



Young Justice Advisors

Impact report: 2016 – 2024



YOUR EXPERIENCES ARE YOUR SUPERPOWERS

**YOUNG
JUSTICE
ADVISORS**

**LEADERS
UNLOCKED**



Contents

The Young Justice Advisors are a team of young adults aged 18-30 with various lived experiences of the criminal justice and care systems.

We highlight the voices of those in the systems and use the power of our lived experience to create change, because we are passionate about seeing informed reform.

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Foreword



Nadine Smith

Young Justice Advisor and Project Manager

I'm honoured to be writing the foreword to this brilliant document which highlights the strengths, impact and legacy of our Young Justice Advisors project. In this report, you'll read about our individual journeys as well as our collective achievements.

I've been involved with the Young Justice Advisors from the very beginning. I became one of the first young advisors when the project began in 2016. Over the years, it has provided a safe, supportive environment where I have been able to grow and build up a catalogue of skills. For the past four years I have had the honour of leading this project. To explain what this journey has meant to me would have me writing pages. Every single young adult I have met and had the pleasure of working with holds a special place with me. Getting to work with a diverse group of young adults from across the country, engaging with so many young people, helping make their voices heard, is my biggest highlight of the past eight years.

We have created this report to show how one project – with a focus on listening and platforming lived experiences – can make a huge difference across the sector. When we started out, we had a vision to elevate the voices of young adults, to help make a difference. Over the years, not only have we achieved this, but we've also shown the young adults involved in our projects that people want to hear what they have to say, and that people care about them. Through our project, they have met people with lived experiences of the criminal justice and care systems who are out there doing positive things. The project has been a journey, and it has not all been smooth sailing. When you have lived experience and you're delivering projects in the system, you face real barriers. Even so, we've created resources and guides, training for prison and probation

staff, peer-research, policy recommendations and programmes for young adults in prison. All along the way, the young adults involved have been at the centre of everything we've done, and that's been the key to our success. **So to all practitioners, staff and agencies reading this, I urge you to be open and receptive to those that want to make your spaces more focused on young adult voices.**

For the Young Justice Advisors reading this report, you have made every day of the past eight years a joy for me, because of your support for each other, for those in the system and your strong passion to create change. You have all made a mark on the system. You all make a difference to the young adults you interact with, with everyone who meets you. **You have created a legacy.**

We will never stop working to create safe and young adult focused spaces. We will never stop promoting the need for practitioners who have lived experiences, to enable young adults in the justice space to feel heard and to feel hope.



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Eight years of impact

Since 2016, we have:

80

**Recruited 80
Young Justice
Advisors**

1200

**Engaged over 1,200 young people
in contact with the criminal
justice and care systems**



**Approximately 2/3rds
of the young people
we have engaged
are from minoritised
ethnic communities**



**Developed and
delivered training
to help prison and
probation staff
communicate more
effectively with
young adults**

Worked with / within:



**23 prisons /
Young Offenders
Institutions**



**7 Youth Offending
Teams / Services**



**Community
organisations working
with young people**

20

**Counties in
England
& Wales**



**Published 3
research reports**



**Produced 4 peer
to peer resources
for young adults with
experience of the
justice and
care systems**

14

**Engaged and formed
strategic partnerships
with 14 government
bodies, institutions
and sector-leading
organisations**



**Delivered
change-maker
programmes
with c.70 young
adults in 3 prisons**

Our Journey

2016

Leaders Unlocked establishes the Young Justice Advisors, with funding from the Barrow Cadbury Trust. Originally called the Young Adult Advisory Group, we started out as a group of 11 young adults with lived experience of the justice system, created to inform the work of Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance and become policy advisors at the national level.

2017

We publish our **Race and Criminal Justice** report, which is quoted throughout the Lammy Review. We work with the Lammy Review Team at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to disseminate our insights. We conduct **our first** peer research with young adults in prison, **engaging more than 100 young people in HMP ISIS**.

2020

We publish **Hearing from Young Adults**, a youth-led report that presents our **peer research with 500+ young adults in the criminal justice system**. Three Young Justice Advisors submit **oral evidence to the Justice Select Committee** as part of its inquiry into children and young people in custody. **We are becoming the go-to voice of young adult lived experience.**

2019

We partner with HMPPS to involve service users in the **long-term strategy for prisons and probation**. **Our influence expands**, with HMPPS, MoJ, HMIP, the Youth Justice Board (YJB), the Independent Office for Police Conduct, PRT and Clinks attending a showcase of our research findings and recommendations.

2018

Our policy work grows, as we form strategic partnerships with **His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), the Howard League for Penal Reform** and more.

2021

We publish **our first peer-to-peer resources**. Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we **engage hundreds more young people in prison and the community**, with many young adults joining our team of advisors and undertaking peer-research.

2022

We publish a third research report, **Learning from Young Adults**. We launch our own **Young Justice Advisors website**. We **pilot a new change maker programme**, where young adults take the lead on improving the young adult experience in their prison.

