



# YOUNG JUSTICE ADVISORS:

## LEARNING FROM YOUNG ADULTS

**FINAL REPORT  
MAY 2022**

**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**



**YOUNG  
JUSTICE  
ADVISORS**



## FOREWORD

Following the success of our first youth-led report 'Hearing from Young Adults' in 2020, I am proud to introduce 'Learning from Young Adults', a second report co-produced by the Young Justice Advisors team. This report centres the raw voices of those excluded from, yet most affected by criminal justice policy and decision-making.

Over the past year, the team have worked hard to deliver this deep dive into their four chosen priority areas; race, mental health, life after prison and the care system. The Young Justice Advisors have led on the research, analysis and writing of this report. As you will see, they have spoken candidly in their introductions and throughout.

Due to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns, we adapted our approach, engaging with 333 young adults for this report. The development of the Young Justice Advisors team over this time has been exceptional. Everyone has contributed so much during turbulent times. Collectively, the support they have shown each other and their passion for change has driven this work. Everything in this report has been created with young adults, for young adults, and designed to be engaging in a meaningful way.

Something that stands out to me across all the research and individual experiences that have gone into this report, is that the young adults affected by policy and decision-making want their views to be listened to. In my experience, having worked as a Young Justice Advisor myself, and now in my role as Young Justice Advisors Project Manager, the best way to do this is to **have people with lived and shared experiences creating meaningful and safe spaces**. This creates an environment which enables young adults to share their experience and opinions, as our team has done throughout this peer research.

For the practitioners and decision-makers reading this, I hope that this report shows you what happens when young people are given an opportunity to voice their opinions and be involved in discussions about solutions, rather than being considered part of the problem and excluded from the conversation. I hope that you will take inspiration from this team and want to collaborate with us more as our work expands into new areas. You need to listen to the young adults you're in contact with and get them involved in decision-making at every level, and not just in a tick-box way. There are small, tangible changes that can be made starting today, as well as the bigger changes that we should be working towards together, as a sector.

For the Young Justice Advisors reading this report, you inspire me every day. You help so many young adults without even realising it, leaving an impression wherever you go. You are amazing, your voice matters, and your experiences are your superpowers. So, I want to say thank you, this wouldn't have happened without you.

Nadine Smith,  
Young Justice Advisors Project Manager

**For the Young Justice Advisors reading this report, you inspire me every day. You help so many young adults without even realising it, leaving an impression wherever you go.**

# INTRODUCTION

This report has been co-produced by Leaders Unlocked and the Young Justice Advisors, a team of young adults aged 18–30 with lived experience of the criminal justice and care systems. The Young Justice Advisors work to highlight the voice of lived experience, and advocate for lived experience to inform policy and practice changes at the national level.

The Young Justice Advisors was created by Leaders Unlocked in 2016, with funding from the Barrow Cadbury Trust. The young adults involved are from all over the country, including Leeds, London, Leicester and Birmingham. Everyone in the team has a passion for informed reform to the criminal justice system.

Over the last six years, the Young Justice Advisors has become a leading voice of lived experience in the criminal justice sector. The team has worked with a range of agencies, including the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the Youth Justice Board (YJB), MOPAC, Select Committees and more.

The Young Justice Advisors project aims to:

- Equip young adults with lived experience to present their insights and recommendations, playing a leadership role working with policymakers 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

# BACKGROUND

In early 2020 Leaders Unlocked and the Young Justice Advisors co-produced 'Hearing from Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System,' a report that brought together findings from the Young Justice Advisors' peer research with 500 young adults in the criminal justice system.

In that report, the Young Justice Advisors identified key findings and recommendations from their peer-led research in relation to five priority topics: racial disproportionality, sentencing young adults, the Care system, mental health and the Criminal Justice system, and employment and life after prison.

The report received a hugely positive response from stakeholders across the justice sector, including HMPPS, MoJ, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation), YJB, Independent Office for Police Conduct and leading justice charities such as Clinks and Prison Reform Trust.

A lot has happened since then:

- Starting in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic led to a series of lockdowns in our community and prisons.
- In May 2020, the murder of George Floyd by police in the USA sparked Black Lives Matter protests around the world and shone a light on racism here in Britain. Institutions and organisations rushed to respond with statements and action plans – HMPPS introduced a Race Action Programme.
- In January 2021 the government announced an Independent Review of Children's Social Care to look at whole system issues with the aim of improving children's experience in care.
- In June 2021, the probation service was overhauled because the previous, semi-privatised service model was deemed a failure.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

In the context of so much change, the Young Justice Advisors decided to narrow the scope of their research this time around and look in depth at four priority areas:

- Race and Racism
- The Care System
- Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System
- Life After Prison.

The recommendations in this report focus on what policymakers can do, both at national and local levels, to make real, positive changes for young adults in the criminal justice and care systems.

# WHAT WE DID

## DESIGNING TOOLS FOR PEER RESEARCH

The Young Justice Advisors co-designed the peer research tools for this research.

**Peer-led workshops** were designed and facilitated by Young Justice Advisors and supported by a member of Leaders Unlocked staff. The workshops included a range of activities, such as debates, discussions and interactive exercises to identify common issues and potential solutions.

**One-to-one interviews** were conducted by Young Justice Advisors and Leaders Unlocked staff with lived experience. These allowed for more in-depth conversations with individual young people about their experiences and opinions, and enabled us to listen those who were not comfortable sharing in a group setting.

**Structured surveys** were used to gather individual responses to a range of quantitative and qualitative questions designed by Young Justice Advisors. This method was useful for enabling young adults to contribute insights that they were not comfortable sharing in face-to-face interactions.

## DELIVERING THE PEER RESEARCH

From January 2021 to March 2022, 20 Young Advisors conducted the peer research, listening to 333 young people about their personal experiences and views on our four priority areas, including:

- 124 young people in the community, with lived experience of the issues
- 209 young people currently in these CAT B/C men's prisons:
  - HMP Preston
  - HMP Ranby
  - HMP Leeds
  - HMP Birmingham
  - HMP Spring Hill, a CAT D prison.

The Young Justice Advisors listened to:

- 81 young people in 1:1 interviews
- 71 additional young people in group discussions
- 181 young people through our surveys

The young people we interviewed were all aged 18-30. They came from all across the country, in particular the Midlands and London.

The young people the Young Justice Advisors listened to for this research included 20 female and one transgender male interviewee in the community. This relatively small proportion is due to restrictions and challenges that meant we were unable to access any young people currently in women's prisons for this report.

We conducted face-to-face interviews and workshops in prisons. We also conducted face-to-face and online\* interviews and workshops in the community. (\*using Zoom, an online meeting platform.)

## PRESENTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Young Justice Advisors, supported by Leaders Unlocked, compiled and reviewed the data, coming together in several group sessions from December 2021 to April 2022, to identify key findings and recommendations.

The priority areas in this report all interrelate. This means that some findings inevitably relate to more than one priority. For simplicity, we have grouped the findings thematically by priority, but please note that there is cross over.

In April 2022, the Young Justice Advisors held an online showcase event where they presented their key findings and recommendations to an audience of approximately 90 key stakeholders from across the justice sector, including HMPPS, MoJ and other government institutions, funders, voluntary sector organisations and academic institutions.

The response was extremely positive:

**"Thought provoking and interesting."**

**"Absolutely amazing! Brilliant conversations."**

**"So insightful and powerful"**

**"Really fascinating"**

**"Thank you so much for speaking truth to power."**

**"I am so impressed by the passion and lived experience."**

## TERMINOLOGY

In this report, where possible we always name the specific ethnic and/or minority groups we are referring to. Where we do need to talk in broader terms – because we are referring to inequalities experienced across certain groups – we use the term ‘people from racialised communities.’ While we are aware that no collective term works for everyone, ‘people from racialised communities’ is understood, popular with organisations led by people from these communities. Using ‘people from racialised communities’ allows us to stop using BAME (a government acronym used to categorise Black, Asian and minority ethnic people together). For these reasons we have adopted it for this report.

The term ‘offender’ appears in reference to the government system of ‘Offender Management’ statistics – we do not use or promote this term due to negative connotations and stigma attached to it, not just for young adults, but all people with justice experience.

## LANGUAGE

In order to promote the voices of the young people at the centre of this research, we have used direct quotations from interviews throughout this report. We have kept these quotations verbatim where possible, to preserve their tone and impact for the reader. For this reason, while we use the term ‘people from racialised communities’ throughout the report, sometimes alternative language (e.g., people of colour) will appear in the quotations themselves. We have only edited quotations where necessary for clarity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our biggest thank you goes to all the young adults who took part in this research.

We are also very grateful for the support of a wide range of partners across the country, who have allowed the Young Justice Advisors to consult the young people in their organisations. Thanks goes to:

Birmingham YOT	HMP Preston
IDEssence	HMP Ranby
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons	HMP Spring Hill
Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service	Kinetic Youth
HMP Birmingham	SparkInside
HMP Leeds	Switchback

We would also like to thank the Barrow Cadbury Trust and T2A Alliance for their vital and invaluable support for this work.

## THE YOUNG JUSTICE ADVISORS

A special thank you goes to all the Young Justice Advisors who have made time for this project while juggling busy work and family lives, and put so much thought and hard work into producing this report:

Aliliyah	Kojo	Romaine
Fardowsa	Latreece	Sadia
Fatmata	Matthew	Sarah
Frankie	Mo	Stefan
Jai	Patrick	
Karene	Reuben	

And finally, thank you to Nadine Smith, the Young Justice Advisors Project Manager, who made it all happen.

*"We were pleased to host the Young Justice Advisors in a series of workshops with groups of young adults, followed by some individual sessions. Sarah and Nadine combined professionalism with a 'down to earth' approach. The YJA helped the men to utilise their insight into their own experiences and to appreciate how these insights could be applied to help others in their situation. It was humbling to see the commitment of the team and to witness them listening to and validating the views of the young adults at HMP Leeds. The men were given a written endorsement afterwards, which recognised their contribution, and highlighted some of the skills they had used. The experience gave the participants a chance to think critically about their environment and respond positively to an organisation who appeared to be interested in them as individuals. Thank you, Nadine and Sarah."*

*Karen Tate, Head of OMU Delivery, HMP Leeds*

*"HMP Preston have been developing bespoke programmes to work with differing cohorts in the establishment including Young Adults. The Young Justice Advisors aligned with this work. Reading their previous report, it struck us that this was exactly the sort of intervention that would further support our vision. A 2-day workshop was delivered to a selection of Young Adults from all residential wings including VP's [Vulnerable Prisoners]. This resulted in these young lads being given a voice, a real opportunity to open up and talk about their issues, indeed they did not shy away from this, but clearly relished the chance and it was clear that they appreciated the support and the personal approach taken. The YJA delivered something that was well received by both prisoners and staff, HMP Preston look forward to working with them again in the near future."*

*Philip Copeland, Custody Manager – OMU, HMP Preston*

# OUR FINDINGS

## RACE AND RACISM



My name is Karene, and I am from the city of Leicester which is in the midlands ... a very mundane but generally nice place.

