

# being **WELL** **BEING** equal



Prioritising the wellbeing of young men and young Black men in the criminal justice system

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the young men who took the time to share their insight, experiences and thoughts with us – it is your vision for a brighter future that we have sought to represent.

Thank you to the Alliance members and our friends and colleagues working tirelessly in the voluntary sector for sharing your views and providing valuable support. Your knowledge, expertise and understanding have been vital in developing this report.

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Finally, thank you to Polly Wright of P Wright Consultancy for developing this report for us.



# Foreword

Before the Covid-19 pandemic our prison system was already on its knees, in desperate need for investment, reform and transformation. However, since the pandemic, many of the long-standing issues have only gotten worse, with the critical effect of this meaning that the prison system is being shoved beyond breaking point. This must worry us ALL - not just those of us working in the sector - because billions of pounds of taxpayer's money are being spent on a system that has proven to be unsafe, ineffective and clearly not value for money. We deserve better and we can have better too, and this report is another timely reminder of the vital importance to deliver dignity and opportunity in a young prisoner's journey to freedom and responsible citizenship.

The government is failing in its duty of care towards young people in our prisons. Following the 23 hour a day lockdown regime placed on people across the prison system during the pandemic - long in place after restrictions were lifted for those of us outside - we have seen the mental health and wellbeing of young people in prison immediately drastically deteriorate, particularly for young Black men in prison aged 18-25, who are significantly overrepresented in the prison system as this report shows. The emotional and psychological toll that the pandemic has had on young men, especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds, is evident. With major staff shortages, and increased overcrowding of prisons, the situation in our prisons is critical.

However, there is still hope and there are scalable solutions too, that we could adopt to ensure the prison system actually delivers a service that safeguards and promotes the wellbeing of the young men it looks after.

**Kenny Imafidon,**  
Co-founder and Managing  
Director of ClearView  
Research Ltd and Spark Inside  
Ambassador.

If we don't, we will only be kidding ourselves if we expect to see the 99% of people who eventually come out of prison transformed and living purposeful lives.

The 'lock em all up and throw away the key' strategy is evidently not working, and neither is it producing the environment we need to see, where the wellbeing of young men, particularly young Black men is prioritised. Positive wellbeing in our prisons is the foundation for people to flourish before they get to the gate and go through it.

I'm also very proud as Spark Inside's first ambassador that I can be part of an organisation that is part of the effective solution to the crisis we find ourselves in. The power of coaching and what it does for people, particularly for those who never would have access to this, is truly life changing. I also know first-hand through a lot of the work I do through My Brothers Keeper, where we voluntarily provide long-term to lifelong mentorship and support to men serving long sentences, the power that consistent and positive relationships can have too to improve the wellbeing and the positive life outcome of those that society ignores and casts out.

I cannot stress enough why the recommendations here should be acted on immediately, but you must read this for yourselves and see the writing is on the wall (or in this case the report) in terms of what we need to do next. This requires not consideration and debate - it necessitates action and determination.



## About Spark Inside

Established in 2012, Spark Inside has worked with over 1000 people who live and work in prisons across London and the South East, using coaching to unlock the potential of individuals and drive culture change in the criminal justice system. Our vision is that the futures of people affected by the criminal justice system are determined by their potential, not their past.

## About the Being Well Being Equal Campaign

We believe that wellbeing support for young men in prison - particularly for young Black men - should be prioritised and should be tailored to meet their specific needs. Young people in prison have untapped potential, but have different needs to older people in prison, and are less likely to be able to access the support they need to flourish and build new lives.

The Being Well Being Equal campaign calls for urgent action from the Government, prison policy-makers and practitioners to:

- ▶ prioritise wellbeing services in prisons for young men and young Black men;
- ▶ tailor wellbeing services to take into account and meet the specific needs of young men in prison and young Black men in prison;
- ▶ provide better support and guidance for professionals in prison working with and caring for young men and young Black men.

## The Being Well Being Equal Alliance

The Being Well Being Equal campaign is driven and informed by a coalition of six voluntary sector organisations providing rehabilitation services and supporting racial equity and wellbeing in prisons.

The Alliance members are:

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Centre for Mental Health | Spark Inside        |
| Clinks                   | Wipers              |
| Race Equality Foundation | Zahid Mubarek Trust |



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# Introduction

**Being Well Being Equal focuses on the wellbeing of young men in custody aged 18 to 25<sup>1</sup> and in particular highlights the experiences of young Black men, who are significantly overrepresented in the prison system<sup>2</sup>.**

The report presents a consolidation of the research, policy and practice concerned with the wellbeing of young men in custody, as well as insight from expert organisations and, most importantly, young men themselves. It is hoped, that by bringing together the evidence, this report will enable practitioners, policy makers and commissioners to have a more informed understanding of how to promote Being Well and Being Equal amongst young men in custody. Practice examples throughout the report provide tangible solutions to meeting the needs of young men, developed by voluntary sector organisations who bring significant knowledge, skills and experience.

Young adults make up 15% of the prison population, (around 12,000 individuals), with 18-20 year olds representing the highest level of Black and ethnic minority over-representation in the adult prison estate<sup>3</sup>. Prison population projections suggest that there will be a 50% increase in the number of 18 to 20 year olds in custody between 2021 and 2026<sup>4</sup>.

The Health Foundation states ‘the health of a country’s young people is one of the greatest assets it holds’<sup>5</sup> and yet for the 0.4% of young adults in prison in England and Wales, their distinct wellbeing needs are often overlooked.

Wellbeing, as defined by the Department of Health, is ‘**about feeling good and functioning well and comprises an individual’s experience of their life and a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values**’. Repeat evidence presented by HM Inspectorate (2021), the Justice Select Committee (2016) and the Harris Review (2015) clearly demonstrates that young adult wellbeing in the prison system is significantly poorer than for older prisoners – with more negative experiences of relationships, physical environments, mental health and safety. This experience is often exacerbated for Black and minority ethnic prisoners with fewer feeling safe, supported or respected<sup>6,7</sup>.

Alongside the fundamental difference in cognitive maturity between adult men and young adult men, 18-25 year olds in custody represent some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities. They account for 22% of incidences of self-harm in the prison estate<sup>8</sup> and are more likely to have experienced poverty, childhood trauma and being in care than the general population. In addition, young Black men experience the social, emotional, economic and structural impact of racism. While in custody there is an opportunity to ensure that young men have access to the support they need to flourish and build new lives.

In order to unlock their potential and improve their wellbeing, prison policy, practice and commissioning must differentiate between the needs of 18-25 year olds and the older prison population. There are only three distinct young adult establishments in England and Wales with a total operating capacity of around 1000. Almost 90% of young adults reside in the wider adult estate where HM Inspectorate of Prisons has found little differentiation between meeting the needs of 18-25 year olds and older prisoners.

**This report presents the key issues that must be considered to promote Being Well and Being Equal amongst young men in custody. While presented as individual issues to consider, none of these factors exist in isolation and it is important to recognise the interplay between them and how they relate to and influence one another.**

<sup>1</sup> HMPPS policy increasingly recognises the advances in neuroscience that demonstrate that brain development and maturity continues up until at least the age of 25. For the purpose of this report therefore, we define ‘young adults’ as prisoners aged 18-25.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to minimise the needs of young women in custody, who have distinct needs that must be recognised. Organisations such as agenda are leading the way in highlighting the needs of young women.

<sup>3</sup> Prison Reform Trust (Winter 2022) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Justice (2021) Prison Population Projections 2021-2026

<sup>5</sup> Jordan, Kane and Bibby (2019) A Healthy Foundation for the Future, The Health Foundation

<sup>6</sup> Prison Reform Trust (Winter 2022) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

<sup>7</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (December 2022) Thematic Review: The experiences of adult black male prisoners and black prison staff, HMIP

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

## Terminology

While we have referred to young Black men throughout this report, we are very aware that language regarding race and ethnicity can be limiting and can imply a homogeneity of identity and experience. The use of the term Black in this report refers to individuals who would describe themselves as Black or Black British as well as those of mixed Black heritage (and who would be identified as Black within HMPPS equalities data). As we discuss later in this report, it is vital that we understand diversity within communities and respond to the unique needs and experiences of individuals. Where we have cited sources of research or policy, we have used their terminology to ensure we represent their data accurately.



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# Methodology

## Review of existing policy and research

- ▶ A significant amount of research has been conducted into the needs of young men in custody. This report draws together the existing policy and research to illustrate the key themes identified by Alliance members, expert providers and young men.

## The views of young men (section still to be finalised)

- ▶ 11 face to face conversations were held with young Black men in custody (or recently released from custody) in London.
- ▶ A focus group with six young men with experience of custody was facilitated by Leaders Unlocked.
- ▶ Young men's views were also collated from evaluations of Spark Inside programmes and were incorporated into case studies throughout the report.

## Alliance members

- ▶ 3 roundtable events were held with Alliance members to identify the key messages for policy and practice in improving wellbeing outcomes for young men in custody.
- ▶ One to one conversations were also held with Alliance members, outside of the roundtable events, to explore themes in greater detail.

## Expert providers

- ▶ In addition to the Alliance members, interviews were also conducted with representatives from 3 Black-led or Black-specialist voluntary sector organisations working with young men in the criminal justice system.
- ▶ Case studies of voluntary sector provision were gathered from both Alliance members and expert providers.

# Executive summary

There is clear evidence that more needs to be done to recognise and meet the needs of young men, particularly young Black men, in custody. While the Chief Inspector of prisons (2022) stated that the 'prison service needs to take meaningful action' to address the discrimination of Black prisoners, the inspectorate has also stated that, for young adults specifically, 'if action is not taken, outcomes for this group and society will remain poor for the next decade and beyond' (HMIP, 2021).

Promoting wellbeing is fundamental to rehabilitation. HMIP expectations for assessing the treatment of and conditions for men in custody include the promotion of 'wellbeing' in all 5 assessment criteria: safety, respect, purposeful activity and release planning<sup>9</sup>. This is of even greater importance post-Covid-19, where HMIP found that the 'most disturbing effect of the restrictions was the decline in prisoners' emotional, psychological and physical well-being'<sup>10</sup>.

Young adults report more negative experiences than older prisoners, across multiple indicators of wellbeing: relationships, physical environments, mental health and safety. They are also more likely to reoffend on release from custody. Far from prison promoting positive wellbeing amongst young men, young adults' over-representation in incidences of self-harm, segregation and violence suggest prison often has a significant detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

**'I was quite positive when I went inside and I think the system strips you of that. And once it has been stripped you then have the issue of well, trying to get that back and they are not putting support in place to rebuild that... the whole point of rehabilitation and for you to re-settle back into the community and society and whatever is kind of like broken then and they are the ones that have stripped that from you.'**  
*(Young man in custody)*

While young men in custody have distinct needs that set them apart from the older adult estate, they also possess unique strengths and are at critical time in their transition to adulthood where the right support can make a significant difference.

**'When you've got loads of 18 to 21's here they're young, you know, they're basically still kids. And they're predominantly in this jail so, why can't we help them? They're still young. They're very young. We should be focused on helping them straight away.'** *(Young man in custody)*

Most young adults are held in male establishments where they make up less than a quarter of the population. In order to deliver the 'right support', targeted at the needs of young adults, commissioners, policy makers and practitioners need to better understand the key issues that impact on young men's wellbeing and listen both to the voices of young adults and the expert organisations working in the field.

<sup>9</sup> HMIP (2017) Expectations Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for men in prisons

<sup>10</sup> HMIP (2021) What happens to prisoners in a pandemic? A thematic review. HM Inspectorate of Prisons

## 1 Trauma, mental health and wellbeing

Young adult mental health must be understood within the context that many young men in custody will have experienced high levels of childhood poverty, deprivation, discrimination and violence and that the prison experience itself can serve to both traumatise and retraumatise young men.

**'You never know what a person has gone through. It all stems from when they were younger... you just don't know what experience they have been through... I think [prison staff] hear about it but I don't think they take it as seriously as they could. There is not a lot of looking at how prisoners think and why.'** (Young man in custody)

Support and interventions need to recognise and respond to the many challenges that young men face in being able to communicate need or access support. Trauma can affect young men's ability to interpret or communicate emotions, while stigma can prevent conversations about mental health, and a distrust in statutory services or practitioners and a perceived lack of safety, can restrict willingness to ask for help.

**'You have to create this false sense of yourself whilst you are in there, so you can go under the radar. So, I wouldn't have been highlighted as a person that was suffering from mental health 'cos outwardly I was projecting myself as somebody that was confident, somebody that was ok, somebody that was happy.'** (Young man in custody)

The impact of secondary trauma on prison staff must also be recognised in order that they can respond effectively to the wellbeing needs of young men. Provision of support, supervision and trauma informed working practices play an integral role in building staff resilience.

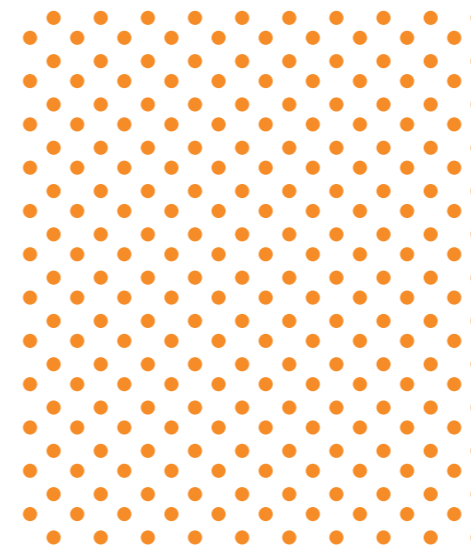
## 2 Recognising difference: meeting the needs of young Black men

Young adults have the highest level of Black and ethnic minority over-representation in the adult prison estate and prison inspection reports consistently demonstrate that they have worse experiences of prison life and wellbeing than white prisoners. Key to addressing the needs of young Black men is an acknowledgement and understanding of the significant inequalities that they face throughout their lives.

**'I think it's like, teach 'em about Black people's socio-economic position right now, how black people are actually living compared to how other people might be living and the privileges that they're getting. Do you know what I mean?'** (Young man in custody)

Poverty, poor housing, lack of safety, and poor access to education and employment are all risk factors for poor mental health, many of which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 Pandemic. These factors, combined with daily experiences of systemic and interpersonal racism and discrimination, go some way to illustrating the potential vulnerability of young Black men in custody.

**'There needs to be cultural awareness... Black people are getting treated unfairly – everyone needs to be thinking about equal rights. On the surface it seems okay, but behind the scenes there is a real problem... are Black young men getting equal access to jobs in prison? Do they have roles like Wing Reps? There is a lot that prisons need to be held to account for.'** (Young man in custody)



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In promoting the wellbeing of young Black men, a focus on identity is essential in challenging predominantly negative views of Black masculinity and Black heritage and enabling individuals to develop a positive sense of self.

**'I feel like a lot of staff feel like if they give a Black person like a good job, they feel like they're automatically going to mess up, or because they're Black they're involved in gangs and they're going to see someone and fight someone. Not everyone's like that.'** (Young man in custody)

Effective utilisation of equalities data, listening and responding to the voices of young Black men and providing support delivered and/or informed by Black-led and Black-specialist organisations is integral to responding to the distinct needs and experiences of young Black men in custody.

## 3 Unlocking potential: using a hope and strengths-based approach

There is increased recognition within the criminal justice system about the importance of strengths based, desistance-focused practice that recognises individuals as 'agents of change'.

**'I think it would be better if they looked at people to see what their strengths are, see what their talents are, see where they shine!'** (Young man in custody)

Young men in custody are at a critical point in their lives, moving into adulthood and developing a sense of 'who they are'. Supporting them to recognise their potential and self-worth can provide that elusive element of 'hope' and challenge the frequently negative narratives about young men.

**'If someone believes in you... you don't want to let down that person and if you do that you know you're going to get better results. And that person will praise you and everyone will see your good work, and everyone will start to praise you and that will boost your confidence even more. Then that's when you start to set positive goals for yourself.'** (Young man in custody)

Effective rehabilitative culture, supported by staff training and supervision, that promotes hope and optimism, is key to enabling strengths-based approaches. While the provision of positive, culturally competent role models for young men in custody (via staff, peers and mentors) and access to coaching are valuable resources in enabling individuals to recognise their potential.