2023

We launch a new training programme for prison and probation staff. We are now well recognised in the criminal justice sector. **We have a seat at the table.**

2024 and beyond

We publish this **Impact Report**, reflecting the community we have built, our achievements and our influence. We are excited for the future.

Our ten guiding principles for working with young adults

- 1. Approach situations with young adults with empathy and understanding**
- 2. Plans should focus more on helping young adults – including their goals, skills and talents**
- 3. Be mindful of the language used when speaking to young adults***
- 4. Every young adult is an individual, there's no 'one size fits all' to engagement**
- 5. Trauma-informed practice should be at the forefront of all interactions**
- 6. Listening should come first, young adults often just need a space to be heard**
- 7. Give the young adults small goals to work towards**
- 8. Share, learn from and highlight best practice within teams**
- 9. Each young adult has potential that needs unlocking**
- 10. It doesn't matter if the young adult is in the care or justice system, they are a human first and foremost, so should be treated in that way**

*A note on language

In our work and publications, we do not use or promote terms that have negative connotations or stigma attached to them. For that reason, we do not refer to 'offenders', or 'prisoners'. Collectively, we prefer to refer to young adults (or people) with justice experience.

Similarly, we avoid using the acronym BAME (a government acronym used to categorise Black, Asian and minority ethnic people together). Where we do need to talk in broad terms – because we are engaging

with or referring to inequalities experienced across certain groups – we use the terms 'people from racialised communities' or 'people from minoritised ethnic communities'. While we are aware that no collective term works for everyone, we have adopted these terms because they are understood, and popular with organisations led by people from these communities.



Sarah's Story

I was involved with Young Justice Advisors from inception. At the beginning, we worked on really understanding the concepts of brain maturity and development, looking at government and policy and use of language and grasping where the gap was between the young people with lived experiences and decision-makers.

It was really exciting to see the Young Justice Advisors coming into existence. For the participants, you went from being a young person who was good at speaking and explaining your story to other people, to understanding the wider justice sector, how young people fit into it and how important and valuable insights from young people actually are. So it was exciting to learn so much, in particular about how the sector works with young people with lived experiences, and how young people can implement change.

For me, the highlight has been seeing concepts turn into reality. So for example, we looked at what can be done to reduce reoffending. We went into secure settings and listened to young people with those experiences. Hearing new information and new perspectives challenged my own judgements and strengthened our recommendations. We're continually adapting and it has to be an evolving project.

I think we've had a big impact on young people. Through Young Justice Advisors, I've met people in genuinely challenging situations and then seen them turning their lives around. I've seen the many colours of what success looks like – people starting families, their career progression, their happiness and the resilience they've built through taking part in the Young Justice Advisors. I feel like we've created a community. We all learn from each other, every time we meet up. It's been really humbling to see everyone's successes.

In the future, I'd like to see young people involved at every level of decision making in the justice system, because I've seen the impact that their involvement has had on a smaller scale. For myself, I'm thinking about how I can continue to use my experience to empower more young people, both personally and professionally.



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Romaine's story

I first got involved with the Young Justice Advisors in 2019, when I had just been released from prison/detention having served a three-year sentence. My cousin was a mentor facilitator at the time and she introduced me to the project and reintroduced me to Rose (CEO of Leaders Unlocked) as I had met her a few years back as a teenager in Bristol. I've been a Young Justice Advisor since then.

My highlight so far is going to Parliament and the Ministry of Justice, where I met the youth justice minister and asked him a few important questions pertaining to the youth justice system, including what can be done and is being done to improve it for the wellbeing of young people and the preservation of their mental health.

Since becoming a Young Justice Advisor, I've collaborated on many Leaders Unlocked projects. Being a part of our impact reports has always been a nice feeling, but also getting the opportunity to develop and work with our young leaders on the project has been a delight. It always leaves me stunned as to how dedicated young people can be to a cause that is important to them.

In the future I'd love to see young people and young adults collaborating and connecting with more adults and professionals to create a bridge. I'd love to see more young people/adults, especially those with lived experiences of the justice system, training the 'professionals'.

Personally, my ambition is to bridge gaps and change stereotypical narratives, so that young people growing up have a voice and identity that is represented properly. I want to help create an environment where young people can express themselves in many ways and be listened to and accepted, a space where we do not feel the pressure to conform to what's considered 'normal'.



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Our research



Race and Criminal Justice

In 2016, the first Young Justice Advisors deliberated and collaborated with experts from the T2A Alliance to shortlist some urgent priority issues. From those, we selected **Race and the Criminal Justice System** as our first priority.

We co-created a set of consultation tools: a workshop plan and supporting resources for focus groups, a semi-structured interview guide and a structured survey.

Then we consulted over **90** young people aged 15-25 across the country, with a particular emphasis on young adults from minoritised ethnic communities. **67%** of our respondents had experience of custody. **27%** were currently in custody.

