



**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**

# **Race and the Criminal Justice System: Hearing from Young Adults**

**Produced by the T2A  
Young Adult Advisory Group**

**Commissioned by**



**to inform**



**Leaders Unlocked enables young people to strengthen their voice on the issues that affect their lives. In policing, criminal justice, education, health and elsewhere we help organisations to involve the people who matter in order to shape decision-making for the better.**

**[www.leaders-unlocked.org](http://www.leaders-unlocked.org)**

**This report was supported by the Barrow Cadbury Trust to inform the work of the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance - a broad coalition of 16 leading criminal justice, health and youth charities - working to evidence and promote the need for a distinct and effective approach to young adults (18-24 year olds) in the transition to adulthood, throughout the criminal justice process.**

**T2A is convened and funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust.**

**The Trust is an independent, charitable foundation, committed to bringing about socially just change.**

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**T2A Alliance's 16 membership organisations include: Addaction, BTEG, Catch 22, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS), CLINKS, Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA), Howard League for Penal Reform, Nacro, The Prince's Trust, Prison Reform Trust, Revolving Doors Agency, the Young Foundation, Young Minds, Care Leavers' Association, Together for Mental Wellbeing and the Restorative Justice Council.**

**[www.t2a.org.uk](http://www.t2a.org.uk)**

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# INTRODUCTION

## A Voice for Young Adults on Criminal Justice

In 2016, Leaders Unlocked established the [T2A \(Transition to Adulthood\)](#) Young Adult Advisory Group in collaboration with the [Barrow Cadbury Trust](#). The purpose of the Advisory Group is to enable young adults with personal experience of the Criminal Justice System to have a national voice on policy. This includes a personal or family experience of the criminal justice system, such as engagement with the police, being convicted of a crime, or being a victim of a crime.

The T2A Young Adult Advisory Group goes beyond traditional models of consultation; it is driven by young adults and allows them to put forward solutions to the problems they identify in their own peer groups. The aims of the Advisory Group are to:

- Gather and represent the views of young adults on the Criminal Justice System (CJS).
- Act as a sounding board to inform the T2A Alliance.
- Produce reports outlining the views of young adults on different criminal justice themes.
- Present insights and recommendations to policy-makers working on criminal justice reform.

Through this project, a diverse group of 10 young adults aged 18-25 years from across the country have worked in partnership with the T2A Alliance to identify and address priority issues for young adults in the Criminal Justice System.

## Hearing from Young Adults on Race and Criminal Justice

In the summer of 2016, the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group **selected Race and the Criminal Justice System as their first priority**.

This Group chose this priority because they felt passionate about this issue and because it tied in to a number of current national developments, such as the Lammy Review<sup>†</sup> and the Young Review.

The Group's aims were to:

- Gather **personal testimonies** from BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) young adults of their experiences of policing and criminal justice.
- Understand whether, and how, participants feel their **racial, ethnic and religious identity** affected these experiences.
- Explore participants' views on **trust in the CJS**.
- Involve participants in the **development of solutions** for policy makers.

<sup>†</sup>The Lammy Review, chaired by David Lammy MP, is an independent review of the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The Young Review, chaired by Baroness Young of Hornsey, is working with government to improve outcomes for young black and Muslim men in the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

## About this Report

This report is based on **90 in-depth conversations** with young adults around the country, gathered using a range of methods including: focus groups, surveys, and semi-structured interviews.

The report is structured into 4 key sections that outline what we have found about the experiences and treatment of young adults at different stages of the Criminal Justice System:

1. **Policing and Arrest**
2. **Courts and Sentencing**
3. **Youth Offending and Probation Services**
4. **Custody**

The final section, Section 5, looks at the question of **Trust in the Criminal Justice System**, exploring the overarching findings from our participants around trust.

Each section features verbatim quotes from young adults and outlines the main ideas they have put forward for change.

The pictures featured throughout the report are images of the work created by young adults participating in our focus groups.

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

## What we did

**Recruiting the Advisory Group members:** Leaders Unlocked carried out a recruitment process, working through our existing network across the country, to select a group of 10 motivated young adults to join the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group. We worked proactively to ensure that we recruited a diverse group from a range of different regions of England. As a result, we were successful in recruiting young adults with a wide range of personal experiences of the Criminal Justice System, and including a significant number from BAME backgrounds.

**Identifying priority issues:** At their inaugural meeting in June 2016, the new Advisory Group deliberated and collaborated with experts from the T2A Alliance to select a short list of priorities that they felt were particularly urgent and important to address. As a result of this inaugural meeting, the group selected their first priority of Race and the Criminal Justice System.

**Creating the tools for the consultation:** Through a process of co-creation with the young adults, we developed 3 different consultation tools for the Group to use to gather the views of other young adults. These included: a workshop plan and supporting resources, a semi-structured interview guide, and a structured survey.

**Running the peer consultation:** Reaching out to a wide variety of organisations, we arranged opportunities for the Advisory Group to engage young adults with experience of the Criminal Justice System, with a particular emphasis on young adults from BAME backgrounds. The group was able to engage with over 90 individuals using a blend of consultation methods to get a real depth of response.

**Presentation at the Ministry of Justice:** In March 2017, the Advisory Group were invited to make a presentation of their findings at the Ministry of Justice, to an audience of policy officials working on the Lammy Review, and other related areas such as Prison Education and Probation. Attendees particularly valued the opportunity to enter into a dialogue with young adults who are 'experts by experience' of the criminal justice system.

## Consultation methods

**Focus groups:** Advisory Group members ran 7 focus groups to engage groups of young adults in community settings. These 90-minute sessions featured standing debates to explore questions of trust and fairness, image-based exercises to examine experiences and perceptions, and structured group discussion to identify solutions for policy makers. Focus groups were held in Nottingham, Leicester, London and Stoke-on-Trent.

**Semi-structured interviews:** Advisory Group members conducted 30-minute interviews with individual young adults to understand how and why they had entered CJS, their experiences at different stages of the justice system, what difference they felt race/ethnicity/ faith had made, and their ideas for solutions. Twenty-four interviews were conducted within prisons, and the rest were conducted with individuals in the community.

**Surveys:** A survey was conducted face-to-face with 62 participants after the focus groups and interviews were completed. This paper survey featured questions about trust, fairness, and policing. It also captured information about diversity of the respondents.

## Who we reached

Between November 2016 and March 2017, the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group spoke to **over 90 young adults** aged 15-25 years across the country.

### **We targeted young adults from BAME backgrounds with experience of different stages of the CJS.**

The group put particular effort and energy into engaging with young adults with personal experience of the justice system who would not usually have the opportunity to comment on policy issues. The group carried out workshops and interviews with young prisoners, Youth Offending Team service users, young homeless people, and young people in alternative education settings.

Out of our total respondents:

- 87% have experienced arrest
- 62% have experienced custody
- 80% from BAME backgrounds
- 20% white British, white English, or Traveller
- 30% are Muslim
- 13% female
- 87% male

The table below gives a breakdown of the sample reached:

<b>Young male prisoners:</b> from mixed ethnic backgrounds in HMP/YOI Glen Parva in Leicestershire and HMP/YOI Brinsford in Staffordshire	24
<b>Young people currently engaged with Youth Offending Teams:</b> through Stoke-on-Trent Youth Offending Service and Leicestershire Youth Offending Service	8
<b>Young homeless adults:</b> from mixed ethnic backgrounds at Crash Pad youth shelter in London, Nacro in Nottingham and Leicester YMCA	24
<b>Young adults in education centres:</b> Male students from African-Caribbean backgrounds at Further Education College in South London, Young African-Caribbean males in Take 1 Studios, an alternative education centre in Nottingham	13
<b>Young adults in community centres:</b> Young Bengali Muslim men at Kings Cross Neighbourhood Centre in London	9
<b>Peer interviews through personal networks</b> of Advisory Group members with young African-Caribbean men and women in Leeds, Leicester and London	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>

## Our partners

We are grateful for the support of a wide range of local partners who have allowed the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group to consult with the young adults in their organisations. Thanks go to:

- Crash Pad Youth Shelter
- HMP/ YOI Glen Parva
- HMP/ YOI Brinsford
- Kings Cross Neighbourhood Centre
- Leicestershire Youth Offending Service
- Leicester YMCA
- Nacro Nottingham
- South Thames College
- Stoke-on-Trent Youth Offending Service
- Take 1 Studios Nottingham

We would like to thank the T2A Alliance and the Barrow Cadbury Trust for their invaluable support of this work. We also want to give a special mention to Laurie Hunte and the Lammy Review team for their support of this work and for hosting the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group presentation at the Ministry of Justice in March 2017.