**'Life coaching has also helped me to have awareness of what's going on within my life and how I want my life to be. I'd say it's increased my belief within myself.'** (Young man in custody)



## 4 Developmental maturity and wellbeing

There is clear neurological and psychological evidence that brain development continues well into the twenties and can also be significantly impacted by adverse experiences such as trauma, head injuries, deprivation, discrimination and violence.

Despite the Probation Service stating that sentences have the potential to be 'a vehicle for developing young adult maturity'<sup>11</sup>, HMIP has reported that prisons are 'failing to provide the tailored support, structure and consistency' that young adults need. Approaches and interventions that fail to respond to the developmental maturity of young adults can be to the detriment of their wellbeing and can slow desistance. For example, evidence has found that rewards and sanction-based approaches, such as the Incentives scheme used across the male prison estate, are inappropriate for individuals with low psychosocial maturity. Young adults, and particularly young Black men, are far more likely to be on a Basic-incentives regime than older prisoners, something that young adults have said damages wellbeing<sup>13</sup>.

**'So fundamentally what prison ends up doing, it ends up alienating you from opportunities to be actualised, to reach self-actualisation to actually get to a point where you can connect fully with other people.'** (Young man in custody)

Young adulthood provides a unique opportunity for change and should be harnessed through approaches that are informed by and responsive to the psychosocial development needs of young men.

## 5 The power of positive relationships

Young adults are often amongst the most isolated of individuals in custody and are less likely than older prisoners to maintain relationships with family or significant others. Nearly half of young men in custody have recently been in statutory care and many have had poor and/or discriminatory experiences of statutory services resulting in a distrust in professionals.

**'When I built those good relationships with staff it was warming... I felt like they wanted to see the best in me.'** (Young man in custody)

Access to pro-social, trusted, consistent, non-judgemental relationships with staff, peers, family and significant others are fundamental to good wellbeing, an essential element of rehabilitative practice and key to reducing reoffending.

**'It has to be genuine ...people doing their jobs have really gotta care for people that they're dealing with and have empathy, and have empathy for what's going on. If you take a genuine interest I think the person can, kind of clock or read that energy and be like this person wants to know so I'm just gonna tell them what's going on.'** (Young man in custody)

<sup>11</sup> HMIP (2021) Young Adults, HM Inspectorate of Probation

<sup>12</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>13</sup> Leaders Unlocked (2022) Young adult advisors on criminal justice: hearing from young adults in the criminal justice system



## 6 Giving young men a voice

Meaningful participation plays an important role in promoting individual wellbeing: increasing self-esteem and confidence, building relationships and trust, developing skills, providing a sense of agency and creating opportunities to develop a pro-social identity.

**'When you are in jail you are not in control of your life anymore so it's important that they give you a voice and not empty promises.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

**'They don't listen... They don't know where I am. They don't know how I'm coping. So it's got to a point where it's like no matter if I'm in pain, whatever situation I'm in, I'd rather just keep it to myself and wait 'til I get out.'** *(Young man in custody)*

Empowering young adults, who are at a critical point of maturation, to take responsibility and influence policy and practice that affects them can challenge the perception that their voice is not valued, and provides the opportunity to grow, develop, and contribute more meaningfully to the world around them.

## 7 Commissioning services for young men in the criminal justice system

Current prison policy and practice is neglecting the wellbeing of young men, particularly young Black men: not only is it failing to promote young men's wellbeing, but it is having a significantly negative impact on it.

Although there are examples of innovative and needs-led interventions being delivered by specialist voluntary sector organisations (some of which we present as practice examples throughout this report), across the estate there continues to be a 'gap' in targeted services or interventions that promote young men's wellbeing.

**'More people from the outside coming in and just talking... Just talking and running little interventions... It goes a long way for certain for some people here. They feel that they're actually being heard and there's someone that they can actually relate to.'** *(Young man in custody)*

# Calls to action

In order that the key issues presented in this report are addressed to promote Being Well Being Equal amongst young men in custody, we ask that:

### 1.

#### **Long term strategies for promoting mental health, particularly in the wake of the Pandemic:**

- ▶ take a broader, more holistic view of 'wellbeing'
- ▶ co-design any plans with Black-led and Black-specialist organisations in order to increase engagement and trust with Black prisoners
- ▶ ensure that the distinct needs of young men are responded to.

### 2.

#### **HMPPS seek to further understand:**

- ▶ what services and interventions are being delivered across the estate to promote wellbeing
- ▶ whether existing services and interventions meet the distinct needs of young men and particularly young Black men
- ▶ what evidence exists to demonstrate the impact of current services/ interventions on wellbeing outcomes for young men.

### 3.

#### **In developing strategies to promote the wellbeing of young men in custody, the distinct needs of young Black men are understood and responded to by:**

- ▶ drawing on and scrutinising effective equalities data
- ▶ seeking the expertise of Black-led and Black specialist organisations.



#### 4.

**Ensure that young Black men have the opportunity to access support and rehabilitation activities that:**

- ▶ are needs-led and respond to the impact of discrimination and inequality
- ▶ enable the exploration of identity within the context of race, culture, masculinity and faith
- ▶ provides support from practitioners who they can relate to and who understand their experience.

#### 5.

**Commissioning intentions recognise the importance of strengths-based approaches in responding to the distinct needs of young men (as identified in Commissioning Principles for Young Adult Men, 2015) and ensure that all young men have access to evidence-based interventions that challenge discriminatory attitudes and empower them to realise their potential.**

#### 6.

**Key workers and prison staff involved in sentence and resettlement planning receive training and coaching to:**

- ▶ develop knowledge and understanding of desistance focused practice
- ▶ develop knowledge and understanding about the benefits of supporting young adults to identify their ambitions, skills and talents
- ▶ develop skills in empowering young men to identify their ambitions, skills and talents through key work sessions, sentence and resettlement planning
- ▶ explore and challenge discriminatory attitudes towards young adults, particularly young Black adults.

#### 7.

**In developing the national Young Adults Strategy, HMPPS requires establishments to impact assess their existing policy and practice to ensure that they:**

- ▶ effectively identify and respond to the distinct needs and developmental maturity of young adults
- ▶ do not have a detrimental impact on young adult wellbeing.

#### 8.

**Prison key workers have support and training to understand the importance of pro-social relationships in the context of working with young men and how to effectively build positive relationships with young adults.**

#### 9.

**Targeted services and innovations be commissioned to ensure that all young men have increased opportunities to form positive relationships to support their wellbeing and rehabilitation.**



10.

Prison staff have the opportunity to access coaching both to inform their own development and to support them in developing the knowledge and skills to form positive relationships with young men in, what can be, a challenging prison environment.

11

In working to meet the HMPPS Service User Involvement and Engagement Standards of Excellence, prison establishments ensure that the specific needs of young men, particularly young Black men, are recognised and responded to, and that this is evidenced in their policy and practice.

12.

Prison establishments draw on the knowledge, expertise and innovation within the voluntary sector to develop the skills and approaches to effectively empower young men to have voice in the policy and practice that affects them.

13.

**Commissioned wellbeing services provide:**

- ▶ support and training for prison staff which promotes increased confidence, skills and understanding in meeting the needs of young men
- ▶ specialist interventions, support and services that respond to the distinct needs of young men and improve wellbeing outcomes.

14.

**In commissioning wellbeing services for young men, Commissioners:**

- ▶ listen to the views and experiences of young men, particularly young Black men
- ▶ scrutinise equality data to assess the impact of commissioning on young Black men's wellbeing
- ▶ understand 'what works' in improving wellbeing outcomes for young men in custody
- ▶ engage and empower specialist voluntary sector organisations.



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# Chapter 1:

## Trauma, mental health and wellbeing



**'It's about understanding what we have seen, what we have experienced and what we have been told.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

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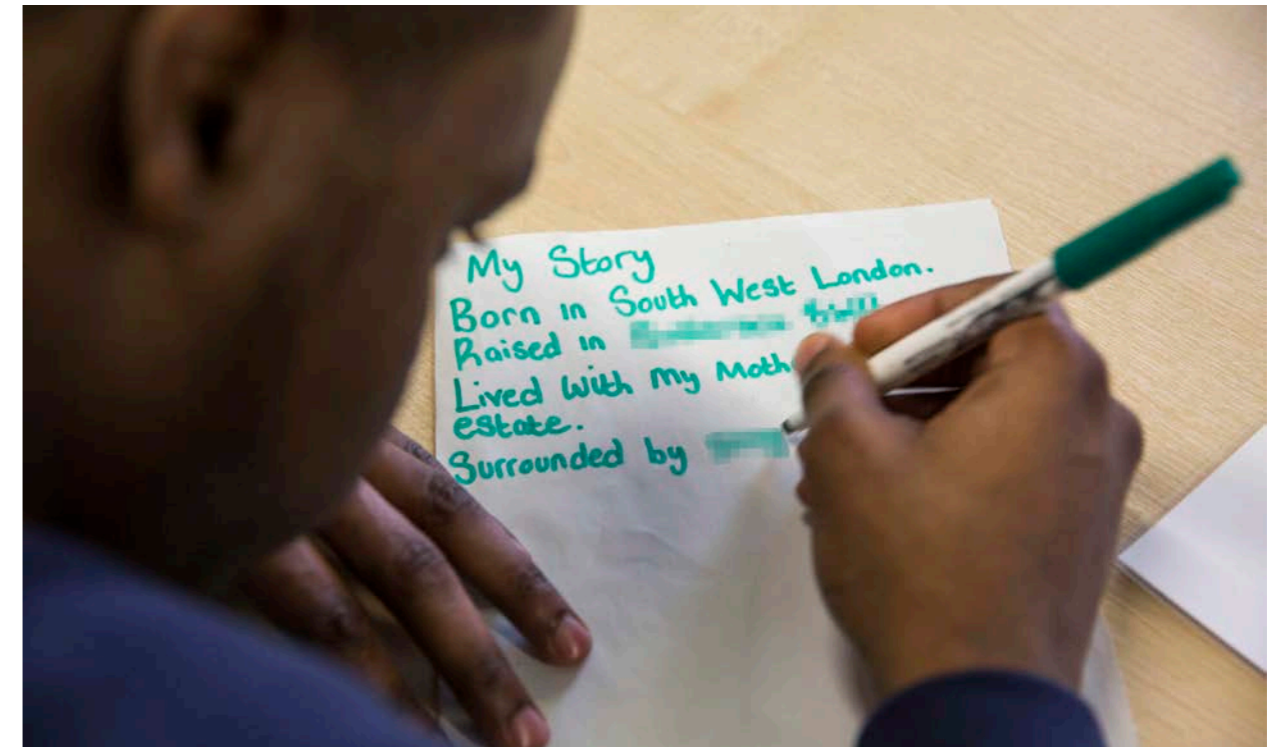
### Calls to action:

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- ▶ whether existing services and interventions meet the distinct needs of young men and particularly young Black men
- ▶ what evidence exists to demonstrate the impact of current services/interventions on wellbeing outcomes for young men.



A disproportionate number of young men entering custody will have complex health and/or wellbeing needs, and contrary to prison providing an opportunity to address health inequalities, evidence suggests that it often has a significant detrimental impact on health and wellbeing<sup>14</sup>.

**'Wellbeing is your mental state, how your health is, what your living conditions are like, what you are thinking, your behaviour and your mindset towards life.'** *(Young man)*

**'When it comes to 'wellbeing', for a lot of people you probably go into prison feeling positive. I was quite positive when I went inside and I think the system strips you of that. And once it has been stripped you then have the issue of well, trying to get that back and they are not putting support in place to rebuild that... the whole point of rehabilitation and for you to re-settle back into the community and society and whatever is kind of like broken then and they are the ones that have stripped that from you.'** *(Young man in custody)*

In 2018, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee stated that the **'Government is failing in its duty of care towards people detained in England's prisons'**<sup>15</sup>. Continued overcrowding, staff shortages, poor environments, lack of staff training and security-led regimes have all been identified as contributing to poor prisoner wellbeing. The restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 Pandemic served to further exacerbate the impact of custody on prisoner wellbeing, with HMIP reporting that the **'most disturbing effect of the restrictions was the decline in prisoners' emotional, psychological and physical well-being.'**<sup>16</sup> A YouGov poll, commissioned by Spark Inside in 2021, surveyed 1717 British adults and found that 72% believed prisons should provide specific support for prisoners' mental health and wellbeing as a way to try and reduce reoffending. 37% of respondents said that current prison-based services for people's mental health were not effective at reducing the likelihood of reoffending<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2018) Prison Health: Twelfth report of session 2017-19, House of Commons

<sup>15</sup> House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2018) Prison Health: Twelfth report of session 2017-19, House of Commons

<sup>16</sup> HMIP (2021) What happens to prisoners in a pandemic? A thematic review. HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>17</sup> All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was GB 1,717 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17th – 19th September 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

**'These young men are so resilient... for them to have survived everything they have survived... they have such resilience!'**  
(Practice provider)

In 2015 the Harris Review, commissioned to report on the deaths of young adults in custody, highlighted their particular vulnerability and the failure of the prison service to meet their distinct needs. Between 1 July 2020 and 31 March 2021, 52% of prisoners reported having mental health problems<sup>18</sup>, this is significantly higher than the general population where it is estimated that 1 in 4 people experience mental health problems in a given year<sup>19</sup>. Data shows that three quarters of adults with mental ill-health will have experienced the onset of those issues while they are still young adults, before the age of 24<sup>20</sup>. In the last decade incidents of self-harm amongst young adults in custody have increased by around 50% and in 2020, young adults accounted for almost a quarter (22%) of all self-harm incidents in prison<sup>21</sup>. During 2019 there were 8 self-inflicted deaths of young men in custody<sup>22</sup>.

The Pandemic also had a disproportionate effect on young adults' wellbeing. They were more likely than people aged over 30 to feel 'bored', 'lonely' and have experienced a decline in their mental health, due to a range of factors impacted by Covid-19, including: housing, employment, training and education, financial security and social isolation. Research has demonstrated that the Pandemic also served to exacerbate health inequalities already felt by Black and minority ethnic individuals – in particular young Black men, who were more likely to have reported a deterioration in their mental health than their white peers (Proto et al., 2021).

**'I felt like my head was going to explode during Covid... staff need to remember, that even though they were in the same environment as us – they got to go home at the end of a shift, be with their families... we were just shut behind a door in our cell on our own – I think the staff forget that.'**  
(Young man in custody)

Young adult mental health must be understood within the context that many young men in custody will have experienced high levels of childhood poverty, deprivation, discrimination, violence and trauma. They will have also recently experienced the 'cliff edge' of turning 18, and the withdrawal of statutory support services (education, youth services, social care and child mental health services) as they move into 'adulthood' – often exacerbating those multiple and complex vulnerabilities.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are 'highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence' (Young Minds, 2018) and can include domestic violence, abuse, neglect, parental substance misuse, bereavement and parental ill-health. Research suggests that the more adverse childhood experiences an individual has, the higher the risk of experiencing future negative health outcomes. The Prisoner Adverse Childhood Experience study surveyed nearly 500 male prisoners, a quarter of whom were under 25. The study found that over 50% of men in custody had experienced 4 or more adverse childhood experiences (compared to 11% of the general population)<sup>23</sup>.

**'You never know what a person has gone through. It all stems from when they were younger... you just don't know what experience they have been through... I think [prison staff] hear about it but I don't think they take it as seriously as they could. There is not a lot of looking at how prisoners think and why.'** (Young man in custody)

It is also important to recognise that prison itself can both traumatise and retraumatise young adults. Despite the Government's response to the Health and Social Care Committee's Inquiry into Prison Health describing a commitment to creating prison environments that were 'conducive to health, wellbeing, care and recovery'<sup>24</sup>, prison life, particularly for young adults, is often characterised by severe ill-health, violence, racism and discrimination. The experience of trauma can have a significant impact on how individuals are able to either communicate their needs or regulate their emotions and heightens sensitivity to danger; young adults will often be locked in a perpetual state of survival – and will easily be triggered into fight or flight mode. This may account for the fact that young adults are disproportionately responsible for assaults in prisons and are involved in nearly 50% of recorded fights<sup>25</sup>.

