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

WHAT WE DID

On the subject of mental health and the Criminal Justice System, we engaged with over 300 young adults across a number of prisons and community organisations. These conversations helped us to gain an insight into young adults' experiences of mental health in prison and what they believe needs to change (before, during and after their time in prison). We wanted to talk to young adults who have accessed mental health support in prison to identify areas of best practice and areas that require investment and improvement. As a result of this work, we have developed a set of findings and recommendations for policy makers and practitioners to inform their approach to youth mental health in the criminal justice system.

"I felt that it was important for us to focus on the issue of mental health within the justice system. It is something that I can relate to and I'm sure that many people who go to prison end up battling with some form of mental health. Having dealt with anxiety and depression whilst in prison, and knowing first hand the impact that it has on young people, it was clear that there is not enough mental health support within the justice system and that better ways to tackle this issue were needed"

Young Adult Advisor

OUR FINDINGS

Mental health support services in prison are inadequate and inconsistent.

We found that there is a lack of mental health support for young adults in prison. Where support is available, it fails to meet their specific needs. Evidence for this finding ranged from young adults not receiving support when they needed it most, waiting weeks for a healthcare appointment, or

support in prison being limited to medication. Speaking about this lack of support, one young adult said they are regularly "having to put on a facade" to try to cope with the mental ill health they were experiencing because the support they needed was not available.

"No access to support facilities to help with mental health"

"Support only lasting 6 weeks"

"Jail don't care about mental health. My meds don't come when I need it"

"Overall there is a lack of support and understanding from prison staff about mental health"

"There's no crisis team at [this jail]"

"Listeners scheme is good but it's difficult to build relationships with listeners, especially if you get moved"

"Lacking 1 to 1 support"

"Had to pester the staff just so I could get my meds"

"14 days waiting time [for GP appointment]"

Young adults experience isolation and loneliness when there is a lack of meaningful activity.

Young adults we consulted said that spending too much time in their cell led to feelings of loneliness and isolation, causing a deterioration in their mental health. It was clear that these young adults felt there was limited time to get outside their cells to engage in meaningful activity. Many were frustrated with the small amount of time they were given to 'do everything' such as getting fresh air, socialising with peers, using the phone to contact loved ones, eating, etc.

"When you're isolated, your mental health deteriorates"

"Lack of social time leading to isolation which contributes to disbelief in reforming one's self"

"Being sent to block / segregation unit"

"Difficult to navigate the system when you have many disorders, makes you feel alone"

The basic regime² damages well-being and undermines the basic rights of young adults in prison.

Many young adults we spoke to said the reward and punishment regime in prison contributed to poor mental health, particularly when you're placed on the basic regime.

"Basic does not help prisoners with mental health - they are just left to rot in a cell for 23 hours with nothing to keep the mind occupied. Some do not read which makes the whole basic thing extremely dark - being left alone can make their condition even worse than it was"

"Basic is a way of controlling some prisoners with behaviour issues but this behaviour will just get worse"

"Many prisoners feel that basic makes things worse and spending too much time in cells is bad for mental health"

"Can we just get rid of this Basic thing as it is not doing any one any good"

"Being on Basic might make things worse"

Young adults in prison report using anger as a response when there are no other ways to cope.

Young adults in prison spoke of feeling angry and often violent due to the lack of support available and a lack of understanding from prison staff. It was clear that how you feel begins to change when you aren't receiving the right support. For example, many

young adults we spoke with explained that symptoms of anxiety and depression spiralled into anger and violence. Some young adults said they felt desperate and like "nothing's going to change".

"Your frame of mind... pissed, annoying, fuming, stressed, anger, violation"

"Makes you want to start a fire"

"Violence is a way of communicating"

"To be violated leads to violence"

"Some people use Spice and/or violence to cope with their thoughts, which leads them to get put on basic and this makes it worse"

"Prisoners feel angry and often violent due to lack of support and understanding from prison staff [or mentally unstable]"

²Incentives and earned privileges (IEP) schemes in prison are intended to encourage good behaviour and challenge bad behaviour. Schemes generally have three levels and the 'basic' level is the most austere. If someone is on 'basic' level it means they can only have certain things that the law says they must have, like some letters and visits.

Maintaining regular contact with family and friends is vital for mental health and wellbeing.