We are called a multicultural city that embraces and loves all its members, but in my eyes, there are massive disparities in how people are dealt with by the law. As a young person I felt the brunt of this. When I was arrested for my first offence I was 17. I was in college at the time studying law and English. I know, crazy right? As I went through the juvenile court system, I was continuously told "hey, you'll be ok. It's your first offence and you are in college doing something with your life, so the judge will show leniency." NO. That wasn't the case. The day after my 18th birthday, I was sent to a woman's prison for 8 months. I was shocked. I knew what I did was wrong and I had shown remorse. So why hadn't I been given a chance?

I had seen other people of lighter skin shades get that chance. That made me realize it was the tone of my skin and how I looked which led them to put me away. I felt they had taken my future away from me without a care. This made me go on a roundabout - committing crime, being arrested and going prison. The topic of race is very important to me because I know a lot of Black people go through this same cycle. Luckily, I changed, but a lot of the time people get stuck in the system.

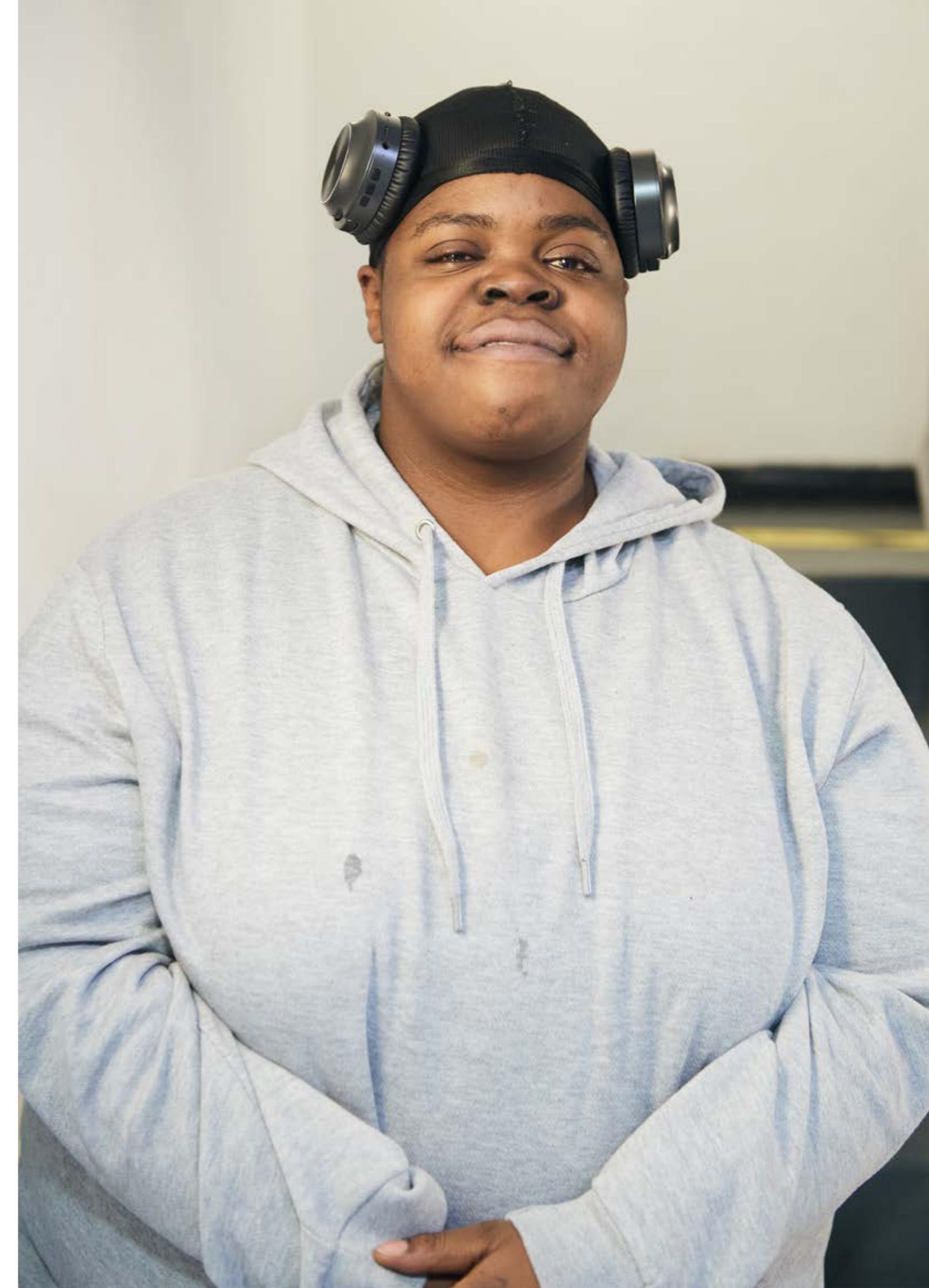
This is the finding I want to highlight. When you see this going on throughout society, and **when you have to move a mountain to get to a place someone can just walk into**, its debilitating. You think the system is fighting against you, **so you'll fight against it.**

I hope this report and these findings are taken to heart and leads to real changes, because many people's lives have been destroyed and halted because of their race. **I would like to see people of colour getting the same opportunities as everyone else** - whether in employment or the criminal justice system. We need to know that the system isn't against us. We need to be given the same shot at life as everyone else in society.

(Karene, Young Justice Advisor)



**'Racist stereotyping means that young adults from racialised communities get targeted for punishment.'**



# WHAT WE DID

Our 2020 report presented findings around the lack of diversity in leadership and decision-making roles in the criminal justice system, and how young people of colour experienced the police, court and prison systems. The report also highlighted the experience of young Muslims and those stereotyped as 'gang members'.

For this report, we listened to a further 73 young people about their experience of race in the criminal justice system, including 1:1 interviews with 15 young people of colour and 17 young people in group discussions. These findings take a closer look at how young people's experience of prison is shaped by their skin colour, ethnicity and/or religion.

## OUR FINDINGS

### Racist stereotyping means that young adults from racialised communities get targeted for punishment.

Across ethnicities, young people from racialised communities told us that in prison, they have to constantly disprove negative stereotypes and believe they get wrongly accused and unfairly punished. Young Black people told us that they are assumed to be more angry, aggressive and violent than everyone else, and as a result, they get punished more frequently, and more harshly than others for the same behaviour.

Young people of colour told us that they don't think enough is being done to combat racism in the criminal justice system.

*"I feel like because of my race, people already have an idea in their head of me before I even get to speak or say my part."*

*"He [a prison officer] is not racist verbally, never been. But his actions towards me are racist."*

*"You're approached with caution if you're bigger and Black by the officers. You're looked at as a totally different person, you're looked at as scary."*

*"I'm more than my conviction and my skin colour."*

### In prison, young people of colour are treated worse than young white people. They get less support and fewer opportunities to work and get their lives back on track.

When we asked young people of colour to pick any three words to describe the criminal justice system, the most common word chosen was '**unfair**'.

Young people from racialised communities in prison reported having requests for basic necessities denied. They also reported being overlooked for jobs, or unfairly sacked from jobs. Young Muslims told us that their requests for support were often met with suspicion. Young Black people told us that they are de-prioritised for healthcare support and denied family visits because of preconceptions about their family ties.

*"You get treated different based on race. It makes the whole situation unfair and then you're uncertain on how you'll be treated."*

*"We don't get an equal chance of jobs within the prison, and we don't get treated equally."*

*"There's less opportunities for people of colour because we always get pre-judged."*

*"I think they think we're 'proper criminals'. White people need help but we're the serious ones."*

### Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and Eastern European young people also face discrimination and stereotyping and receive less support and fewer opportunities.

Young Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people told us that in prison, their distinct ethnicity was often ignored, meaning that they were unaware or unable to access the support available to them, such as access to a Traveller Rep. Yet at the same time, they would be stereotyped as being violent, blamed for starting fights and kept apart from each other.

Eastern European young people who speak English as a second language told us that they were not given enough support to communicate. They needed help to understand instructions or written information, and when they didn't get this, it could lead to being punished for not following instructions or procedures. Eastern European young people also told us they felt like outsiders in the prison, overlooked both by officers and other people in prison.

*"Some Albanians have a bad reputation, I don't shout my mouth. You don't win if you act crazy. I relied on reputation of Albanians that they are tough."*

*"As a traveller you just get judged [...] Who makes sure that there's no bias? I can't write and have to get my padmate to write down [...] We only get information through word of mouth."*

*"Some guy was waiting 5 days for toilet roll. He didn't even speak English."*

### In prison, young people's religious needs aren't properly understood or met.

Many young people of colour felt that prison officers lacked cultural awareness about their religious practices. Young Muslims told us that they had less access to religious leaders, religious broadcasts and group prayer than Christians in the prison. Young Muslims also reported being woken unnecessarily while trying to sleep in the day during Ramadan. We also heard from young Rastafarians who told us that their religion was not formally recognised by the prison and therefore not accommodated at all.

*"There are assumptions about different religions [...] There needs to be more understanding about the importance of prayer."*

*"One time my cell got spun and Quran pages had been ripped out. They're not even allowed to touch it. [...] Extra level of disrespect that wasn't needed."*

*"Does the prison take your religious needs into consideration? "If I was Christian yeah. But if I was to identify with a religion it would be a Rasta – which I've only seen in a foreign national prison."*

### 'Good' prison officers build trust and strong relationships with young adults in prison by treating everyone equally.

Although young people from racialised communities told us they distrusted white prison officers in general, they also told us about individual 'good' officers who they did trust. The young people were quick to praise officers of any colour who publicly treated people of different races equally. They told us that 'good' officers were respectful, friendly, and understanding, and they showed that they cared by taking an interest in young people's cultural background, lifestyle and needs.

