



effective practice

Where we see our standards
delivered well, in practice.



Her Majesty's
Inspectorate of
Probation

AN HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION EFFECTIVE PRACTICE GUIDE



Effective practice guide

Black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system

Based on: A thematic inspection of the experiences of black
and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system

December 2021

Acknowledgements

This effective practice guide is based on information sourced while undertaking the thematic inspection 'The experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system' and peripheral work arising from key lines of enquiry. The inspection was led by HM inspector Maria Jerram, supported by a team of inspectors and operations, research, communications and corporate staff. User Voice (a national charity that seeks to give a voice to people in the criminal justice system) undertook interviews with service users. The manager responsible for this inspection programme is Helen Davies.

In collaboration with Tammie Burroughs, effective practice lead, Maria Jerram has drawn out examples of effective practice (where we see our standards delivered well in practice) across leadership and case supervision. These are presented in this guide, to support the continuous development of practitioners and managers.

We would like to thank all those who participated in any way in this inspection, and especially those who have contributed to this guide. Without their help and cooperation, the inspection and effective practice guide would not have been possible.

Please note that, throughout the report, the names in the practice examples have been changed, to protect the individual's identity.

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Introduction

About this guide

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has a duty to identify and disseminate effective practice.¹

We assure the quality of youth offending and probation provision, and test its effectiveness. Critically, we make recommendations designed to highlight and disseminate best practice, challenge poor performance and encourage providers to improve.

This guide highlights where we have seen our standards delivered well for black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system. It is designed to help commissioners and providers improve this area of their work with children.

I am grateful to all the areas that participated in this review, and for their additional help in producing this guide. We publish these guides to complement our reports and the standards against which we inspect youth offending and probation.

I hope this guide will be of interest to everyone working in youth offending services and seeking to improve their practice. We welcome feedback on this and our other guides, to ensure that they are as useful as possible to future readers.



Justin Russell

HM Chief Inspector of Probation



Finding your way



Tools for practitioners



Useful links

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We would love to hear what you think of this guide. Please find current contact details via the [HM Inspectorate of Probation Effective Practice page](#).

¹ **For adult services** – Section 7 of the *Criminal Justice and Court Services Act (2000)*, as amended by the *Offender Management Act (2007)*, section 12(3)(a). **For youth services** – inspection and reporting on youth offending teams is established under section 39 of the *Crime and Disorder Act (1998)*.

Background

The thematic inspection ran alongside the trial of the murder of George Floyd in the United States and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. This is a reminder to all that **racism is still present** in our societies and that a **proactive anti-racist approach** is required to tackle it. This is especially important when working with children who, as a result of their involvement with the criminal justice system (CJS), are at a **critical moment in their lives**, and often, for complicated reasons, they do not always recognise this.

Despite the Lammy Review (2017) into the treatment of, and outcomes for, black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the CJS, the **disproportionate numbers of black and mixed heritage boys at all stages of the system continue to rise**, as illustrated in Figure 1 and shown within the documents you can access via the links below, provided by the Youth Justice Board.

Figure 1: Statistics regarding black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system



1%

Very few children and young people, either black or white, are involved in the CJS – typically, only about one per cent of the 10–17-year-old population in the local areas we inspect. But that very small number includes a disproportionate percentage of black boys.



2.8x

² **2.8 times** as many black children come to the attention of the youth justice system as would be expected, given the composition of the general population within the relevant age range; moreover, the extent of over-representation for this group has risen substantially since 2010.



2x

³ The representation of mixed heritage children in the youth justice population was consistent with the composition of the general community in 2010, but in the intervening years has **doubled**.



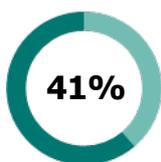
35%

⁴ The proportion of black children **remanded in custody** increased from 21 per cent to **35 per cent** in the year ending March 2020.

² National Association for Youth Justice. (2020). *The state of youth justice 2020: An overview of trends and developments*.

³ *The state of youth justice 2020 An overview of trends and developments* Dr Tim Bateman

⁴ Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Youth justice statistics 2019/20: England and Wales*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2019-to-2020>.



⁵ In the year ending March 2020, 41 per cent of children in youth custody were black or mixed heritage



⁶ Black boys are **more likely** than white boys to serve a greater portion of their original sentence.



[Summary infographic exploring racial disparity 2020](#)⁷ produced by the Youth Justice Board (YJB), 2020.

This over-representation should be **tackled upstream at multiple points** before these children become involved in the youth justice system, to strive towards equity. Practice should be improved to **increase positive outcomes** for black and mixed heritage boys once in the system. It must be done at pace, and with a focus and understanding of the underlying causes, and how to address these.

To do so, it is important to **understand** how black and mixed heritage boys arrive into the justice system and their journey through it, so that all agencies involved can make sure that their policies and processes are not disadvantaging this group of children. We need to **understand their experiences of mainstream services** and **their level of unmet need**, so that targeted and timely support is provided once they enter the justice system. Furthermore, there should be **effective exit planning** that begins well before the child's intervention is due to end, and which supports their reintegration, with specialist services to support ongoing desistance. **At all stages**, consideration should be given to the impact of any experiences of racism and structural barriers on the child's life chances.

⁵ Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Youth justice statistics 2019/20: England and Wales*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2019-to-2020>.

⁶ Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Youth Justice Statistics 2019/20: England and Wales*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2019-to-2020>.