Young Black men are more likely to face multiple and significant risk factors for poor mental health as discussed in the following Chapter. They are far more likely than others to be diagnosed with severe mental health problems and are disproportionately represented in secure mental health facilities (16% of patients are Black, despite Black people only representing 3% of the general population)<sup>26</sup>. An evaluation of projects commissioned by Mind to improve the resilience of young Black men, found that the 'residual and intergenerational effects of slavery and historical trauma' were keenly felt by young Black men and that this was further fuelled by ongoing experiences of racism and injustice<sup>27</sup>. The Institute of Race Relations has highlighted that the existence of racialised stereotypes and discrimination often results in a lack of empathy for young Black men's mental health within the prison system:

**'Black men, especially young Black men, acting erratically or even asking for help, are stereotyped first and foremost as bad, mad, and, being Black, likely to be involved in drugs and/or violent – so they are met with violence.'**<sup>28</sup>

<sup>18</sup> HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2021) Annual report 2020–21, London: HM Stationery Office

<sup>19</sup> McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016). Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014. Leeds: NHS digital.

<sup>20</sup> University of Manchester (2017), Suicide by children and young people, National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness

<sup>21</sup> Prison Reform Trust (Winter 2022) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

<sup>22</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>23</sup> Ford K. et al (2019) Understanding the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in a male offender population in Wales: The Prisoner ACE Survey, Bangor University and Public Health Wales

<sup>24</sup> HM Government (2019:19) Government Response to the Health and Social Care Committee's Inquiry into Prison Health

<sup>25</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>26</sup> Miranda D. (2022) The over-representation of Black people as restricted patients in secure hospitals, Nuffield Trust

<sup>27</sup> Khan, L et al (2016) Against the Odds, Centre for Mental Health

<sup>28</sup> HM Government (2019) Government Response to the Health and Social Care Committee's Inquiry into Prison Health

## Shifting the focus from 'mental health' to wellbeing

In order to respond to the needs of young men in custody there needs to be a shift away from a narrow, clinical focus on mental ill health towards a more holistic understanding of wellbeing.

**'We need to think about how we swing things around and create an environment and culture which is really needs led... needs led interventions, needs led commissioning... if we are only focused on responding to acute mental health there is a whole pool of unmet need that we really need to start thinking about.'** *(Practice provider)*

**'A focus on wellbeing is holistic and it is an approach... training won't change everything.'** *(Alliance member)*

This is in line with the Government's commitment to establishing a 'whole prison approach' to prison health. This approach, endorsed by the World Health Organisation, recognises that meeting the health and wellbeing needs of prisoners should be a 'cornerstone to achieving reform and rehabilitation outcomes' and should involve all aspects of prison that touch on the wider determinants of health and psychosocial wellbeing<sup>29</sup>. This shift to meet the distinct mental health and wellbeing needs of young men requires:

### ▶ Providing young men with increased opportunities and safe spaces to voice their experiences and needs

Young men need the opportunity to identify their needs and talk about their experiences of trauma and adversity so that support can be put in place to enable them to recover and understand the impact of those experiences. This should not be seen as a one-off intervention, but as an ongoing approach that promotes mental wellbeing.

**'They only deal with what's on the surface and what people are showing or whatnot. Do you know what I mean? But I think the biggest problems are the ones that don't really show it. Cause they're probably the ones that are more likely to do the extreme.'** *(Young man in custody)*

**'Personally I think they need to start taking what people say more seriously. Speak to them more, like take them out on more one to ones and get to understand the person.'** *(Young man in custody)*

**'[Mental health] is not a priority... they take it serious where necessary, but I wouldn't call it a priority. Their priority is just getting through the day in it. I mean, making sure the doors are locked past a certain time and going home, that's their only priority, making sure no one's missing.'** *(Young man in custody)*



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**'It's about creating the space where they can sit back and see what they are living and acknowledge it... and only then can they start to understand those emotions and exercise some control over them.'** *(Practice provider)*

It is important to recognise that young men, more so than older prisoners, will often struggle to ask for help or talk about how they are feeling.

**'There's a variety of things [that stop young men asking for help]... embarrassment, scared, not knowing who to share the information with, who they can trust. Not knowing like what treatments are available or what help's available.'** *(Young man in custody)*

**'I'd say pride is a big thing, and men don't want to be seen as weak isn't it, or vulnerable... because people can take advantage of that.'** *(Young man in custody)*

<sup>29</sup> Institute of Race Relations (2015) Dying for Justice. Institute of Race Relations

The diagram below illustrates the distinct challenges that young men face in feeling able to identify their needs and ask for help:



**'Prisons are very sick environments, so it is very difficult to be vulnerable.'** (Practice provider)

**'You have to create this false sense of yourself whilst you are in there, so you can go under the radar. So, I wouldn't have been highlighted as a person that was suffering from mental health 'cos outwardly I was projecting myself as somebody that was confident, somebody that was ok, somebody that was happy.'** (Young man in custody)

**'Young men never have an outlet and sometimes you build up so much emotion in your head... as men we struggle, there is so much ego and pride – no-one has ever told us it's okay to talk about how you are feeling.'** (Young man in custody)

Prison environments need to create additional opportunities for young men to feel safe to talk about their experiences and how they feel, by recognising the potential challenges young men might face. Subsequent chapters discuss the issues, such as provision of pro-social relationships, strengths-based practice and cultural competency, that need to be considered to create these opportunities.

► **Culturally competent approaches that acknowledge and respond to the needs of young Black men**

For young Black men all the issues in the diagram above are amplified by persistent and pervasive experiences of racism and discrimination before, during and after their time in custody. The experience of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement, has also disproportionately impacted on young Black men's mental health and wellbeing<sup>30</sup>. Young Black men are more likely than their white peers to feel unsafe and less likely to identify as having mental health needs when they arrive in custody. For many Black cultures significant stigma associated with mental health persists.

**'I don't think Black men are supported very well at all because we come from a culture where mental health is taboo. So you go in Jamaica, you go to any of these places, start talking about mental health. They tell you, go way bwoy...with that chat. So then soon as that happens and that space for a conversation is not open. That support is not open. Then you straight away ostracize that person, that person's mental health is gonna slowly deteriorate further. So that's just Black culture in general.'** (Young man in custody)

**'Black people, when they deal with mental health, they can just be silent. They're prefer not to tell people that they're dealing with it, cuz they don't want to face that negative stigma that their brothers and their sisters and their mothers and their aunties and their uncles might give them. They don't wanna face that. Because it's really taboo isn't it, in certain cultures. So I think it's sad really isn't it?'** (Young man in custody)

Given the disproportionately negative outcomes for young Black men's mental wellbeing both in the community and criminal justice system (discussed in following Chapter) it is vital that any approaches are culturally sensitive and draw on the expertise that exists within Black-led and Black- specialist organisations. Power the Fight deliver the Therapeutic Intervention for Peace (TIP) Project in London schools and aim to reduce interpersonal youth violence by addressing young people's mental health and wellbeing needs. Fundamental to their approach is the understanding that culturally sensitive approaches require an 'ongoing process of learning' which promotes shame-free reflection on implicit and explicit bias and recognises the power dynamics that exist in the contexts and relationships in which services or interventions are delivered<sup>31</sup>. The Centre for Mental Health recommends that services improve their understanding of the specific mental health and wellbeing needs of young Black men, particularly in the wake of the Pandemic, and ensure that the unique experiences and engagement preferences of young Black men are considered and responded to in service delivery<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Abdinasir K. and Carty S. (2022) Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19, Centre for Mental Health

<sup>31</sup> Power the Fight (2022) TIP Interim Report

<sup>32</sup> Abdinasir K. and Carty S. (2022) Young Black men's mental health during Covid-19, Centre for Mental Health



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### ► Understanding behaviour as a communication of need

As the Probation Service Policy for the Management of Young Adults states, ‘practitioners need to shift the focus away from ‘what’s wrong with them’ to ‘what’s happened to them’ and start to understand that what is often violent and disruptive behaviour, is a communication of need<sup>33</sup>. This is echoed by the Centre for Mental Health who call for significant changes to prison staff training in order that there is a ‘significant focus on the vulnerabilities that many prisoners are likely to present with, and an understanding of trauma’<sup>34</sup>. Young adults are more likely to be involved in disciplinary hearings than any other age cohort and, as discussed later in this report, there is clear evidence to suggest that some of the dominant behaviour management techniques used in custody (such as the Incentives scheme) are largely ineffective with young men<sup>35</sup>. A report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2021) found that 18-25 years olds are three times more likely to be restrained than prisoners over the age of 25<sup>36</sup>. An approach which seeks to understand behaviour and respond to need is less likely to traumatise or retraumatise young men and more likely to empower young men to develop the skills and ability to manage their own behaviour in the future.

<sup>33</sup> MoJ and HMPPS (2022) Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy

<sup>34</sup> Dr Graham Durcan (2021) The future of prison mental health care in England, The Centre for Mental Health

<sup>35</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2018) Incentivising and promoting good behaviour, London: HM Stationery Office

<sup>36</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2021) Outcomes for Young Adults in Custody, a thematic review

### ► An increased focus on the wellbeing needs of staff

Traumatised practitioners cannot effectively respond to or meet the needs of traumatised individuals and yet criminal justice professionals ‘are likely to experience secondary trauma without even being aware of it’ through daily contact with unrecovered trauma survivors<sup>37</sup>.

‘Prison staff are witnessing traumatic things every day... people who work in A&E experience similar trauma and get years of training and still they struggle.’ (Alliance member)

‘In order for people to look after the needs of traumatised people they need support as well.’ (Alliance member)

‘Prison staff are humans as well... some prisoners need to realise that and take some accountability.’ (Young man in custody)

It is important, that in seeking to understand the impact of trauma on young men, prison staff also understand the impact of secondary trauma and that support, supervision and trauma informed working practices are adopted to build staff resilience and promote recovery.

### ► The provision of evidenced based services and interventions that meet the distinct mental health and wellbeing needs of young men

More information is required to understand the approaches, services and interventions that exist across the prison estate to promote the mental health and wellbeing of young men:

- Where does this provision exist and where are there gaps?
- Is the provision culturally competent and does it meet the needs of young Black men?
- Is the provision effective in achieving improved wellbeing outcomes for young men?
- How does the provision respond to the distinct needs of young men?

‘There continues to be a lack of research about the causes of distress and how we can develop practice to meet the needs of these particular groups of young men.’ (Practice provider)

<sup>37</sup> Mulcahy J (2017) Daring to Ask “What Happened to You?” - Why Correctional Systems Must Become Trauma-Responsive University of Limerick

# Chapter 2:

## Recognising difference and meeting the needs of young Black men



**'I think there is an understanding about the issues for Black people – there's loads of information out there... but there is just not enough care or passion for change.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

### Calls to action:

**In developing strategies to promote the wellbeing of young men in custody, the distinct needs of young Black men be understood and responded to by:**

- ▶ drawing on and scrutinising effective equalities data
- ▶ seeking the expertise of Black-led and Black specialist organisations.

**Ensure that young Black men have the opportunity to access support and rehabilitation activities that:**

- ▶ are needs-led and respond to the impact of discrimination and inequality
- ▶ enable the exploration of identity within the context of race, culture, masculinity and faith
- ▶ provides support from practitioners who they can relate to and who understand their experience.

**'Basically everyone needs to treat people equal... well not even equal... switch it up for a second, give all your attention to the Black people. So, you know, [white people] kind of had their time...help us!'**  
*(Young man in custody)*

### Understanding the needs of young Black men

As HMIP has identified, given the significant over-representation of Black and minority ethnic young men in custody, it is 'inconceivable that outcomes for young adults will improve without addressing the specific issues experienced by those prisoners'<sup>38</sup>. Key to addressing these specific issues is an acknowledgement and understanding of the significant inequalities that many young Black men in custody have faced in numerous aspects of their lives.

**'I think it's like, teach 'em about Black people's socio-economic position right now, how black people are actually living compared to how other people might be living and the privileges that they're getting. Do you know what I mean?'** *(Young man in custody)*

Levels of socio-economic disadvantage are higher amongst young Black men than their white peers, with double the percentage of Black secondary school pupils being eligible for free-school meals than White British pupils. Black children are overrepresented among children in need and among 16-17 year olds, 3% of children of Black Caribbean heritage are in care, compared to 1% of children of White British heritage<sup>39</sup>. Black children also have poorer experiences of education, with Black Caribbean children around 1.7 times more likely to be excluded than white pupils<sup>40</sup>. In a study by the YMCA, 95% of young Black people reported that they had heard and witnessed the use of racist language at school and 50% felt that the biggest barrier to education attainment for young Black people was teachers' perceptions of them<sup>41</sup>.

Whilst ONS data for 2020 showed that rates of unemployment have risen for all young adults, unemployment rates for young Black men have risen fastest, with young Black men in London three times more likely to be unemployed than young white men<sup>42</sup>. In a survey of over 500 young Black adults, 54% reported feeling bias or prejudice during recruitment processes<sup>43</sup>. Black young men are more likely to have experienced insecure housing or homelessness, with 1 in 23 Black households becoming homeless or threatened with homelessness between 2019 and 2020, compared to 1 in 83 households from all other ethnicities combined<sup>44</sup>.

Young Black men are more likely to be victims of crime than their white peers - they are 24 times more likely to be victims of homicide and 5 times more likely to be victims of hate crime. 13% of Black people report being 'very worried' about being attacked because of their race or ethnicity<sup>45</sup>.

Poverty, poor housing, lack of safety, and poor access to education and employment are all risk factors for poor mental health, many of which have been exacerbated for young Black men as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. These factors, combined with daily experiences of systemic and interpersonal racism and discrimination, go some way to illustrating the vulnerability of young Black men in our criminal justice system.

<sup>38</sup> HMIP (January 2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>39</sup> Schoenwald, E. (2022) Outcomes for black children in care a rapid evidence review, What Works for Children's Social Care

<sup>40</sup> Timpson Review of School Exclusion (2019)

<sup>41</sup> YMCA (2020) Young and Black: the young Black experience of institutional racism in the UK

<sup>42</sup> UK youth unemployment rate continues to rise; young black men are particularly affected

<sup>43</sup> YMCA (2020) Young and Black: the young Black experience of institutional racism in the UK

<sup>44</sup> Shelter (October 2020) Press Release: Black people are more than three times as likely to experience homelessness

<sup>45</sup> ibid



## Young Black men and the criminal justice system

**'I feel like a lot of staff feel like if they give a Black person like a good job, they feel like they're automatically going to mess up, or because they're Black they're involved in gangs and they're going to see someone and fight someone. Not everyone's like that.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

There continues to be a growing disproportionality of young Black men within the criminal justice system, despite multiple reviews highlighting their experience of racism, discrimination and disadvantage. At the start of 2022 the Chair of the Youth Justice Board stated that the criminal justice system was 'categorically failing on every count to halt the overrepresentation of Black children throughout the system'<sup>46</sup>.

**Personally, from the conversations that I have with fellow Black people, I just think it's the façade of strength. Do you get it? 'Cos then, for us, we've been through so much it's just like there is so much we don't talk about because we've been through so much.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

Across England and Wales, Black people are 5 times more likely than their white counterparts to be stopped and searched and 3 times more likely to be arrested<sup>47</sup>. The young adult male prison population has the highest over-representation of Black and minority ethnic prisoners – in a recent HMIP survey (2021) 43% of young adults reported being from a Black or minority ethnic background. Black men are 26% more likely to be remanded into custody than white men and 53% more likely to be sent to prison for an indictable offence at Crown Court<sup>48</sup>. Reoffending rates are also disproportionately high amongst young Black men with 35% of young Black men aged between 18 and 20 going on to reoffend<sup>49</sup>.