*"There is good staff but only a good handful."*

*"As a young Black woman in prison, when I wanted something done, I would go to an officer who looked like me – someone Indian or Black, someone who could sympathise with my situation."*

*A 'Good' Officer is:*

*"Someone that acts like a normal human being."*

*"Someone that doesn't act like a robot."*

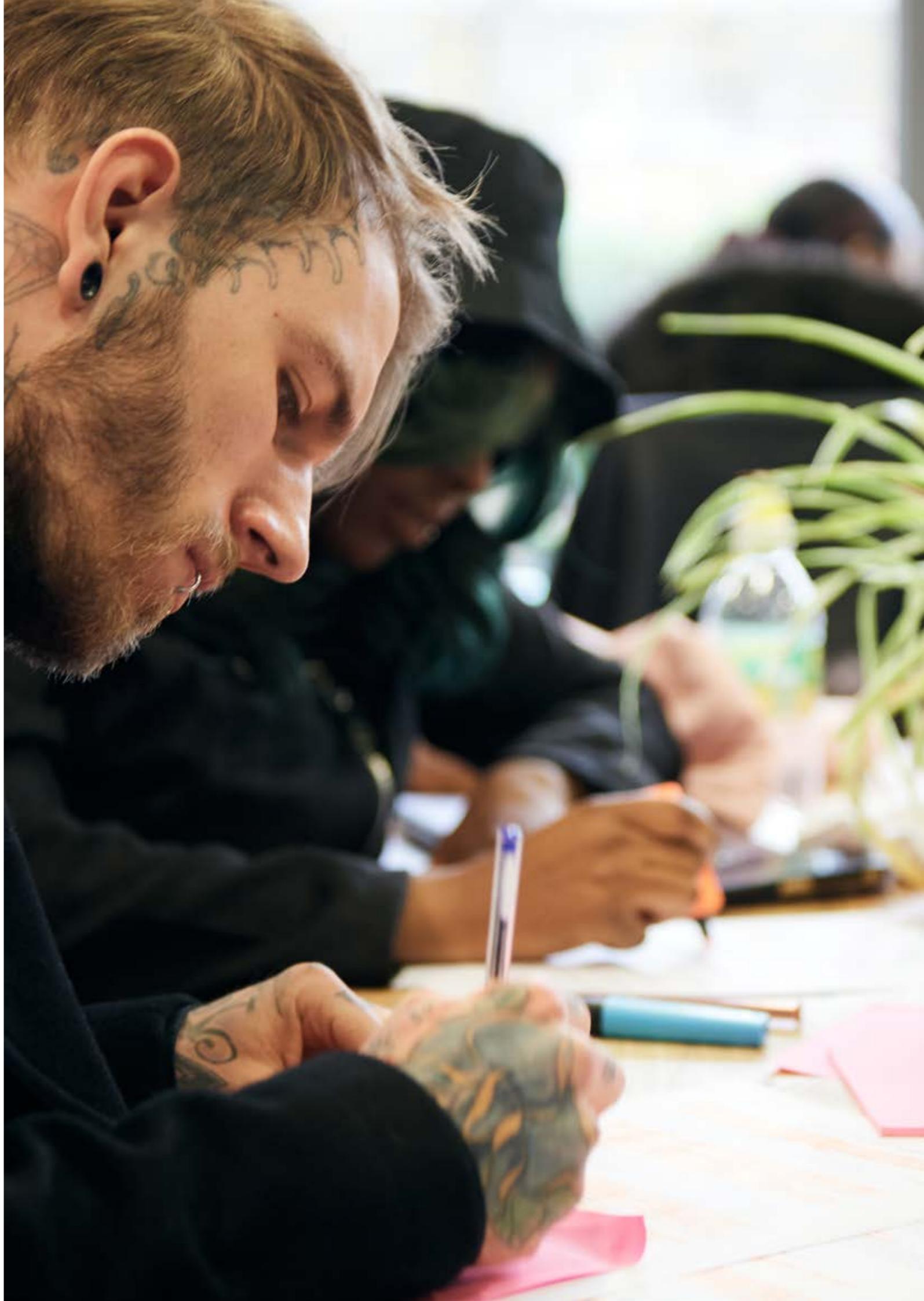
**In the criminal justice system, young women experience a uniquely negative combination of racism and sexism.**

Young women from racialised communities told us that, in the criminal justice system, racism is layered on top of sexist expectations about how they should behave as women. Young women from racialised communities felt that the majority of officers couldn't relate to them and didn't trust them. Both young women from racialised communities and young white women told us that prison officers unfairly targeted young women from racialised communities for punishment.

**"People are afraid of what they don't know."**

**"There was a staff member who repeatedly provoked me, when I retaliated, I was made to look like the aggressor or the angry Black woman. There was a lot of microaggressions especially from certain teachers."**

**"I think being a white female I had far more advantages. I was definitely treated better than minorities and Black people not just by other prisoners but also by prison staff."**





## A SPOTLIGHT ON GANGS

Our 2020 report found that young people of colour believed they were more likely to be recalled because they are stereotyped as 'gang members'. For this report, we looked at the consequences of 'gang' stereotyping on people of colour while they are in prison.

**Young Black and Asian people are assumed to be in gangs and kept apart from each other.**

**Young Muslims who practice their religion are treated like a terror threat and kept apart from each other.**

Young Black people and young Asian men told us that, regardless of why they were in prison, they were often assumed to be in a gang. This was especially true in majority white prisons, where people from racialised communities stood out from the general population more. These young people described having to stay away from each other to avoid being unfairly targeted for punishment.

Young Muslims also experienced being prevented from praying together, as they were assumed to be using prayer as a cover for something illegal. As a result, young Black, Asian and Muslim people were denied opportunities to enjoy group cultural and religious activities and isolated from each other.

***"There's a perception of Black and Brown people coming in only for drugs/gang activity."***

***"When Black people stick together even 5 of us, we get looked at as forming a gang and that stays on record."***

***"Wanted to do Friday prayers – then it went quiet. Friday prayer – you need to read in congregation. It's part of our religion to do this."***

# THE CARE SYSTEM

My name is Matthew. I was born and raised in Reading.

I went into care quite late, at the age of 16, and was only in care for just under a year. In that short period of time, I managed to collect a plethora of bad experiences. Some of these include, but are not limited to, moving into multiple different carers' houses and being forced to engage in cultural practises that I had no interest in. This makes me wonder what it must be like for individuals who have been in the care system for one, five or even ten years.

This is the finding that stands out for me. This, in my opinion, is 100% true. I would be inclined to say it goes even beyond their carers. Being unable to attach through fear of losing them, just like your bio family, can really mess you up. I experienced this. I had several foster carers, some good, some bad. **But all of them were only temporary and that numbed me to the idea of a home I'd be welcome to stay in.** I am 24 now and I still struggle to accept my partner and her family as my own. This is because I know what it feels like to have a family that's there one day and then gone the next.

To address this, I'd like to see a better process before moving a young person into a new home.

Check to see if cultures match. Will the parents support that young person's aspirations and dreams? I feel this is extremely important, as it is vital for children to be placed with carers **they can bond with, and** takes away that 'you're here because you have nowhere else' feeling.

People don't know what they don't know, but I hope this report shows anyone reading it a bit more detail on the goings on in the care system. I hope a couple of people go home and tell their partners or colleagues about this, who then tell their partners and colleagues and **before we know it, most of the UK are aware of what children in care have experienced and their views on the system.** Then change will be swift.

(Matthew, Young Justice Advisor)

**'When young people in care get bounced from home to home, it makes it difficult for them to trust and grow love to their carers'**



## WHAT WE DID

In our 2020 report, we found that there was a stigma associated with being a young person in care. Our findings looked at the links between the care and criminal justice systems, focussing on the institutionalisation and over-policing of young people in care.

In this report, we take a closer look at why the experience of being in care affects young people's self-esteem, relationships, and prospects. We heard from 62 young people about their experiences of the care system, including 15 1:1 interviews and group sessions with 9 young people currently in prison.

## OUR FINDINGS

### Young people in care need much better housing.

Young people told us that unsuitable and unstable living situations were damaging to their safety, mental health, and prospects. We heard from young people who felt forgotten about because of where they'd been housed. Young people in group homes told us that the experience of collective punishment for other people's behaviour made them feel that the system was 'against' them. Young people who had to move frequently, travelling with all their belongings, and not knowing where they were going, felt unloved and 'written off' by the system.

*"I don't think I've ever heard someone say they were in a good housing situation."*

*"I was moved all around and was put in semi-independent living in Hertfordshire. The place got shut down, when I was 18 they had no placement for me and we were just driving around, my stuff got left in the place."*

*"Being in the hostel definitely influenced things [...] if you're not strong minded, or you are easily influenced, or even if you already have them tendencies, you're more likely to get involved because you have more free reign. The carers and guardians don't set up those boundaries and because they're not your parents they just sit round in the office for 8 hours and you're left to your own devices."*

### Care experienced young people felt stigmatised by questions about the link between care and the criminal justice system.

Some young people in prison did see a link between being in care and going to prison, while others saw it the other way – they'd been in prison and that had led them into care. Others felt that the same life events had led them into both systems, but one didn't lead them to the other.

Most notably, in the community, some care experienced young people challenged us for even asking questions about the relationship between care and the criminal justice system. They felt that the question itself evidenced and reinforced the broader stigma children in care face.

*"Care kids have this stigma about them that then leads them to fall into the wrong crowds."*

*"Stigma comes from social workers, staff members, teachers and is embedded in society in general."*

*"I did not enter the criminal justice system after entering care, but I noticed that others in care often ended up entering the criminal justice system. I also felt that I had to constantly prove myself to professionals as they gave off the impression that being in care was my own fault."*

### When young people in care get bounced around, it makes it difficult for them to trust and grow to love their carers.

Care experienced young people told us that they felt they had to earn love from their carers, but could easily lose this love through no fault of their own. Young people told us how damaging this instability was, and that losing carers they had grown to love, especially when they didn't get to say a proper goodbye, made them wary of forming connections with new support workers. Care experienced young adults felt that this impacted on their ability to form stable relationships later in life.

*"Over the time of being in contact with the care system I was in contact with about 20 different social workers."*

*"I have had so many great staff be in my life, then just leave/quit or just move on (all saying they will stay in touch, but they can't and don't) - each time, starting again, each time I give less because I know they will move on also."*

*"When I was 14 loads of things happened. I was arrested and out on bail restriction, so they put me on emergency foster placement. I was there for a month and at the end of the month they moved me far away. I was just placed there without talking to a social or anything."*

### Support workers want to give more and do more for young people in care, but the system doesn't let them.

Many young people described forming strong bonds and loving relationships with their support workers. Even young people who felt that the care system overall had failed them, often identified individual support workers who'd made a big difference in their lives. Young people felt frustrated because they could see that their support workers wanted to give them more time and support than the system allowed for.

*"Despite all the s\*\*\*, there were so many care staff who truly cared and worked hard to keep me safe and happy. Often the care system gets slated, but I met the most amazing and wonderful people in the system."*

*"I had amazing staff in residential who supported me through an immensely difficult time in my life and helped me develop into the human I am today, we had wonderful days out and nights in."*

*"I think there are policies and procedures in the care system that increase the likelihood of negative life outcomes for those in care. Everything becomes a process and children learn about the politics of the care system when in reality, they just need to be cared for. I often felt like a number amongst the statistics instead of a child that was loved."*

### Young people from racialised communities report being housed in places where they experienced racism and isolation.

Young people from racialised communities told us that their race was not sufficiently considered when they were placed in care. They described being moved away from their communities and placed in areas where they didn't feel safe. In white majority places, in particular in rural areas, young people from racialised communities told us that they experienced racism. When they raised their concerns or complained, they didn't feel listened to. These experiences led young people from racialised communities to feel uncared for and sceptical of the care system more generally.