Many young adults stressed the importance of contact with friends and family and the positive impact it has on mental health. Not being able to maintain this contact had the opposite impact, causing them to feel anxious, powerless and angry. Young adults we spoke with found the lack of contact

especially difficult when there were ongoing family issues on the outside, feeling powerless and unable to offer support. Visits had a particularly powerful impact on mental health with one young adult explaining how they felt like they were in "another world" when they were on a visit, forgetting they were in prison.

"I feel powerless when my family are struggling"

"Limited spends – phone credit and canteen spends should be separate"

"Not always knowing how my family are is what makes being inside tough"

"It feels like another world when you're on a visit... you forget you're in prison"

"Arguments with family on the outside makes you angry"

"Issues with mail – handed out late" [can have an impact on mental health]

"Not being able to speak to family often"

"Not getting letters on time"

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Bring in more external support services**

We recommend an increase in the number of external, voluntary organisations offering support services in prison. These external support services should be tailored to the needs of young adults, looking at areas such as 'Mental Health First Aid', peer support, and talking therapies.

We recognise that there has been good work done in prisons so far, such as the maturity screening tool and the choices and changes support material. It's important that this type of support continues to develop and the staff delivering support have a good understanding of young adults.

2. **Ability to maintain relationships with friends and family as a right (not linked to the Incentives and Earned Privileges system)**

We recommend the strengthening of mechanisms that enable young adults to maintain relationships with friends and family. Specifically, we would like to see the rolling out of in-cell phones across the prison estate, an increase in spends amount to enable young adults to spend more on phone credit, and increased opportunities to contact family upon arrival in prison. We do not believe that the ability to maintain relationships with friends and family should be linked to the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) system³.

3. **More time out of cell to stimulate the mind, reduce self-harm and mental ill health**

Young adults wanted more time out of their cell to engage in meaningful activity whether this be education, time at the library or exercise at the gym. In particular, they wanted access to physical exercise as a right, not a privilege, as this has a positive impact on mental health.

4. **Training for staff on how to respond to poor mental health and trauma**

To increase understanding of mental health, particularly in emergencies, staff should be trained in how to deal with young adults in prison who experience poor mental health. Young adults felt that better training for prison staff would enable them to better understand what they were going through. This training should be co-designed by young adults who have experienced prison, are experiencing prison currently or young adults who may have Listeners⁴ roles in prison.

³Each prison has an Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) Scheme. A prisoner's IEP level will determine the extra 'privileges' they can access. If a prisoner keeps to the rules and shows a commitment to rehabilitation and helping others, they may be able to do things like: spend more of their money; get more visits from their family and friends; earn more money; have a TV in their cell; wear their own clothes; spend more time outside of their cell. Prisoners can also have these things taken away from them if they do not follow the rules.

⁴The Listener scheme is a peer support service which aims to reduce suicide and self-harm in prisons. Samaritans volunteers select, train and support prisoners to become Listeners. Listeners provide confidential emotional support to their fellow inmates who are struggling to cope.



NADINE

"I've had experiences of the justice system throughout my life, both directly and indirectly. I wanted to help promote voices from the roots of the system to those in power as they are the experts and often aren't listened to.

Being a Young Advisor I've gained a passion for working in prisons and built my facilitation skills. It has opened so many doors for me, including being awarded a trustee role for a criminal justice charity and getting me a job with a probation company. This project has helped me gain so many links in the criminal justice world that would not have been possible on my own. I've gained so much confidence and feel like I've helped to make a real change.

This project is based on experts by experience engaging with peers in a way that builds rapport and uses their combined knowledge to make recommendations for change. This project has informed reform at the heart of it, and a team of young people who are prepared to share their own experiences. This project puts everyone involved in rooms where the real experiences aren't heard."



JHANZAB

"My journey of working with Leaders Unlocked has been one that I'll always remember. This project has not only encouraged my personal development, but it has also allowed me to use my lived experience and work with those who are still stuck in the system. Without this opportunity, I know it is hard for a former prisoner to change their lives.

Working with people from different backgrounds has made me realise that this fight for a better justice system is one that we all want to see. Their passion has served as a great form of inspiration for me and I'm thankful that we were all brought together through this project.

From working with young people in the community, to those who are in prison, to presenting our findings to professionals in the sector such as the staff at the Ministry of Justice, the work we've done has given me the tools to keep fighting for what I believe in. I feel more confident and able to do so. I look forward to seeing how things develop and the difference we can make in the future."