In 2017 we published the results in **Race and Criminal Justice**, our first research report, which included findings, recommendations, striking statistics and direct testimony from young people.

The report was featured in the final report of the **Lammy Review**, which included direct quotes, like this one, from young adults who participated in our research:

“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.”

(Workshop participant, Leicester)

We worked in partnership with the Ministry of Justice and Lammy Review Team to disseminate our insights.

Read report



Hearing from Young Adults

In 2019-20 we co-produced and published our second research report.

This time, we widened our focus to look at five priorities:

- Racial disproportionality
- Sentencing young adults
- The care system
- Mental health and the criminal justice system
- Employment and life after prison

Throughout 2019, we conducted peer research across England with over **500 young adults affected by the criminal justice system**.

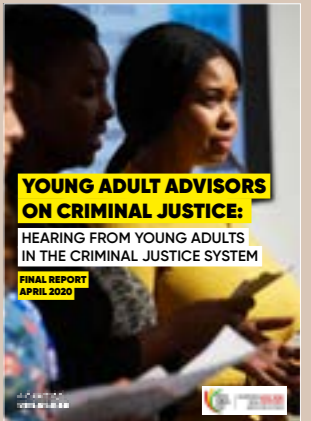
We engaged young people currently in adult prisons and Young Offender Institutions, and in the community, through Youth Offending Teams and voluntary/community organisations connected to the criminal justice system.

We held a showcase event in London, where we presented our key findings and recommendations to an audience of approximately **50 stakeholders** from the justice sector.

Attendees included stakeholders from HMPPS, MoJ, HMIP, YJB, Independent Office for Police Conduct and leading justice charities including the Prison Reform Trust and Clinks. Delegates identified 'pledges' for future collaboration with the Young Justice Advisors.



Read report



Mo's story

I got involved with Young Justice Advisors through probation. I heard there was a workshop going on and I volunteered for it. The workshop was part of the research for the Learning from Young Adults report. I'm happy I volunteered for the workshop, because otherwise I would never have known about Leaders Unlocked and the Young Justice Advisors. Shout out to probation for that.

I've enjoyed everything I've done with the Young Justice Advisors. Going into secure settings and working with the young people inside has been really good.

I don't know what my future holds. I'd like to carry on with youth work and helping young people... I'm also thinking about going into law.



Kojo's story

My first experience with the Young Justice Advisors was when I was in prison. It was a great experience. I got involved in the community council. I felt very empowered. From there, I got a wing rep job and became a mentor. **The Young Justice Advisors gave me confidence to be me. It gave me the confidence to gather information from my peers, and to speak in front of officers. Having that responsibility felt really good, so I stayed in contact with Leaders Unlocked and became a Young Justice Advisor myself when I was released.**

I was involved in researching and producing our Learning from Young Adults report. We got to meet up in person for that, and on one of the occasions we took pictures and mine is on the front cover of the report! That's been a big highlight for me.

I was also involved in delivering the 12-week programmes in HMP Humber with Nadine. I felt like we had a very, very positive impact on that group. Some of the young people who took part in the programme went on to get their D Cats. We met Connor then. He was in the first group we worked with and now he's joined the Young Justice Advisors since his release. I feel like I was leading by example. I am very proud of that.

In the future, I want to see sentences restructured. I know that there have to be sentencing guidelines, but some of them don't really make sense to me. We've got a lot of young people going into prison. Some of them are very young, or easily influenced, or didn't have the best chances growing up. I'd like to see more appropriate sentences in those situations.

I am passionate about improving the justice system for young people. I want to carry on using my experience because I know that relatability really does help break down barriers so that we can get through to more young people.



I'd like to see more opportunities for young adult-led initiatives and projects in the justice space, because it does actually have a big impact. Young adults are at the age where they can still change their lives, and they are the future, so it's very, very important.

Learning from Young Adults

Building on the success of our youth-led approach to co-producing Hearing from Young Adults, for our next research report, we took the same approach, focussing on four priority areas:

- Race
- Mental health
- Life after prison
- The care system



We conducted our research in 2021, and despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, we engaged **333 young people** through our peer research. 63% of these young people were in prison and the remaining 37% had lived experience of the issues.

In April 2022, we presented our findings and recommendations in an online showcase, to **approximately 90 key stakeholders across the justice sector**, including HMPPS, MoJ and other government institutions, funders, voluntary organisations and academic institutions.

Both the report itself and our peer-research activities received resoundingly positive feedback:

“The YJA helped the men to utilise their insight into their own experiences and to appreciate how these insights could be applied to help others in their situation. It was humbling to see the commitment of the [YJA] team and to witness them listening to and validating the views of the young adults at HMP Leeds [...] The experience gave the participants a chance to think critically about their environment and respond positively to an organisation who appeared to be interested in them as individuals.”

(Karen Tate, Head of OMU Delivery, HMP Leeds)

Read report





Our policy and influencing work

From the beginning, we have sought to influence and shape policy at a national level, bringing the voice of lived experience to decision-makers in the justice and care systems.