*"As a child in care I was put in danger by being put into a racist area. There was no research into my placement and I was just left to deal with constant abuse."*

*"I was put into a racist area. I was almost run over. I had racist abuse thrown at me on a daily basis and I never received what I was entitled to."*

## **Young people feel their aspirations are not encouraged.**

Some young people felt that care system had given them access to better opportunities and more resources than they would otherwise have had, but young people were also clear that they were not encouraged to be ambitious for themselves. Care experienced young people felt the system was solely focussed on supporting them to live independently. They wanted more support to break into arts and creative industries, to follow their passions and dream big.

*"I do not feel like they helped with future progress. There were things that the key workers tried, like teaching skills for around the house like cooking but as for my future [...] I feel like they put me on my path and at that time my path was to work at Boots [high street pharmacy]."*

*"Opportunities are made available, but they are very mainstream. For creatives and ambitious people there aren't that many options. I think if you just want a career in an office then that's all they'll support."*

*"I would have considered an apprenticeship and think they are a good opportunity, but I was never aware that it was an option for me."*

## **Young people in care are expected to be adults before they are.**

Care experienced young people described having to grow up fast and learn to be self-reliant at a young age. While some young people saw a positive in this, many didn't. Interviewees pointed to neuroscientific research which shows that rational thinking doesn't fully develop until 25. They told us they wanted and needed a safety net for longer. They explained that when young adults have to navigate adult life without support, the challenges they face can escalate more quickly, leading to debt, homelessness, isolation and for some, contact with the criminal justice system.

*"The label of LAC or care leaver opens many doors as well as causing stereotyping and minimal aspiration due to being thrown into adult life as a child essentially."*

*"The age you get released from care should be different. At 18 you're still vulnerable."*

*"My biggest challenge was independency [...] I can't do what makes me happy because I don't have a fallback. The jobs I would like to do don't pay enough to cover bills. If I wasn't in care, I might have a fallback."*

*"At 18, I'd not lived with my mum or had contact with her since I was 14. I was sent back to live on her sofa. I was told I'd get help and to this day (I'm now 20) I haven't had any additional support."*



# MENTAL HEALTH AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

I'm Frankie. I'm 30 and I'm from Kings Lynn.

I'm interested in our mental health in criminal justice priority because I have mental health issues myself. I have been in the mental health system since I was 8 years old. To this day, I still don't have a proper diagnosis.

From my own experience, I know that sometimes mental health issues can put young people in contact with the criminal justice system. When I was 11, I was arrested for the first time for shoplifting. They didn't charge me then, but it got more serious when I was in college. At 19, when a relationship ended badly, I was back in contact with the police. Over the next three years I received a caution and two suspended sentences. Me, my mum, and support workers all thought I was going prison.

This finding stood out to me because this has been my experience. There isn't enough therapy support out there. Mostly they put you on medication and send you on your way without support. You have to fight to get support, even on the outside. I waited years for the right support, and nearly ended up in prison myself. **I don't want to see young people end up in prison because they don't have to get the right mental health support in place.**

I hope this report helps you understand young people's experience of mental health and criminal justice. I want to see the system improve, so that young people can get the right support before they end up in prison or worse.

(Frankie, Young Justice Advisor)

**'The mental health support young people get, when they get it, isn't enough.'**



## WHAT WE DID

In our 2020 report, we found that some specific aspects of living in prison were particularly damaging to young people's mental health. We made recommendations designed to combat these aspects of prison life – in particular, isolation, loneliness, 23 hour lock up and a lack of contact with family and friends. Then the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and lockdowns in the community and prisons meant the opposite happened – more 23 hour lock up, more isolation, less meaningful activity, mental health support and family contact. So, for this report, we looked at how prison and the pandemic has affected young people's mental health.

In total, we heard from 141 young people about their experiences of mental health and the criminal justice system. This included 17 1:1 interviews and 53 survey responses from people both in the community and currently in prison. Of these 70 people, 61 told us that they were diagnosed or identified as neurodivergent, suffering from a mental health condition or both. We also held group sessions with 71 young people currently in prisons that had recently been in lockdown.

## OUR FINDINGS

### The criminal justice system traumatises young people.

Young people told us that they had been traumatised by their interactions with the police and their time in prison. This was true both for young people with underlying mental health conditions and those without. Some young people had PTSD because of trauma they experienced in prison. Young people told us that living through the pandemic in prison has brought further trauma, caused by extended periods of isolation and fear, without any face-to-face mental health support.

*"There's a public humiliation side of [being arrested] that can really add to people's mental health."*

*"I have gained PTSD and feel on edge and fearful of the justice system, as I feel it makes you feel like an animal and a criminal even if you have not committed a crime."*

*"Governor put on tv – MH [Mental Health] has been reduced since covid!!! That's a lie!! The only reason it's down is because you're not seeing us!!!! The people cutting themselves behind closed*

### Mental health support is seen as a luxury in the prison system.

Young people reported not being taken seriously when they told prison staff about their mental health conditions and needs. They explained that prison officers expect most people in prison to have some mental health condition, and so mental ill health has become normalised, which means mental health support is not prioritised. Young people described having to be in crisis in order to get help, especially during lockdowns.

Young people who had had mental health support before imprisonment, told us that it had increased their ability to cope with life in prison, demonstrating the value of non-crisis support when it is available.

*"I think the justice system is okay at dealing with mental health disorders that become problematic for them [...] but they're completely useless when it comes to 95 percent of mental health, problems are overlooked – things like PTSD, anxiety, depression and so on. Unless it becomes a problem and someone is harming themselves or attempting to take their life, then they step in with protocol."*

*"You have to be extreme or you're on a waiting list."*

*"I have been here 6 months and I've had no one see if I need help or come to check on me [...] I try and ask but nothing gets done."*

### In prison, young people who need mental health support often end up getting punished instead.

Young people described a system that pays lip service to mental health support. Young people – in particular young Black people – described being punished for being angry or aggressive while in crisis, rather than receiving support for the underlying mental health condition that was causing their behaviour.

*"I feel that someone who has mental health is just seen as bad."*

*"[We] are not taken seriously when it comes to mental health. We are seen as aggressive."*

### It is too hard to get mental health support in prison. Some people just give up trying.

Young people felt that prison staff on the wings act as gatekeepers to mental health support. They felt frustrated at having to plead with officers for access to healthcare and felt that these requests were often not believed, lost or ignored. Young people told us that the only way to get mental health support was to be proactive and seek it out themselves, although even then, they reported support being slow to come and inconsistent. They told us that process of seeking out mental health support can take so long that it arrives too late, especially during lockdowns, when almost all non-urgent face to face support ceased.

*"They don't advertise it, no one comes to you."*

*"You feel like you are not taken seriously."*

*"They'll see you randomly. But by time they see you you're not even feeling that way anymore. I've dealt with that crisis. But there's some people that can't figure a way around it and it gets really bad."*

### The mental health support young people get, when they get it, isn't enough.

Young people told us that they felt prison staff treated everyone with a mental health need the same. They explained that they were more likely to be prescribed medication and/or inappropriately referred to peer support services instead of being offered the clinical, therapeutic support they believed they needed.

*"There's an overarching theme of treating everyone with 'mental health' in a one size fits all way. Regardless of your condition you are treated the same."*

*"I spoke to someone from mental health while I have been here [in prison] and they just gave me a colouring book."*

*"I had to argue a bit with my probation officer when I was released as to how much support I needed. It was a very cutthroat approach they were taking with me."*

## Racist stereotypes make it even harder for young people of colour to get mental health support.

Young people from racialised communities told us that experiencing racism is traumatising. They pointed out that on top of this, it is harder for them to maintain good mental health, because in general, they receive less support and fewer opportunities. Yet racist stereotyping by gatekeepers – such as beliefs that Black people are more resilient, or Muslim women are introverted – also made it harder for young people from racialised communities to access mental health support.

**"As a Black woman you are often pushed to the back of [the] queue because you're seen as being able to handle more."**

**"They viewed me as a threat and as violent from the outset. They also assumed I could handle greater adversity."**

**"You always hear 'you fit the description' as justification to traumatisise. Even when you know your rights, they don't like it. They accuse you of being angry."**

## Isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic has broken family ties and damaged young people's mental health.

Young people told us that being locked in their cells for 23 hours a day for months on end in the pandemic led them to feel isolated, depressed and anxious. Young people described feeling cut off from their family, because they were unable to visit them during the pandemic, and phone access was more limited. They told us that most face-to-face mental health support services ceasing during this time, which cut off access to this vital support when they needed more of it, not less.

How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your mental health while in prison?

**"Very depressing. Too much time to think."**

**"No extra support with mental health issues."**

**"Family issues during the pandemic what I cannot control."**

**"Lonely experience."**

**"Only getting an hour to shower and to have a call with families and usually waiting 30 minutes to have a phone call."**



## A SPOTLIGHT ON NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodivergent conditions include **autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury, learning difficulties and disabilities**. There isn't yet enough data to know for sure, but it is estimated that about half of the current prison population may have a neurodivergent condition that affects their interactions with other people. That tallies with our research. Approximately half of the interviewees in prison who we spoke to about this topic, told us that believed they had a neurodivergent condition (either diagnosed or undiagnosed).

**The criminal justice system doesn't understand neurodiverse young people's behaviour and in prison their needs aren't met.**

Neurodiverse young people in prison told us that they did not feel that their conditions were understood or accommodated. Neurodiverse young people said they found it difficult to explain the impact of their condition on their behaviour, or easily express their needs in a way prison staff would understand. In prison, neurodiverse young people reported feeling confused about what was happening to them and why, in particular around changes to their routine, such as the 23-hour lock ups during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**"I was assaulted by the police for things that are indicative of my autism, like not being touched by a stranger."**

**"Not asked about autism or Asperger's. They ask if you have mental health but don't ask about what the needs are, for example, that if your routine changes, you're going to act up."**

<sup>1</sup>"Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System: a review of evidence, published by the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. <https://www.justiceinspectortates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf>. See Russell Webster for a summary of the

# LIFE AFTER PRISON

My name is Fatmata, but everyone calls me Fats. I am originally from London but found my new start in Birmingham, five years strong now.

When I was eighteen, I went to prison for three and a half years. I believe without my own strength and willpower to ensure I had security and support once released, my "cycle" of reoffending would have most definitely continued. Important things that were the responsibility of staff and professionals were left to me. I prepared myself, supported and guided myself to where I am today - from housing and finances to career opportunities, relationships, and family. This is why I take a keen interest in our life after prison priority. I think the criminal justice system has failed to recognise the importance of its role in the rehabilitation of young people. It should and could play a major part - if it did, it could make all the difference.

These are the two findings that stood out to me the most. Many of us young people have been through the system and come out the other end, and alone we created our future. Five years after leaving prison, I deal with ongoing issues. Young people leaving now are still fighting that battle today. They carry all that weight on their shoulders and then are expected to never make a mistake again.

I think we need to improve the relationship between young adults and their probation workers. The relationship should be in place months before release to create a level of understanding, a bond and trust between both parties in order for rehabilitation to be successful. I think this solution will have the most impact because involving the young person within their journey allowing them to have opinions and a voice on what impacts them and how it can be avoided.