⁷ The summary infographic is based on the Youth Justice Board Prezi presentation [Exploring racial disparity: how it affects children in their early years and within the youth justice system](#) – August 2020. [Accessible version of Exploring racial disparity 2020](#).

This is essential, as black and mixed heritage boys are:

More likely to come from the **poorest areas**, with the **social problems** and **violence** linked to **poverty**, and which impacts on their development view from a young age.

Less likely to have been referred to **early help services** in their formative years.

More likely to have been **excluded** from school.

More likely to have experienced **discrimination**.

More likely than their peers to have an **education healthcare plan**, and even **more likely** to have **special educational needs** that have not been identified or addressed.

More likely to have **emotional** and **mental health needs**, as well as **substance misuse** issues.

Library image

Of the cases we inspected in the thematic, where boys were sentenced to court orders, we found that:

A **third** were subject to **child protection or child in need** processes.

60 per cent had been **excluded** from school, the majority **permanently**.

Only **56 per cent** of boys felt that their **pre-sentence report fully represented** them.

Over a third had been a **victim of criminal exploitation**.

In a **quarter of cases** (where information had been recorded) the child had a **disability**.

Half of the boys (where information had been recorded) had experienced **racial discrimination**.

Library image

This raises questions about what had happened at the earlier stages of these boys' lives to result in such **high levels of need but such low levels of support and intervention**. The level of unmet need among this cohort of children is worrying. It is also concerning that there is limited understanding about the barriers that may be blocking their access to support, prior to them entering the youth justice system.

In addition to their over-representation in the justice system and high level of need, HM Inspectorate of Probation inspection data for 2019/2020, when split by ethnicity, highlighted that the supervision and **services delivered** to black and mixed heritage children were of **poorer quality** than those delivered to all other groups.

Youth offending services have a **responsibility** to address this, and a number that we inspected were making some progress in doing so. Therefore, this guide seeks to share examples of **effective practice**, which HM Inspectorate of Probation defines as: *where we see our standards delivered well in practice, with our standards being based on established models and frameworks, and are grounded in evidence, learning and experience.*

The examples are drawn from evidence of effective practice identified while undertaking fieldwork for the thematic inspection in Manchester, Lewisham, Nottingham, Haringey, Hackney, Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool and Oxfordshire.

The guide is aimed at a range of audiences; it is intended to support **practitioners, middle managers and strategic leaders** to reflect on their own experiences and consider how they may apply the salient learning points in their own contexts. Therefore, please use the contents page to navigate directly to the sections pertinent to you.

Our Standards: what we looked for and our expectations

For our thematic inspection, we inspected against the following standards:

Leadership

In relation to leadership, we expect that:

the governance and leadership of the YOT supports and promotes the delivery of high-quality, personalised and responsive services for black and mixed heritage boys.

This includes the following expectations:

- All board members contribute data from their individual agencies that identifies areas of disproportionality and the action being taken to address it, and then this data is used to develop a joint strategic needs assessment.
- A joint set of partnership targets – for example, with schools and children’s services – for improving service delivery to black and mixed heritage boys is in place, and there are mechanisms in place to track, monitor and evaluate outcomes.
- Staff understand what is expected of them in their work with black and mixed heritage boys, and are inducted, trained and supported to work effectively with this group of children.
- Management oversight focuses sufficiently on diversity, and practice, which means that there are clear escalation routes to address any barriers to black and mixed heritage boys accessing the services they need.
- Specialist services are available to black and mixed heritage boys, either delivered in-house or commissioned from appropriate local community organisations.
- Feedback from black and mixed heritage boys, and their parents or carers, is used to assess the effectiveness of service delivery and make adaptations where required.

Case supervision

In relation to assessment and planning, we expect that:

assessments and planning for black and mixed heritage boys are well-informed, holistic, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

This includes the following expectations:

- There is a sufficient focus on engagement with black and mixed heritage boys and their parents or carers, including fathers (neglected in many of the cases we inspected).

- There is a sufficient focus on the factors linked to desistance for black and mixed heritage boys.
- There is clear analysis of how to keep black and mixed heritage boys safe.
- There is evidence of consideration and analysis of the key structural barriers facing black and mixed heritage boys.
- There is evidence of consideration of the diversity, and wider familial and social context of the child, utilising information held by other agencies.

In relation to implementation and delivery, we expect that:

high-quality well-focused, personalised and coordinated services are delivered, engaging black and mixed heritage boys and their parents or carers.

This includes the following expectations:

- There is a focus on actively supporting the engagement of black and mixed heritage boys.
- There is evidence of effectively supporting a reduction in offending by black and mixed heritage boys.
- There is evidence of effectively supporting the safety of black and mixed heritage boys.
- There is a focus on addressing any structural barriers facing black and mixed heritage boys, and service delivery that promotes opportunities for community integration, including access to services post-supervision.
- Services reflect the diversity and wider familial and social context of the child, involving parents or carers, or significant others.
- Enforcement actions for black and mixed heritage boys (for example, breach, recall and warnings letters) are applied appropriately and fairly.

In relation to reviewing, we expect that:

reviewing of progress for black and mixed heritage boys is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

This includes the following expectations:

- There is evidence that reviewing is an ongoing process that responds to changes in factors linked to desistance, and safety and wellbeing.
- There is evidence that structural barriers facing black and mixed heritage boys are considered and addressed.
- Assessments and plans are updated, particularly following significant changes in circumstances.
- The services, activities and interventions being delivered are changed when necessary, as identified within reviewing activities.
- All relevant partners and agencies, as well as black and mixed heritage boys and their parents or carers, are involved.
- Documentation is reviewed thoroughly, with information that is out of date or no longer relevant removed or placed in context.