**'Naturally actually everybody thinks that they're at a disadvantage because they're Black so they're already feeling on the back foot, so heading that way it's easier isn't it? Heading down is easier than heading up, you know?'**

*(Young man in custody)*

Once in custody young Black men report more negatively than white young men about their prison experience. They are less likely to report being treated with respect, less likely to say they were treated as an individual and 3 times more likely to have been restrained and placed in segregation<sup>50</sup>. In addition, Black and minority ethnic prisoners are more likely to report poor access to purposeful activities than white prisoners and generally have low expectations of rehabilitation and release support<sup>51</sup>.

**'There needs to be cultural awareness... Black people are getting treated unfairly – everyone needs to be thinking about equal rights. On the surface it seems okay, but behind the scenes there is a real problem... are Black young men getting equal access to jobs in prison? Do they have roles like Wing Reps? There is a lot that prisons need to be held to account for.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

**For him in his head because all of the white people were in the better jobs, he may feel like he can't progress because it's always the white person doing better than him. Do you get it? So it can really knock someone down, to the bottom of the barrel, knowing they can't get any further than that.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

**'So then if you come into prison and see me, a young Black man, it kind of gives them a notion what they they've been seeing or hearing on television may be right and that's what they correlate with? And that's not always the case innit? Some people have that ingrained in them and you can see it in certain behaviours and mannerisms. I'm not gonna say it's all of them, but some of them... I see these things and it's disappointing.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

Ministry of Justice data demonstrates that while Black men are more likely to be given an adjudication than white prisoners, they are less likely than other prisoners for that adjudication to be proven<sup>52</sup>. Despite seemingly explicit discrimination, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman has reported that inadequate investigations are undertaken into discrimination complaints 'all too often' and poorly informed by equalities data<sup>53</sup>.

## Key issues to consider in promoting the wellbeing of young Black men

In addition to the issues discussed throughout this report, it is essential that the distinct needs and experiences of young Black men are considered and responded to in order to improve wellbeing outcomes. This can be achieved by:

### ▶ Improving the collation and use of data relating to outcomes for young Black men

Any effective system-wide strategy for addressing the needs of young Black men should be informed by accurate and detailed equalities data. Despite repeated reviews demonstrating the disproportionately poor outcomes for young Black men in custody, there continues to be limited data and/or analysis and use of data, to demonstrate how or why this is the case. As HMIP has highlighted, improved monitoring of equalities data is essential in identifying whether a 'lack of provision for young adults discriminates against prisoners from a Black and minority ethnic background'<sup>54</sup>.

**'We need to improve equalities work within prisons... we need to better understand the experience of young Black men in custody... equalities work needs to be done well.'**

*(Alliance member)*

Within this there also needs to be a greater scrutiny of what works for young Black men and an acknowledgement of the expertise that exists within Black-led and Black-specialist organisations.

<sup>46</sup> Fraser, K. (2022) Annual statistics: a youth justice system failing Black children, Youth Justice Board

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Justice (2021) National statistics Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System, 2020

<sup>48</sup> Prison Reform Trust (2022) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>51</sup> HMIP (2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning a thematic review

<sup>52</sup> Prison Reform Trust (2022) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

<sup>53</sup> Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2018) Learning lessons bulletin: Complaints about discrimination, London: Prisons and Probation Ombudsman

<sup>54</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons



**'It is important to be respectful of the diversity space and what others have done before. Speak to those that have been successful...'**  
*(Alliance member)*

► **Increase awareness about the impact of wider determinants of wellbeing on young Black men**

**'Just continue raising awareness... Maybe people start to see different, you know, but there's no physical thing or no study sessions, really, and truly just the right people just gotta keep doing what they're doing in it and kind of see what happens and weed out all the nonsense.'**  
*(Young man in custody)*

**'I'd say the big thing is people skills and understanding the culture, understanding what disadvantaged backgrounds we're coming from. Also understanding that it's hard for us to do well and it's hard for us to change... obviously just spurring us in the right way.'**  
*(Young man in custody)*

Practitioners within the prison service need to understand and acknowledge the experiences of young Black men and, in line with the Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy<sup>55</sup>, 'sensitively explore the experience and understand the impact of discrimination' for individuals. Poverty, poor housing, lack of safety, discrimination and poor access to education and employment, all need to be understood and recognised as factors that can impact on an individuals' wellbeing (rather than 'criminogenic' or 'risk' factors) and should inform the approach, resources and support provided.

► **Listen to and respond to individual needs of young Black men**

It is vital that in using the term 'Black', services avoid presuming a homogeneity of culture, experience and need. Cultural competence goes some way to ensuring that the diversity of cultures and communities is understood, however an individualised, needs-based approach is essential in promoting wellbeing, challenging racialised stereotypes and empowering young men to identify their own needs and aspirations.

**'Recognising diversity within Black communities is important... within communities there is diversity.'** *(Alliance member)*

**'Not grouping Black people into a single group, but understanding that there are cultures within Black – the Caribbean experience, is very different from the African experience, the modern Northern African experience, is very different from the generational diaspora third and fourth generation experience. Building the structures and the framework in their minds, so they can understand where these young people are coming from.'** *(Practice provider)*

**'It is really important to have an individual approach, there might be nuanced differences, but they are still different.'** *(Alliance member)*

<sup>55</sup> MoJ and HMPPS (2022) Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy

► **Recognising the importance of work regarding 'identity'**

Adversity, trauma and racial discrimination are persistent features in the lives of many young Black men in custody and the impact that this has on their sense of identity cannot be ignored or underestimated. A report by the Centre for Mental Health found that 'young Black men felt systematically flooded with predominantly negative and one-dimensional views of black masculinity and of black heritage' by society and that this had a significant negative impact of their self-identity, mental health and wellbeing<sup>56</sup>. A recent report by Clinks has highlighted that there are few statutory interventions provided by the criminal justice system that 'take into account ethnic and cultural identities or the impact of negatively racialised identity'<sup>57</sup>.

In promoting the wellbeing of young Black men, a focus on identity is essential in enabling individuals to develop a positive sense of self. For young Black men, it is important that multiple facets of identity are explored including:

● **Racial and cultural identity**

Providing opportunities to explore racial and cultural heritage is an important aspect of empowering young Black men to define their own sense of identity.

**'If you go and talk to a young British-born Black person, if you ask them where they are from – even if they are third or fourth generation removed from their grandparent country – guess what they are going to say? Nigeria, Jamaica, Ghana. There is an immense identity crisis, because what are they called when they go to their country? British. Where does that person find belonging?' (Alliance member)**



<sup>56</sup> Khan, L et al (2016) Against the Odds, Centre for Mental Health

<sup>57</sup> Williams, P (2020) Community empowerment approaches The key to overcoming institutionalised racism in work with black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people in contact with the criminal justice system, Clinks



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● **Masculine identity**

Predominantly negative and limiting representations of Black masculinity in society and throughout the media can restrict young Black men's vision or understanding about what it means to be a man. Providing young men with the opportunity to explore their understanding of masculinity, identify positive Black male role models and re-imagine their own positive self-identity is a vital aspect of promoting their wellbeing.

**'Healthy masculinity is about knowing who you are. If I know who I am, I don't need to rely on other people's ideas about what masculinity is.'** (Alliance member)

**'I had always known that I wanted to be someone and it all starts from the streets... we all look to what external things are telling us we should be... in music, on social media... but we need to be looking inside, we listen to others too much and you need to listen to yourself.'** (Young man in custody)

**'From watching TV and seeing on social media how people live their life and wanting to live that life, then yeah, I think that's what stimulated it. But initially because my mum was... I'm not going to do the whole "my mum was a single mum, she had to work two jobs, she was never home" but I think that had a role to play in it because then I learned things so quickly. I grew up early. I wanted to get out of the house.'** (Young man in custody)

## ● Religious identity

Faith and belief have been identified as an important 'protective factor' that can support both wellbeing and rehabilitation – they also form a crucial aspect of identity for many young Black men. Maslaha, a social enterprise advocating for a more sophisticated approach to understanding the needs of Muslims in the criminal justice system, has found that services that 'recognise the importance of religious needs and make practical changes to meet those needs can have huge benefits for Muslim men and women in prison'<sup>58</sup> (it is estimated that 29% of the Muslim population in prisons is Black<sup>59</sup>).

**'When you are thinking about identity it is important to recognise religious identity as well... it can help a lot in terms of forming a positive sense of self. Prison chaplaincy teams play a hugely important role in this work.'** (Alliance member)

## ▶ Creating opportunities for young Black men to access support from people who they can relate to and who understand their experience

There have been repeated calls by policy makers, practice providers and young adults for improved representation of Black and minority ethnic professionals within the criminal justice system. Young Black adults in custody, consulted by Leaders Unlocked, stated that there should be 'more BAME professionals at every level, from Judges to prison & police officers'<sup>60</sup>.



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**'To be honest, it's intimidating being a Black man in a prison where it is all white staff.'** (Young man in custody)

Although there has been a slight improvement in diversity amongst prison officers in recent years, in 2021 only 2% of prison officers identified as Black (despite 13% of the prisoner population identifying as Black)<sup>61</sup>.

**'So when we're talking in a context of minorities, not just Black but coloured people... even when they go to healthcare, it's so under-represented. Most of the time they go in and see a white doctor, a white nurse, or maybe not even a white doctor, a white nurse, but just a very bureaucratic person. And it makes them feel, you know, far removed, disengaged, disenfranchised. Makes them feel like I can't really share with you because you're not, like me, people always share with people, they feel like they've got common ground with.'** (Young man in custody)

**'There are not a lot of Black staff in prisons... I don't know how they feel being in such an un-diverse team – it must be intimidating for them as well.'** (Young man in custody)

**'I think we should have more Black people, Black officers in places like this. Because predominantly jail is dominated by Black people, you know. Obviously it's about getting the right characters as well.'** (Young man in custody)

Young men and practitioners emphasised however, that, although cultural diversity is vital, so too is lived experience and appropriate skills and expertise in working with young people:

**'It doesn't matter how they look. It matters on the advice that they give, the positivity that they give, how they can help you in a positive way, and how they generally impact on you becoming a better person.'** (Young man in custody)

**'Obviously I'm a Black person so I gravitate towards [Black people] because naturally I'm like, "they understand where I'm coming from". So especially maybe someone of a hard background, they understand what it is to have nothing or what it is to be abandoned.'** (Young man in custody)

Black-led and Black-specialist organisations play a critical role in providing support delivered by practitioners who have an authentic understanding and appreciation of the lived experiences of young Black men. The combination of experience, skill and authenticity enables vital trust to be built with young Black men who, quite rightly, often have a significant distrust of a system and the people who work within it. As the Centre for Mental Health has stated: 'working in partnership with communities and Black-led organisations must be the norm, not the exception; it must be sustained, not occasional; and it must mean sharing power, not just 'involving' people tokenistically'<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> Mohammed R. and Nickolls L. (2020) Time to end the silence: The experience of Muslims in the prison system, Maslaha

<sup>59</sup> Prison Reform Trust (2022) Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile Winter 2022

<sup>60</sup> Leader Unlocked (2019) Race and the Criminal Justice System: Hearing from Young Adults, Barrow Cadbury Trust

<sup>61</sup> Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (2021) HMPPS Staff Equalities Report: 2020 to 2021, London: Ministry of Justice and Table 1.4, Ministry of Justice (2021) Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2021, London: Ministry of Justice and Office for National Statistics (2019) Population characteristics research tables, London: ONS

<sup>62</sup> Abdinasir, K. (2022) Blog post: Shifting the dial on mental health support for young black men, NHS Confederation

## Practice example: Wipers

Who:	What:
<p>Wipers is a youth justice social enterprise which specialises in working with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. Our mission is to engage with young people to empower them by increasing their personal and social development, confidence and self-esteem.</p>	<p>We provide specialist, one to one mentoring, workshops and programmes that aim to reduce offending behaviour, support and supervision for socially excluded people from marginalised communities and training and consultancy to youth justice teams and other partners.</p>

How:
<p>One of Wipers' flagship programmes is The Ether Programme - an eight-session group workshop aimed at Black, Asian and minority ethnic young men aged 10-18. Delivered by professional facilitators, the programme seeks to increase the likelihood of positive life outcomes and reduce the likelihood of reoffending by empowering attendees to increase their confidence and develop pro-social skills.</p> <p>Sessions include unapologetic and authentic discussions of race, culture, masculinity, and broader identity, facilitated by staff who are from an ethnic minority background. Following completion of the Ether programme, participants are offered specialist mentoring support that seeks to build on progress made in group work.</p> <p>Critically, the programme was explicitly designed to build on Ministry of Justice research that suggested that young people who had more frequent contact with a rehabilitative programme were less likely to re-offend, and that a holistic approach to 'cognition and lifestyle' interventions delivered in one programme could reduce reoffending.</p> <p>In addition, programme design was shaped by data from the Young Foundation which demonstrated the impact of emotional and social skills in outcomes including educational attainment, employment, and health.</p>

Impact:	Feedback from participant:
<p>The programme uses the 'Youth Star' outcomes framework to assess progress; the tool is specifically designed for young people receiving services in the community and is suitable for young people with a range of needs, including those at risk of exclusion from education or involvement in criminal behaviour and those in need of additional support in the first steps towards employment.</p> <p>In 2020-21 115 young people participated in The Ether Programme, 92% of which reported an increase in confidence and self esteem.</p>	<p><b>'The Ether Programme is so real. I was able to speak my truth. I see who I am. Past, present and future. I know what I can achieve now.'</b></p>

## Practice example: Black Hero's Journey (Spark Inside)

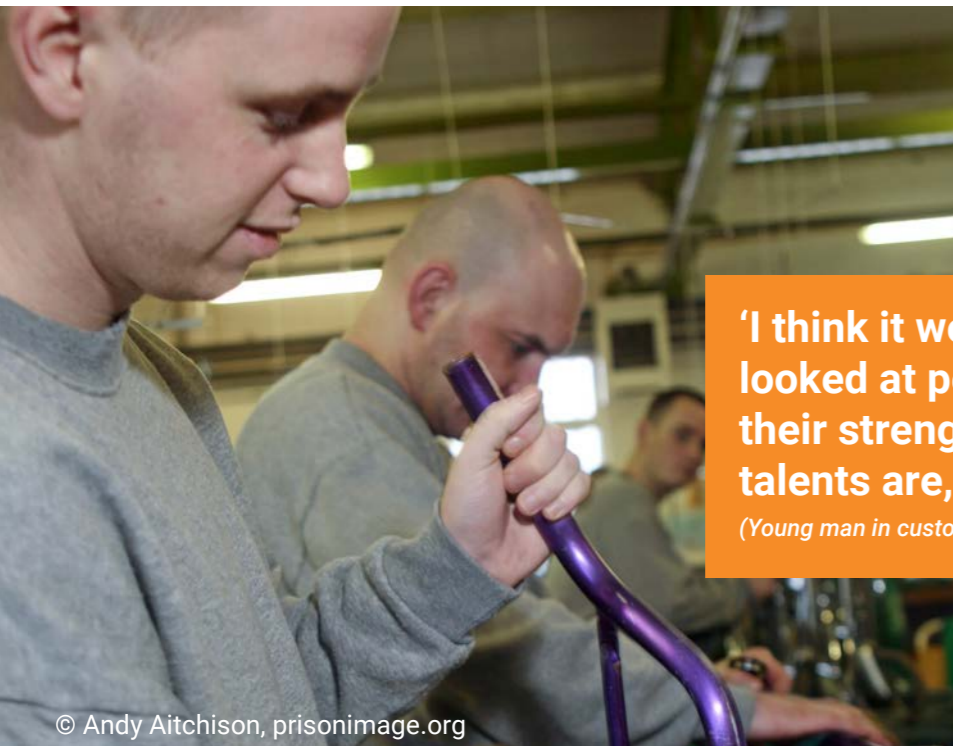
Who:	What:
<p>Established in 2012, Spark Inside uses coaching to unlock the potential of individuals and drive culture change in the criminal justice system so that rehabilitation is possible. They are one of the first organisations to take life coaching to 15 to 25-year-old boys and men in prison.</p>	<p>Adapted from their Hero's Journey™ programme and co-designed with young Black men with lived experience and Black coaches, Black Hero's Journey™ addresses the specific experiences of young Black men in the prison system. When it comes to participating in coaching programmes, young Black men said that they wanted to have Black coaches who they felt would better understand them, their experience and perspective. Many of the young Black men felt hesitancy around participating in group coaching sessions and expressed fears around lowering their guard and being 'vulnerable' around others. They also talked about identity and feeling the need to 'code switch' in certain situations, which they felt negatively impacted their mental health. They wanted to see more heroes/role models in programmes that were not sports or music personalities. They wanted a Black space, where they could be supported by Black coaches, and talk about racism but leave feeling empowered and proud of their Blackness.</p>