I hope that people reading our report see the common themes – that **simple changes to the system will have big positive impacts**. I want people reading this report to think about what they can do in their work to bring about these positive changes. **We all need to be able to take responsibility**, accept criticism and learn from our mistakes. I have spoken to so many young adults for this project, and I have seen their will to change and to make a difference in their lives. They just need the consistent, effective support and guidance they deserve.

(Fats, Young Justice Advisor)

**'Many young people feel it is down to them alone to make success over their life after prison.'**

**'Young people receive better rehabilitation support from charities and the voluntary sector than from the prison or probation.'**



## WHAT WE DID

In our previous report, we sought to gain an understanding of what support young adults felt they needed to help them resettle after release and to explore what support was available. This time, following the pandemic and the reunification of the probation system in June 2021, we wanted to see what had changed. We also looked at what support was available for young people to help them prepare before release, and listened to their reflections on what it's like to return to the community after prison.

In total, we heard from 149 young people about their expectations and experiences of life after prison. This included 32 1:1 interviews and 49 survey responses from young people currently in prison or recently released. We also held group sessions with 68 young people currently in prison.

## OUR FINDINGS

### There is a lack of basic information given to young people to help them prepare for release.

In our 2020 report, we found that there was a lack of information available to young adults upon release. The young adults we spoke to for this report, told us that this is still the case. They described receiving too little information too late, and in some cases, not at all. They pointed out that they need more information earlier before they leave prison to help them prepare for release.

*"I know there's a lot of different organisations out there, but who they are and what they do and how they can help me – it's something I've always had trouble finding out."*

*"It was like I was just thrown out to the wolves."*

*"The resettlement team should visit prisoners sooner and prepare them for release. I wish that probation had been more helpful, and that there was more information provided about housing options."*

### Many young people feel it is down to them alone to make a success of their life after prison.

Young people told us that because they had found it hard to access support on release, or expected to find it hard, they believed self-motivation was the key to a successful life after prison. Many young people told us they wanted to build their own business so that they could be self-reliant and financially independent after prison.

*"Come out with a plan. Don't rely on the system to have your back."*

*"Never leave things to other people. If you want something, go out and get it yourself. You are the only person you can truly rely on."*

*"Be a business owner [...] Successful business owners, their thinking and perspective are inspiring."*

### Young people have lost faith in the probation system but have a clear understanding of what needs to change.

Young people told us that the resettlement process started too late, and described not feeling involved in their resettlement plans. Some young people left prison having not yet met their resettlement worker. They told us that they wanted resettlement workers who spent time with them, so that they could build trusting relationships. Young people wanted resettlement workers who understood their cultural backgrounds and the reality of their lives.

*"Don't get enough time to spend with key workers. You need to build a bond with the officer. But not time to build relationship. Build a rapport."*

*"There should be an end-to-end management of resettlement. There should be a checklist of certain things that your worker helps you with. Someone who's invested in your successful rehabilitation as much as they are in your court order. You could do a few steps before people leave prison."*

*"They need to understand you. They need to not have a base plan that they try to make work for everyone because it's not going to work for everyone."*

### Young people receive better rehabilitation support from charities and the voluntary sector than from the prison or probation.

Young people felt positive about the support offered by charities voluntary sector organisations. Young people told us that these organisations provided them with more opportunities, support that was actually tailored to their needs and aspirations, they also helped them navigate the practical and emotional challenges of leaving prison. They told us that workers from these organisations were more sympathetic and understood their lives and needs.

*"Charities make the most impact [...] the justice system itself is useless."*

*"I big up everyone at Switchback! I was en route back to jail, and they grabbed me at the right time... Because my housing was unstable, probation, my meetings and all that was not looking good. She [probation officer] was saying: 'you can end up recalled'. At Switchback, you got some serious people working with you. It all just went up from there."*

*"St Mungo's have been a massive help."*

*"Key4life charity has really helped me with housing and helping me to be more regulated and responsible."*

### The Covid-19 pandemic has made it even harder for young people to get control of their lives after prison.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, more resources to help young people navigate resettlement went online, but overall, young people still found the support available confusing and hard to access. Young people told us that they'd had less opportunity to prepare for life after prison during the pandemic – due to lockdowns, they had less contact with probation and resettlement officers, and often missed out on taking courses, going to a Cat D prison and out on ROTL prior to release.

*"Coming out in the middle of a pandemic felt weird because it was a prison after prison. I didn't get the opportunity for D-Cat, so I felt trapped when I came out."*

*"There were courses I was meant to do, but because of covid I haven't had a chance to do them [...] I'm in a Cat-B prison. I should have been in a Cat-C jail, being re-categorised to Cat-D! I've been here for nearly 8 months. I should have been out of here ages ago [...] the delay in re-categorising me is because I've not completed the relevant courses."*

## The challenges of leaving prison can be damaging to young people's mental health.

Young people described feeling overwhelmed and isolated during the transition from prison to the community. Some young people told us they were mentally unprepared for release and felt confused about how to live in the outside world. This was worst for young people without family support nearby and without a progression plan in place.

**"Everyone thinks that its only happening to them."**

**"A lot of sorrow in prison was around not knowing what I could do or wanted to do once leaving prison."**

**"For me coming out was really overwhelming. I didn't really know where I stood in this world and what I was supposed to do with my next steps. There was no progression plan in place, so I was kind of stuck and had to just do it on my own. That was where I was really struggling. It started to deteriorate my mental health. I became really depressed, something that I haven't struggled with previously."**



## A SPOTLIGHT ON RECALL

Young adults are more likely to be recalled than older adults, and young adults from racialised communities are more likely to be recalled than other young adults. According to the Government's Offender Management Statistics, in 2021, the prison population who had been recalled to custody reached an all-time high.<sup>2</sup>

**Many young adults leaving prison feel like their license conditions set them up to fail, and recall is the norm.**

Young people described leaving prison on impractical and complicated license conditions that left them feeling recall would be inevitable. This was especially true for young people from racialised communities, in particular those stereotyped as 'gang' members.

Young people described being released homeless, jobless, or to a hostel that was too far away for them to see the people they loved. Young people told us about license conditions that prevented them from returning to the area they came from, meaning they had no access to support from family and friends.

Young people told us that if they arrived ten minutes late for a probation appointment for good reason, they were given no leeway and automatically recalled. When they did speak to probation, the focus was on not committing crimes, instead of discussing the support available to them.

**"Everything was about what I couldn't do rather than help to support me in what I could do."**

**"They're quick to punish, but very slow to help in any meaningful way."**

**"I'll be left with anxiety, the thought of recall will be on my mind constantly, I will struggle in social situations."**

<sup>2</sup>'Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2021', published 27 January 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2021/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2021#fn:3>

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

## RACE AND RACISM

### 1) Prison and police officers should receive higher quality anti-racism training. For prison officers, this means anti-racism training in their initial training (POELT) and regularly throughout their careers.

In our 2020 report, we made several recommendations around increasing diversity in the criminal justice system, so that people of colour are represented in leadership roles and throughout the system. We also recommended cultural diversity training for prison staff which included real life scenarios. Since then, HMPPS has introduced a Race Action Programme with a focus on encouraging greater diversity and cultural competency among HMPPS staff.

As part of its Race Action Programme, we recommend that HMPPS involves young adults from racialised communities with lived experience of the criminal justice system in developing its cultural competency training.

Rather than delivering this training in-house, we recommend that HMPPS engages with charities and local grassroots organisations led by people of colour in each region of the country, to co-deliver this training, so that they can engage directly with prison officers, to help them understand the cultures and communities in their area.

Prison officers should be required to undergo this training during POELT. As an ongoing professional development requirement, they should also undergo 10+ hours of further anti-racism training every year. This ongoing requirement will ensure that tackling racism remains a priority for HMPPS.

To combat racism in policing, we recommend that Chief Constables/Commissioners responsible for each police force take the same steps to develop anti-racism training programmes for their regions.

### 2) Celebrate 'good' prison officers, as nominated by young people of colour in the prison.

In our previous report, we recommended the creation of initiatives that focus on building relationships between prison officers and young people of colour in the prison. Here we are recommending how HMPPS can incentivise prison officers to be proactive in building these relationships.

We recommend that HMPPS take steps to foster stronger relationships between prison staff and young people from racialised communities, by showing that the prison system values prison officers who demonstrate a commitment to equality and tackling racism.

We propose that a council of young people of colour in the prison nominates prison officers who demonstrate these values on a regular basis. These nominated officers should be formally celebrated by the Governor and senior management team.

Prison officers who are celebrated should be supported in their careers and considered for promotion to encourage them to stay in the prison service. They should also be invited to contribute their experience during anti-racism training for their colleagues and at POELT.

While we recommend that this initiative is rolled out across the prison estate, it will be of particular benefit in prisons with majority white populations (most prisons).

### 3) Every prison should produce quarterly statistics, showing the demographics of who in the prison is receiving mental health support and who is benefiting from opportunities available.

In our research, we learnt that young people from racialised communities find it harder to access mental health support, education, training, and work opportunities in prison than their white peers. We are recommending that HMPPS collect and publish more data to shine a light on these inequalities.

Alongside publishing quarterly demographic data about each prison's population, we recommend that each prison publishes demographic data about who is receiving clinical mental health support, who has a job and who is in education or training.

Where the data shows that white people are disproportionately benefiting from any services or opportunities in the prison, this should be reported to HMIP. In consultation with young adults from racialised communities with lived experience of the criminal justice system, HMIP should make recommendations on what steps the prison needs to take to tackle this race inequality.

Similarly, there is a lack of intersectional data about how women from racialised communities experience the criminal justice system compared to white women, which in itself prevents us from fully understanding the inequalities they experience. We recommend that women are prioritised, by rolling out this new data collection and process of accountability across the women's estate first.

# THE CARE SYSTEM

In our 2020 report, we focussed our recommendations on tackling the over-policing and criminalisation of young people in care. However, as the recommendations below show, our care experienced advisors are passionate about looking beyond issues linked to the criminal justice system, to inform reform across the Care system.

**Leaders Unlocked is planning to establish a new team of Young Care Advisors to engage on the broad range of issues that matter to care experienced young people.**

## 1. Prioritise improved housing for young people in care.

The current Independent Review of Children's Social Care should include a specific review of the housing crisis for children in care.

The Review should solicit testimony from care experienced young people about how their housing in care affected them, their relationships, prospects, and mental health. This review should ensure that it gathers reports from young people from racialised communities housed outside large urban areas.

In its final report, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care should include specific recommendations improving housing for young people in care.

## 2. Care orders should be extended to last until a young person's 25th birthday.

We recommend that England's Local Authorities gives better, longer term support for young people as they transition into adulthood. We propose that the Children's Commissioner co-develops plans that outline Local Authority obligations to young people aged 18-25 in consultation with young care-experienced adults.

Just as young people who have parental support rely on this well into young adulthood, we recommend that Local Authorities provide young people in their care with a similar safety net to fall back on until they are 25. This will prevent young people from navigating the challenges of early adulthood alone and, in some cases, prevent contact with the criminal justice system. It will also give young people the means to seek opportunities and build careers that are unaffordable or otherwise out of reach.