A special thanks goes to the members of the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group: Adam Eastmond, Ebenezer Amoh, Louis Faith, Nadine Smith, Sadia Begum, Samantha Burns, Sarah Hack, Sax Sattar, Tashan Wilkin.

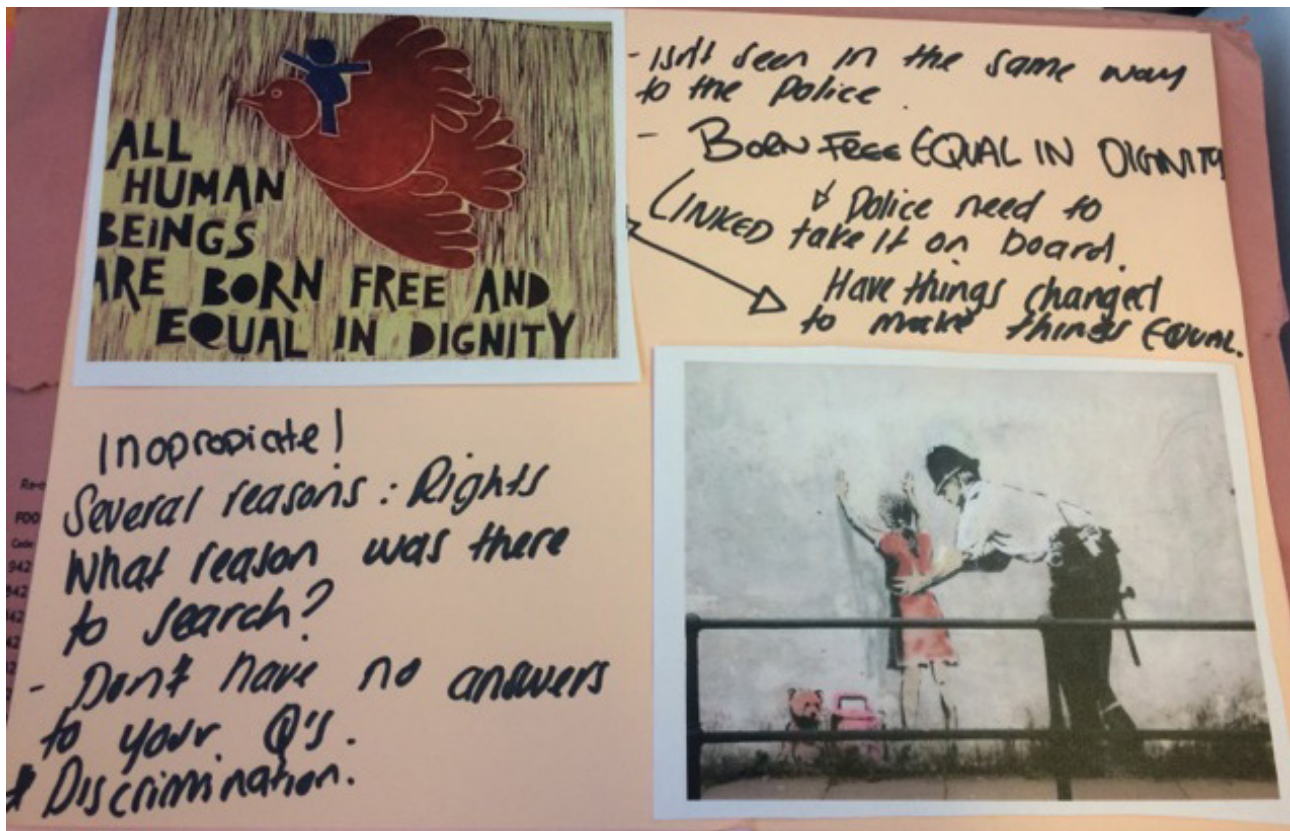
I recommend more black police officers

(don't use live numbers), that is a lack of respect  
before how can we have a mutual respect.

**POLICING & ARREST**



# POLICING & ARREST



## What we did:

We aimed to understand young adults' experiences of policing and arrest. We wanted to explore what difference they felt race and religion made to their treatment and experiences, if any. We also wanted to get their views on the solutions that may help to improve experiences of policing and arrest in the future.

## What we found:

Most young adults we spoke to said they felt targeted by the police in their local areas. Our survey results show that as many as 76% of respondents agreed that they felt targeted to some degree.

**76% of respondents felt targeted by police in their local area "to some extent" or "very much".**

Young people told us they feel targeted for a variety of reasons including their **criminal background, the people they are associated with, family reputation, race and religion**. We found that race was the biggest factor identified by those from BAME backgrounds. Many felt that the police were always watching them and looking for reasons to interfere. Participants gave examples of being searched, raided, followed, verbally abused and provoked by the police.

*"Yes! [I feel targeted by police] because I'm black, because I'm dark. The darker the worse."  
(Workshop participant, London)*

*"I feel targeted by the police in my local area because they slow down and stare at me."*

(Workshop participant, Nottingham)

*"Although I'm working, I see them parked outside my house. We call it 'Terrorist watch.'"*

(Workshop participant, London)

Many participants commented that they were repeatedly **subjected to Stop and Search**. BAME young adults recounted numerous stories of regular searches, taking place in the course of their everyday lives. Many participants felt that 'no valid reasons' were given to them by the police for these searches.

*"I was stopped and searched a lot (3 times in one day) because of my skin colour even to the point friends wouldn't get in my car." (Prisoner, West Midlands)*

*"[Stopped and searched] in the morning on the way to college. The description was 'the guy was wearing gloves.' And that was enough of a reason to search me." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"Lately I've been stopped 4 times in 4 months, since I've been driving. Trying to search and dig for stuff that isn't there. They try to pin things on me that aint even me. We all get stopped and searched a lot." (Workshop participant, London)*

Many BAME participants said the police jump to the conclusion that they **must be guilty of something** if they are seen with material possessions - including laptops, bikes, cars and cash. They felt their race was the primary reason for this. In their view, the police seem to actually want BAME young people to be guilty if they have material things.

*"I come from a well-off family and was working hard to save for my first car, which was a BMW. I felt like the police wanted me to be guilty and would make up any excuse to search the car and me." (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

*"New Years day they stopped me, put me in a van, told me that if my laptop was stolen I'd be in trouble, but then I typed in my password and proved it was mine." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"I'm a trainee mechanic going to fix my friend's bike and the police stop me looking for a stolen bike and wasted 30 minutes." (Workshop participant, London)*

For the young people who are targeted and singled out in this way, **there is a clear emotional impact**. Being on the receiving end of this treatment is embarrassing and can be deeply humiliating for individuals – especially when done in public places or in front of friends and family. When these interactions with police are repeated regularly over an extended period of time, it feels like harassment, or bullying, and makes young people feel violated. This can result in anger, retaliation and emotional outbursts. It can easily escalate situations.

*"It's embarrassing – it's embarrassment as well too." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"When I go to carnival, police tried to arrest me 3 times. The worst is when it affects your family – I was with my baby mum." (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*"You feel more violated – it's the repeated bullying – it's repetition." (Workshop participant, London)*

We heard that these negative experience often start from a young age and ignite a lifelong distrust - or even hatred of the police. These experiences, in turn, can shape the individual's wider relationships with the authorities. Some participants explained that, as small children they had faith in the police, but this faith was eroded as they became older and their experiences with the police led them to enter the 'system'.