How:	Impact:
<p>During group workshops, which are followed by one-to-one coaching sessions, specially trained professional life coaches provide a safe space and support young Black men to engage with the topic of Black identity, and the experiences and attitudes linked to the individual's view of themselves as a member of the Black male community.</p> <p>The sessions, which are led by Black coaches, examine topics including social intelligence, limiting beliefs/internalised bias, celebrating Blackness/Black joy, cultural background, personal values, how I see myself vs how I am seen and first experiences of race.</p> <p>The ultimate goal of the programme is to provide a space for Black participants to recognise their potential, to see their qualities and value, and feel empowered to carve out a bright future.</p>	<p>Black Hero's Journey is currently being piloted at HMP YOI Isis and evaluated by the Ubele Initiative.</p>

Feedback from young Black adults who have received coaching:
<p><b>'Life coaching has helped me to have awareness of what's going on within my life and how I want my life to be. It's increased my belief in myself. Just speaking to my coach, the fact that he could recognise and see that I have a bright future – that gave me more belief and confidence within myself, like I'm going down the right path. My head, my mind is in the right place.'</b></p> <p><b>'I attended their workshops about 3 months before my release and it really made me more optimistic about life and what I could achieve. I learnt things about myself I didn't know, like my values, and discovered strengths I didn't realise I had... Before I was really impulsive. I didn't think before I did things or really think about who I was hanging around. Now I feel much more emotionally intelligent, I've got hope for the future and feel confident that I won't reoffend.'</b></p>

# Chapter 3:

## Unlocking potential: using a hope and strengths-based approach



**'I think it would be better if they looked at people to see what their strengths are, see what their talents are, see where they shine!'**

*(Young man in custody)*

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### Calls to action:

**Commissioning intentions recognise the importance of strengths-based approaches in responding to the distinct needs of young men (as identified in Commissioning Principles for Young Adult Men, 2015) and ensure that all young men have access to evidence-based interventions that challenge discriminatory attitudes and empower them to realise their potential.**

#### **Key workers and prison staff involved in sentence and resettlement planning receive training and coaching to:**

- ▶ develop knowledge and understanding of desistance focused practice
- ▶ develop knowledge and understanding about the benefits of supporting young adults to identify their ambitions, skills and talents
- ▶ develop skills in empowering young men to identify their ambitions, skills and talents through key work sessions, sentence and resettlement planning
- ▶ explore and challenge discriminatory attitudes towards young adults, particularly young Black adults.

## Defining a hope and strengths-based approach

There is a growing acknowledgement that risk-based interventions that focus on an individuals' past and criminogenic needs (reasons for offending) have limited effectiveness in empowering individuals to create positive change in their lives. Focusing on deficits, rather than assets, narrows the focus of rehabilitation 'solely as a means to an end (reducing crime), rather than recognising that supporting people to lead better lives is an important end in itself'<sup>63</sup>. Risk-based approaches can also perpetuate negative self-perception and neglect to acknowledge the strengths, hopes and aspirations that can help the shift towards a more positive self-identity.

The criminal justice system has begun to emphasise the importance of strengths based, desistance-focused practice that recognises individuals as 'agents of change'. HMPPS states that one of the key principles for delivering effective rehabilitative interventions and programmes is to ensure the 'approach is adapted to respond to people's individual circumstances, abilities and strengths'<sup>64</sup>. In addition, HM Inspectorate of Probation identifies a strengths-based approach, that fosters agency or self-determination, as a key part of supervision processes.

**'With the staff that I deal with, I think they definitely want me to do well here. And they got people skills. You can feel that, you know? They try and encourage you to do good things and not come back to a place like this.'** *(Young man in custody)*

### Strengths-based practice empowers individuals to change by:

- developing self-esteem and hope,
- encouraging cognitive transformation towards a positive sense of self,
- supporting societal inclusion and social capital, and
- action planning towards personal and long-term goals<sup>65</sup>.

## Why a strengths-based approach is critical in working with young men and supporting their wellbeing

A consultation with over 300 young adults in custody found that sentence plans frequently failed to consider ambitions, goals, skills and talents<sup>66</sup> and yet research has repeatedly identified strengths-based approaches as effective in working with young adults in custody<sup>67</sup>. The Social Exclusion Taskforce (2008) stated that young people, particularly those from deprived communities, are 'more likely to achieve positive outcomes when they develop ambitious, achievable aspirations, combined with the self-esteem, self-efficacy, information and inspiration they need to persevere towards their goals'.

<sup>63</sup>Wigzell A. (2021) Explaining desistance: looking forward, not backwards, National Association for Youth Justice

<sup>64</sup>MoJ and HMPPS (2022) Guidance: Offending behaviour programmes and interventions, Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Service

<sup>65</sup>Hampson K.S. (2017) Desistance approaches in youth justice - the next passing fad or a sea-change for the positive? Youth Justice, Volume 18, Issue 1 (2017)

<sup>66</sup>Leaders Unlocked (2020) Young adult advisors on criminal justice: hearing from young adults in the criminal justice system, Leader Unlocked

<sup>67</sup>Transition to Adulthood (2020) T2A response to the Comprehensive Spending Review September 2020

'Lots of young men have only been taught what not to do, what they should avoid... they have never been taught how to be the highest version of themselves.' (Young man in custody)

'They've gotta get to know, they've gotta be more personal with their residents. You know, they've gotta be more looking into them. I think everything's so superficial.' (Young man in custody)

'Suddenly they've been identified because somebody has seen potential in them, that boosts that person, that makes them happy. It brings out another side to them that they've never seen. Because you don't know, that person may have not been told they've had potential or never been believed in before you know. So, we've got to try.' (Young person in custody)

'If someone believes in you... you don't want to let down that person and if you do that you know you're going to get better results. And that person will praise you and everyone will see your good work, and everyone will start to praise you and that will boost your confidence even more. Then that's when you start to set positive goals for yourself, then you start reaching your goals and then when you look back and Miss always believed in me, this is how I got here because one person believed in me. It goes a long way, trust me, it goes a long way.' (Young man in custody)

Young men in custody are at a critical point in their lives – supporting them to recognise their potential and self-worth can provide that elusive element of 'hope' in what can often feel like a 'hopeless' criminal justice environment. For young men working with 'hope' is vital to their wellbeing as:

#### ▶ Young men are more likely than other age groups to 'grow out of crime'

In 2016, the House of Commons Justice Select Committee concluded that young adults, despite committing the highest volumes of crimes and having the highest rates of reoffending, 'are the most likely age group to stop offending as they 'grow out of crime''. The period between 18 and 25 years old therefore, provides a unique and important window of opportunity to support young men to recognise and unlock their potential.

#### ▶ Young men are at a critical point of maturation

The Commissioning Principles for Young Adult Men (2015) refers to the late teens and early twenties as a period of 'emerging adulthood', when younger people are moving through a critical period of maturation in which they develop a 'more fixed idea of who they are'<sup>68</sup>. This timeframe therefore provides an important opportunity for young adults to be supported to develop a noncriminal identity. As Transition to Adulthood states, 'a more positive, or pro-social, identity will provide a framework in which the young adult is empowered to make the right choices in their behaviour' and allows them to be 'more future-oriented in their motivations and choices'<sup>69</sup>. A strength-based approach is vital in enabling young men to recognise their positive skills and attributes and encourage them to visualise and plan towards a positive future.

<sup>68</sup> NOMS (2015) Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men Evidence Based Commissioning Principles, National Offender Management Service

<sup>69</sup> Transition to Adulthood (2021) Diverting young adults away from the cycle of crisis and crime

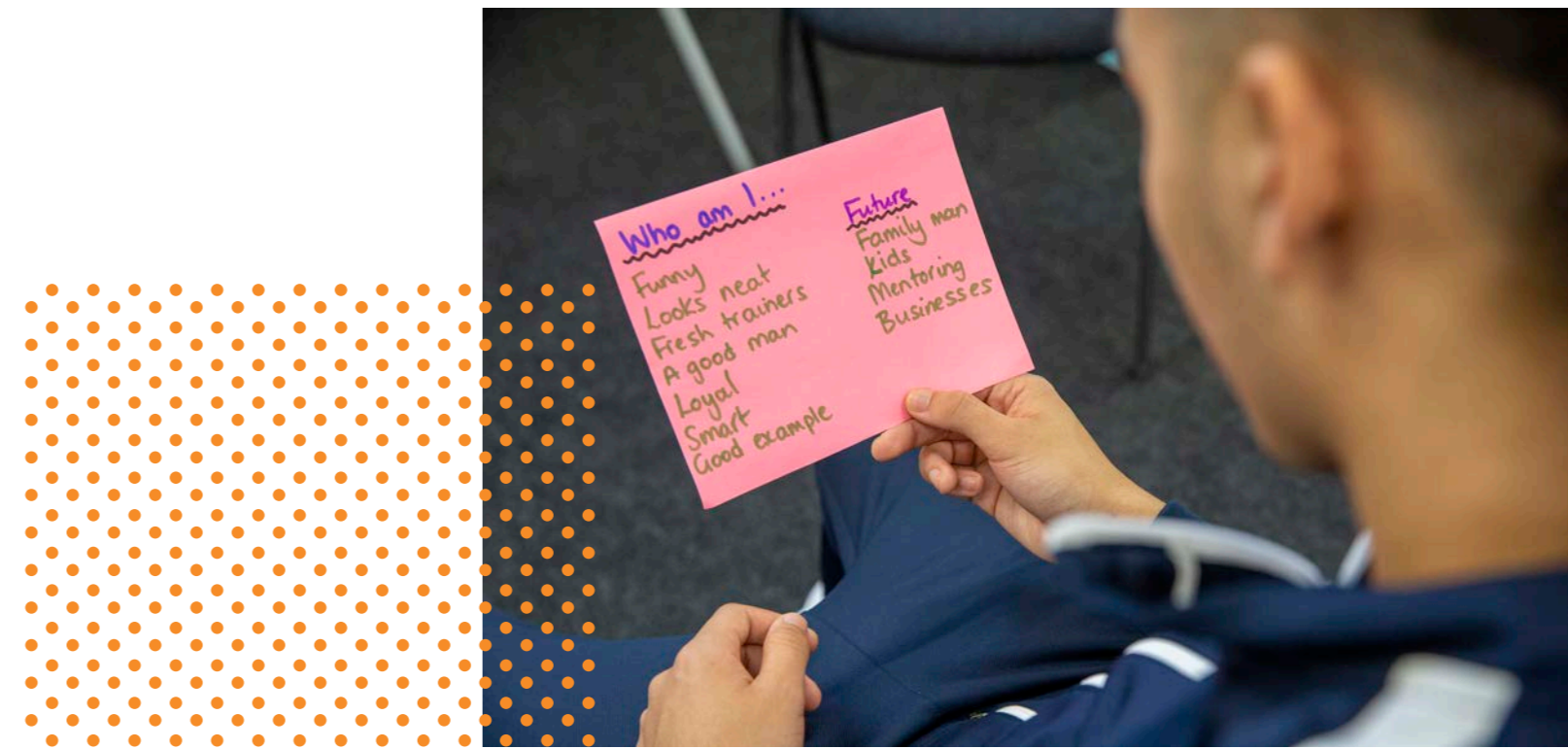
#### ▶ Young men need discriminatory stereotyping to be challenged

The Young Advocates project, led by young people with lived experience of the criminal justice system, identified 'stereotyping' as a priority issue that needs addressing in policy and practice. They described it as 'negative ideas or generalisations that others may associate with you', present across all systems including education and criminal justice, and perpetuated by media discourse about young people.

'In terms of prison officers, it's about emotional intelligence, being aware of who you're dealing with. Don't watch the news, see young people being violent, and then try and respond to a young person in real life based on what you see on the news.' (Alliance Member)

In 2014 the Chief Inspector of Prisons identified concerns relating to 'negative staff perceptions of young adults in integrated establishments' and provided examples of where young adults' behaviour had been stereotyped by staff. This may account, to some extent, for the fact that young adults in custody are far less likely to report that staff treat them with respect than prisoners aged over 25 and are three times more likely to be restrained than older prisoners<sup>70</sup>. This is particularly pertinent for young Black men who, having faced persistent inter-generational racial discrimination in the community, continue to face racialised stereotyping once in custody. The Young Review that explores how to improve outcomes for young Black and/or Muslim men in the criminal justice system (2018) found that Black prisoners regularly reported being 'stereotyped as drug dealers', while 'Muslim prisoners were stigmatised as extremists' – affecting how they were perceived as well as impacting on their perception of self.

Strengths-based approaches which challenge frequently negative narratives about young adults are therefore essential in enabling young men to create positive self-identities. Dr Patrick Williams states that for young Black men, empowerment approaches, that highlight individuals' accomplishments and contributions, 'challenge and contradict popular racialised stereotypes and affirm to the individual and group their rightful place within society as citizens.'<sup>71</sup>



<sup>70</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>71</sup> Williams, Dr P (2020) Community empowerment approaches The key to overcoming institutionalised racism in work with black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people in contact with the criminal justice system, Clinks

## What does a strengths-based approach to young adult wellbeing look like?

### ► A shift in culture

HM Inspectorate of Prisons states that the ability of staff to work with 'hope and optimism' and 'model and promote pro-social values and identity' is a key component of creating a rehabilitative culture<sup>72</sup>. Staff therefore need the opportunity to:

- develop knowledge and understanding of desistance focused practice
- develop knowledge and understanding about the benefits of helping young adults to identify their ambitions, skills and talents
- develop skills in empowering young men to identify their ambitions, skills and talents through key work sessions, sentence and resettlement planning
- explore and challenge discriminatory attitudes towards young adults, particularly young Black adults.

### ► Provision of positive role models

The provision of positive role models, who demonstrate 'what can be achieved' has been found to be effective in 'creating a belief in the possibility of change'<sup>73</sup> for young adults.

**'It's giving them a sense of belief - you can do this, I did it, and you can too. I was that kid in the corner outside the headmaster's office, I know that kid wanted to feel hope about his future.'** (Alliance Member)

Positive role models may be provided by staff, effective peer support programmes and mentoring interventions. Young adulthood is a developmental stage in which individuals move away from looking to family and/or significant others for guidance and are instead more likely to be influenced by peers. Although prison service data suggests that for young adults, peer influence is important in 'determining engagement in risky behaviour'<sup>74</sup>, it also provides an opportunity for more positive role modelling. For young Black men, role models who they can relate to, who demonstrate cultural competence and who challenge racialised stereotypes are important. The Harris Review (2015) recommended that more be done to ensure that the ethnic mix of the staff in prisons reflects that of the prison population to provide prisoners with role models to whom they can relate<sup>75</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/the-evidence-base-probation/specific-types-of-delivery/custody-and-resettlement/>

<sup>73</sup> Transitions to Adulthood (2013) Going for Gold Developing effective services for young adults throughout the criminal justice process, Clinks

<sup>74</sup> NOMS (2015) Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men: evidence based commissioning principles, National Offender Management Service

<sup>75</sup> Lord Toby Harris (2015) The Harris Review: Changing Prisons, Saving Lives Report of the Independent Review into Self-inflicted Deaths in Custody of 18-24 year olds

### ► Provision of positive role models

Coaching has long been established as a transformative, strengths-based tool in healthcare, education and sporting sectors and research has demonstrated the positive impact it can have on mental health, wellbeing and resilience in young people<sup>76</sup>. Organisations such as Spark Inside are now beginning to demonstrate the value of coaching in supporting young men in custody. Unlike mentoring, coaching offers no advice or guidance, instead it uses specific tools and techniques that encourage individuals to recognise their potential while enabling self-sufficiency, fostering independence and building personal responsibility.