Learning from black and mixed heritage boys: User Voice

We commissioned the services of 'User Voice', a national charity, created and run by people who have been in prison and on probation, to give a voice to those in the CJS. They met 38 black or mixed heritage boys, to gather their perspectives on the services that they had received from the youth offending service (YOS). The boys also helped us understand some of the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives and what could be done to help.

We are grateful for the insights of the 38 boys, whose feedback we have used to inform our findings for the thematic.

Rennel Gayle, from User Voice, spoke to us about his experiences as a peer researcher for the inspection and shared salient points provided by the boys. He told us that the boys he spoke to are very aware of racism and discrimination and noted that, while there were no surprises for him, he was not aware of the "extremity of it".

Therefore, he hopes that the impact of the thematic will be that:

*"everyone will refocus on the child, on **all** aspects of the child".*



He shares the importance of:

- taking children out of their daily routine
- challenging conversations (he described challenge as a natural indicator that something needs to change) regarding what is acceptable behaviour
- a tailored service, not one size fits all
- the practitioner putting in the effort to make a connection
- having difficult conversations – for example, regarding profiling and discrimination
- opening these children's eyes to the possibilities of a different, pro-social life
- having high aspirations.

In looking at how we move this forward, Rennel states:

"Success must be measured by the personal development of the kid, so what I mean by this is, you shouldn't have a checklist to the side saying they have done this course, done that course; that's not cutting it – the approach should be tailored to each individual."



[Video \(YouTube, 10:42\): Learning from stakeholders: User Voice \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)



The boys identified a number of relationship pillars which they feel are beneficial in their relationships with their YOS practitioners. Please find a [poster outlining the 'pillars of relationships identified by the boys'](#).



After completing the research, [User Voice has identified six solutions to drive change.](#)



This report from User Voice explains its methodology and findings in full: ["Black is guilty in their eyes". Experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in youth justice services.](#)

Leadership

Addressing disproportionality is, and has been, a longstanding priority for most YOSs, and addressing it has been an objective in youth justice plans for a number of years. However, to date, this has not yet translated into consistently high-quality service delivery and improved outcomes for black and mixed heritage boys.

Our standards expect that YOS partnership boards have a clear and detailed understanding of over-representation in their YOS, so that they are confident they have the right services and resources in place to tackle this. YOS partner agencies need to ensure that any barriers limiting the access of black and mixed heritage boys and their families to the support they need are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity. To achieve this, YOS management boards should make sure that they use accurate data to assess any over-representation, and that the needs of this group of children are understood. The commissioning and provision of services should be led by this analysis and there should be regular evaluation of the quality of services delivered, rates of referrals, uptake and improvements in outcomes.

In this section, we speak to a number of services who have made progress in this area; Matthew Knights, formerly from Haringey YOS, discussed his leadership to address disproportionality. Brendan Finegan, from Hackney YOS, explains the YOS response to children who have raised concerns about stop-and-search and how the YOS is increasing black and mixed heritage boys' engagement with out-of-court disposals. Keith Cohen, from Lewisham YOS, talks about how the YOS created a shared vision, and the family therapy team shares how it engages parents or carers actively. Finally, we highlight the work of 'Wipers' in how it supports black and mixed heritage boys referred to it by YOSs in East London.

Example of effectiveness: Haringey's disproportionality project and systemic leadership

In Haringey, inspectors noted a clear connection between the strategic direction of the YOS and practice on the front line, with staff understanding what is expected of them to work effectively with black and mixed heritage boys. Managers, while recognising the challenges, had a consistent focus on driving practice around diversity, using multiple methods to drive this, and the board was promoting this work actively.

One of the key drivers for this was Haringey's involvement in the disproportionality project. This was a co-funded with Islington YOS and City Criminology; City, University of London was commissioned to complete the evaluation.

The four key aims of this project were to:



provide training around adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) within ethnic minority communities



provide parents from ethnic minority backgrounds a safe space to discuss the pressures associated with their children's involvement in antisocial behaviour and/or offending behaviour, and the structural and societal pressures they face



improve support for children and their families from ethnic minority backgrounds who face increased barriers and lack of opportunities



strengthen marginalised communities and encourage Haringey and Islington YOSs and authorities to shape and improve the services provided, so that children and their families are supported to 'live their best life'.

The project involved an evaluation of services, based on interviews; workshops; observations with staff, children and families; evaluations of outputs and outcomes; and focused training for all staff, which the managers also attended. The training covered unconscious bias and institutional racism (to bring discussions into the open); trauma and ACEs within ethnic minority communities; and relationship building and working with ethnic minority communities, to provide a focus on practice.

We spoke to **Matthew Knights, former Head of Haringey YOS, now London Accommodation Pathfinder Strategic Development Manager**, who provided us with the headlines of the post-project developments:



As a result of the findings and analysis, the research team developed a set of recommendations for the YOS to pursue.