*"When I was young, like 5, I used to think the police would help." (Workshop participant, Nottingham)*

*"It's got to a point where I would run if they approach me [even if I've done nothing wrong]." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"It all started off from the first stop and search, then they get your details in the system, your finger*

*prints and mouth swab. From there they find out who you are.” (Interviewee, London)*

*“When I was younger they tried to nick me, I was 15, and they NFA’ed me. But one of them said I have to stay on the system, I should have been removed when I was 17. They still mention it now.” (Workshop participant, London)*

As these young people grow up, they feel they are subject to an unfair level of monitoring and **underhand attempts by the police** to gather evidence on them. From their perspective, the police are simply ‘out to get them’ and are always trying to ‘trip them up’ in order to get an arrest leading to a conviction and ultimately to ‘put them away.’

*“They want to know you so they can identify you. Build something around you.” (Workshop participant, London)*

*“When they arrest you they don’t arrest you for no reason, they arrest you because they want to find you guilty.” (Workshop participant, London)*

During arrest, we heard there is often **a lack of respect** shown to young BAME people, and at times **excessive force is used**. Young BAME adults also commented that the police can be manipulative towards them, for instance by making threats or trying to strike deals. Many feel there is little or no accountability on the part of the police for these actions.

*“I was chilling around Coop and there was a stabbing that happened round the corner. The stabbing was nothing to do with us. But it was cold and we were wearing dark colours. The police said I’ve been smoking substances, they got aggressive and irate, they bent my arms and they just arrested me. They put me in the cells, left me there and then let me out without saying anything – no apology, no explanation. That was the worst thing.” (Workshop participant, Nottingham)*

*“My offence was death by dangerous driving. At the time it all happened, I was the one who actually called the police and called the ambulance to the scene. I didn’t resist or anything, yet I was manhandled and had a lot of excessive force used.” (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

*“My mate got arrested for calling someone [an offensive term]. He’s white. They treated him so nicely. He got put on the bench. Whereas the first treatment I had was that I was pushed in the cell.... Sometimes race has a role, not all the time. (Interviewee, London)*

Despite all these negative stories we have gathered, we did find that **experiences do differ depending on the police officer**. Some officers are honest and respectful and these officers make a big difference on an individual level. One example of this came from a young man in Nottingham:

*“There was one officer. I always respected him because I got in trouble once riding a stolen moped and he was honest with me from the first day he saw me on the ped. .... Since that day I’ve always had respect for him, every time I see him I’ll have a convo with him.” (Interviewee, Nottingham)*

## POLICING AND ARREST - OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When we spoke to young adults, they suggested a range of ideas to improve policing and arrest including: tackling unconscious bias through police recruitment and training processes; strengthening the complaints system and increasing police accountability for actions; raising awareness of the rights young people have in relation to policing; recruiting more diverse police officers at every level.

TACKLE POLICE STEREOTYPING  
AND BIAS.

MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IT IS NOT  
ACCEPTABLE FOR THE POLICE TO  
HARASS YOUNG PEOPLE.

MAKE SURE POLICE ARE  
HELD TO ACCOUNT FOR THEIR  
ACTIONS AND STRENGTHEN  
THE SYSTEM FOR POLICE  
COMPLAINTS.

DO NOT ALLOW POLICE  
OFFICERS TO TURN  
THEIR BODY-WORN  
CAMERAS OFF.

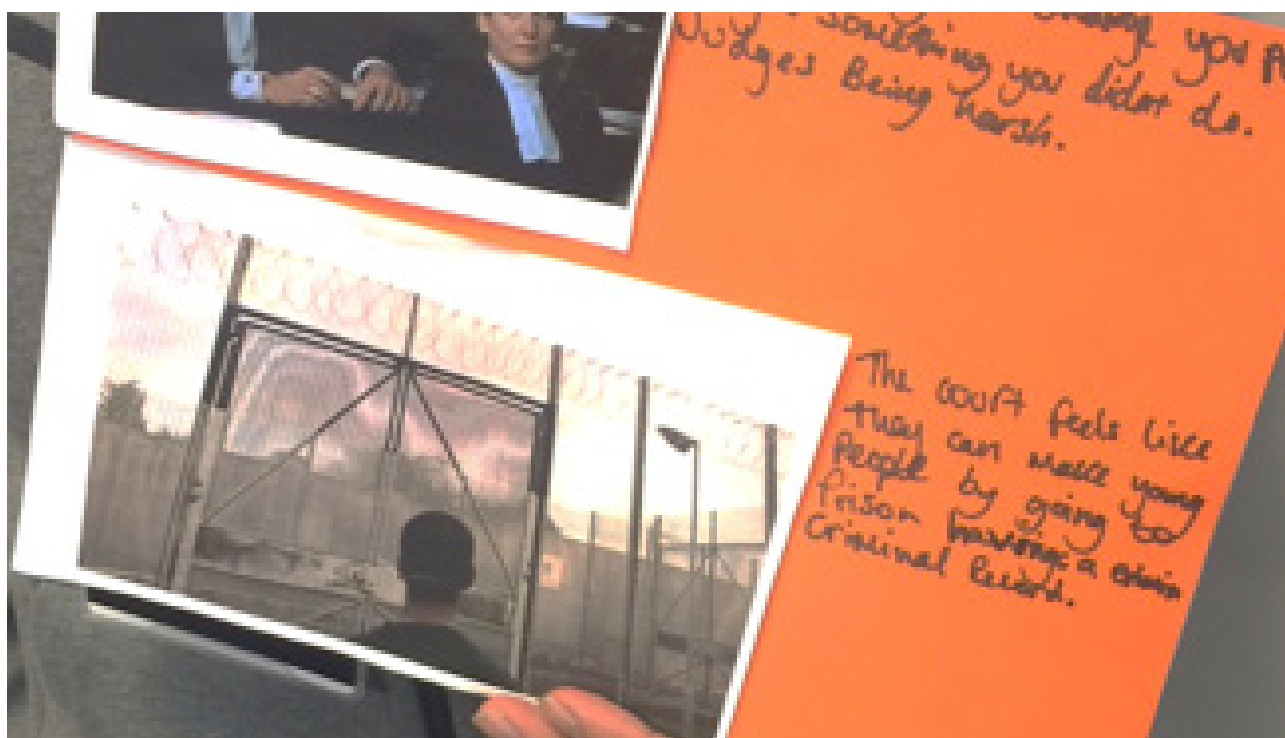
- Changing the way they convict people.
- Don't think they are fair!

RACE IS A BIG PART!

BRINGING IN MULTICULTURAL  
PEOPLE SO THINGS WOULD BE  
TREATED FAIR & EQUAL!

**COURTS & SENTENCING**

## COURTS & SENTENCING



### What we did:

We sought to understand young adults' experiences of courts and sentencing and find out whether they felt they had been treated fairly. We wanted to explore what difference they felt race and religion made to their treatment and experiences at this stage of the justice journey, if any. We also wanted to get their views on the solutions that may help to improve experiences of courts and sentencing in the future.

### What we found:

Among the young people we spoke to, there **were mixed** views about whether they had been treated fairly and given a fair punishment for the crimes they were accused of. Just over half of all respondents (52%) agreed that the punishment they received was appropriate for the crimes they were accused of, at least to some extent.

**52% of respondents rated their punishment as either "very much" or "to some extent" appropriate, compared to 39% of respondents who rated this punishment as either "not really" or "not at all" appropriate.**

When talking to young adults, we heard that **the language of the courtroom** can be confusing and disempowering for many. Several participants told us they did not understand much of what was said in their own cases. Young adults can feel very 'distanced' in the court, as the case seems to happen around them, without them being actively involved. The terminology used to describe individuals in court categorises and labels them. For instance, an individual may be described as a 'gang member' or a 'prolific offender.'