The journey began when we met Charlie Taylor in 2016, to discuss our experiences and inform his research for the Youth Justice Review.

From there, we developed long standing relationships with HMPPS and the MoJ. Over the years, we have acted as a sounding board and a route to include authentic input from young adults into institutional decision-making.

In everything we've done, we've sought to embed young adult voices into policy-making processes and initiatives.

The Lammy Review
An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System

Working with the Lammy Review Team – our first Race and Criminal Justice report and our recommendations informed their evidence base

Partnering with the London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to develop a probation hub

Partnering with the Centre for Mental Health – conducting peer research with girls from seven units in the Children and Young People Secure Estate (CYPSE), to contribute to their report Out of Sight, then presenting to key audiences at NHS England and the Young Combined Authority

Contributing peer research and insights for Broke, but not broken, a report produced by Revolving Doors, in collaboration with researchers from Newcastle University that reviewed the impact of poverty and inequality on young people's life chances

Three Young Justice Advisors submitting oral evidence to the Justice Select Committee as part of its inquiry into children and young people in custody

Partnering with HMPPS to involve young adult service users in the development of a long-term strategy for prisons and probation

Co-facilitating a Young Adults Summit at HMP Winchester, attended by several prisons in the South Central region;

Working with HMPPS Insights, producing a short film to share our insights and experience with a wider community of professionals working in the probation and prison system.

Two Young Justice Advisors participating in expert consultation for HMIP on a proposed methodology for 'scrutiny visits'

Delivering webinars about the value of engaging with young adults with lived experience to 125+ key stakeholders from PCCs, the shadow cabinet, MoJ, HMIP & more

Participating in a panel discussion at a learning event for HMIP

Contributing peer research and insights for Broke, but not broken, a report produced by Revolving Doors, in collaboration with researchers from Newcastle University that reviewed the impact of poverty and inequality on young people's life chances

Three Young Justice Advisors speaking as panel members to a large group of trainee prison officers through the Unlocked Graduates programme

Contributing to the Howard League for Penal Reform's work to inform new sentencing principles for young adults

Justice Committee
Oral evidence: [Children and young people in custody](#), HC 306
Tuesday 24 July 2020
Debated in the House of Commons to be published on 14 July 2020
[Watch the evidence](#)
Members present: Sir Robert Mutt (Chair); Paula Barker; Richard Burgon; Bob Baker; James Chalmers; Steve Clapham; Peter Dutton; John Hayes; Kerry McCarthy; Dr Karan Gillard; Nicky Morgan
Questions 294 - 322
Witnesses
① Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner; Rose Smith, Chief Executive, London Children's Home; Henry Ashwin, Chief Executive, National Youth Justice Agency; Young Justice and Criminal Justice and Probation Unit, Young Justice and Criminal Justice
② Lucy Fisher, Member of State for Justice, HMPs, Scotland; Executive Director, Youth Custody Services; Caroline Taitford, Children's Quality Lead, HM Prison and Probation; and the Honorable, Director of Youth Justice and Probation Policy, Ministry of Justice

Justice Committee @CommonsJustice
In our youth justice session on Tuesday @HoldingSmith @LeadersUnlocked described children and young people's experience of the youth court and what can be done to improve it.
Read the transcript of the session or watch it again
committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/7...

Children and young people's experience of the youth court
What's the best way to support young people's mental health? @LorraineKhan, @AndrosiaHarris and @CurtisSexton

Partnership with HMPPS
Insights, producing a short film to share our insights and experience with a wider community of professionals working in the probation and prison system.

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at HMP Winchester, attended by several prisons in the South Central region;

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Three Young Justice Advisors speaking as panel members
to a large group of trainee prison officers through the Unlocked Graduates programme

Contributing to the Howard League for Penal Reform's work
to inform new sentencing principles for young adults

Sentencing Young Adults
Making the case for sentencing principles for young adults

Our resources for young adults

Since 2021, we've also published resources created by young adults, for young adults.

A team of young justice advisors created each guide, openly sharing their experiences to identify the information that would help those currently in the systems. We also collected feedback through consultation, to ensure that our guides would be genuinely useful.

Our guides include lots of practical information and advice, to help readers navigate moments of transition in and out of the system. They also showcase our own stories, so that readers can read about our experiences and see examples of people who've successfully made it through what they're going through.



Read guide

Through the gate

We designed this guide specifically for young adults who are due to be released from prison, or who have recently left prison.



Shahid's story.

What motivated me to step on a journey path was... I engaged... enjoying the life I used to live.

This guide is for all who wish to be the best person they can be when they are released from prison.



Read guide

Boys' transition guide

This guide is for boys and young men moving into the adult male prison estate for the first time.

We created this guide in collaboration with the HMPPS Young Adults team.

Over 50 stakeholders from HMPPS, individual prisons and the voluntary sector attended our launch event in London in April 2023.