- **Disproportionality development plan:** A strategic and operational plan which at present focuses on the youth justice service (YJS), early help and youth services.
- **'Ether' programme over the summer 2020:** A highly motivational and inspirational leadership course which directly addresses issues around race and identity, and perceptions of self, as well as self-esteem and confidence, attitude and behaviour, and independent thinking.
- **Diversity workshop:** This was completed with staff, to review how the YJS is addressing and evidencing diversity within key focus areas' assessments, plans and interventions.
- **Reports for court:** The report templates for the YJS have been reviewed, to give them a more 'child first' and 'identity lens' approach, as opposed to 'offender' dominating the initial part of the reports.
- **YJS disproportionality podcast:** The main focus of the podcast is about spreading the awareness of disproportionality, gaining three young people's experiences of growing up in Haringey and going through the CJS. The podcast was produced by an organisation called 'Bird Podcast'. The YJS service manager and local councillor were also interviewed, to give a wider perspective on disproportionality.
- **Social workers in Schools:** The disproportionality pilot project is to be embedded within the pastoral structures in seven secondary schools, to support learning and culture change, and keeping children in mainstream education.
- **Development of the YJS Haringey racial disparity analysis:** This has been completed, alongside YJS, education and health data, to capture a live picture of the

racial disparity for the YJS cohort. This has been shared with the management board and presented at local authority conferences.



The north London YOTs all agreed to use the same data sets, as per the summary provided by the YJB, this is the [Haringey 'exploring racial disparity' data](#).



[Transcript of interview with Matthew Knights](#) discussing the disproportionality project.



[Read the full Disproportionality Project Evaluation Report](#).

Matthew was clearly committed to gaining an improved understanding of structural racism and racial disparities in Haringey, and then determined to take affirmative action to address these injustices.

We asked him how he had driven changes in this area. He explained that there were multiple lessons to be learned, especially given that services are on a journey. However, he advised that the key points would be:



Be persistent

- **Recognise that it is a journey, and that you need to keep going** – even when faced with barriers; discuss how to overcome them with your team, your board and partners. Give people space once they have established momentum to progress on their individual and team's journey.
- **Don't just provide training** – keep thinking about what comes next and how you will keep the learning alive. Do follow up workshops with your services, to keep the reflective discussions going.
- **Get creative in reinforcing progress and addressing the fears about getting it wrong** – we had reflective practice discussions, and used supervisions and team meetings to embed learning.
- **Keep it on the agenda** – disproportionality was a key agenda item at all our all-service meetings; we wanted the message always to be there. The board and management team were receptive and agreed its importance.
- **Use your influence with wider partners and take every opportunity to promote equality** – I was invited to an education steering group which focused on disproportionality looking at the exclusions and protected characteristics of Haringey children. I shared our learning and data about the YOS and highlighted the impact of exclusions on the children within the CJS.
- **Always ask yourself, your team and partners, what else we can do?** – A group of us across North London used the same disproportionality data set and infographic, to understand better the picture in North Central London, and shared learning about how to make progress.



Be bold

- **Take an investigative approach** – see problems as opportunities to drive improvements.
- **Think big** – it is important to influence colleagues and partners. I took the disproportionality plan to the board, engaged the heads of early help and youth services, showed what we were doing and asked what they could add to ensure that it was a more partnership approach and practice.
- **Challenge others regarding what they can do** – I suggested that the training we completed as part of the disproportionality project would be beneficial for all local authority staff as part of their induction.
- **Ensure accountability at all levels** – I held my managers and team to account and asked the board to review progress of the disproportionality plan every three months.
- **Don't be afraid to recognise that you need external assistance** – Our bid to the YJB for funding to address serious youth violence led to the disproportionality project; get external support to build your foundations.



Be curious

- **Be curious about the data and the cohort** – Start from the beginning, in how the YOS data sets are transferred to YOS and how this information is used for the management board, and understand what data sources are used so that data sets can be aligned. Break the data sets down by ethnicity, age and gender. We noted that the ethnicity data was captured from the police and court sheets, and not from the boys themselves, and so we made a commitment to query its accuracy.
- **Understand the local and regional perspective**, so that you know what is happening in your local authority and how it compares. What does the YOS national data tell you and how is this analysed and compared with the data from your YOS? Why is it showing more disproportionality in your borough compared with others, or vice versa?
- **Encourage others to be curious** about the data. We took the data for black and mixed heritage boys and asked case managers to review this with each child and consider how they defined themselves in relation to religion, nationality, and so forth. This helped them to think about the communities they worked in and ensured that the YOS had the most accurate data.



Connect the dots

- **Make a clear connection between frontline practice and the management board** – anything presented to the management board was also presented to staff, to communicate an awareness of disproportionality. This also included ensuring that this was a key focus in our YOS strategic plans.
- **Connect strategic changes with practice** – we reviewed management oversight templates, audit questions and our court report template, to ensure that we were capturing structural barriers and diversity, so that these conversations became the norm and looked at what needed to change as a result.

- **Follow-up training.** We held a diversity workshop which explored where people captured diversity in the AssetPlus and what it meant for the plan of work with the child. For instance, how does the experience as a black boy link with learning needs and other diversity factors, and what does that mean for the boy's self-identity?
- **Use the data to inform service delivery** – we commissioned specialist services, such as Wipers, to do eight-week programmes with our black and mixed heritage boys, and we became an assessment qualifications alliance licence centre and linked certification of achievements to all of the reparation and activities we facilitated. We recognised the importance of understanding cultural identities, and during lockdown organised virtual cookery classes, making meals reflecting the children's heritage – which promoted communication with parents and a sense of achievement. We were creative with our approach and allowed for the children to build their own portfolio.