*"Offenders are not involved in the process. You only have the chance to say your name, DOB, guilty/not guilty." (Workshop participant, Stoke-on-Trent)*

*"Sometimes the language in court was hard to understand." (Prisoner, West Midlands)*

*"They think I am a 'prolific' offender. I hate that word." (Interviewee, London)*

Many participants felt that race made a **big difference to their experiences in court** and in the way they were sentenced. They also felt that sentencing was unfairly affected by the way individuals present themselves in court. In the eyes of the young people, this in-built injustice discredits the integrity of the court.

*"I think the role of race played a big part in sentencing. Even the court official said he reckoned if I was a white male it would have been a lesser sentence. I received 6 years and 4 months for GBH even though I pleaded guilty." (Prisoner, West Midlands)*

*"The way you present yourself in court can have a bigger effect on the outcome than it should. The way young people dress has an impact on how harsh or understanding professionals can be." (Workshop participant, Stoke-on-Trent)*

*"Something is wrong with the way the criminal justice system works and how they sentence individual people. It should be the same sentence for all. Maybe the judges like some people in the youth offending service are only trying to make money and don't care about the people." (Interviewee, Leicester)*

Within the court setting, where these young people felt that white British judges and juries are 'the norm', we heard that BAME young adults can feel very conscious of their racial difference. In particular, some participants described the gap in empathy or sympathy between them and those who are there to judge them.

*"Always trying to charge you for something you didn't do, they have no remorse for you, sometimes way too harsh." (Workshop participant, London)*

Numerous participants told us that they felt that the **CPS and the police were working against them** to get a harsher outcome and, ultimately, to deprive them of liberty. Several BAME young adults in different regions told us the same thing: Their perception was that the CPS and the police work together to 'pin something' on the individual and deny them bail, even though there is little tangible evidence.

*"The CPS would try to put you under pressure, pin something on you. Makes you feel like you've done something." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"Once you're in court, there is no way out, they just want to send you to jail." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"The judges or the CPS they don't give any bail, even though they have hardly any evidence. They will either interfere with the victims, or say you are a threat to the public." (Workshop participant, London)*

As a result of these factors, we heard from BAME young adults that they may be more likely to plead 'not guilty' because they may feel the prosecution is not fighting a fair or honest case. Several participants explained that pleading not guilty is a way of standing up for what is right, and keeping your pride.

*"I'm on remand for 6 months. They have no evidence. I ask myself why am I inside and [the guy that did it] is outside. I'm a religious person, I tell the truth all the time. When I go to court [to get sentenced] I'll tell the truth but I don't think they'll treat me fairly." (Prisoner (Muslim), West Midlands)*

*"Sometimes they put too much evidence up, it makes you more in denial. [BME defendants] say they are not guilty for a reason." (Workshop participant, London)*

*“Of course [BAME people are less likely to plead guilty] – because stats wise, black people authority wise, you know you have a disadvantage in the prison because they will treat you like that.”*  
(Workshop participant, Leicester)

Many participants felt that sentencing does not take enough account of the individual’s circumstances, including the underlying reasons behind their offending. They also commented that an individual’s positive actions are not taken into consideration enough. As one participant put it, ‘you might have changed your life, but that’s not considered.’

*“I was sent to prison for 2 years after a 3 year trial and having changed my life in that time. Despite writing a letter to the judge I was still sentenced and had to serve time.”*  
(Interviewee, Leicester)

## **COURTS AND SENTENCING - OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE**

When we spoke to young adults, they suggested a range of recommendations for courts and sentencing including: ensuring that juries are more ethnically diverse; increasing diversity in the judiciary and related roles; insisting on fairer sentencing decisions that are consistent across different ethnic groups; ensuring that clearer and more accessible language is used in court; increasing the involvement of defendants in their cases, including giving them a clear explanation of every step of the process.

ALL JURIES SHOULD BE  
ETHNICALLY MIXED, AND THE  
LAW SHOULD MANDATE THIS.

TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE  
UNDERLYING REASONS BEHIND  
THE INDIVIDUAL'S OFFENCE.

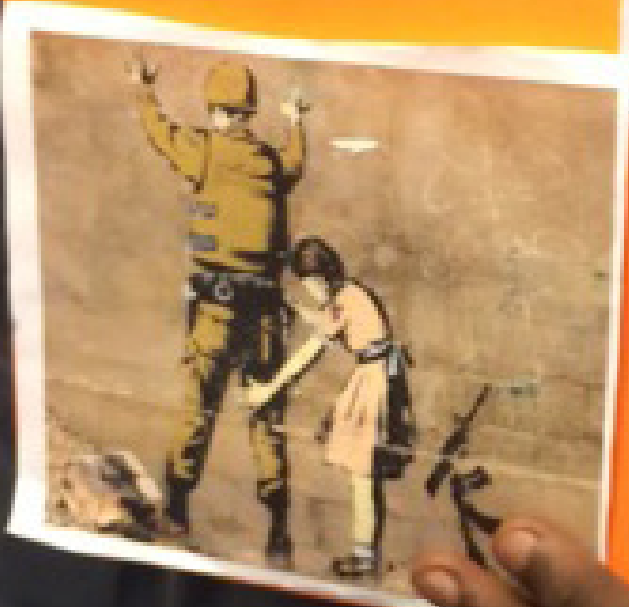
DON'T INCARCERATE PEOPLE FOR  
LOW-LEVEL CRIMES.

DON'T LOCK PEOPLE UP UNLESS  
THERE IS REAL EVIDENCE.



South Thames Regional  
James College students

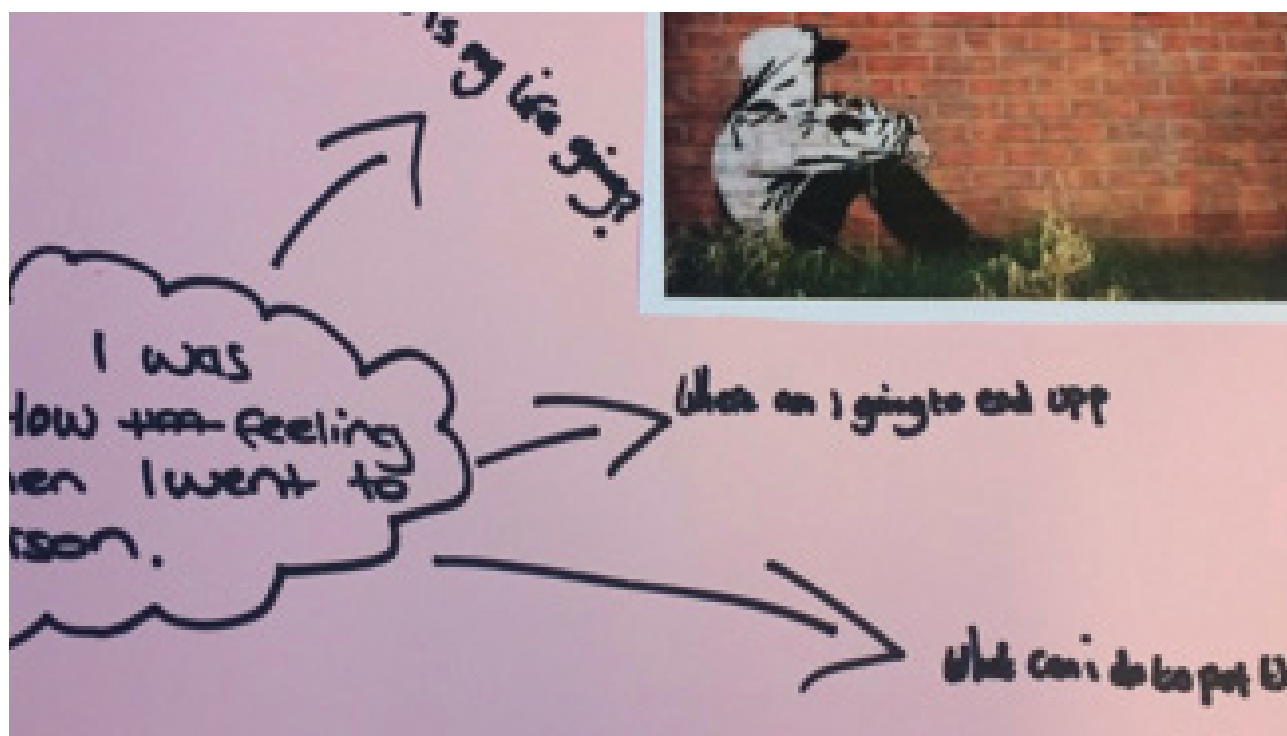
Tables turned. Searching  
an officer with the same  
brutality & he would search  
you.