Karene's story

I got involved with the Young Justice Advisors because I was ranting about something to Sadia. She was already involved with the group and thought I would be good because of my experiences. Usually, anything about the experience of going to prison is not a good thing, so I thought how can it be a good thing to talk about being in trouble and my experiences and going through the system? You see yourself as not a good thing. But I gave it a try, because at the end of the day, if I could help other young people to see a better path or not go down the path I went down, I thought, why not?

I was involved in creating the **Guide to the Female Estate**. I felt that was super important, because I remember my first night in there. It was flipping horrible. You don't know nothing and you're bashed into the deep end and it's like sink or swim. So it was amazing to do that guide.

It's been a pleasure and an honour to work with the Young Justice Advisors. Working with everybody, getting to know different people from different places who you might not meet every day. You see things in a box, but this opened my eyes to things I didn't know. It's made me passionate to delve deeper into things and see what can be changed.

I've had a lot of opportunities through the Young Justice Advisors, including being a researcher at the UK Acquired Brain Injury Forum. Never in a million, trillion, billion years did I think I'd be able to what I'm doing now, speaking about neurodiversity to these people with PhDs, having a conversation and have them listen and understand what I'm saying. That's been amazing.

I want to see more young people involved in decision making and being in positions of power. I want to see young people with experience changing other young people's lives, like we have done in this group – not just being heard, but also having real power.



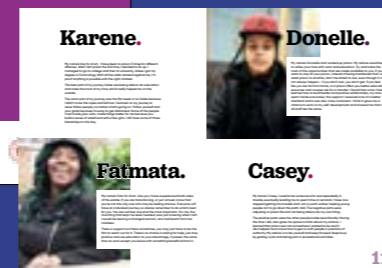
I want to see more young people involved in decision making and being in positions of power.

Guide to the female estate

This guide is for children and young people going into the female adult prison estate for the first time.

It includes key information about what to expect on arrival at prison, the locations of different establishments, and some top tips.

We also share our experiences, and share the story of one young person who transitioned from the youth estate to an adult establishment while we were creating this guide.



[Read guide](#)

Our work on the care system



We have all grown up living under slightly different rules and regulations. This has made us a lot stronger and more resilient than the average person.

Matthew, Care Experienced Young Advisor

"As we know, the care to prison pipeline is very real, and the support for care experienced young adults has not been the best."
Nadine, Young Justice Advisor and Project Manager

From 2016 to 2022 we looked at care as one of our priority areas. A dedicated team of care experienced young advisors designed and delivered workshops to engage with and learn from care experienced young adults.

Over the six years we spent focussing on this area, we saw that care experienced young people need more support, more opportunities to grow and for wider society to have a better understanding of what it means to be a care experienced young adult.



Guide to the care system

Drawing on their collective experiences, our team created a specific resource for care experienced young people. The guide includes information about their rights and entitlements, support and tips on mental health and self-care, as well as a space to explore career goals and future ambitions.



[Read guide](#)



Sadia's story

At first I was suspicious of Young Justice Advisors – I wondered if it was a tokenistic platform, or whether there was an opportunity for real change. I was pleasantly surprised because the projects I took part in were widely promoted and created an awareness of the needs of young people within the criminal justice system among policy-makers.

For me, talking to young people involved in the system has been really eye opening. They have so many hopes but get so little support. I see them being inspired by the work that we're doing as Young Justice Advisors, and knowing that we've had direct experience of the system, I believe it gives them hope and inspires them and gives them a bit of strength back that there is a chance for them to contribute to society in a positive way.

I really enjoyed taking part in creating **Your guide to the care system**. It made me reflect on my time in care, and all the support I could have done with, so working on this project meant I was able to utilise my own past experiences to help other young people in care.

At the end of the day, it's important to think about how to help rehabilitate young people involved in the criminal justice system, because everyone makes mistakes in life and it's not fair to have to pay for that mistake forever. That is so disempowering. It leads to people committing crime and ending up in a revolving door situation, just because the support they needed wasn't available, or their probation worker just wasn't willing to try to truly understand the young person, so they didn't know how to support them.

I plan to continue to support young people caught in the criminal justice and care systems in the future. I feel like it's my duty, as someone who's managed to come out the other end. **I like to think I can give them hope through my own experiences. I want them to feel that they have so much more to give to life.**



Fats' story

In 2013, I started a prison sentence.. Upon my release in 2016, a passion for involvement within the youth justice system emerged. I started my sentence at the age of 18 but had been engaged with the criminal justice system since the age of 12. Throughout my sentence, I observed numerous gaps within the system and an overemphasis on punishment rather than rehabilitation, with little consideration for the needs of young individuals to thrive, succeed, and break free from cycles.