A practical example of the action that Haringey has taken is a podcast episode capturing the life experiences of children in Haringey and what it is like for them being in the CJS.

This helped to acknowledge the reality of life for the black boys; for example, one boy stated: *"I am probably going to get stabbed"*.



A senior practitioner in Haringey YOS, Kate Littler, is part of '**Bird podcast**', an organisation that produces podcasts highlighting issues linked to the CJS. Each episode focuses on a different aspect of a complex issue in the CJS – for example, knife crime, mental health, substance misuse, UK street gangs.

Guests always include one or more people with lived experience of the CJS, supplemented by perspectives from a range of relevant professionals, as well as statistical research and up-to-date domain knowledge. They report to *"highlight good practices, community resources, and avoid engaging in victimisation or blame"*.

Together **with children from Haringey YOS**, Bird Podcast created '**Youth Justice: the black experience**' podcast episode, which covered:

- black children discussing their lived experience of stop and search, root causes of youth crime, and the Black Lives Matter movement
- Haringey Councillor, Mark Blake, discussing diversity in government
- Haringey YJS Manager, Matthew Knights, highlighting his professional point of view from working with many ethnic minority young people in the youth justice system.



[Podcast episode \(36:10\) Youth Justice: the black experience](#)

Example of effectiveness: Hackney tackling disproportionality in stop and searches and in out-of-court-disposals

To reduce the over-representation of black and mixed heritage boys in the CJS, there must be a clear local understanding of what is driving it in the first place, with a detailed, robust working plan in place to address it.

Hackney YOS has developed an evidence base to enable it to understand disparity and over-representation, not just in terms of ethnicity within the YOS cohort, but also so that it can cross-reference the numbers of black and mixed heritage children outside the YOS who are in care or subject to child protection processes. This highlights the multiple levels of disadvantage experienced by this group of children and assists the partnership in considering its approach.

We spoke to **Brendan Finegan, Hackney Service Manager**, who reflected on stop and search and out-of-court disposals.



Stop and search

In the first video (page 18), Brendan Finegan, Hackney Service Manager, explains the approach that the Safer Young Hackney Board (YOS management board) took when Hackney Young Futures Commission⁸ advised that children were concerned about the approach taken in stop and searches.

"The children recognised that it was a tool but were experiencing it as oppressive."

This was raised at the board, and to understand why this was happening, the Police Chief Inspector agreed to undertake a dip sample of stop and searches in the area. This sample, of 35 out of 74 young black males who were stopped in May 2020 with an outcome of 'no further action', found that 23 did not show sufficient grounds for a stop and search. The information recorded was lacking in detail, and the process appeared not to be a proportionate response. As a direct result of this, the Chief Inspector of the Central East Basic Command Unit contacted the supervisors of those officers, in order to remind them of the expected procedures. They also took the learning to the training and development division, to refresh and review training, and this was fed back to the young people.

Brendan explained that this has allowed a much more **open conversation about searches**, and YOS practitioners are now much more likely to **advocate on behalf of the children**, asking the police to review cases and, if necessary, support complaints.

⁸ Hackney Young Futures Commission is the largest consultation undertaken with young people, aged between 10 and 25 years. The Commission spoke directly to over 2,400 young people between the ages of 10 and 25 years, from a range of backgrounds.

Through addressing this, Brendan explained that the YOS and police were able to identify that they have the:

“same task, by a slightly different route; we want communities to be safe, we want children to be safe and we want fewer victims. But if children feel victimised, it results in a reduced ability to develop empathy... So, there is a basic understanding that we’re on the same ground, want the same goals, and it’s not a personal attack on policing, my officers seconded to a YOT or a general attack on police. Just, if practice is poor, it should improve.”

He is clear that this only worked because the strategic board was prepared. This preparation included sharing data, which had been assured by testing and cleansing, and using the different forms of evidence regarding disproportionality, including lived experience.



[Video \(YouTube, 6:32\): Learning from stakeholders: stop and search \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)

Out-of-court-disposal

The Lammy Review (2017) indicated that ethnic minority children were significantly under-represented in YOS out-of-court cohorts, although this does not appear to have been the case in Hackney. In the video below, Brendan shares why he thinks this has been the case, including:

- **strong partnership work**, building from commissioned youth work service, which undertakes our out-of-court-disposals
- **youth work model engagement**, including child first and family engagement
- **work with police colleagues** around decision-making
- **decision-making based on an assessment** developed by Young Hackney, the YOS, speech and language team, using a youth work model; following the promising evidence base, we amended this service to be located outside the YJS for less serious offences.

Brendan identifies the strengths of this approach as:

- the **feedback loop** – outcomes are fed back to the officer in charge regarding progress, outcome and, where appropriate, the next steps, even for informal disposals. This builds confidence in the service
- for black and mixed heritage boys, specifically:
 - the process is **transparent**
 - it is explained in **understandable language**, which builds trust
 - they get the experience of **being listened to**
 - people are able to opt for the decision which is **less damaging** for the future.



[Video \(YouTube, 9:56\): Learning from stakeholders: out-of-court disposals \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)

In discussing the outcomes of this, Brendan stated:

"This approach has empowered children and families to share their experiences, and communicate their needs, in respect of the impact of racism and discrimination they experienced.

"Intervention plans have recorded increases in requests for support with IOPC [Independent Office for Police Conduct] processes, advocacy with education exclusion and sessions exploring rights and responsibilities; identity; racism and discrimination.