If the police move like  
this now. What happens  
in the near future.  
§

**PROBATION & YOUTH  
OFFENDING SERVICES**

# PROBATION & YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICES



## What we did:

We set out to understand young adults' experiences of Probation and Youth Offending Services and to find out whether they felt they were effective. We wanted to explore what difference they felt race and religion made to their treatment and experiences at this stage of the justice journey, if any. We also sought their views on the solutions that may help to improve experiences of Probation and Youth Offending Services in the future.

## What we found:

The young people we spoke to were **generally a lot more positive** about Probation and Youth Offending Services than they were about other stages of the criminal justice journey. A significant proportion agreed that Probation and Youth Offending Services were effective, at least to some extent.

*"They give you lectures and advice, they help you in some way." (Workshop participant, London)*

We heard a number of **positive examples of Youth Offending Services** working well. Young people told us that they can form positive relationships with staff in these services when it feels like 'they care.' These relationships enable the individual to open up and receive help. Some also appreciate the activities and opportunities they are able to access.

*"There are some YOT workers who are calm." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"I do a lot of voluntary work with YOS and I've seen how much difference they make and how much opportunities they give." (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*"I just see from my friends – it benefits them because they get stuff off their chest" (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*"Youth offending did a lot for me - I used to fight police back and they taught me it's not worth it."  
(Workshop participant, Leicester)*

We also heard some **positive examples of probation helping individuals** to move forward. Some told us that probation really helped them to change their lives for the better. They told us that probation can stop people from getting into trouble again, if they really want to change.

*"Yes – probation can be a lot of help, gave me everything I needed, probably wouldn't have got into trouble again." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"My probation office – they treated me quite well, and they tried to keep me on track. I had one worker, a female, they are there to help you." (Interviewee, London)*

However, young people also told us that the **'tick box' approach** means there is not enough time to help people reform. Some felt this was particularly the case with probation. Several participants commented that the appointments were too short and the professionals were not concerned with them as individuals. Essentially, they viewed the process as too mechanised and not compassionate enough.

*"They just get you in a room and they just speak to you, going in one room coming out another (going through the motions) – it might just be me." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"In probation, people go in and out in 5 minutes. So how have you helped him?"  
(Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*"I don't think they do enough to help you reform." (Workshop participant, London)*

One participant compared their experiences making the transition from youth to adult services, saying that **Probation treat you with less compassion** when you are an adult.

*"Upon release I was on youth probation, which I felt worked as they cared more, but on adult probation they more ticked boxes and was in and out in five minutes." (Interviewee, Leicester)*

Some participants commented that there is generally **too much emphasis on regulation and not enough on guidance**. They emphasised the importance of helping young people to reform, rather than simply monitoring them. Although it might be helpful for a young person to be regulated to some extent, it can also be overbearing and counterproductive.

*"Regulating where they are helps to keep them out of trouble, but can easily become overbearing." (Workshop participant, Stoke on Trent)*

*"When you're in youth offending you are just a kid, you have your whole life ahead of you, they should sit down with you. It's just about someone sitting there and saying 'I see where you are.' It's compassion that's missing." (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

We heard that the effectiveness of Probation and Youth Offending is largely dependent on the **desire of the individual to change** and to take it seriously. We heard that some young adults wear probation like 'a badge of honour' and don't take it seriously. We also heard that some people get exposed to negative peer influences while they are engaging with the service. Some don't turn up to their appointments with little consequence, which undermines the system.

*"A lot of time you get your probation order, you don't turn up and no one says anything." (Workshop participant, London)*

*"Some people wear it [probation] as a 'badge of honour.'" (Workshop participant, London)*

*"If you keep offending, it's hard to break the chain regardless of intervening bodies/organisations." (Workshop participant, Stoke on Trent)*

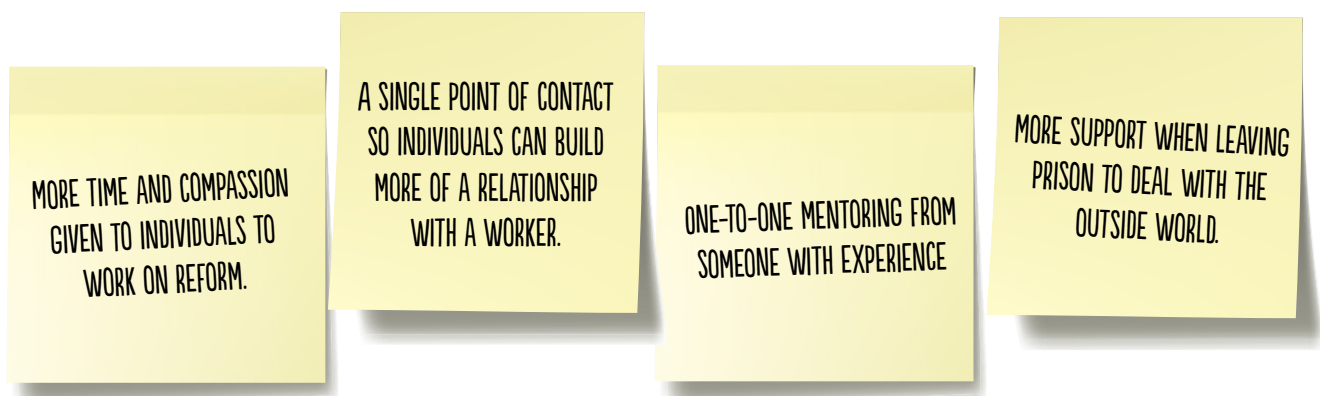
Overall, we found that **race and ethnicity does not make an obvious difference** to young adults' experiences at this stage of the justice system. None of our research participants could point to any racial bias or discrimination in Probation or Youth Offending Services. Some felt that these workers were not on their side, and were helping the wider authorities such as the police to build a negative picture of their character.

*"YOT worker lied to me when I was 11, he said I could talk to him, but then he gave the police the evidence." (Interviewee, Nottingham)*

*"I had a boxing bag at home and my arm went through the wall. The YOT worker brought it into court saying 'he tends to get angry'." (Interviewee, Nottingham)*

## PROBATION AND YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICES - OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When we spoke to young adults, they suggested a range of ideas for improving youth offending and probation including: allocating more time to individuals to help them to reform; offering more personalised support for individuals to pursue their interests and aspirations; improving the transition between youth and adult probation services; encouraging greater empathy and compassion among the workforce.