**'The one-to-one coaching is a conversation with you, about you, and how to help you. Nowhere else in prison are there people there for you, to talk about you, and help you understand yourself better.'**  
(Young man in custody)

**'Life coaching has also helped me to have awareness of what's going on within my life and how I want my life to be. I'd say it's increased my belief within myself. Just speaking to my coach, the fact that he could recognise and see that I have a bright future is just confirmation within myself that I'm not going crazy, or like I'm onto something.'**  
(Young man in custody)

**'1:1 coaching really helped me because I had someone I felt comfortable with and I could trust and it was in a confidential space... that was an important part of my healing process.'**  
(Young man in custody)



<sup>76</sup> Robson-Kelly, L., & van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2016). What does coaching have to offer to young people at risk of developing mental health problems? A grounded theory study. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 11(1), 75-92



## Practice example: Hero's Journey (Spark Inside)

### Who:

Established in 2012, Spark Inside runs coaching programmes in prisons across London and the South East, to encourage rehabilitation and contribute towards a reduction in reoffending. They are one of the first organisations to take life coaching to 15- to 25-year-old boys and men in prison. The Hero's Journey™ is their award winning structured life coaching programme for young men in prison.

### What:

Young men in custody have repeatedly told Spark Inside that they have spent most of their lives having people of authority tell them what they need to do, and prison is no different to that. Young men talked about feeling stuck in a cycle of offending behaviour, with little hope for a brighter future due to limiting beliefs about what they were able to achieve. Coaching takes a different approach to many rehabilitation programmes – it starts from the foundational belief that young people are the experts in their own lives, and so does not tell them what to do, rather it empowers them to find the solutions to their own problems. It gives them the tools they need to change their circumstances and achieve their goals. Spark Inside programmes are underpinned by our core belief that young people's futures should be determined by their potential, not their past.

### How:

A key element of the Hero's Journey programme is the 'Posipping' exercise - positive gossiping - in which the group discuss the qualities and future possibilities of each participant. The participant who is being 'posipped' about, remains in the room and so can hear the positive affirmations from their peers. This exercise comes towards the end of the programme, when participants have spent many hours together and know each other well. This session can be hugely impactful for young people in prison, many of whom haven't been told many positive things about themselves for a long time, or do not feel particularly positive about themselves anymore. But this exercise can help remind them of their worth and potential.

### Impact:

Many of the participants report that the Posipping exercise is their favourite part of the programme and that it helps them to recognise qualities and strengths in themselves that they hadn't seen before.

Spark Inside uses the Youth Outcomes Star impact measurement tool to effectively monitor young people's progress. Initial results are positive: in a recent delivery of the Hero's Journey, 78% of participants made progress around 'choices and behaviour'; 67% made progress on 'education and work'; and 89% had made progress on their future 'hopes and dreams'. Independent research about Spark Inside coaching programmes has demonstrated that they can reduce reoffending among participants by up to 33%.

### Feedback from participant:

**'When we first started the workshops, it wasn't easy to stand there and talk about everything in front of people we didn't really know. I came out of my shell when we did the 'possipping' exercise, where it's the gossiping but you hear things that people can see in you that you don't necessarily see in yourself. It makes you think positively about yourself. All the exercises we did were really beneficial to me.'**



# Chapter 4:

## Developmental maturity and wellbeing



**'When you've got loads of 18 to 21's here they're young, you know, they're basically still kids. And they're predominantly in this jail so, why can't we help them? They're still young. They're very young. We should be focused on helping them straight away.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

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### Calls to action:

**In developing the national Young Adults Strategy, HMPPS requires establishments to impact assess their existing policy and practice to ensure that they:**

- ▶ effectively identify and respond to the distinct needs and developmental maturity of young adults
- ▶ do not have a detrimental impact on young adult wellbeing.

### What does a strengths-based approach to young adult wellbeing look like?

An understanding of emotional and developmental maturation is essential when considering effective approaches in promoting young adult wellbeing. Without this understanding policy and practice can be detrimental to the wellbeing of young adults in custody.

**'I was starting to mature... I was reading a lot of books so my mind was opening up slowly, I was reprogramming my mind... but it's hard, you've got an ego, you've got a name on the street...'** *(Young man in custody)*

There is now clear neurological and psychological evidence that brain development continues well into the twenties and can also be significantly impacted by adverse experiences such as trauma, head injuries, deprivation, discrimination and violence. As a result of this evidence, the Sentencing Council states: 'the emotional and developmental age of an offender is of at least equal importance to their chronological age (if not greater)'<sup>77</sup>.

Neuroscience has now irrefutably demonstrated that the frontal lobes of the human brain continue to develop until around 25 years old. It is this area of the brain that regulates impulse control and reasoning. Until the brain has fully developed, younger adults will find it harder to control their emotions, will struggle to be future orientated, will be more responsive to negative stimuli and will be less likely to consider the consequences of their behaviour on themselves or others.

The process of brain development is however dependent on the individual. There is significant evidence that young adults mature at different rates and that many of the criminogenic factors that influence offending behaviour and are prevalent amongst young adults (such as poverty and adverse childhood experiences), can also impact on brain development – slowing down the maturation process.

**'They think, we are just normal people that's in jail, that we are calm... But we got emotions as well! So when you come with your emotions or you speak to me in a certain way, it's like Bruv, how do you expect me to react?'** *(Young man in custody)*

The frontal area of the brain is also the most likely part of the brain to be affected by injury – further impacting on an individuals' ability to self-regulate, to the extent that the Centre for Mental Health has estimated that traumatic brain injury can increase the likelihood of crime by at least 50%<sup>78</sup>. It is estimated that almost a third of young adults in custody have an Acquired Brain Injury<sup>79</sup> – significantly higher than the older prison population.

**'I got caught on the train [with drugs], went to court, and got a suspended [sentence].... I [also] ended up getting stabbed several times in the head and whacked with metal bars that left me with head traumas. Now I'll have black outs where, like I'm on the floor [with] no recollection.'** *(Young man in custody)*

<sup>77</sup> Sentencing Council (2019) General guideline: overarching principles

<sup>78</sup> Parsonage, M. (2016) Traumatic Brain Injury and Offending: an economic analysis, London: Centre for Mental Health

<sup>79</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee (2016) The Treatment of Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System, House of Commons

**'Some of the young people we work with might not think they have any mental health problems, but the violence they have been involved in has caused traumatic brain injury. If a prison officer is aware of this, and understands the impact of the injury, they have a chance to work in a different, more effective way with that young person.'**  
*(Practice provider)*

In the context of developmental needs, it is also important to consider that disproportionate numbers of young adults in custody are neurodiverse – which can result in cognitive difficulties with thinking, acting, and problem solving, emotional literacy and regulation, learning and communication difficulties.

## Supporting young adult maturation in prison: a contradiction?

Despite the Probation Service stating that sentences have the potential to be 'a vehicle for developing young adult maturity'<sup>80</sup>, HMIP has reported that prisons are 'failing to provide the tailored support, structure and consistency' that young adults need<sup>81</sup>.

**'So fundamentally what prison ends up doing, it ends up alienating you from opportunities to be actualised, to reach self-actualisation to actually get to a point where you can connect fully with other people.'**  
*(Young man in custody)*

In 2019 most young adults were held in male establishments where they made up less than a quarter of the population. While the Maturity Screening Tool, introduced in the male prison estate in 2019, seeks to identify individuals with low psychosocial maturity, in 2021 a quarter of male prisons were failing to use the tool. Further evidence suggests that, even when low psychosocial maturity had been identified, helpful tools such as Choices and Changes (an HMPPS resource to support work with young men) are failing to be used effectively by prison staff.

While HMPPS has committed to 'a comprehensive and wide-reaching project to develop a national Young Adults Strategy' (HMPPS, 2021) some establishments have developed their own local 'Young Adult Strategies' that take into account the specific needs and maturity of young men. These strategies, however, risk simply becoming paper-based exercises unless they are embedded within the practice and culture of establishments.

**'If there is a Young Adults Strategy, is it meaningful? Is it being used? How is it a live document? How do the staff make use of it?'**  
*(Alliance Member)*

The failure of wider prison policy and practice to differentiate for prisoners under 25 can also have significant detrimental impacts on young adult wellbeing. The Justice Select Committee stated that 'flawed interventions that do not recognise young adults' maturity can slow desistance and extend the period of involvement in the system'<sup>82</sup>. The Incentives scheme, for example, used across the male prison estate, has been shown to be least effective in young adult prisons<sup>83</sup>, reflecting the evidence that reward and sanction-based approaches are inappropriate for individuals with low psychosocial maturity<sup>84</sup>. Young adults, and particularly young Black men, are far more likely to be on a Basic-incentives regime than older prisoners, something that young adults have said 'damages well-being and undermines the basic rights of young adults in prison'<sup>85</sup>.

HM Inspectorate of Probation states that appropriate, evidence-based approaches to support maturation in young adults in the justice system include the delivery of: programmes that enhance thinking skills and regulate emotions, interventions that strengthen relationships, education and training, and activities that help individuals take responsibility and build positive identity<sup>86</sup>. The isolation and institutionalisation of prison life, however, often denies young adults these very opportunities – putting strain on family and significant other relationships, reducing opportunities for independent living and further accentuating negative self-identity.

**'It's about developing both appropriate responses but also about providing an environment that enable those responses to be effective... there are systemic issues that need to be addressed.'** *(Alliance Member)*

HMIP (2021) has found that young adults report spending less time out of their cells, are less likely to find it easy to engage in activities, education or training, and are less likely to maintain family-ties. The Covid-19 Pandemic only served to exacerbate young adults' experiences, imposing long periods of solitary confinement and with most face to face education and support withdrawn<sup>87</sup>.

## Young adulthood as a unique opportunity for change

While the number of young adults in our prison estate is projected to increase significantly over the next 4 years, it is vital that their distinct needs and strengths are responded to effectively. As the Sentencing Council states 'there is a greater capacity for change in immature offenders' and as such, far from being seen as a deficit, young adult development can be seen as a valuable opportunity for change.

**'Remember, their minds are impressionable... they are young minds, we need to remember that they will be influenced by what you do and say.'** *(Alliance Member)*

Understanding the key aspects of cognitive and emotional development during young adulthood, allows practitioners to recognise the unique potential within young adults to develop the skills, qualities and attributes that are vital for future desistance. Within this, individualised approaches, that acknowledge the differing rates of maturation amongst young adults are critical.

<sup>80</sup> HMIP (2021) Young Adults, HM Inspectorate of Probation

<sup>81</sup> HMIP (2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>82</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee (2016) The Treatment of Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System, House of Commons

<sup>83</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2018) Incentivising and promoting good behaviour, London: HM Stationery Office

<sup>84</sup> HMIP (2021) Young Adults, HM Inspectorate of Probation

<sup>85</sup> Leaders Unlocked (2022) Young adult advisors on criminal justice: hearing from young adults in the criminal justice system

<sup>86</sup> HMIP (2021) Young Adults, HM Inspectorate of Probation

<sup>87</sup> Howard League for Penal Reform (2020) Young Adults in prison during the Covid-19 pandemic

## Practice example: Safe Ground groupwork

### Who:

Safe Ground is an award-winning arts organisation designing and delivering pioneering therapeutic group-work for people in prison and community settings nationally. Our essential function is creating spaces in which transformational change can occur.

### What:

Safe Ground programmes are designed to accommodate those least likely to engage with services and interventions, and whose behaviour is often perceived as 'negative', 'disruptive' or 'resistant'. Our work is trauma informed. It considers the ways in which trauma affects both personal development and educational engagement, disables positive experiences of trust, and can become an obstacle to maturity. Programmes are designed to accommodate with equally meaningful participation people who cannot read or write, do not have English as a first language, may have cognitive or physical impairments, dependency issues, anxiety, or other difficulties with education, group work or participation.

### How:

We support participants to consider experiences of violence, neglect, abuse, loss, grief, emotional absence or numbness, and a recurring theme in the popularity of all Safe Ground's work is 'space to think'. In nearly every programme we deliver, participants will remark upon the importance of their 'thinking', and the ways in which the group work both requires and enables it.

Due to the nature of our work, which focuses on relationships, power and cultural and social norms, we are regularly involved in conversations about what maturity is and is not. This is particularly apparent in conversations with young men in prison. Often our conversations pivot around issues of power, social legitimacy, authority and 'responsibility'. Many young men we work with are very attached to notions of 'respect', protecting loved ones and friends; but show a resistance to ideas of support, help or love being expressed.

### Impact:

Safe Ground programmes enable young men to consider the context in which they operate, and their roles in the wider community, family, and 'system'. Participants are supported to recognise their intelligence and abilities and are clear about the ways in which their trajectories, access, and liberty is limited by both racism and issues of social class. Facilitators effectively support young men to "develop their own internal worlds" with which to weather the external world. (Sloan, Jennifer; 2016)

The group work develops participants' understandings of what it means to be 'a man', and impacts attitudes and values around a wide range of issues including 'toughness', tendency toward violence, and risk-taking perceptions (Blagden and Perrin; 2016). Justice Data Lab Research (December 2016) demonstrated that the 50 men who had attended the Family Man programme were 16 percentage points (40%) less likely to reoffend than a matched control group of men who did not take the Fathers Inside programme. This is one of the most significant results of any programme ever measured by the Data Lab.

### Feedback from young adults:

**'This is less about being a man and more about being an adult. It's about integrity and that's the most important thing you can have.'**

**'I don't feel like a prisoner in this room, I feel like a normal person having a conversation.'**

**'For once, we weren't speaking to a brick wall.'**



# Chapter 5:

## The power of positive relationships



**'Prison staff have got such an important job because it is a place where we are starting again, and prison is where it is starting off – so it is stemming from them, and they shouldn't forget that.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

### Calls to action:

**Prison key workers have support and training to understand the importance of pro-social relationships in the context of working with young men and how to effectively build positive relationships with young adults.**

**Targeted services and innovations be commissioned to ensure that all young men have increased opportunities to form positive relationships to support their wellbeing and rehabilitation.**

**Prison staff have the opportunity to access coaching both to inform their own development and to support them in developing the knowledge and skills to form positive relationships with young men in, what can be, a challenging prison environment.**

### Why are positive relationships so important for wellbeing?

**'Family are massive, it's what got me through. Family is the most biggest thing you need.'** *(Young man in custody)*

There is a growing recognition that positive social relationships are fundamental to good wellbeing. Good-quality, pro-social relationships can help us all to live longer and happier lives, with fewer mental health problems and give individuals a sense of purpose and belonging<sup>88</sup>.

Positive relationships are consistently highlighted as an essential element of rehabilitative practice and key in reducing reoffending (particularly important for young adults therefore, who have significantly higher levels of recidivism). In 2018 the prison service introduced the Offender Management in Custody Framework that is designed to 'promote positive staff prisoner relationships' and ensure that all prisoners have an allocated key worker to engage, motivate and support them during their sentence<sup>89</sup>. In addition, HMPPS emphasises the importance of family and significant other relationships. Ministry of Justice research states that prisoners who receive visits from family and significant others reduce their reoffending rate by 39%<sup>90</sup> and in 2017 Lord Farmer's 'landmark' review of the male prison estate stated that 'relationships are fundamentally important if people are to change'<sup>91</sup>.

**'They should encourage you to see your family and to book visits... they shouldn't be moving people to prisons a long way from their families, especially if they have kids.'** *(Young man in custody)*

Access to pro-social relationships is also essential in supporting recovery from trauma and therefore a key component of work with young adults in custody. As Beyond Youth Justice states 'most young offenders have experienced adverse (if not traumatic) childhood experiences and so it is important for resettlement work to build their personal resilience and social support systems'<sup>92</sup>.

**'What we observe in lots of areas of trauma informed practice is that often the most useful approach is to do the opposite to what caused the trauma in the first place... and for many people their trauma is as a result of poor relationships... the simple thing of forming positive relationships with trusted adults is very important.'** *(Alliance member)*

### Why are positive relationships so important for young men?

**'When I built those good relationships with staff it was warming... I felt like they wanted to see the best in me.'** *(Young man in custody)*

For young men in the prison system, positive relationships are often missing as an essential component to wellbeing.