During my probation period, my probation officer introduced me to a project called the Young Advisors in early 2017. She believed it aligned with my interests and career aspirations. **I joined to explore how my lived experiences within the care and criminal justice systems could contribute to the project. My motivation stemmed from a desire to prevent other young people from enduring similar hardships and to instil hope in them, rather than viewing them as lost causes, as I once was.**

Reflecting on my journey, I defied the expectations of officers who predicted my return to the system. This transformation was not only a testament to proving them wrong but also to my own growth, supported by the Young Advisors. I passionately believe in second chances, emphasising the importance of compassion, care, and empathy in mitigating judgment and providing opportunities for learning and growth.

Some of my highlights have been the Young Advocate programme allowed me to witness the support offered to young people, reminiscent of the support I wished I had received. Despite the progress made, it saddened me to observe that many young people still face similar challenges. However, serving as a role model who navigated the system successfully offers them hope and inspiration to pursue their aspirations.

Taking a lead on developing resources, such as the Care Resource Pack and Girls Transition Guide, has been particularly rewarding. **These resources aim to provide guidance based on lived experiences, addressing overlooked aspects that I wished I had known during my own journey.**

Engaging in that research provided an avenue for young voices to be heard and validated, offering reassurance that their

experiences matter. Empowering them to contribute to reports disseminated across various networks provides a sense of agency and recognition often lacking in their lives. Working on the Girls project with NHSE and the Centre for Mental Health, sharing my story at a care and custody seminar, participating in the workshop with the Ministry of Justice and at the time, Youth Justice Minister Agar.

My primary advocacy is for a shift in focus from punishment to rehabilitation within the justice system. Regardless of the sentence served, the emphasis should be on prevention and offering realistic opportunities for growth. This necessitates a change in how professionals are recruited, emphasising passion and commitment to making a difference rather than merely fulfilling a job role. Furthermore, I advocate for policies that prioritise support over restriction, acknowledging the importance of safety while ensuring that individuals receive the assistance they need without unnecessary barriers.

As I pursue a degree in working with children, families, and young people, my goal is to establish an organisation supporting individuals in contact with the care and criminal justice systems. Despite initial doubts about my academic capabilities this process has revealed my capabilities and demonstrated how even with minimal support; I can excel. Despite not completing school and facing academic challenges, I never imagined I would thrive in a university setting, particularly in academic writing. Fortunately, the university I attend provides exceptional support. Following just three sessions with a writing mentor, my grades consistently reflect first-class performance, aside from my initial assignment. This underscores the transformative impact of genuine care and dedicated support in fostering growth and success. It reinforces the notion that with proper guidance and encouragement, you can achieve anything.

Looking ahead, I aim to explore the correlation and criminalisation of young people in the care and criminal justice system and its impact on future prospects for my dissertation. Additionally, I plan to gain practical experience through volunteering during summers, adopting a hands-on approach tailored to individuals' unique needs.

Our training programmes



Change maker programmes

In 2022, we launched a new change maker programme, supporting young adults in prison to conduct their own peer research into the issues affecting them in the prison.

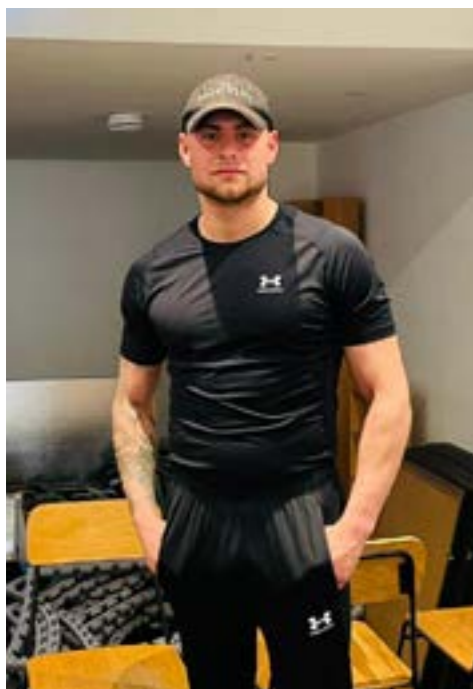
At the end of a 12-week programme of regular, fortnightly sessions with the Young Justice Advisors team, participants presented their findings for how to improve the young adult experience of the prison to its leadership.

We piloted the project at HMP Humber, and have since delivered further programmes at HMP Humber and HMP Lincoln. Participants gave extremely positive feedback about the programme:

“It’s made me feel like I matter.”

“I [didn’t] feel looked at like a prisoner but as a person.”

“I feel it’s made a change and it’s made a change to me.”



Connor's story

I first got involved with Young Justice Advisors in 2022 when I was in HMP Humber. I heard about an information session they were doing. It was about making change in the prison. I'd already done a lot of courses that said they were doing that, but they were just tick box exercises – someone asks your opinions about the prison but then nothing really happens, nothing changes. So I wasn't expecting much, but I thought to myself, you can get out of your cell and have free coffee and biscuits, so I went along. At the session, there was so much energy coming from Kojo, one of the Young Justice Advisors delivering the session, so I decided to sign up for the course.