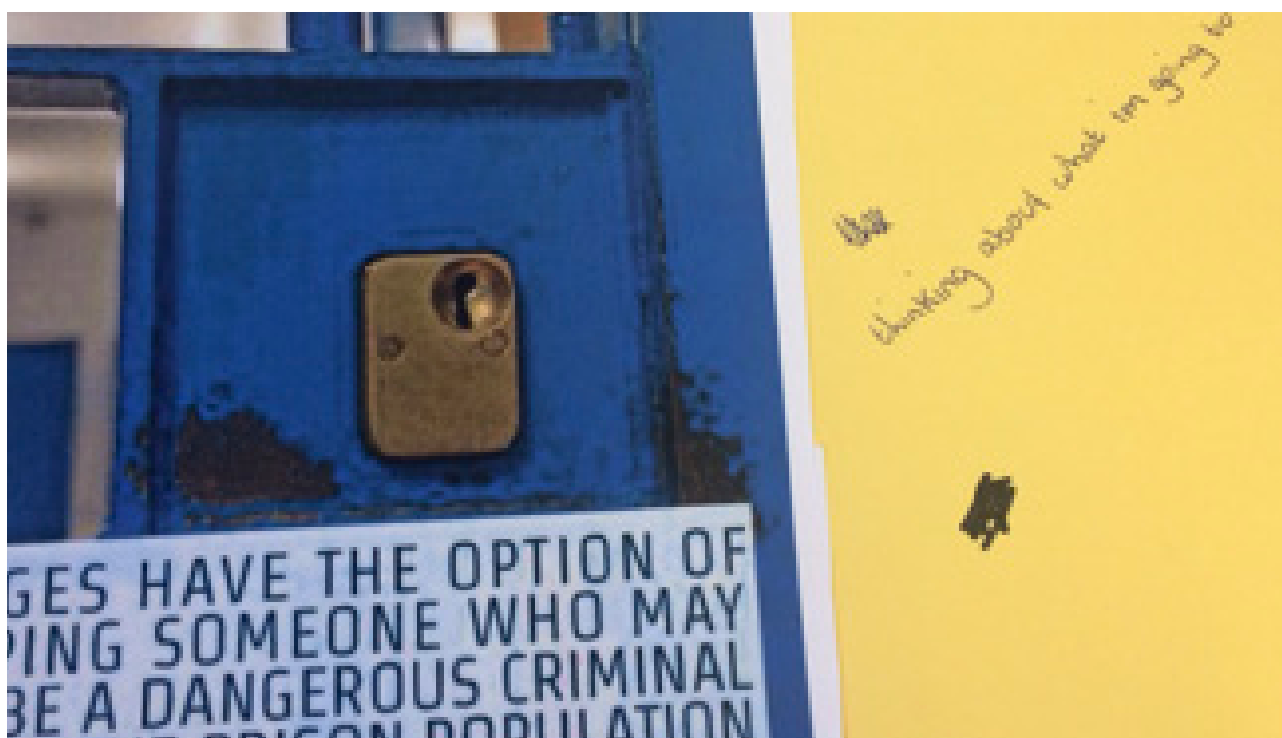
CPS wanting to charge you for  
maybe something you didn't do.  
Judges being harsh.



The COURT feels like  
they can make you  
people by going to  
prison having a clean  
Criminal Record.

**CUSTODY**

# CUSTODY



## What we did:

We aimed to understand young adults' experiences of custody and to find out whether they felt they had been treated fairly within custody. We wanted to explore what difference they felt race and religion made to their treatment and experiences at this stage of the justice journey, if any. We also wanted to get their views on the solutions that may help to improve experiences of custody in the future.

## What we found:

When we spoke to prisoners and young adults with experience of custody, we found mixed opinions about the way they were treated. There were differences of opinion about whether race makes a difference to the way individuals are treated.

Some young adults told us that their **race played less of a role in prison** than at other stages of the justice system. They explained that they feel they are 'more in the same boat' with other prisoners once they are incarcerated. We found that young adult prisoners are subject to similar conditions, regardless of race, including the 23-hour lock-up, which means they are not allowed more than one hour out of their cells per day. This immediately puts people into the 'same boat', some felt.

*"I don't feel race plays a role in how I'm treated in here." (Prisoner, West Midlands)*

*"In prison they are just gov's, unless you have been in that jail before there is no problem, if you give them respect they will give you respect." (Interviewee, London)*

However, others from BAME backgrounds told us that **race played a big part in their treatment in prisons**, especially when prisoners and staff were primarily white. Some individuals told us they **suffered racial abuse** from prison officers, as well as from other prisoners. Some said they felt they were **subjected to more strip searches** and cell searches as a result of their racial difference. Some said they had their **privileges or their basic rights obstructed**.

We gathered the following testimonials from BAME young adults in Leicester who had recent personal experience of custody:

*“Majority of officers were white. I used to work in kitchens and I started to hate this guy, he always had something to say to me, and it felt like he was bullying me, felt like he was being racist. He was making me suffer, giving me IEPs all the time – giving me negatives and I was trying to get out – trying to make it even harder.” (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*“I can say from experience I have had prison officers directly be racist. At a certain time, there is one officer left on wing. I asked him for toilet paper, that’s what the night staff were for, he called me a ‘black piece of shit’, in front of the whole wing. The whole wing went mad.” (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*“Race played a big difference in my experience. When I was in a prison in one place it was mostly white including staff and prisoners. I felt segregated and suffered a lot of racial abuse. I was strip searched 6 times in 3 days and it was humiliating, when the people who said I was doing things were the ones actually doing it and getting away with it because they are white. My co defendant saw what was happening and mentioned something to the guard and said I was being racially abused, to which his reply was “good, tell someone that cares.” (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

Similarly, we heard the following personal stories when we spoke to current prisoners in the East and West Midlands:

*“Asian night officer called me a nigger. Race is more significant in the criminal justice system.” (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

*“They don’t listen to us, even simple things like loo roll they would rather give white people, a lot of white prison officers are undercover racists.” (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

*“Traveller people aren’t really liked. Some officers are a bit wary, rude, disrespectful of you. Corrupt people.” (Prisoner, West Midlands)*

We also heard from BAME prisoners who **feel segregated from other prisoners**. Of course, it’s stressful for young prisoners of any race being locked up 23 hours a day, but some BAME prisoners felt they were getting even **fewer opportunities** for study or work than their white counterparts.

*“Race is a big part of sentencing and treatment in jail. For example, not being able to do the same as other prisoners.” (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

*“There should be equal opportunities. Some people get everything thrown at them whereas others don’t.” (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

Some young adults also felt that **BAME males were more likely to be contained within prisons**, with a disproportionate level of regulation and restriction. Some BAME **males felt they were more likely to be placed in high security wings** or moved away from a lower security wing due to their connections with other prisoners.

*“They are actually hurting you, not just restraining me, there is no way it takes 6 male officers to restrain you, the way he grabbed me. I was trying to get out at these times, I just lost my dad. There was only white officers around.” (Workshop participant, Leicester)*

*“Get treated like a dog, when you have fights on the wing and that.” (Workshop participant, London)*

*"If you've got anger issues, in prison it will get worse." (Interviewee, East Midlands)*

A key message from the prisoners that we spoke to – of any racial or ethnic background – is that there is **too much favouritism** in the way things work in prisons. Prison officers can choose to help some people and block others, as they wield too much discretionary power.

This is exacerbated by the fact that the **system is paper-based**, and prisoners have to submit paper applications to officers to obtain information or make requests. These applications can take a very long time to be processed and some can become 'delayed' or even 'lost'. This system damages trust. Many say there is **no point in making complaints** as there is no accountability.