As some young people may be ready to leave the care system sooner, for young people aged 21 or over, the order could be lifted by mutual consent.

## 3. Central Government, Local Authorities and industry leaders should create programmes that provide financially accessible opportunities for care experienced young people to build the careers of their dreams.

We recommend that Central Government, Local Authorities, and industry leaders across the private, public, and voluntary sectors rebuild the landscape for care experienced young people, by investing in training programmes and apprenticeships for care experienced young people across all sectors.

We propose that the Government create tax incentives and DLUHC grants that incentivise organisations to create these programmes.

We envisage organisations in the arts, sports, science, as well as medical institutions, city firms and the civil service taking advantage of these incentives to create a financially viable opportunities for care experienced young people to gain experience and a foot in the door in the career of their dreams.

# MENTAL HEALTH

## 1) HMPPS should work with young adults with lived experience, to enhance prison staff training, and create a trauma-informed prison culture.

In our 2020 report, we recommended training for prison staff to increase their understanding of mental health, particularly in emergencies. We recommended this training should be co-designed with young adults with experience of prison.

We are now recommending that HMPPS develops a programme of enhanced training for prison staff, to improve their understanding of the range of mental health needs and neurodivergent conditions experienced by the young people in their care. Prison staff need to understand the important role of therapeutic support in managing mental health conditions, including PTSD, on a daily basis, not just in emergency situations.

We recommend that HMPPS involves young adults with experience of mental ill health and neurodivergent conditions, who have lived experience of the criminal justice system in developing this training to ensure its quality.

## 2) HMPPS should update prison service instructions so that when young adults in prison are in crisis, prison staff don't just manage risk, they get appropriate mental health support and treatment for them.

We recommend that HMPPS updates its prison service instructions, in particular its Safer Custody guidance, to include a focus on supporting young adults in prison to achieve and maintain good mental health.

The current Safer Custody guidance sets out how prisons are expected to manage people with mental illnesses and neurodivergent conditions, including those who may 'exhibit challenging behaviour'. It focusses on how prison staff should manage the risk these people pose to the safety of staff, themselves, and others.

We recommend that the Safer Custody prison service instructions are reviewed and updated, so that they guide prison staff to prioritise and facilitate therapeutic support and activities that promote the individual's wellbeing and comfort, alongside necessary risk management actions.

In our previous report, we recommended increasing the number of external, voluntary organisations offering support services in the prison. We recommend this again here, so that these external services can support the prison to deliver this support and activities.

## 3) The NHS should provide in-depth, face to face clinical mental health assessments for every young adult (18-25).

In our 2020 report, we noted that young adults in prison wanted more time out of their cell for activities that have a positive impact on mental health. Since then, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the opposite happening, with devastating consequences for young adults' mental health. Now more than ever, young adults need access to mental health support.

We recommend that every young adult (18-25) is offered a face-to-face mental health assessment with a professional healthcare worker on their first day in prison, or if they are transferred, on their first day in a new prison.

Given the scale of the damage to young adults' mental health caused by the pandemic and lockdowns, we recommend that the NHS also assesses every young adults in the criminal justice system who hasn't had any mental health support or assessment since the beginning of the pandemic.

<sup>3</sup>Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2021, published 27 January 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2021/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2021#fn:3>

For young adults who need ongoing support and/or medication, assessments should then continue at regular intervals.

**4) Healthcare workers should have a presence on every wing, with 'drop-in' sessions very week.**

We recommend that healthcare workers visit prison wings where young adults are living every week, so that young adults can engage with them directly about their mental health needs. Making healthcare workers visible on the wings each week would encourage young adults to ask for the support they need and give them faith that there is support available.

**5) At induction, the prison should provide every young adult with information on what mental health support services are available in the prison and how to get these.**

We recommend that each prison co-ordinates a taskforce of Safer Custody staff, healthcare workers and young adults in the prison who have relevant roles in the prison (for example Listeners). This taskforce should develop a set of resources explaining what mental health support services are available in the prison and how to access these.

These resources should be provided to every young adult at induction, with easy read versions available and translated versions in languages commonly spoken in the prison.

**3) HMPPS should provide cultural awareness training for probation staff.**

As part of its Race Action Programme, we recommend that HMPPS provides a programme of cultural awareness training for probation staff. This will enable probation officers to better understand the lives and needs of young people leaving prison, to build rapport and earn their trust.

We recommend that HMPPS involves young people, including young people from racialised communities, with experience of recall in developing this training to ensure its quality.

**4) The Probation service should build greater flexibility into probation requirements, to prevent unnecessary recall.**

We recommend that the probation service takes a more proportionate response to minor breaches of license conditions by young people.

A young person's record in attending appointments and courses, meeting curfews, and completing other administrative tasks required of them, should always be viewed in light of their means and the support available to them. For example, where a young person is late to an appointment with their probation officer, or misses one altogether, through no fault of their own, despite making considerable effort to attend on time, this should not lead to automatic recall. Instead, probation officers should be required to demonstrate that there was nothing further they could do to support the young person to make it to the appointment, before the young person is recalled.

**5) HMPPS should make it free at the point of use for people in prison to call their probation officer.**

We recommend that HMPPS prioritises resettlement planning for young adults leaving prison, by making it simpler and easier for them to call their probation officer. Free calls to probation officers will help establish an open line of communication. They will allow young adults more opportunity to develop a trusting relationship with their probation officer before they leave prison.

## LIFE AFTER PRISON

**1) Every Regional Probation Director (RPD) should produce a specific Reducing Reoffending Plan for Young Adults in their region.**

Alongside their wider Reducing Reoffending Plans, we recommend that each Regional Probation Director develops and publishes a specific Reducing Reoffending plans for young adults in their region. RPDs should consult with young adults with experience of recall to develop these plans.

We recommend that these plans are modelled on the youth offending service approach to supporting children. The plans should take a holistic approach and focus on enabling local grassroots charities and voluntary sector organisations to engage with young adults at risk of reoffending and provide the support, opportunities and community that can send them on a better track.

**2) HMPPS should make resources available to young people in prison so that they have the information they need when they leave prison.**

We recommend that HMPPS prioritise making resources available to young people before they leave prison, to help them prepare for their release.

Physical resources should be available for people while they are in prison, alongside any digital resources available on a prison intranet.

General resources, such as the Young Justice Advisors 'Through the Gate' guide to resettlement, should be provided alongside resources developed specifically for each prison. These resources should be developed consultation with young adults who have recently left the prison, and with the local grassroots charities and voluntary sector organisations that provide support to prison leavers.

All resources should be regularly updated so that they stay up to date and accurate.

## ROMAINE'S STORY

When I was in prison, I had thought that my hopes of becoming a youth worker and youth mentor had been ruined.

I was able to get bail from detention and, since being released, I have been working a freelance role for Leaders Unlocked, engaging in various projects and even mentoring others. I am also a sports coach within youth work and have been studying to gain my diploma within youth work, as well as other qualifications and further education.

I applied for the youth work role that I am in now and was given an interview; in the interview I made sure that I projected myself as best I could to give a good impression. I also told them about my offence and how I feel about it and then left. I took the chance and didn't really think I would get the job, but I was proud of my effort and my honesty and it paid off.