"The rich and powerful narrative shared by our children and families and captured in the assessment tool has also served to improve communication with YOT [youth offending team] police partners, who have become more proactive in responding to issues of racism in the context of policing. The assessment tool has allowed practitioners to directly and explicitly discuss and give voice to black and mixed heritage children, allowing us to better understand their lived experience and specific support needs, with a focus on taking deliberate action to address them."



We thank [Hackney YOS for providing a copy of the out-of-court disposals assessment they use.](#)



In addition, they have shared documents which explain various processes to children, parents and carers:

- [out-of-court: Understanding decision making](#)
- [what happens in custody flowchart](#)
- [police custody language guide.](#)



They have also shared their [youth justice dictionary](#) which explains a number of the terms used within the youth justice system.

Example of effectiveness: Lewisham's anti-racist strategy

In response to the evidence that black and mixed heritage boys are disproportionately represented in the CJS, Lewisham has developed an anti-racist strategy, which has been agreed and promoted actively by the YOS management board. Addressing disproportionality is a standing item at management board meetings. As a result of the strategy, managers have devised an anti-racist action plan, and an anti-racist statement has been agreed by the staff team.

The anti-racism statement begins with the quote:

"In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist. We must be anti-racist."
(Angela Davis)

It then goes on to state:

- ✓ **We are resolved** to explicitly and publicly affirm our identity as an anti-racist service.
- ✓ **We are resolved** that our anti-racism commitment be reflected in the life and culture of the service through our policies, programmes and practices as we continue to learn about racism.
- ✓ **We resolve** to develop and work to implement strategies that dismantle racism within all aspects of our organisation, our stakeholder services and the wider network.
- ✓ **We resolve** to promote the potential of children in their learning and development to be aware of their history, understand injustice and take pride in their identities to be their best.

The statement covers:

- anti-racism definitions from a human rights framework
- terminology and acronyms typically used in racial justice work
- evidence base and theoretical underpinning
- being an anti-racist manager
- being an anti-racist practitioner
- Lewisham YOS disproportionality policy
- the journey of the black child in the youth justice system action plan
- how Lewisham YOS will tackle racism – a partnership approach.

Inspectors noted the following actions being taken/developed as a direct result of the anti-racist strategy:

- The service developed a 'journey of the black child' report to identify areas where **discretion and discrimination** can be used inappropriately, and shared with partners to promote awareness and action to address barriers.
- **Racial trauma** is considered within its trauma-informed approach to practice, resulting in the TIARA approach – **trauma-informed, anti-racist, restorative approach**.

- **Magistrates and district judges** have participated in YOS training on trauma-informed practice, to give them a better understanding of the language and content of the pre-sentence reports produced (PSRs).
- **PSRs have been reformatted**, to place the circumstances of the child before the details of their offending, to make sure that their life experiences are understood, and their offending is placed in context.

Inspectors commented:

"These changes, that have taken place over the last 12 months, have created a shared understanding across the team of what is expected of them."

"They [staff] told us it has helped them to feel empowered to question discrimination where they see it. They are confident that they will be supported by their managers if they appropriately challenge the rationale and decision-making of other agencies and escalation processes are in place".

Keith Cohen, Head of Youth Offending Service in Lewisham, said that the board promotes the policy and strategy actively, and noted the importance of different elements of the approach:



"We publicly and explicitly affirm our identity as an anti-racist service — it is important, as the opposite of racist is not non-racist, it is anti-racist. We have a responsibility to walk that walk, hence the [inclusion] of qualities of anti-racist managers and practitioners."

This helps to drive:

"skilled and competent [staff] in talking to [children], young people and families about identity, background, race and some of the massive challenges that they face around that".

In the video (page 22), he shares his insight and covers several important points for consideration, including:

- the importance of **constantly evolving the approach** – for example, they started with trauma-informed and restorative approaches, and the strategy adds a third prong in the understanding of how bias impacts this
- **getting comfortable with the uncomfortable**
- **shared understanding of language**, as sometimes the language used is adversarial and we **want it to be restorative**
- the importance is the **intersectionality** and the **layers of the individual**
- **excellent training**
- setting **clear expectations** that all staff should be committed to the strategy and be working towards it

- line management and clinical supervision to support the team’s understanding of, confidence and capacity around race and ethnicity
- the fact that we look to ourselves first but then are always looking outwards about how can we make a difference
- no quick fix, it takes time to change
- culture is more difficult to change than strategy
- your team is your strength – the quality of individual supervision is key, who you commission and who supports you
- the importance of getting support from the board and wider governance framework
- advocating and modelling the transformation and curiosity.



[Video \(YouTube, 6:32\) Learning from stakeholders: Anti-racist strategy \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)



With thanks to Lewisham YOS, you can access the [full anti-racist strategy](#).

HM Inspectorate of Probation would recommend that you peruse the strategy, but would like to draw practitioners’ attention to the specific sections below:



[Journey of the black child in the youth justice system](#); the first slide explores early years and development stages, pre-court, court, community and the secure estate.

The second slide explores the relative rate index (RRI): ethnic minority young males relative to white young males. The RRI allows a comparison to be made between distinct groups for rates of contact with different CJS stages, taking account of numbers of each group ‘at risk’ at each stage (rather than the general population). Measures over one indicate increased disproportionality (for example, above, 1.21 black boys were sentenced to custody at a magistrate’s court for every one white boy).⁹

Lewisham’s anti-racist strategy includes the following list of qualities of anti-racist managers and practitioners.