<sup>88</sup> NHS England (2021) NHS Health and Wellbeing Framework

<sup>89</sup> MoJ and HMPPS (2018) Manage the Custodial Sentence Policy Framework

<sup>90</sup> May C., Sharma N. and Stewart D., (2008). Factors linked to reoffending: a one-year follow-up of prisoners who took part in the Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004. London: Ministry of Justice

<sup>91</sup> Lord Farmer (2017) The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime, Ministry of Justice

<sup>92</sup> Liddle, M., Boswell, G., Wright, S. and Francis, V. with Perry, R (2016) Trauma and young offenders: a review of the research and practice literature, Beyond Youth Custody



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**'Lots of young men don't have skills in relationships because they don't have that from their own family... they might have been alone in the world.'** (Young man in custody)

Imprisonment itself automatically separates individuals from their communities, putting significant strain on any existing relationships. While this is the experience for all prisoners, young adults are amongst the most isolated of individuals in custody:

- 18-25 year olds are less likely than older prisoners to maintain relationships with family or significant others during their custodial sentence and only a quarter of young adults receive at least one visit each week<sup>93</sup>. In addition, Black prisoners report less access to family support than white prisoners<sup>94</sup>
- nearly half of young men in custody have recently been in statutory care and are therefore less likely to have pro-social family relationships available to them<sup>95</sup>
- young people between the ages of 16 and 24 report feeling lonely more often than any other age groups<sup>96</sup>
- trauma and poor experiences of statutory services have often resulted in a distrust of professionals and a reluctance to engage in those relationships
- young adults, particularly young Black adults, report significantly poorer relationships with prison staff than prisoners over 25, and are less likely to approach a member of staff for support
- young adults are more likely to be placed in segregation. In an HMIP survey, young Black adults were 3 times more likely to be placed in segregation than their white peers<sup>97</sup>
- young adults in prison report spending less time out of their cell and less time accessing exercise or association with other prisoners<sup>98</sup>.

The Covid-19 Pandemic exacerbated this isolation with many prisoners being confined to their cells for 23 hours a day and face to face visits with family and friends suspended. HMIP reported that 'the most disturbing effect of the restrictions was the decline in prisoners' emotional, psychological and physical well-being'<sup>99</sup>. A review of the impact of lockdown on the mental health of prisoners found that the 'lack of contact with family was the biggest cause for declining mental health' amongst prisoners and disproportionately affected Black and minority ethnic prisoners<sup>100</sup>.

<sup>93</sup> HMIP (January 2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody: A thematic Review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>94</sup> HMIP (October 2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>95</sup> Written evidence from the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance

<sup>96</sup> Office for National Statistics (2018) Loneliness in children and young people

<sup>97</sup> HMIP (January 2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody: A thematic Review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*

<sup>99</sup> What happens to prisoners in a pandemic? A thematic review (2021) Her Majesties Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>100</sup> Wainwright, L. and Gipson, D. (2021) The impact of lockdown to mental health: a summary of patient views, EP: IC

For young adults, their distinct needs make positive relationships (with peers, professionals, family members or significant others) essential in:

- ▶ supporting recovery from trauma and building resilience
- ▶ supporting the development of positive self-identity
- ▶ supporting cognitive development and maturation
- ▶ challenging distrust in relationships developed through discrimination and persistent failure of services/ individuals in meeting their needs
- ▶ reducing isolation
- ▶ promoting good mental and physical health
- ▶ supporting rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

## Creating positive relationships

Positive relationships are a product of the previous issues discussed in this report; they rely on trauma informed, culturally competent, needs-led practice that recognises individual attributes and celebrates identity.

**'Hopefully, over time, we instil a sense of belonging, that authenticity... But what you find with professionals, is that sometimes they lead with their title, not their real selves.'** (Alliance member)

**'You don't necessarily have to be trained in those certain areas... It's just... Just being human, innit? Just being open minded. Just taking that time to speak to someone or that person, and actually get to know them.'** (Young man in custody)

**'If you're working with somebody and you're warm... [a young man is] not going to open up to you but they're going to be more willing to, you know, share some information that they may not have shared before... It's all about the way you portray yourself isn't it... first of all its having people skills isn't it. Most officers don't have the people skills. And that's basically closing down the relationship barrier, straight away.'** (Young man in custody)

**'As long as they can relate then it's fine. If they can't relate, then there's no point... Then the skills come in and that's how you build the rapport. That's when you're able to identify problems with young Black men, do you get it? Then you can start helping them out, you know. Then that's when progression is made.'** (Young man in custody)

Prisons, however, provide a uniquely challenging environment in which to develop positive relationships – where the dominant culture is one of control and discipline, and an 'us' and 'them' mentality prevails.

**'[Staff need to have] transparency and rapport with the prisoners and not abuse their authority. Also, the prisoners, not thinking that it's an us and them thing. 'Cos the prisoners are very adept at getting into that mindset.'** (Young man in custody)

**'I understand that you need to verify the line between us: "I'm an officer and you are a prisoner". That line has been clarified, but at the same time you don't need to dehumanise us by then not being able to talk to us because you want to make sure the top thing on my mind is that you're the officer and I'm the prisoner.'** (Young man in custody)

It is also an environment where many young men (and staff) often feel unsafe (and Black men in prison report feeling significantly more unsafe than their white peers) and therefore being vulnerable, letting down defences, confiding in someone else and developing trust, can be challenging.

**'In [HMP/YOI] I was very paranoid, you don't feel safe, you have to keep up your image... you don't want to be a victim.'** (Young man in custody)

**'Staff are scared too... but their job is so crucial, this is the core of everything, this is where change can happen... so they need to be strong.'** (Young man in custody)

Voluntary sector organisations can address some of these challenges by providing external practitioners who often offer a 'distinctive and valuable approach, which may enable prisoners to move beyond the toughened prisoner identity'<sup>101</sup> and form positive relationships. While Lord Farmer acknowledged the valuable role that prison staff can play in developing relationships, he also emphasised the value of independent, non-uniformed staff, citing research that stated '50% of prisoners found it easier to talk to non-uniformed staff from a voluntary organisation than with prison officers'<sup>102</sup>. Voluntary sector organisations also bring valuable knowledge, skills and expertise in working with particular communities that often enables them to engage more effectively with young Black men<sup>103</sup>.

In order to respond to the challenges that young men face in forming and sustaining positive relationships, prisons must create environments for young men, in which:

- positive relationships are valued and promoted as an essential element of prisoner wellbeing
- staff and prisoners understand what positive relationships look and feel like
- staff and prisoners are supported to develop the understanding and skills to develop and maintain positive relationships
- there are increased opportunities to create positive relationships – with peers, staff and family/ significant others.

<sup>101</sup> Tomczak, P. and Albertson, K. (2016) Prisoner relationships with voluntary sector practitioners. The Howard Journal Of Crime and Justice, 55 (1-2), 57-72.

<sup>102</sup> Lord Farmer (2017) The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime, Ministry of Justice

<sup>103</sup> HMIP (October 2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning, HM Inspectorate of Prisons



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## Young men's views on 'what works' in building positive relationships

### 1 Make the time to listen, talk and engage

'Most people just want someone to chat to innit. You know, it's too easy to get brushed off, they say they're busy and the staffing and so on and so forth.'

'[What works is] an officer that's willing to take his own time to converse with you or help you with something that you're struggling with.'

'Even video links, rubbish, you know, come in and see me face to face. Sit down properly. Like I'm chatting to you through a screen... I'm not really gonna be open like that.'

'Investing a little more time. I'm telling you that's all it takes. Investing a little more time, more one to ones you know.'

### 2 Be consistent and persistent

'Keep trying, keep engaging with them, you know, and kind of just help them in it where necessary.'

### 3 Be true to your word

'If you come and tell me something, then stand by it.'

'I don't care what you do on the outside. I don't care. But don't let that interfere with my things. I've gotta be interacting with this woman for five years. And the first thing that you do is cancel on me, but you want me to give you my all and tell you all this and that, and that I'm not happy.'

'Like, holding out, "I'll see what I can do". They know they're not gonna do it, but just so you are off their case, they will tell you something like that. And then when you go back to them and ask them about it again, they'll do it again and then that's what builds a bad connection. 'Cos now you're thinking nothing's ever going to get done.'

4

Build trust and respect by finding common ground

'So it's just having a relationship, having that rapport, building that rapport, finding common ground with each other and respecting each other.'

'I've had good relations with my Offender Management Unit here, he has been cool. We chop it up over philosophy and stuff... his knowledge is really good. He's like a cool guy, he's gone on holidays and stuff and I'm interested. That's just cool. Like we find common ground and he's a white dude and I'm a mixed race guy.'

5

Demonstrate genuine care, compassion and interest

'It has to be genuine ...people doing their jobs have really gotta care for people that they're dealing with and have empathy, and have empathy for what's going on. If you take a genuine interest I think the person can, kind of clock or read that energy and be like this person wants to know so I'm just gonna tell them what's going on. When it seems false and they just ask you the question, it just feels like they're just doing their job, then you're just gonna wanna get it over and done with but, if you sit down and talk then I think you might just get a little bit outta them.'

'I felt like I had a good relationship with some staff because they looked out for you, checked in on you, asked how you were... you want it to feel like a normal interaction.'

'Understanding where a man's coming from, you could form a bond off that, you know? That's all you have to do, understand. If you can understand where that guy is coming from you know, you need to understand first.'

'But there's other officers that you can actually have a meaningful conversation with like... they don't look at you like a prisoner, they're like "oh, he's made a mistake". Do you get it? What are your interests? What are your hobbies?'



## Practice example: Routes to Change at HMP Isis (Prison Advice and Care Trust)

### Who:

Pact, the Prison Advice and Care Trust is a national charity supporting prisoners, people with convictions and their families. Pact provides services at every stage of the criminal justice process: in court, in prison, on release, and in the community.

### What:

Routes to Change is a pioneering programme first developed by Pact at HMP Brixton. It is based on a 'relationships first' approach which aims to embed and develop pro-social relationships for prisoners throughout their sentence and upon release. Its long-term aim is to create a culture of 'relationships first' as a golden thread running through HMP Isis. HMP Isis has a predominantly young adult population with 77% of prisoners aged between 18 and 25 and around 60% of prisoners are Black or Asian. Pro-social relationships are complex for many of the young men and are not always 'familial'. A significant proportion of the population are care experienced.

### How:

Routes 2 Change uses a whole systems approach to embed 'relationships first' into HMP Isis – this includes direct work with young men, awareness raising across staff teams, influencing development/review of local policy and practice and engagement of young men in programme development and delivery. Key outputs include:

- Development of 'Relationship First' award scheme for prison staff who demonstrate a clear understanding of the important role that relationships have in the rehabilitation of prisoner.
- Recruitment, training and support of Routes to Change Peer Support Champions on every wing to promote engagement and raise awareness about the importance of pro-social relationships
- One to one case work with prisoners to support them to develop and strengthen pro-social relationships
- Integration of relationship triage and Care Plans into induction and assessment processes.

### Impact:

The Routes 2 Change programme at HMP Isis is currently being evaluated by the Policy Evaluation Research Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University.

### Feedback from young adults:

'Some people go from prison to prison and have no visits and they think 'this is it'. They need to have others who can open up the world to them.' Young man, HMP/YOI Isis

'This is the best time to try and reset some of those relationships. We need more support for these opportunities by people who are trained to know what to do when people are having problems and have been through a lot of shit.' Young man, HMP/YOI Isis

'If you come from a broken home, it can make you really angry as a child but it can also make you stronger. You need someone around you to give you a bit of guidance.' Young man, HMP/YOI Isis



# Chapter 6:

## Giving Young Men a Voice



**'Just listen to us isn't it. Just don't talk over me, just listen and just try to change something please. Simple as.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

### Calls to action

**In working to meet the HMPPS Service User Involvement and Engagement Standards of Excellence, prison establishments ensure that the specific needs of young men, particularly young Black men, are recognised and responded to, and that this is evidenced in their policy and practice.**

**Prison establishments should draw on the knowledge, expertise and innovation within the voluntary sector to develop the skills and approaches to effectively empower young men to have voice in the policy and practice that affects them.**

Many young adults in custody have been part of systems throughout their lives (whether education, social care, health or criminal justice) where their voices have been silenced. They arrive in custody disillusioned, disempowered and lacking trust that their voices will be listened to, valued or responded to. A review of the criminal justice system by over 500 young adults from across England found that many individuals felt disempowered before they entered custody, reporting that the court process offered young adults **'no opportunity to tell their story, leaving many important factors ignored'**<sup>104</sup>.

**'They don't wanna feel like a box. They don't want to feel like a tick. They want to be people, people with thoughts and emotions, ideals, the system doesn't see 'em like that, the system just sees 'em as a piece of paper with their criminal history.'** *(Young man in custody)*

For young Black men the sense of being unheard is magnified by their persistent experience of racial profiling and discrimination<sup>105</sup>. In 2014 the Young Review recommended that 'individuals who understand the lived experience of young Black and/or Muslim male offenders should play an integral part in the planning and delivery of programmes and interventions to support desistance' and yet 6 years on HM Inspectorate of Prisons reported that 'BME prisoners were not actively involved in defining and refining the concept of rehabilitative culture in their establishments'.

**'Regarding having a voice and hearing their voices, ethnic minority prisoners, particularly young people, feel mistrusted, dismissed and ignored.'** *(Alliance member)*

**'When you are in jail you are not in control of your life anymore so it's important that they give you a voice and not empty promises.'** *(Alliance member)*

There is well documented evidence of the benefits of meaningful participation for individual wellbeing: promoting self-esteem and confidence, building relationships and trust, skill development, providing a sense of agency and creating opportunities to develop a pro-social identity<sup>106,107</sup>. Empowering young adults, who are at a critical point of maturation, to take responsibility and influence policy and practice that affects them and their environment, can challenge the perception that their voice is not valued, and gives 'normally passive recipients of policy decisions the opportunity to grow, develop, and contribute more meaningfully to the world around them'<sup>108</sup>. In addition, young Black adults with lived experience of the criminal justice system have stated that 'listening to the views and experiences of service users when making decisions about the criminal justice system' is essential in building trust in the system<sup>109</sup>.

**'Just listen and take notes and hear what people have to say, and just try and be open minded. Try and be someone that they can relate to because if not it's going to be the same circle, same circle, same circle. Everyone's going to get bored of the same circle and next thing you know, this place is done because they're angry. Because they don't listen.'** *(Young man in custody)*

<sup>104</sup> Leaders Unlocked (2020) Young adult advisors on criminal justice: hearing from young adults in the criminal justice system, Barrow Cadbury Trust

<sup>105</sup> Leaders Unlocked (2022) Race and the Criminal Justice System: Hearing from Young Adults, Barrow Cadbury Trust

<sup>106</sup> Nacro, Clinks, the Association of Mental Health Providers, Mental Health Foundation and the Race Equality Foundation (2017) Race, mental health and criminal justice: moving forward, Nacro

<sup>107</sup> National Offender Management Unit (2015) Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men

<sup>108</sup> HMPPS (2021) Service User Involvement: A toolkit to support excellence

<sup>109</sup> Leaders Unlocked (2022) Race and the Criminal Justice System: Hearing from Young Adults, Barrow Cadbury Trust

As there is persistent evidence that the prison system is failing to recognise or meet the specific needs of young adults, and particularly young Black adults, there is no better time to actively engage and listen to 18-25 year olds to better understand what they need to reach their full potential.

HMIP requires prisons to demonstrate that ‘prisoners are able to take an active role in influencing decisions about services, routines and facilities in the prison and in managing their own day to day life’<sup>110</sup> and in 2021 HMPPS published their ‘Service User Involvement Toolkit to Support Excellence’ committing to ‘continually improving how we do this going forward’.<sup>111</sup>

Giving young men a voice is not a one-off, tick box activity. In order to affect systemic and long-term change, service user involvement requires a whole-systems approach: one where staff understand the benefits of empowering young adults and have the skills to do so effectively; where young adults are provided with the support and development they need to contribute; where establishments are held to account if their policy and practice is not informed by the voices of young adults; where leaders promote and encourage young adult empowerment; and where the mechanisms in place enable all voices to be heard and acted upon – particularly those from Black and other marginalised communities.