EMPLOYMENT AND LIFE AFTER PRISON

WHAT WE DID

On the subject of 'Employment and Life After Prison', we engaged with over 350 young adults across a variety of different prisons, YOTs and community organisations. Through these conversations, we sought to gain an understanding of what support young adults feel they need for resettlement after release – including pursuing career goals, and securing

"This topic was really important to me because I really wanted to know whether there was anything in place for young adults experiencing prison that helped unlock potential and created goals and aspirations. I think it was really important to look at this in our research to see how young adults are supported both inside and in the community."

stable accommodation. We also wanted to explore what support, if any, was available for young adults in prison to prepare for life after release – including pursuing career goals, and securing stable accommodation. We also wanted to explore what support, if any, was available for young adults in prison to prepare for life after release.

"Not only that, it was important to understand what young adults in prison wanted from their support and education."

Young Adult Advisor

OUR FINDINGS

The courses available in prison do not reflect young adults' aspirations.

The young adults we consulted felt that the courses available to them in prison were not giving them the tools they needed to reach their goals and gain employment on release. There was a keen interest in the creative and tech industries amongst the young adults we spoke to, but there was a lack of courses available in these areas. Some felt that they were completing courses that equipped

them with skills they were unlikely to use upon release, in a job market that is increasingly focused on technology. Some young adults had positive experiences of completing courses in prison but there were cases where young adults were transferred to a different prison and were unable to continue the same course.

"Some courses work well but others don't"

"Not enough courses tailored"

"Level 3 qualifications not available"

"Courses available are vague/ not helpful – e.g. retail – funding could be directed to something more useful e.g. trades such as car mechanics, plumbing, cooking"

"There are some computer courses but there should be more advanced courses"

"Teach life skills, e.g. credit, how to manage money"

"Putting more support in place for prisoners. More courses just key skills for when you're outside. Ones that will help people to reach goals in life that they want in life"

"There should be more electrical work and trades courses available"

"More courses with guaranteed jobs at the end of it"

A heavy focus on punishment, instead of rehabilitation, is de-motivating and destructive.

From our work on this topic, it is clear that the prison regime is heavily focused on punishment instead of rehabilitation. The young adults we spoke to said that they

"Security can be a hindrance to any progression that you want. But if I don't know why I'm being blocked, how can I address it?"

"[Officers are] quick to punish for the smallest things"

"You get officers giving out too many negatives and no positives at all"

wanted to see more opportunities to learn new skills, showcase talents and demonstrate abilities as a way of strengthening rehabilitation.

"They don't understand what prisoners need. We have to have a better relationship with officers and not always be punished if we get in trouble"

"In adjudications no matter what you say you still won't be heard and will be punished even if the incident was down to neglect from staff"

Young adults in prison, deemed to be 'low risk', are left unsupported.

Young adults felt that, where they were deemed 'low risk', they were left unsupported in prison. This was particularly the case for young adults serving short sentences. Being left unsupported created feelings of loneliness with young adults feeling like they have to get through their sentence with no support

"Low risk prisoners feel that due to not having enough support, they are left alone to deal with rehabilitation which can be the downfall for some"

and no opportunity to access the courses and educational opportunities that will help them progress. Prison does not seem set up for short sentences and for young adults this represents a significant part of their lives where they are not progressing.

"Many prisoners feel they are not given sufficient support from their Probation Officers (POs) or Offender Management Unit (OMU) which relates to being a low risk prisoner"

There is a lack of information available to young adults upon release.

The young adults we spoke to felt that they did not have the information they needed to rebuild their lives upon release. This was

"Offenders need all organisations around them to take an interest and not just see them as a number"

"More info about housing – where to go for help. Making sure something is in place before release"

"Housing information should be given and arranged before release"

particularly the case in relation to housing, employment, claiming benefits and access to education.

"Not enough information about how to apply for jobs"

"Don't know where to find info about applying for jobs"

There is a lack of adequate support from probation and resettlement officers when preparing for release.

A lack of information on release was coupled with young adults saying that they did not have support to prepare them for release. We regularly heard that probation did not communicate with young adults until a few

weeks before release instead of providing regular and consistent support throughout their sentence.