Qualities of a committed anti-racist manager:



They are willing to take risks and **acknowledge privilege and power differentials**.



They are **open to/seek out feedback** and integrate it.



They engage in a **transparent** decision-making process.



They **hire, promote and retain** black, Asian and minority ethnic people.



They **commit** time, money and training, and participate actively.

⁹ Uhrig, N. (2016). *Black, Asian and minority ethnic disproportionality in the criminal justice system in England and Wales, Ministry of Justice Analytical Services 2016.*



They are willing to **stop and reflect**, then redirect if their way is not working.



They **share** power and control, while accepting the hierarchy of responsibilities.

Qualities of a trauma-informed anti-racist practitioner:

A key feature of a trauma-informed organisation is the way in which a service is offered (that is, the whole *context in which it is provided* – not just ‘what’ it entails). As healing from interpersonal trauma occurs in a relationship, the wider relational context in which healing takes place is critical.



Safety – creating spaces where people feel culturally, emotionally and physically safe, as well as an awareness of an individual’s discomfort or unease.



Transparency and trustworthiness – providing full and accurate information about what is happening and what is likely to happen next. Respectful and professional boundaries are maintained.



Peer support – providing hope and support. Promoting trust.



Collaboration and mutuality – recognising that healing happens in relationships and partnerships with shared decision-making.



Empowerment, voice and choice – recognising an individual’s strengths. Prioritising staff and client empowerment, choice and control, and building skills.



Cultural historical and gender contexts – recognising historical/ inter-generational trauma, cultural sensitivities and strengths, and gender issues.

Individual actions:



Understand the culture in which you are working and find cultural references that will resonate with children/young people (C/YP).



Be **aware of your connection** to the communities you are discussing.



Recognise that even people who are members of the same racial or ethnic group may have very **different life experiences, emotions and responses**.



Be careful **not to generalise** about groups of people.



Understand yourself and your own beliefs, biases, privileges and responses because this is an essential foundation for facilitating discussions with C/YP.



Create safe space – highlight that all C/YP need to have a sense of psychological safety and trust, so that they can express their perspectives and listen respectfully to others' perspectives, even when there are disagreements.



Prior to engaging in the discussion, **set up options and provide clear directions for managing overwhelming emotional responses** related to the discussion.



Set rules and boundaries – for example, permission to leave the room.



Reflection with peers – debriefing, processing or support.



Validate and de-escalate emotions when possible – C/YP often have difficulty identifying, expressing and managing emotions.



Help C/YP and colleagues **understand the connection between historical trauma, systemic racism and community trauma**.



Give C/YP **opportunities to share cultural stories and experiences in a variety of ways**.



Offer **empathy and understanding** to C/YP who express distrust and distress.



Validate and honour C/YP experiences and emotions, rather than trying to convince them that they no longer have a rational reason to feel that way.



Avoid telling C/YP that their past experiences should not affect their current beliefs.



The London Councils website includes '[Tackling disproportionality good practice case studies](#)' focusing on Lewisham, noting:

"Building on its long-term ambition to becoming a trauma-informed service, Lewisham's youth offending team is using data, external facilitators and workshops to embed cultural competence within its service".

Example of effectiveness: Lewisham’s specialist services provided by the YOS family therapy team (LYFT)

The involvement of parents and families is an important part of the work done with children in the youth justice system. YJB case management guidance¹⁰ highlights that parenting interventions designed to provide additional support to parents:

- improve their relationships with their children
- reduce negative factors
- strengthen protective factors, such as positive and consistent discipline and constructive supervision.

It states that good parenting interventions help to build self-confidence and awareness of how important effective parenting is, not only to prevent children from becoming involved in the youth justice system, but also to go on to lead productive and successful lives.

The Lammy Review cites the importance of involving parents in the youth justice system. It states that when children from ethnic minority groups are being drawn into street crime, sometimes under duress, by powerful adults, the role of parents and carers is important in re-establishing boundaries and protecting them. It also states that parents and carers should be held responsible for their children until they reach adulthood. YOSs rarely recommend the imposition of a court-ordered parenting order, as there is a general view that the voluntary engagement of parents in parenting work is preferable and less punitive.

We were impressed with the attention that Lewisham YOS has paid to engaging therapeutically, not only with children, but also with their parents and carers. This can be seen in the therapy team (discussed below), implementation and delivery of the family therapy work, and through the co-produced newsletters for parents (examples of which are provided in the links below).

Learning from the frontline



The LYFT was born from a desire to provide a unified and localised service, which drew on the skills and expertise of a range of services and local knowledge, to provide a breadth of therapeutic support to children and families. This consists of the Lewisham Adolescent Resources and Therapy Service, part of Lewisham Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, which provide assessment, treatment and care for children in, or at risk of entering, the CJS. Alongside this, the LYFT has an ethnically diverse team of therapists, who deliver family functional therapy interventions.

¹⁰ GOV.UK. (2019). [Support parents of children in the youth justice system: section 9 case management guidance - \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/support-parents-of-children-in-the-youth-justice-system-section-9-case-management-guidance).

Kevin Cohen, Head of Youth Offending Service – Lewisham, stated:

“Being co-located is a key element, as the team also offers ongoing support and training, advice, opportunities for reflective practice and to vent, which is a very important part of systemic therapy and trauma-informed work – and that, in turn, means more referrals”.