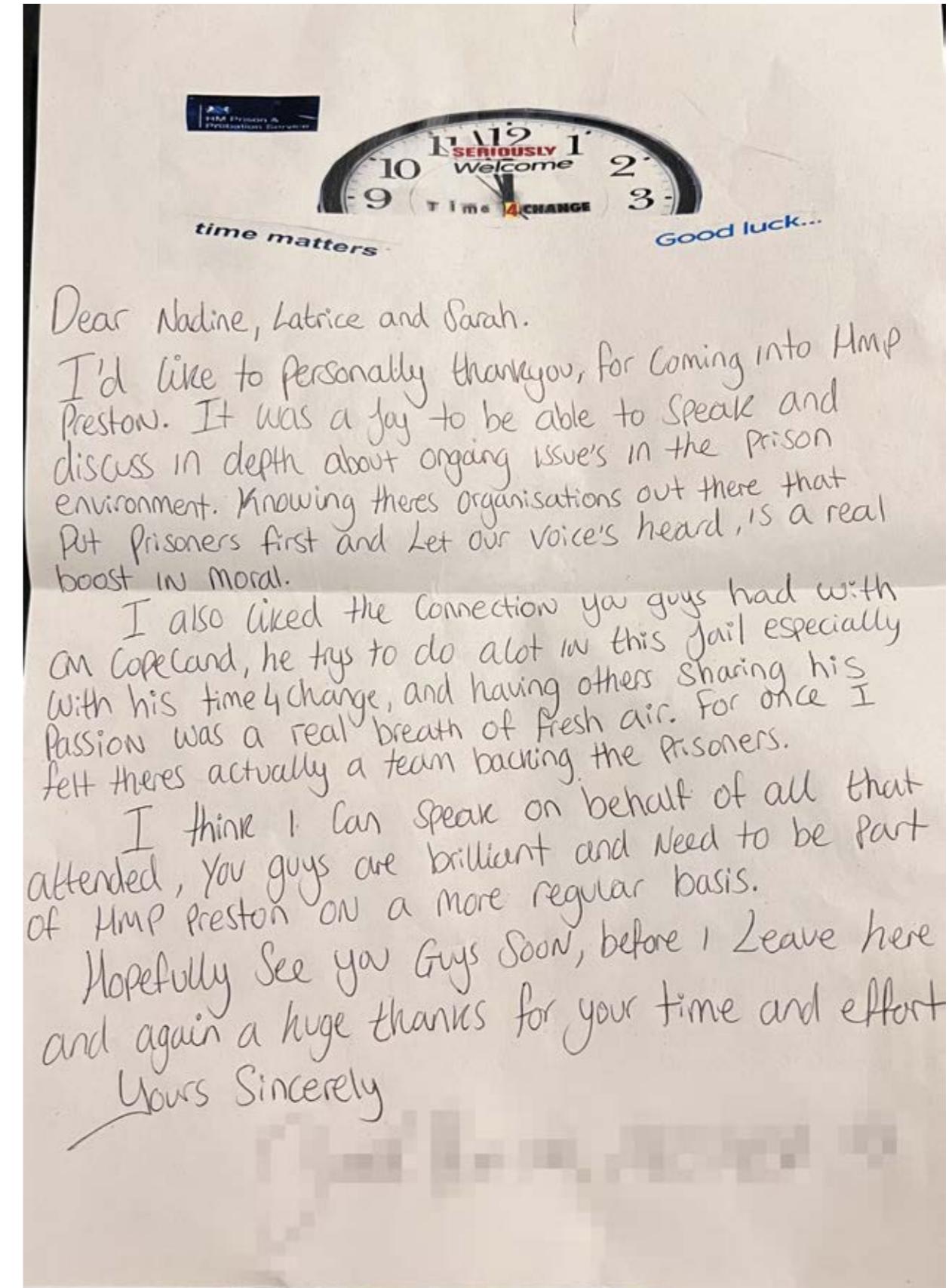
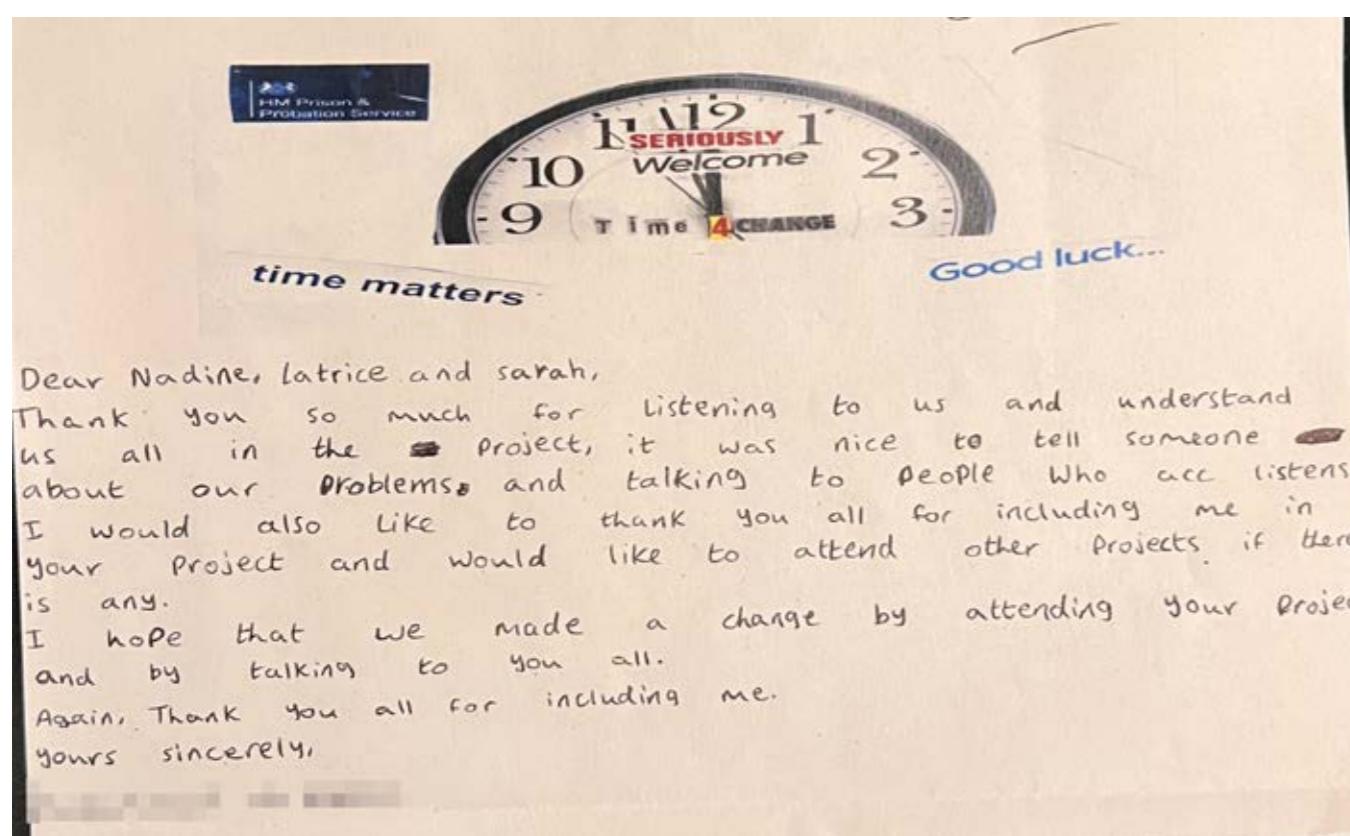
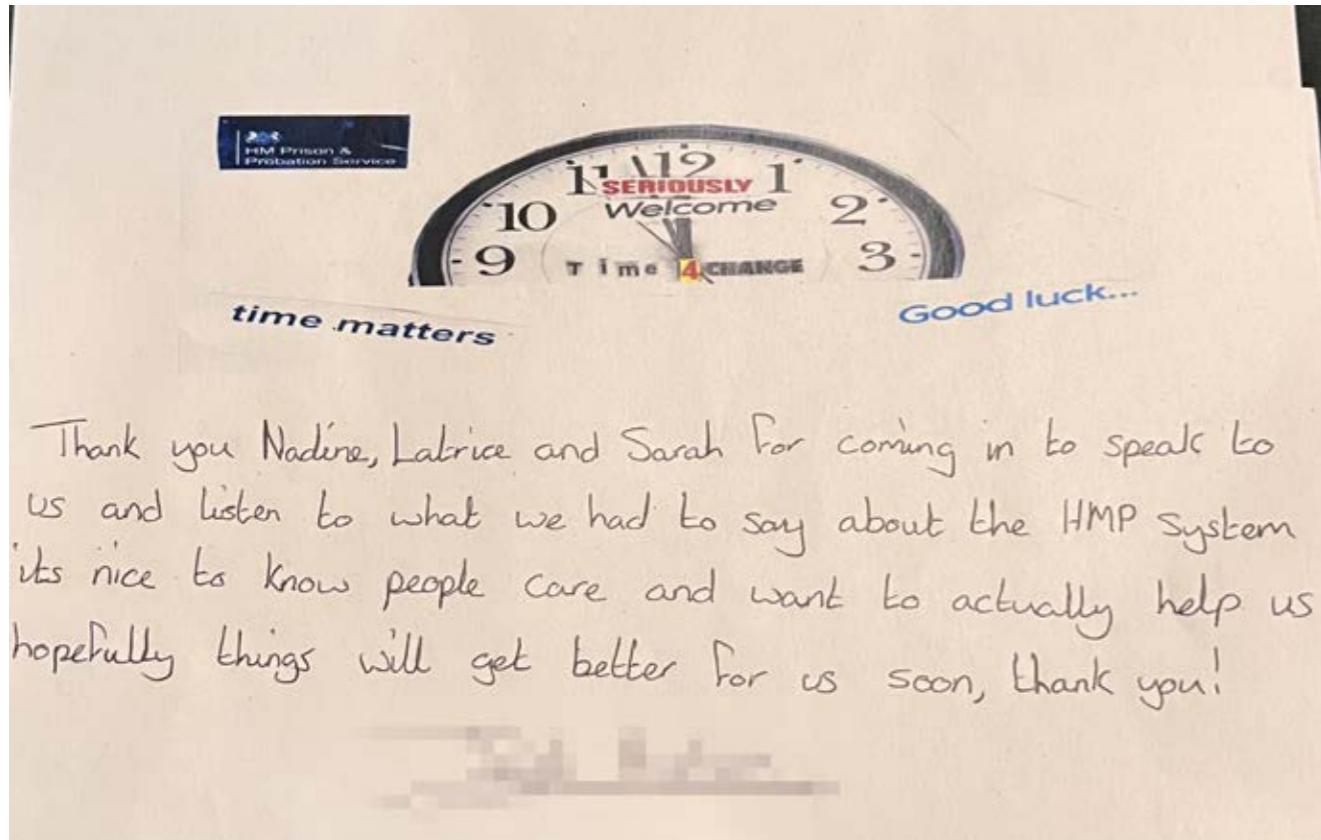
I had a response within days and was told that, despite my conviction, they were willing to give me a chance and that they loved my energy etc. They thought that my experiences, coupled with my energy, personality and my age could be used to bridge a gap with young people within our communities and youth clubs.