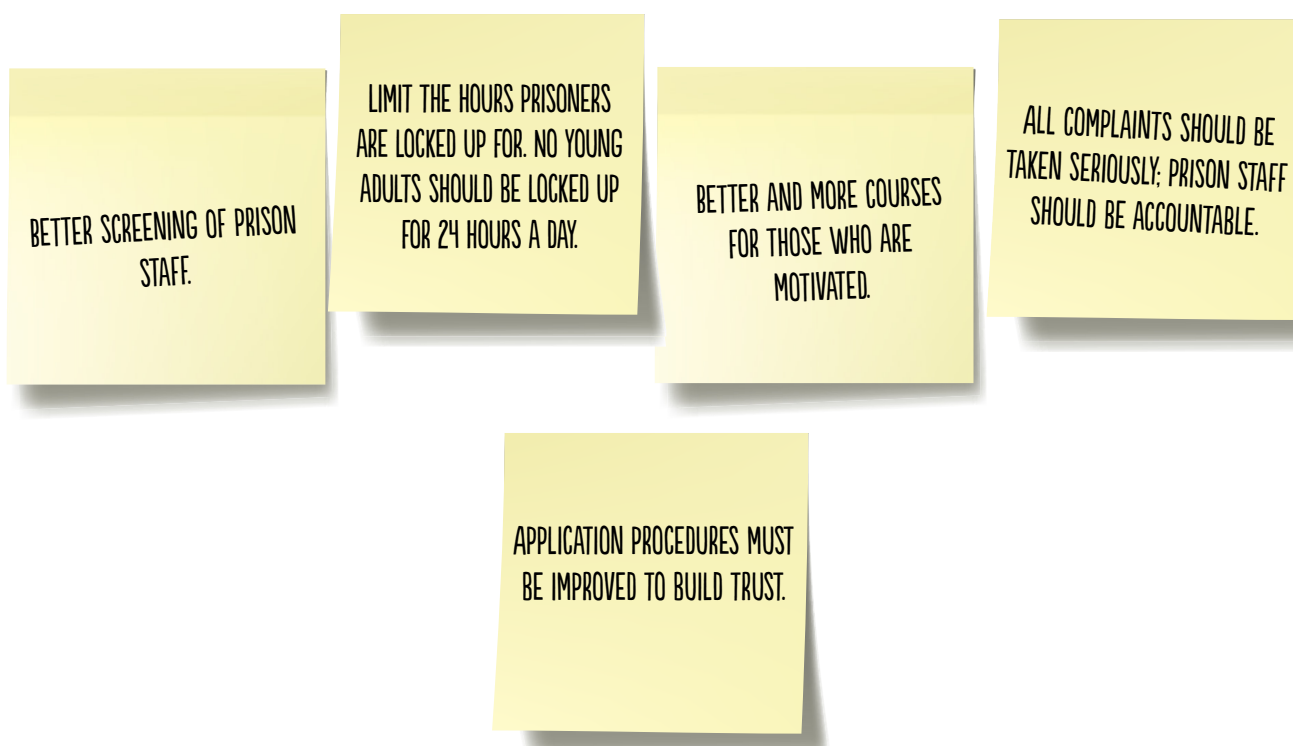
*"I see a lot of favouritism. Different officers are different. Everything takes ages. You could hand a staff member forms and it takes a long time to get a response back." (Prisoner, West Midlands)*

*"Application forms take a very long time to be given an answer to. Even if I was just asking about transfers, not even requesting one it takes over 4 weeks to get an answer when I know that all the prison officer who it goes to just has to say yes or no. They should have a specific place that you can just get your answers from." (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

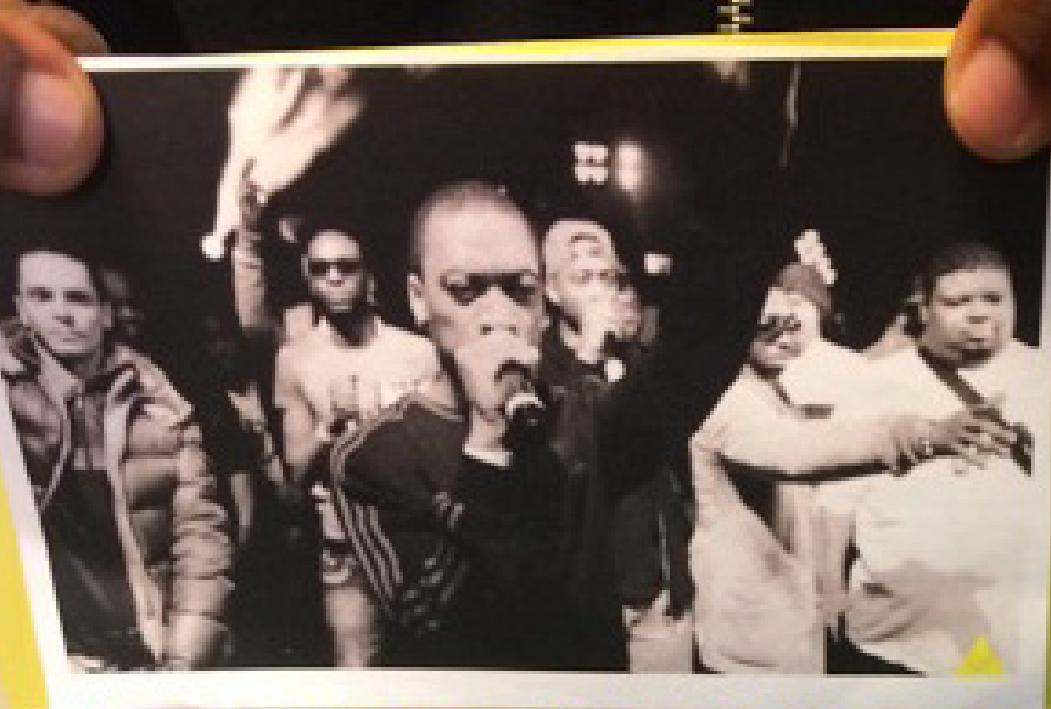
*"It was hard coming back. They take too long to tell you if you're going to be remanded. There is not very much support, you never get any response from applications. It feels as though because I'm not a first time offender I don't get support." (Prisoner, East Midlands)*

## CUSTODY - OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

When we spoke to young adults, they suggested a range of recommendations for improving custody including: reduce the numbers of hours prisoners are locked up for; strengthen the complaints system for prisoners; tackle corruption and make prison officers more accountable for their actions; more opportunities for training, work and personal development to be given consistently to all prisoners; expand peer support and mentoring initiatives within prisons; crack down on racism and other forms of discrimination within prisons.







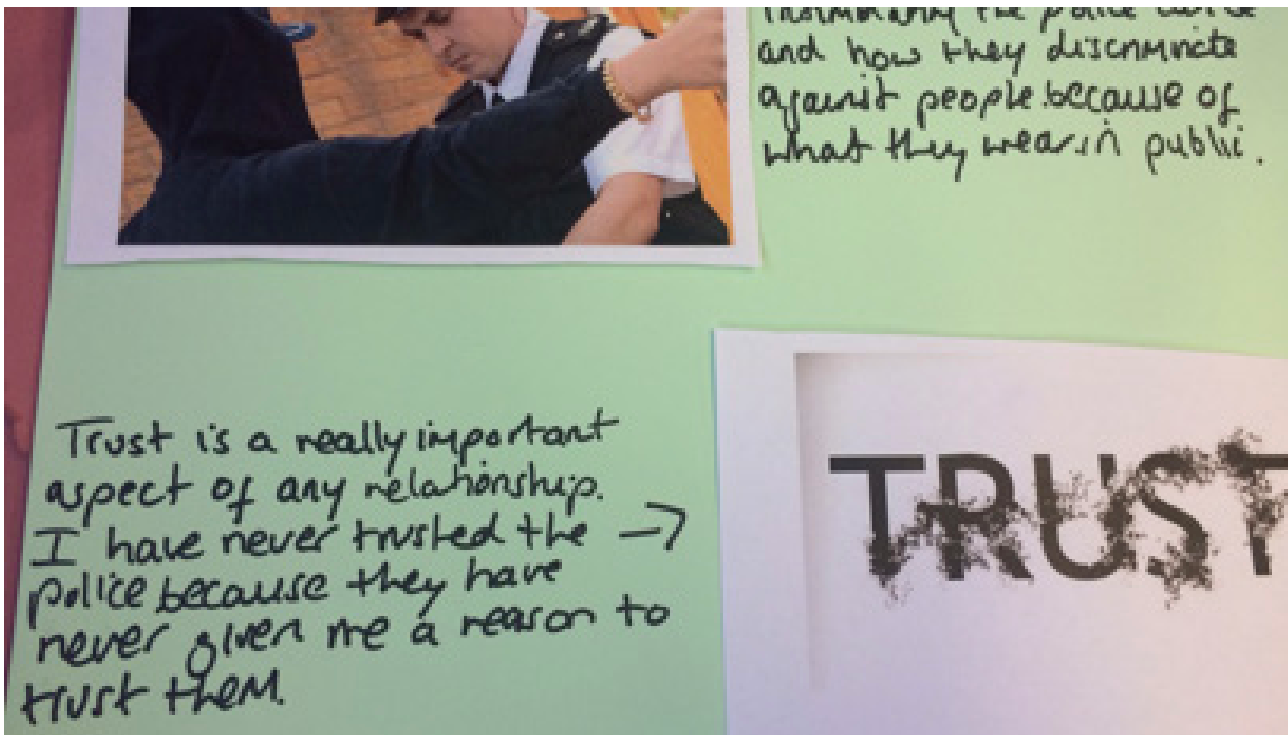
Trust

The government shut down peoples  
shows when their making positive  
movements and trying to better  
their lives.