"Probation officers and resettlement officers need more training maybe by prisoners to know what support is needed"

"Seeing me more often and work with me to make my sentence plan and listen to the actual help I need and support outside"

"Probation to be more involved whilst in prison so things are set up before release – not just to be in contact before release but whilst people are doing their sentence"

"Probation and other support systems not communicating with them properly"

"More contact with Probation – not a big rush at the end of your sentence"

"Not prepared to be released, long sentence, no help to feel good about self"

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Support plans for young adults in prison tailored to needs and aspirations**
We recommend the development of support plans that are tailored towards the individual needs and aspirations of young adults. We recommend that such support plans are formulated with the young adult and support worker, which would help to strengthen relationships within prison as well as ensuring the support plan is tailored to the young adults' specific needs.

Some good work has already been done by Beyond Youth Custody, Nacro and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, looking at why it's important for statutory services to not just manage risk. Their report, *Using an Identity Lens*, is available at www.t2a.org

- 2. Wider range of courses to teach vital skills for future and support career goals**

Linked to the recommendation to develop better support plans for young adults is the recommendation to widen the range of courses and educational opportunities in prison. For the young adults we consulted, it was important that courses available in prison reflected their wide range of skills and ambitions.

- 3. Apprenticeships and jobs offered as part of 'New Deal' reducing crime and inequality**

We recommend the creation of a 'New Deal' that provides services to enable young adults to start an apprenticeship or a job when leaving prison. Within prison, this could take the form of employers actively visiting prisons to provide job opportunities, interview experience and support in writing CVs.

Could this be done through the newly-created New Futures Network, particularly if this new network were to develop an offer for young adults specifically.

- 4. When young adults are released from prison, provide them with a mentor who has experienced the system**

We recommend the introduction of a mentoring scheme that enables young adults to gain a mentor who can offer support upon release. Our evidence shows the value of lived experience. We recommend the roll out of mentoring schemes across the prison estate whereby mentors with lived experience of the justice system are able to be paired with a young adult returning to the community.

- 5. Co-design resettlement packs with young adults**

We recommend the development of co-designed resettlement packs that include the relevant information as a young adult being released from prison (e.g: how to secure accommodation, employment, claim benefits, how to manage money, how to access education). There was a particular need for housing information for the young adults we consulted, with a need for information on how to secure stable accommodation upon release. Resettlement packs could also include case studies of individual 'success stories' to highlight how change happens in individuals' lives.

LEADERS UNLOCKED



CONCLUSION

We are grateful to all of the young adults for sharing their experiences and views of the criminal justice system as well as the prisons, YOIs, YOTs and voluntary organisations that have supported us to make this work a success. We also extend a thanks to the Young Adult Advisors for the enthusiasm, dedication and passion they have shown to this project over the past two years.

In November 2019, an audience of criminal justice professionals came together in central London to hear the Young Adult Advisors present the key findings and recommendations you have read in this report. At this event, professionals posed questions to the Young Advisors on the findings and recommendations as well as asking the group for their thoughts on current policy issues within the criminal justice sector.

We asked attendees to suggest ideas for our future work and their ideas included:

- Help the inspection bodies to engage young service users in inspections
- Collaborate with local authorities and relevant organisations to work at a preventative level to match the Young Advisors with other young people at risk of coming into contact with the CJS
- Contribute written articles to CJS publications to reach a wider audience
- Co-design the ways in which behaviour in prison is both incentivised and sanctioned so it feels fair and just, keeps everyone safe and always encourages change and improvement
- Consult with young people on probation to understand their experiences
- Look at the recent sentencing changes and how young adults feel when going through the process
- Contributing to the upcoming Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

Over the next two years, we plan to extend the work of the Young Adult Advisors on Criminal Justice, growing the voice and leadership of young adults experiencing the criminal justice system. Over this next stage we intend to focus on co-designing solutions to address some of the urgent challenges contained in this report. We also intend to pursue further peer research to examine areas where there is a lack of existing evidence from young adults – e.g. perceptions of gang affiliation, experiences of recall, experiences of young women and girls in the criminal justice system.

We are excited to continue working with system leaders, policy-makers and other professionals involved in criminal justice reform.



ROMAINE

"The experiences I've been through have given me the impetus to help other people through similar situations. When I speak to other young adults regarding the justice system it seems that no one thinks it works properly. I believe the solutions in this report are better than what's in place, and now it's about the right people coming together to force that change. Through this project I've gained confidence, learned how to be more organised and how to work in a team for a joint cause. The experience has brought me closer to other people and helped me to express what I feel, whereas before I would just keep it inside. What makes the project unique is the huge diversity, everyone's from somewhere different and everyone going out of their way to travel for miles and miles to work together to make a change."

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**LEADERS
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