‘There is a ladder of co-production that we all work towards and prisons tend to be on that bottom rung using a more coercive approach and we need to move away from that.’ (Alliance member)

‘Giving people a voice is about giving individuals agency, but it only works where the right leadership is in place.’ (Alliance member)

Traditional mechanisms for giving prisoners a voice – such as prisoner-led councils, Wing meetings, peer-led programmes and paper surveys can often exclude the very voices that routinely go unheard. HMIP reports frequently flag non-representative prisoner consultation processes, with a recent (2022) site inspection stating ‘strategic oversight of equality, consultation with prisoners in protected groups and analysis of data to identify potential disproportionate treatment of these individuals were limited’<sup>112</sup>. Young adults, particularly young Black men, who may have a history of being excluded and a lack of trust in the system, will require additional support to understand the value of sharing their views.

‘They don’t listen... They don’t know where I am. They don’t know how I’m coping. So it’s got to a point where it’s like no matter if I’m in pain, whatever situation I’m in, I’d rather just keep it to myself and wait ‘til I get out.’ (Young man in custody)

57% of adult prisoners taking initial assessments have literacy levels below those expected of an 11 year old<sup>113</sup> and nearly nine out of 10 children in YOIs said they had been excluded from school<sup>114</sup>. Paper based surveys and assessment forms will automatically deny many individuals a voice. In addition, unless young adults can see the change that has occurred as a result of their voice being listened to, participation will remain limited.

‘I was at a Wing Rep meeting here... they said they gonna change so much things. Six months I come back there... He says he gonna do this, do that... and not one thing changed! Just tell us straight up... people are scared to open their mouths in the Wing Rep meetings.’ (Young man in custody)

Approaches to developing meaningful involvement, particularly for young adults, need to be responsive to their specific needs and utilise creative or innovative approaches. Voluntary sector organisations will often have the skills, experience and innovation to support prisons to develop their policy and practice and empower young adults to have their voices heard.

‘All the different forms of medium like radio, the TV, writing, all of the different mediums of creativity ... it’s the way the world is, it’s the way to get people’s view across just like it is outside. It’s the same. It’s just prisons are like a little mini society. So we could just bring all of that... the way they use the media out there and bring it into prison.’ (Young man in custody)

## Practice example: Giving young adults a voice

<p><b>Who:</b></p> <p>Zahid Mubarek Trust (ZMT) advocates for racial justice in the prison system. They combine policy work with grassroots projects and work across 40 prisons scrutinising and supporting establishments to improve treatment and outcomes for ethnic minority people.</p>	<p><b>What:</b></p> <p>ZMT delivers two distinct yet complementary projects in prisons: External Scrutiny and Support and Equality Advocates. Both projects aim to empower and support ethnic minority prisoners to have a voice in issues that concern them and their peers, while also aiming to achieve greater transparency and accountability on racial disparity and improve the outcomes for ethnic minority prisoners.</p>
<p><b>How:</b></p> <p>ZMT trains and supports ethnic minority young people to become Equality Advocates. The training course consists of seven sessions delivered in small group settings every two weeks. The sessions are delivered by trained facilitators, including the ZMT’s lived experience staff. After the graduation ceremony from the Advocacy course, Advocates begin work experience of facilitating peer-led support work on their wings, providing voice to others and contributing to wider equalities work across the establishment. The project is viewed as an effective tool of reducing racial disparity by those Equality Leads who are committed to affecting change locally.</p>	<p><b>Impact:</b></p> <p>The Equality Advocates Project is currently being externally evaluated with the final report due in October 2022. The External Scrutiny and Support Project has been formally assessed twice over the past ten years, and various stakeholders have noted its positive impact. For example, HMP Bedford’s recent HMIP report noted that, following ZMT’s work:</p> <p><b>“Leaders had also sought to improve the experience of treatment for the large minority of Black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners, including by being more transparent about the way that work is allocated and making a concerted effort to deal more sensitively with discrimination incident reporting forms.”</b> (Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Bedford 2022: 3)</p>
<p><b>Feedback from young adults:</b></p> <p><b>‘Advocates are our change to the future transformation! A study shows that 50% of ethnic minority prisoners feel unheard. Ethnic minority prisoners would feel more comfortable speaking to advocates similar to them with similar experience. So let’s get together and make the change!’</b> (Young ethnic minority prisoner Advocate)</p>	

<sup>110</sup> HMIP (2021) Expectations Criteria for assessing the treatment of and conditions for men in prisons

<sup>111</sup> HMPPS (2021) Service User Involvement A Toolkit to Support Excellence

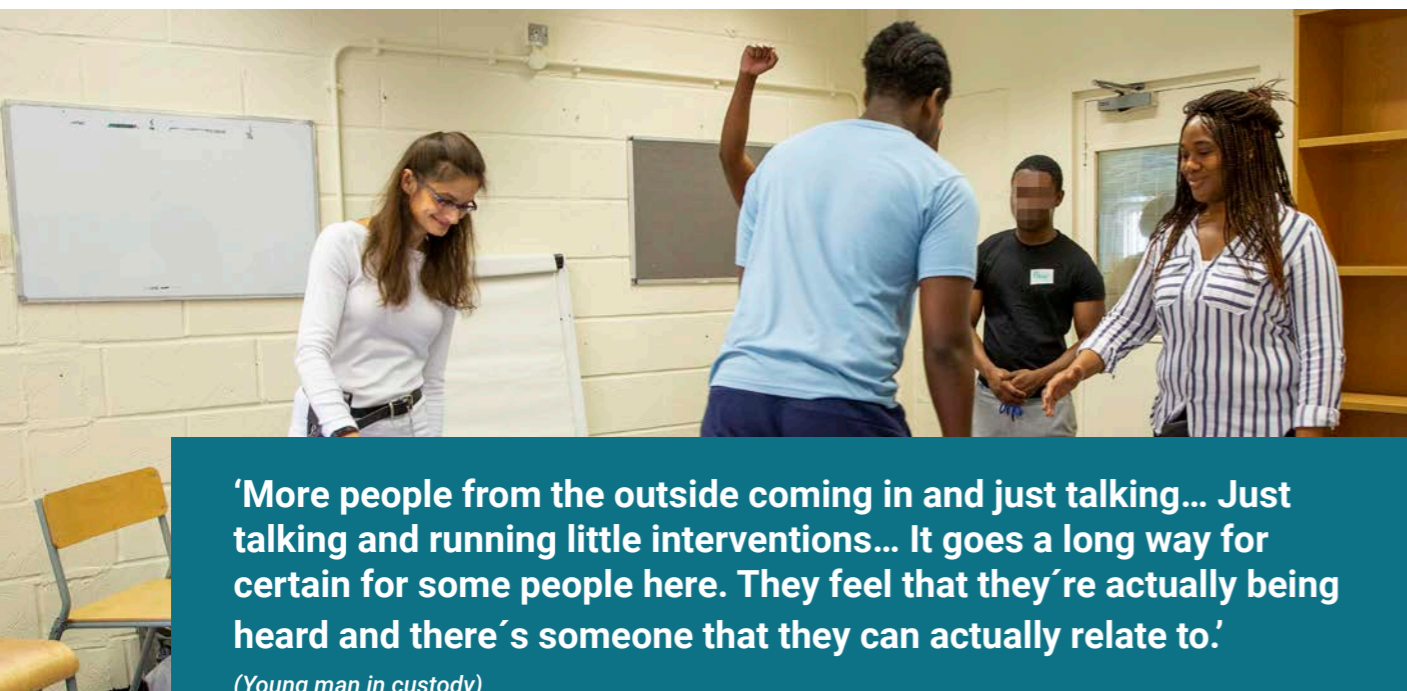
<sup>112</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2022) Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Thameside by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons

<sup>113</sup> Ministry of Justice (August, 2021) Prison education statistics 2019–2020, Ministry of Justice

<sup>114</sup> HMIP and Youth Justice Board (2017-18) Children in Custody 2017–18, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

# Chapter 7:

## Commissioning services for young men in the criminal justice system



**'More people from the outside coming in and just talking... Just talking and running little interventions... It goes a long way for certain for some people here. They feel that they're actually being heard and there's someone that they can actually relate to.'**

*(Young man in custody)*

### Calls to action

#### Commissioned wellbeing services provide:

- ▶ support and training for prison staff which promotes increased confidence, skills and understanding in meeting the needs of young men
- ▶ specialist interventions, support and services that respond to the distinct needs of young men and improve wellbeing outcomes.

#### In commissioning wellbeing services for young men, Commissioners need to:

- ▶ listen to the views and experiences of young men, particularly young Black men
- ▶ scrutinise equality data to assess the impact of commissioning on young Black men's wellbeing
- ▶ understand 'what works' in improving wellbeing outcomes for young men in custody
- ▶ engage and empower specialist voluntary sector organisations.

As this briefing has demonstrated, young men in custody have distinct needs that set them apart from the older adult estate and as such require support, approaches and interventions that are tailored to them. They also possess unique strengths and are at a critical time in their transition to adulthood where the right support can make a significant difference. Current prison policy and practice is neglecting the wellbeing of young men, particularly young Black men: not only is it failing to promote young men's wellbeing, but it is having a significantly negative impact on it.

In 2015, the National Offender Management Unit published evidence-based commissioning principles for young adult men, identifying six priority areas of need and associated interventions and programmes that could contribute to meeting those needs. While the prison service has since developed the 'Choices and Changes' resource pack to support work with young adults, HM Inspectorate of Prisons has reported limited use of the resource and that 'even if delivered consistently... it is insufficient to address the specific needs of young adults'. Overall HMIP has reported that there has been a 'reduction of services for young adults and most receive no specific provision at all'<sup>115</sup>. Given that young adults have the highest level of Black and ethnic minority over-representation in the adult prison estate and that prison inspection reports consistently demonstrate that they have worse experiences of prison life and wellbeing than white prisoners, it is essential young adult services are commissioned to recognise and respond to the needs of young Black men as individuals and as members of ethnic minority groups.

While the practice examples throughout this report demonstrate that some young adult-specific interventions and services have been commissioned, across the estate there continues to be a 'gap' in targeted services or interventions that promote young men's wellbeing. Further targeted commissioning for services that are tailored to the needs of young men, and particularly Black young men, is therefore required.

Specialist interventions for young adults however, will struggle to succeed in improving wellbeing outcomes in young adults, if delivered within a vacuum. Given young adults report more negative experiences than older prisoners, across multiple indicators of wellbeing: relationships, physical environments, mental health and safety – there is wider work required to develop prison cultures that promote young adult wellbeing. When HMIP asked prisons to explain why the 'Choices and Changes' resource had not been used more widely with young adults, the main reason cited was that 'staff lacked experience and confidence'<sup>116</sup>. Commissioners therefore need to consider how they can draw on the expertise of the voluntary sector to promote a greater understanding and awareness of the distinct wellbeing needs of young adults and increase confidence and skills amongst prison staff.

In commissioning services, interventions or capacity building there are key issues that need to be considered to ensure that commissioning processes are responding to the needs of young men, and in particular, young Black men:

### Listen to the views and experiences of young men

As HM Inspectorate has recently reported, attempts to understand the distinct perspectives of BME prisoners have been 'largely ineffective'<sup>117</sup>. In order for commissioning processes to respond to the specific needs of young men and particularly young Black men, it is vital that their views and experiences inform the commissioning process. Clinks recommends that people within the criminal justice system be involved in 'equality impact assessments for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act, throughout the whole commissioning cycle'<sup>118</sup>.

<sup>115</sup> HMIP (January 2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody: a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>116</sup> HMIP (January 2021) Outcomes for young adults in custody: a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>117</sup> HMIP (2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>118</sup> Livingstone, I. (2018) More than a Provider: the role of the voluntary sector in the commissioning of offender services, Clinks

## Scrutinise equality data to assess the impact of commissioning on young Black men

One of the key findings of the Lammy Review (2017) was that the criminal justice system needed to do more to understand Black and ethnic minority disproportionality by improving the collection and scrutiny of ethnicity data. Crucially Lammy highlighted the importance of using data to provide insight into the impact of decision making<sup>119</sup>. Three years on, HM Inspectorate of Prisons has found that there continues to be 'insufficient use of data to understand access to activities and rehabilitative interventions' for Black and minority ethnic prisoners<sup>120</sup>. Key to effective commissioning of wellbeing services for young adults, therefore, is to:

- understand the demographics of the young adult population and
- scrutinise the impact of the commissioning on individuals, including young Black men, within that population.

## Understand 'what works' in improving wellbeing outcomes for young men in custody

As there is an increased awareness about the distinct wellbeing needs of young adults in custody, there is also a need to understand 'what works' in response to those needs and to develop an evidence base that can inform future commissioning intentions.

**'More needs to be done to recognise good practice – the quality of the work needs to be considered.'** (Alliance member)

**'Research funding bodies should prioritise research and evaluation that will build the evidence base for programmes supporting young Black men's mental health.'**<sup>121</sup> (Alliance member)

Commissioners therefore need to support innovation, while also demanding effective monitoring and evaluation to determine the impact of that innovation on young adult wellbeing.

**'Governors need to be leaders, visionary, not afraid to take risks and use initiative.'** (Alliance member)

<sup>119</sup> Lammy D (2017) The Lammy Review: An Independent Review into the Treatment of, and Outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Individuals in the Criminal Justice System. London: Lammy Review

<sup>120</sup> HMIP (2020) Minority ethnic prisoners' experiences of rehabilitation and release planning: a thematic review, HM Inspectorate of Prisons

<sup>121</sup> Centre for Mental Health (2017) Against the Odds: Evaluation of the Mind Birmingham Up My Street programme

## Engage and empower specialist voluntary sector organisations

There is repeated evidence that the voluntary sector can bring vital specialist knowledge and experience to wellbeing services for prisoners. This has been particularly highlighted in regards to meeting the needs of Black and minority ethnic communities. Black-led and Black-specialist voluntary sector agencies are well-placed to offer (generic or specialist) services to young Black men, because they tend to have greater scope than statutory providers to:

- engage individuals whose experiences or perceptions of racial discrimination make them particularly mistrustful of statutory services;
- deliver culturally sensitive provision;
- deliver person-centred services that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of prisoners as individuals and as members of minority ethnic groups.<sup>122</sup>

However, while the valuable role of smaller, specialist voluntary sector organisations is widely acknowledged, commissioning processes often exclude those very organisations<sup>123</sup>. The introduction of the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) by the Ministry of Justice has created further challenges for the voluntary sector – particularly smaller, more specialist organisations who do not have access to well-resourced business development or bid-writing teams. The Lammy Review cited a report published in 2015 that found that 'funding for BAME organisations is around half the average, and surveys of BAME groups indicate they are experiencing more rapid reductions in their funds than mainstream charities.'<sup>124</sup>

**'If the numbers don't look right, that organisation isn't going to be the one commissioned. It's a terrible state of affairs when on the ground organisations that do the work, don't get the funding. And sometimes unfortunately that funding instead goes to organisations that don't have the expertise to really deliver for their beneficiaries.'**  
(Practice provider)

Commissioners therefore need to recognise the value of the voluntary sector and ensure that commissioning processes don't disadvantage or marginalise smaller voluntary sector organisations – particularly those with the cultural competence to work effectively with Black and minority ethnic young men.

<sup>122</sup> Jacobson J., Phillips C., and Edgar K (2010) Double Trouble? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement, Clinks and Prison Reform Trust

<sup>123</sup> Nacro, Clinks, the Association of Mental Health Providers, Mental Health Foundation and the Race Equality Foundation (2017) Race, mental health and criminal justice: moving forward, Nacro

<sup>124</sup> Lammy D (2017) The Lammy Review: An Independent Review into the Treatment of, and Outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Individuals in the Criminal Justice System. London: Lammy Review



**Thank you!**

Thank you to everyone who helped  
make this report possible.

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please visit our website or contact us below.**

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