Police judge people on their  
past life and hold it against  
them forever.

**TRUST IN THE CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE SYSTEM**

# TRUST IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



## What we did:

Throughout this process of talking to young adults, we sought to address the **question of trust** in the justice system. We wanted to find out whether they feel they can trust the Criminal Justice System, and what difference race and religion makes to their trust. We also wanted to get their views on the solutions that may help to increase trust in the Criminal Justice System in the future.

## What we found:

Overall, we found that there is a **general distrust** of the Criminal Justice System among young adults from BAME backgrounds. Again and again during our consultation, we found they trust the system even less than their white counterparts.

**68% of our survey respondents said they do “not at all” trust the Criminal Justice System. Only 14% gave any positive response of either “very much” or “to some extent” trusting the Criminal Justice System.**

This distrust is rooted in **their experiences of being stereotyped by the police** and harassment. Talking to young adults, we found that distrust tends to take hold during childhood, when individuals lose any faith in the police.

Police harassment, especially around the family, ignites an enduring hatred of the authorities. Participants told us this often happens at a young age, at some point between 7 and 14 years old.

*“Trust – it’s a really important aspect of any relationship; I have never trusted the police. I’ve been involved with social services most of my life, I have never trusted them. They are really domineering and they just try to control you.”*

*“BAME young people 100% do not trust the criminal justice system they borderline hate it due to amount of BAME arrests, mistreatment and blatant racism.”*

*“When you’re growing up, you think the system is there to protect you but really it’s not, because there is a lot of racism within the justice system it makes young people give up and have no hope.”*

Many of our participants told us that the predominance of White British people in positions of responsibility and power – from police officers, to prison officers, judges, juries and solicitors – meant they did not trust the system. In the courtroom, trust is limited because **judge and jury are usually white**. Young adults from BAME backgrounds feel that they are at a disadvantage because most of the people who make decisions and judgments about them are less able to empathise with them.

*“No they can’t trust. The system is run by white people. Not many black officers and judges. Never going to heal this trust thing all the time that is true.”*

*“[BAME people] are less likely to trust in CJS because usually judge and jury are white. Juries by law should be mixed.”*

*“No people as an ethnic minority could trust the system as this moment in time. The system don’t trust us so we don’t trust the system.”*

Young adults feel they cannot trust the system because they feel there is **no accountability for police officers or prison officers**, and there is no meaningful way to complain and get justice. In prison, many BAME people don’t trust the system because they feel there’s **no real justice**. They may be locked up when there is no evidence. They feel that favouritism and corruption within prisons undermines trust.

*“No I don’t trust the system, the system is not right. There are people in here that’s not done anything. There is no proper evidence. (I would say I trust the system 1 out of 10).”*

Overall, many of our participants felt that the Criminal Justice System is too corrupt and believe that it operates **‘too much like a business.’**

## TRUST IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM - OUR IDEAS FOR CHANGE

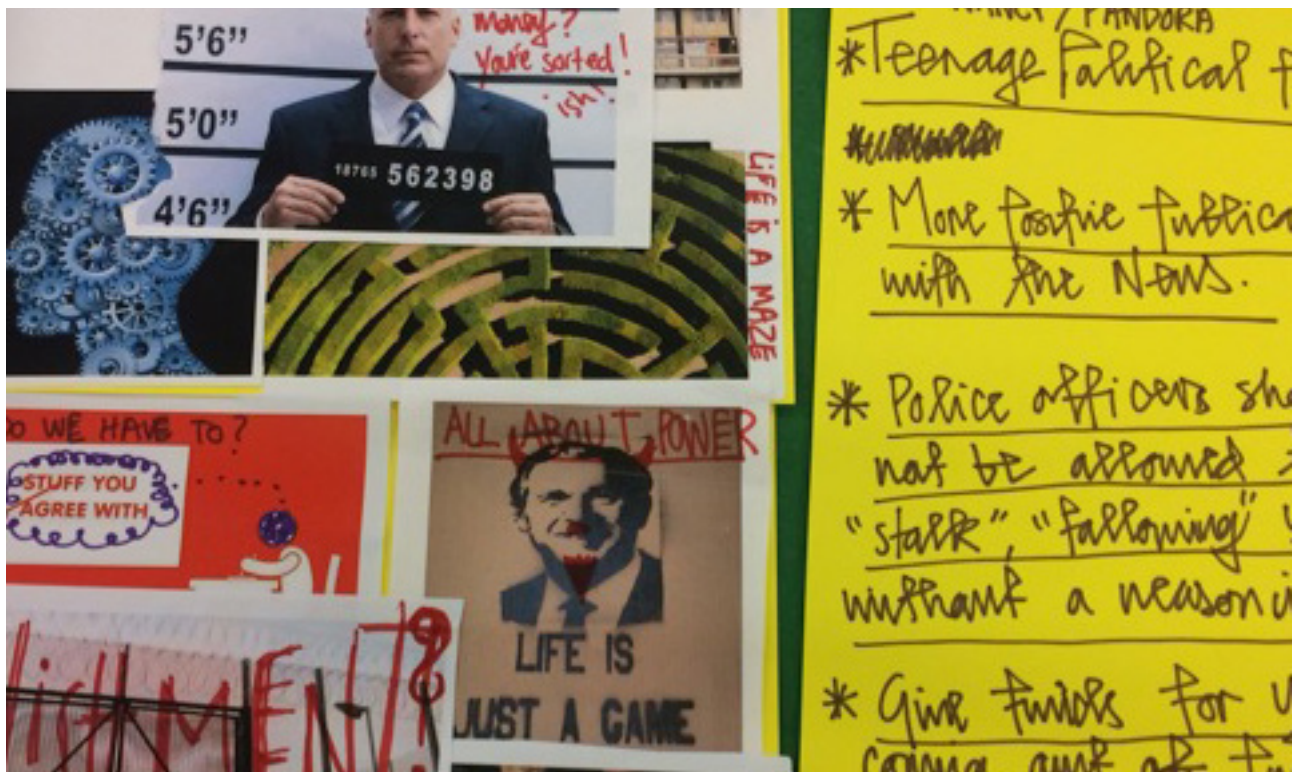
When we spoke to young adults, they suggested a range of ideas for increasing trust in the justice system including: listening to the views and experiences of service users when making decisions about the CJS; increasing ethnic diversity in the CJS workforce at every level; enabling people with personal experience of the CJS to pursue routes into the workforce; confronting corruption and stereotyping in a systematic way.

THERE SHOULD BE MORE BAME PROFESSIONALS AT EVERY LEVEL, FROM JUDGES TO PRISON & POLICE OFFICERS.

WE NEED TO PUT PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN ROLES OF RESPONSIBILITY.

IT IS CRUCIAL TO LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE MORE WHEN MAKING CHANGES TO THE CJS.

# CONCLUSION



Through the findings and recommendations contained in this report, the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group can make a significant contribution to the research and debates around the reform of the Criminal Justice System.

For policy makers and practitioners, this report is very timely. The findings have already been presented to policy makers at the Ministry of Justice, and CJS professionals working to advance equalities in areas such as probation. The findings have been very well received so far, and we hope this report will continue to inform developments.

Through this work, we also believe the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group has demonstrated the value of involving young adults who are 'experts by experience' in the development of ideas for change. By taking a youth-led approach, this research has resulted in an honest, authentic appraisal of the justice system through the lens of young adults. It also presents plausible and valuable solutions to the problems, for consideration by policy makers and practitioners.

We anticipate that the T2A Young Adult Advisory Group will be further developed as a means for young adults with experience of the CJS to influence national policy discussions on key priority topics over the years to come. The group can provide youth-centred insight to policy makers on a range of CJS priorities affecting young people. The group can also play an important role in the development and evaluation of the solutions they have set out in this report. We look forward to working with a wide range of partners to build on this significant piece of work in the months and years ahead.

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