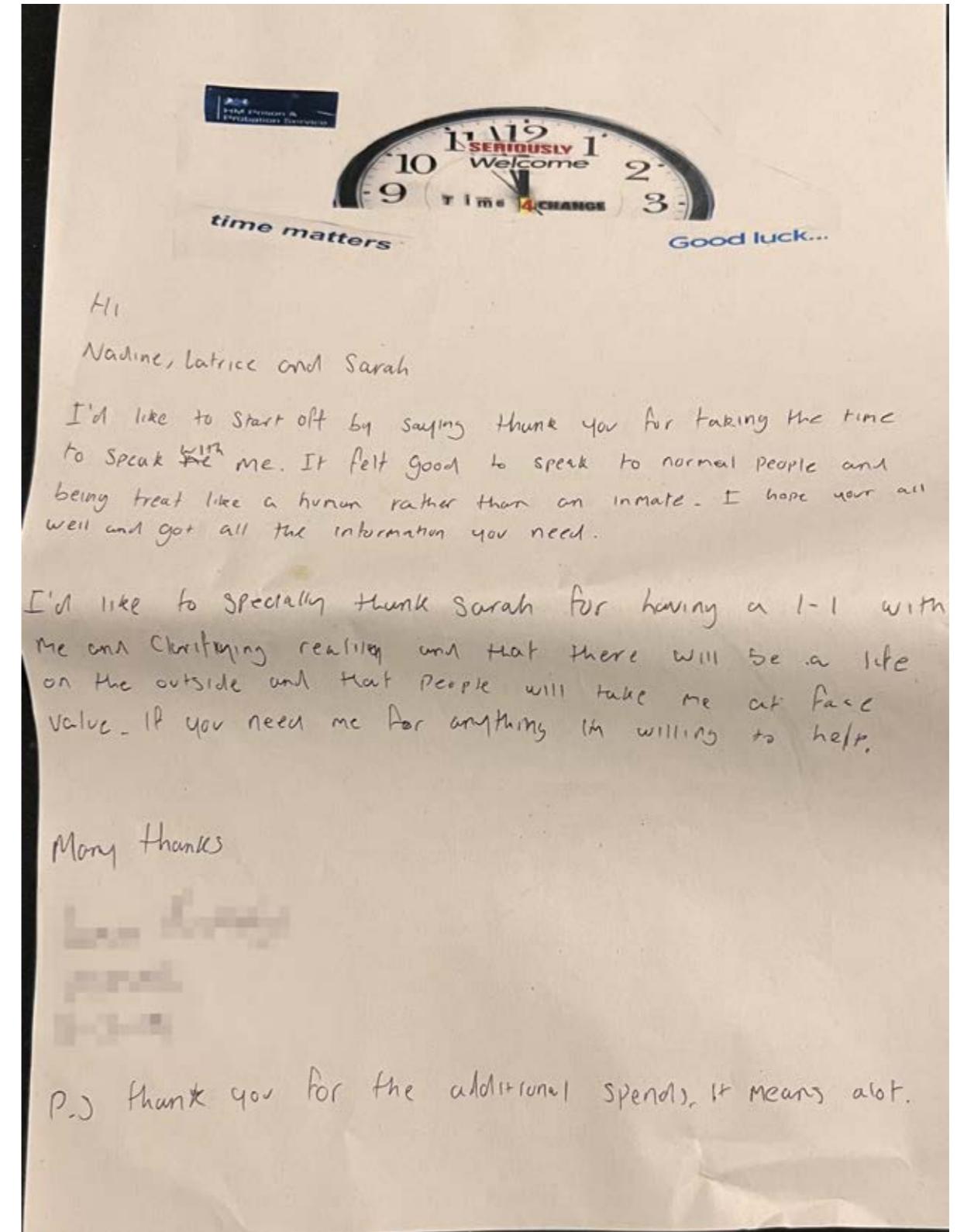
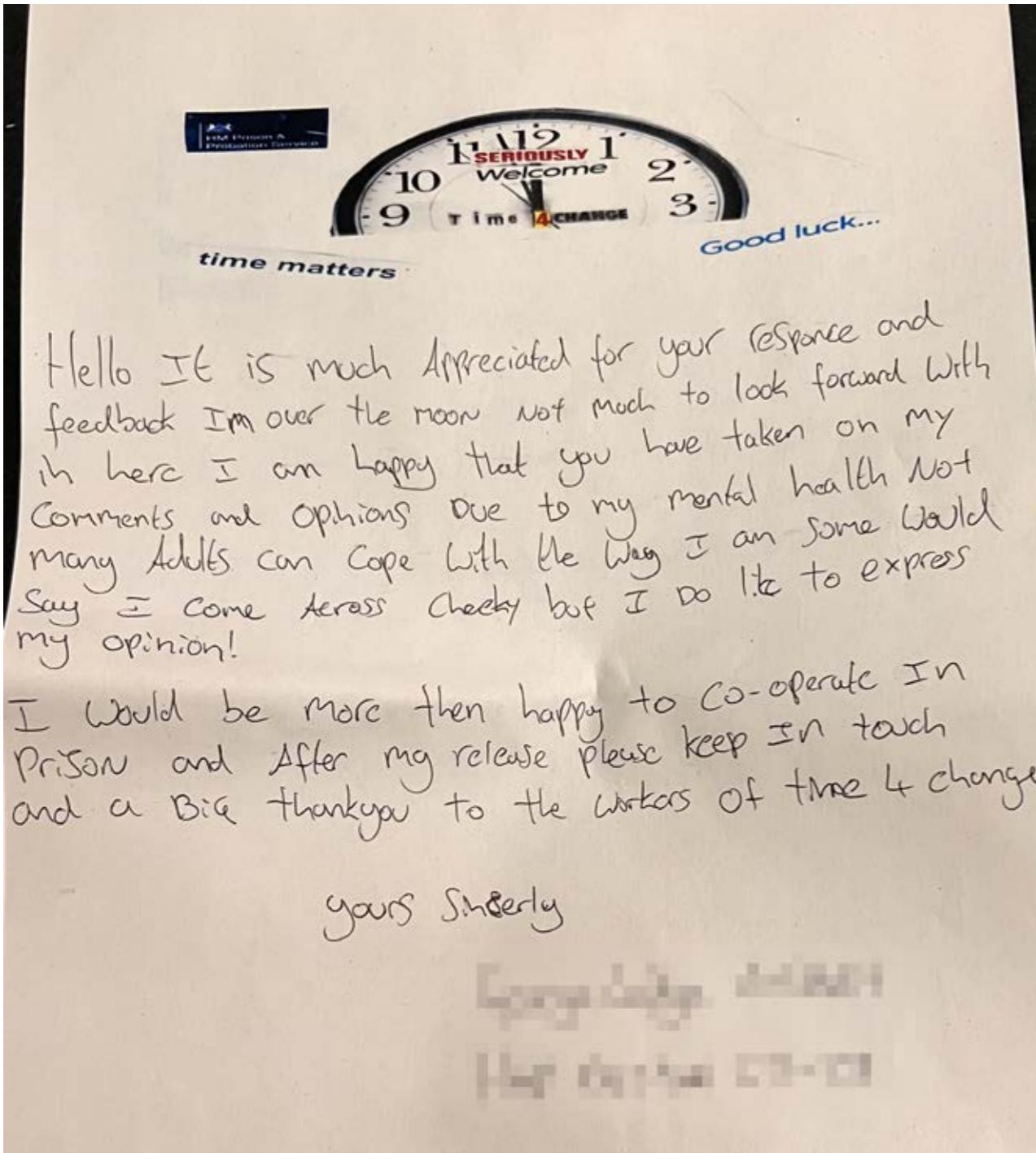
I have been a youth worker for over a year and a half and a young leader and mentor for two years now. I've just recently completed my internship with Leaders Unlocked, running my own creative project and empowering young people to use their voices to shed light on their stories.

What I can tell you from my experiences is to never give up on your dreams, the door will open eventually, just look for the key instead of trying to force it open!



# LETTERS FROM THE YOUNG ADULTS IN HMP PRESTON





# CONCLUSION

We are very grateful to every young person who shared their experiences and views with us for this report.

We are also grateful for the support we received from the prisons and voluntary sector organisations that made it possible for us to reach so many young people.

As ever, thank you to the Young Justice Advisors for their commitment, energy and insights that have taken this work from strength to strength.

In April 2022, the Young Justice Advisors presented their key findings and recommendations to an audience of criminal justice professionals. We thank attendees for their suggestions and offers of support for our ongoing work.

Over the next three years, we plan to establish the Young Justice Advisors as an independent organisation, and extend its work:

- To amplify the voice of young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system among policymakers
- To support policymakers and institutions adopt our recommendations
- To design and deliver youth-led training for practitioners working in the justice system
- To work within prisons to engage with groups of young adults to listen to their views on the system and co-produce solutions.

**Leaders Unlocked is also planning to establish a new team of Young Care Advisors to engage on the broad range of issues that matter to care experienced young people,** looking beyond issues linked to the criminal justice system, to inform reform across the Care system.

If you want more information about working with Leaders Unlocked and the Young Justice Advisors to make real change happen, get in touch with [nadine@leadersunlocked.org](mailto:nadine@leadersunlocked.org)

## OUR RESOURCES

Young Adult Advisors on Criminal Justice: Hearing From Young Adults In The Criminal Justice System, April 2020:

[http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

'Through the Gate' Young Justice Advisors guide to Resettlement:

<https://youngjusticeadvisors.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/YJA-Resettlement-Through-the-gate-2022.pdf>

'Your guide to the female estate' Young Justice Advisors guide for young women in prison:

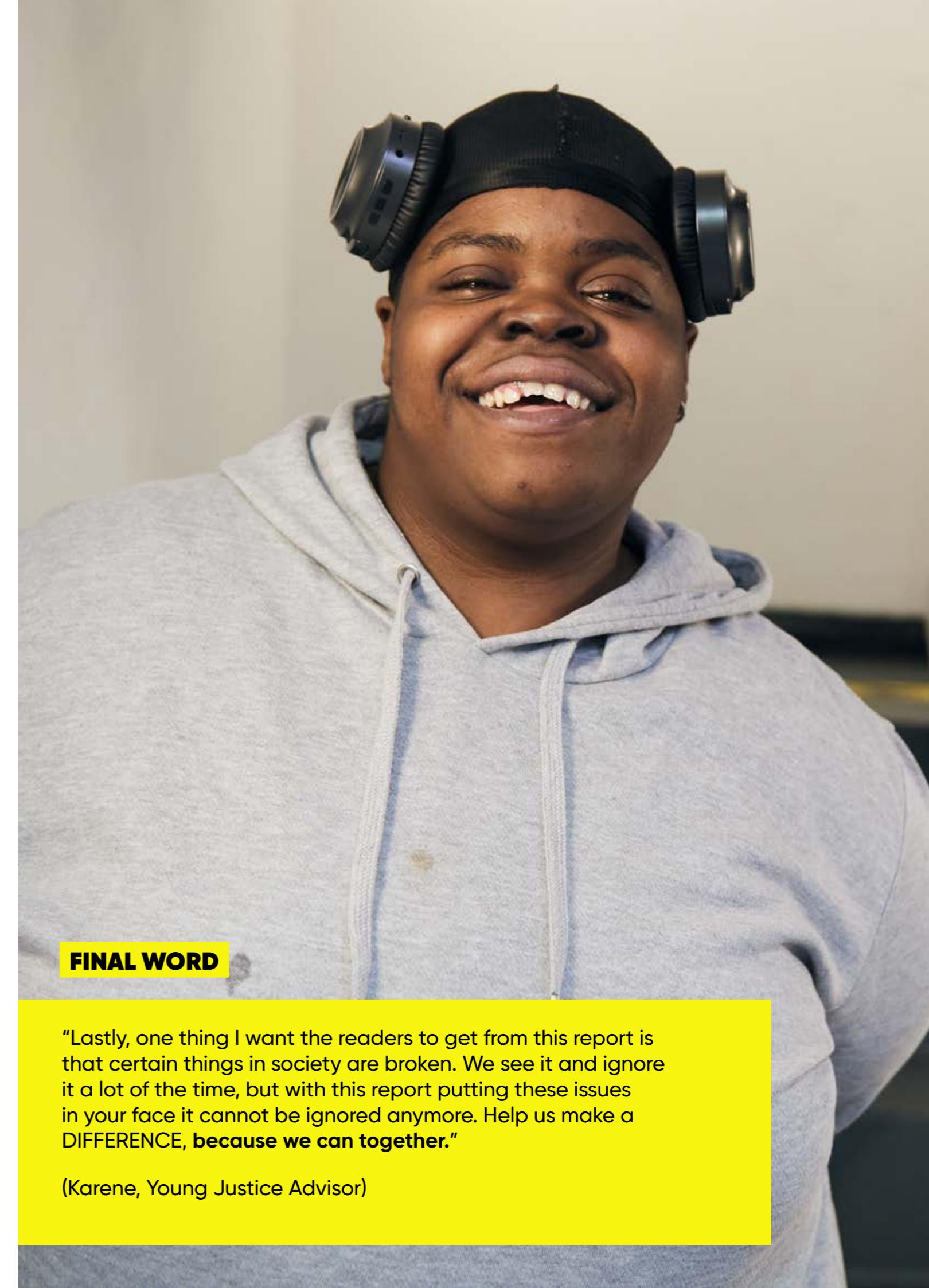
<https://youngjusticeadvisors.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/YJA-Your-guide-to-The-Female-Estate-2022.pdf>

'Your guide to the care system' Young Justice Advisors guide for young people in care:

<https://youngjusticeadvisors.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/YJA-YP-Guide-to-the-Care-System-2022.pdf>

The Young Justice Advisors have created a Hints and Tips page for people working with young adults within the care and justice systems, so that they can learn from young adults about best practice:

<https://youngjusticeadvisors.co.uk/hintstips/>



## FINAL WORD

"Lastly, one thing I want the readers to get from this report is that certain things in society are broken. We see it and ignore it a lot of the time, but with this report putting these issues in your face it cannot be ignored anymore. Help us make a DIFFERENCE, because we can together."

(Karene, Young Justice Advisor)



## CONTACT US

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Written by [Rebecca Hammond](#) and [Nadine Smith](#)

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