On the course, Nadine and Kojo were great. It was a good vibe. It didn't feel like you were in prison for a bit.

At the end of the programme, we presented our suggestions to the governor and other staff. They said yes we'll do this, and this and that... but I didn't really expect anything to change.

It didn't happen straight away, but slowly, I did see things change because of the programme, so that one day I was thinking, hang on a sec, this has changed and I'm sure it's what we asked for. Things like full time workers getting more free time out of cell, and more family day visits for the lads who had sons and daughters, and more activity-based stuff for them to do together instead of just being sat down on chairs. That changed quite sharpish actually. So that gave the programme a good reputation. A lot of people wanted to do the course, and it wasn't because of the biscuits.

Young Justice Advisors has changed a lot of people inside prison. I'd like to see that carry on.

I'm planning to create a programme of my own, to support people leaving prison through fitness. There's no support there for a lot of people, so I'd like to deliver a six-month course, mentoring the newly released person, with the support they need – fitness, finances, mentoring, and support them to change their mindset and lifestyle.

Supporting prison staff to communicate effectively with young adults

In 2023, we developed training sessions for prison and probation officers, to support those working with young adults to communicate effectively with the young people in their care.

The training supports participants by giving them new skills and techniques to build effective relationships. It includes discussion and role play exercises, all informed by young adults with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

In 2023 we piloted the training with staff at HMP Berwyn (male prison) and HMP Styal (female prison), helping them to better understand how age, race, religion, life events and trauma all contribute to a person's sense of self, their motivations and their actions.

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I'm planning to create a programme of my own, to support people leaving prison through fitness.

Testimonials

Callum Pethick

Youth Led Change Manager, The Blagrove Trust

In wider society, there are certain views of people who get in trouble with the police, but it's a lot more complex than people realise. **The Young Justice Advisors have done an incredible job of highlighting this through their work, especially their work into how race and neurodiversity can impact your experience of the criminal justice system, exposing the institutionalised racism and ableism that exist within these institutions.** They've also really highlighted the challenges around transition into the adult system, which can be really traumatic for young people and not support their rehabilitation. The human aspect, knowledge and experience of the Young Justice Advisors is so special. They've achieved so much. For example, **they've given young people in prison a voice to challenge their governor, and then they've seen the governor act on their recommendations. That's huge.** I've never heard of anything else like that happening in Young Offenders Institutions. A lot of people might say that the reports and resources are the biggest achievements, but for me it's the impact of their individual journeys. I remember the first time I met Nadine. The way she talked about the importance of youth lived experience leadership, and having people who have the experience in those spaces still stays with me. To see young people who take part in the Young Justice Advisors going on to do such wonderful things, including going back into prisons to give more young people the power to have their voice heard as well as to train prison officers on unconscious bias, that circular model has such a big impact. More than anything, I think its biggest achievement is the community they've created, and the relationships they build as people transition out of institutions. The network is really positive in terms of building power through community. That should live on.

Adam Powell

Cohort Lead, HMPPS

The Young Justice Advisors is a unique programme, because it is run by those with lived experience of the justice system, who have the drive to make positive changes to help the Prison Service provide more effective outcomes. The Young Justice Advisors themselves are positive, friendly people who are always willing to try new initiatives and constantly want to support establishments and their young people. **Their constant drive to provide support to young people in custody, and help improve their outlook is key to their success.** Undoubtedly, their guides have been extremely useful, in particular the Guide to the Care System. I hope that their drive to succeed and provide a service to our young people will continue into the future.

Debbie Pippard

Director of Programmes, Barrow Cadbury Trust

The Young Justice Advisors were great from the start. **We really liked their energy. It was unusual. What's been so impressive about them is how they've deepened their understanding since they started.** With each grant from us, they've done deeper, more nuanced work. Their understanding and appreciation of the challenges with the system have grown, but without losing the focus on championing and advocating for young adults. We've always found them really authentic, really insightful, and able to talk to people in a way we just wouldn't be able to. It has been really lovely to see them develop over the years. The Ministry of Justice and services want to hear the voice of young adults, and hats off to them for being respectful and welcoming to the Young Justice Advisors. The Young Justice Advisors have also got inside the services, working in prisons. **They definitely get feedback and understanding that other people just wouldn't be able to get.** It would be great if this model could be built in, across the system.

Lorna Smith

Head of Offender Management Services, HMP Humber

We saw real value in what Nadine and Kojo delivered. They have the lived experience, so they've been there, they've lived it, breathed it and come out the other side successfully. From the beginning to the end of the course, for some of the young adults who took part, there was a real change in their confidence. One young adult who would not speak to us at all, by the end, he was engaging and giving a presentation to the governor and senior management team. It also allowed prisoners to show their leadership skills, which we wouldn't necessarily see just on the wings. One young man in particular showed leadership qualities we may not have seen otherwise. He has lots of experience of the care system and I'm the care leavers lead, so now we're collaborating together on that. **Through the course we've also gained insight into what a young adult needs in prison. How do I know what they need? I might think I know, but through this programme, we've given them a platform to tell us.** So much has happened because of the course – we now have young adult mentors on the wings, a group of young adults who meet new staff during their induction, to help them understand young adults within prison, family days specifically for young adults. **The course gives prisoners a voice and that's a really important part of rehabilitation. It's not just that they felt heard, but that they see that their voice matters. Young adults are our future. We need to invest time into them. Giving them that voice is really important.**

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So much has happened because of the course – we now have young adult mentors on the wings

Laura Montgomery

CEO & Trustee of The Ellis Campbell Foundation

The Ellis Campbell Foundation trustees undertook a strategic review in 2020, conscious of our need to increase our impact and refine our strategic objectives. We wanted to pivot our grant making to building youth power and leadership systemically, focussing on marginalised young people and we met Nadine in one of our interviews and then funded Young Justice Advisors (through Leaders Unlocked) following an application process. Nadine is an exceptional individual who has turned adversity into opportunity with the most extraordinary courage, determination and selflessness. **Not only has our funding supported Nadine, who has used her incredibly powerful voice to ensure those in power listen – which they are – but is has also supported Kojo and dozens more young justice advisors, with equally powerful voices, who collectively have had a huge impact within the justice system,** working collaboratively to produce transition guides for young people in prison, sharing their lived experiences. Beyond this is an additional legacy, being the profound impact the support of Nadine has on lifting these young people and their voices up into the world and into whatever that support empowers them to become. Nadine and her team of young people have clearly illustrated the immense and positive power of lived experience to make those in power listen and create systemic change and it has been a privilege to witness and to get to know Nadine and Kojo over the past 4 years.

Conclusion

At Leaders Unlocked we are extremely proud of the impact the Young Justice Advisors have made in their first eight years. As this report shows, they have played an influential role at many different levels in the justice and care systems, including through their peer research, advisory work with policy-makers, the creation of new resources, programmes and staff training.

Looking to the future, we want to see the Young Justice Advisors continue to be a force for positive change in the justice sector. We are delighted that some of the Young Advisors will be taking up paid internships and facilitation roles with Leaders Unlocked over the next year, in order to create and develop their own innovative projects and interventions. We will also be offering a free, four session version of our change maker programme, working with young adults and prison leadership to improve the young adult prison experience. Please do get in touch with us if you/your institution is interested in taking part in this programme. More widely, we will be exploring avenues for the future sustainability of the project – we would be keen to hear from potential partners and supporters who are excited by the work.



Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who's been on this journey with us.

We are enormously grateful to the wide range of partners that have worked with us over the past eight years:

Barnet YOT	Leicestershire YOS	Staffordshire YOT	HMP Lincoln
Birmingham YOT	Midland Heart Foyer	Stoke-on-Trent YOS	HMP Pentonville
Centre for Mental Health	Ministry of Justice	Take 1 Studios	HMP Preston
Crash Pad Youth Shelter	London Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime	Unlocked Graduates	HMP Ranby
Hackney Care Council	Nacro (Nottingham)	Young Combined Authority	HMP Spring Hill
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons	Nacro (Peterborough Centre)	Youth Justice Board	HMP Stafford
His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service	NHS England	HMP & YOI Askham Grange	HMP Styal
Howard League for Penal Reform	Prison Reform Trust	HMP Bedford	HMP Winchester
ID Essence	Revolving Doors	HMP Berwyn	HMP Wormwood Scrubs
Justice Select Committee	Salford YOT	HMP Birmingham	HMYOI Glen Parva
Kinetic Youth (Doncaster)	St Giles Trust	HMP Brixton	HMYOI Werrington
Kings Cross Neighbourhood Centre	Switchback	HMP Bronzefield	HMP/YOI Brinsford
Lammy Review Team	Social Pantry	HMP Bure	HMP/YOI ISIS
Leeds YOS	South Thames College	HMP Hatfield	
Leicester YMCA	SparkInside	HMP Humber	
		HMP Leeds	

By allowing us into your institutions and organisations, you have made it possible for us to consult and engage the young people at the heart of our work. By partnering with us to platform the voice of lived experience, you have supported the Young Justice Advisors to drive systemic change in the justice and care systems.

We would like to thank the T2A Alliance and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, for the consistent support you've given to the Young Justice Advisors from the very beginning. (Visit the [T2A Alliance website to find out more.](#)) We would also like to thank the Ellis Campbell Foundation and the Blagrove Trust for your invaluable support as we've grown and developed.

A very special thanks goes to every young person who has taken part in our project activities. You are the insight and talent at the heart of this programme.

Finally, our heartfelt thanks goes to the Young Justice Advisors, who have given so much of their time, energy and expertise to this immense body of work.

Thank you to our funders



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Written by Rebecca Hammond and Nadine Smith

**LEADERS
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