The joint team allowed them to create one pathway for referrals from the YOS for children and families, which means that needs are more easily assessed and met. Under the LYFT remit, every child involved with the YOS attends an induction with their parent at the beginning of their intervention. At their initial appointment, the practitioner facilitates a restorative meeting between the child and their parent or carer. Children and families then have access to a range of services, including family mediation and interventions for those who have been affected by domestic abuse. The interventions involve a whole-family, strengths-based, systemic approach, supporting families who have complex needs. The team of therapists works in collaboration with the YOS speech and language team, and liaison and diversion workers. Furthermore, the YOS restorative justice practitioner is part of the team. The LYFT delivers an integrative home/community-based model of family therapy to children and young people, aged 11–18 years, and their families, where there is offending or an identified risk of offending.

There are recognised benefits in having an ethnically diverse team of therapists, as this is reflective of the community and important in terms of engagement. However, staff and managers are clear that understanding barriers and not being afraid to try new ways to engage are of equal importance. Also important are being tenacious, flexible and realistic about gaining engagement, and understanding that this is a gradual approach that recognises the challenges of gaining trust. Staff felt that the fact that interventions are delivered at times when the families are available, and in a home, as opposed to a clinical environment, also supports engagement.

“There is resistance to engage for some; it is important to acknowledge it, but the team are extremely good at overcoming it. They are good at making connections, there is some cultural affinity and lived experience/experts by experience, but they are also really flexible, very clear and open; they use the restorative approach as a base. I don’t hear blame language; they listen and seek to understand and articulate this.

“Additionally, there is an understanding from our black therapists, who have connected proactively with our anti-racists stance – they know they have the backing of the system to challenge systemic racism and they have an understanding of the highly difficult and challenging system families face in being marginalised.

“There is a lot of skill and knowledge in the team and there is an element of cultural knowledge, from knowing the community they work in; it is like a pool of skills, different puzzle pieces coming together in CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy], MST [multi-systemic therapy], RJ [restorative justice].

Keith Cohen, Head of Youth Offending Service – Lewisham

The **Lewisham YOS family therapy team** showed significant insight into how to support black and mixed heritage children and families.

In the three videos below, we asked them to focus on **engagement**, the importance of **working with parents or carers**, and latterly the significance of **working within the systems** impacting on families.

Left to right: Eugenie Douglas, Tina Oye-Bamgbose, Eunice Alloh, Ellie Davis, Serena Mullings, Claude Murray, Keith Cohen.



Engagement

The team talks about how they are **intentional** in all they do with the families they work with; they spend time planning and preparing as part of the model. This includes considering barriers, previous relationships, how they have seen help or support, and their experiences of racism and oppression. They acknowledge this within the first week and *“speak to it”*.

They state:

“Black families are often bruised and battered by not being able to get what they need; [we] acknowledge the journey, address commonalities and differences, and put it on the table”.

This is important for the boys and families/care givers, as they spoke about racism being more *“undercover”* in the UK. So, the team was clear that:

“you have to ask the question; if you don’t create a space and a place where children, young people and parents are able to speak to their experiences, then anything we do as an intervention is going to be insufficient because it’s not addressing needs”.



[Video \(YouTube, 10:29\): Learning from stakeholders: Engagement with black and mixed heritage boys and caregivers \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)



The team, led by Serena Mullings, spoke about small things with big wings. Please find a [poster outlining the ‘small things big wings’ principles](#).



With thanks to [@clinpsych_ind](#) for allowing us to share her [visual representation of engaging the “hard to reach”](#).

The importance of working with parents/care givers

The team was clear that working with families is fundamental to sustain positive changes; its ethos is *“child first but think family”*.

It shares salient points to this work, including providing choices, demonstrating compassion, identifying the family as the experts, taking a collaborative approach –demonstrated actively in language and actions, being curious and open, looking beyond what is being said and bring your authentic self:

"The family have a culture and custom in their home, so it's fundamental, when we are working with the child/young person and family in collaboration, we are working together...to reduce the tension and rubbing [when changes occur]".



[Video \(YouTube, 15:35\): Learning from stakeholders: Working with the parents/caregivers of black and mixed heritage boys \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)



Examples of parent or carer engagement:

- [Lewisham Youth Offending Service newsletter – Issue 002](#)
- [Lewisham Youth Offending Service newsletter – Issue 003](#)
- [Lewisham Youth Offending Service table talk flyer – for their table talk session, held during the national lockdown.](#)

The systemic approach

An important facet of the family therapy team is its influence on other services working with the same families. It recognises that effective engagement "*oscillates around the ecosystem around the children*" and, therefore, relationships are crucial to support positive progress.

In this video, team members share how they advocate actively for families and influence other systems positively. For example, they speak about eloquent challenges to other systems "*correcting language, gently, and offering alternatives*".

The team was keen to impart on others the importance of building a relationship with children and families before challenge, which it sees as vital for change:

"before challenge, you have to acknowledge that parent and that child's context, what they are coming with, build the relationship, and that way the challenge can land".



[Video \(YouTube, 9:34\): Learning from stakeholders: Systemic engagement with black and mixed heritage boys \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\).](#)

Key take-aways: leadership

This requires:

- a management board which **engages partners** in an **analysis** of the drivers of disproportionate outcomes for black and mixed heritage boys, and **holds each other to account** for achieving systemic change
- a **vision and a strategy for improving outcomes** for black and mixed heritage boys, which are known and understood by YOS staff and partner agencies
- a **clear anti-racist stance** taken by leaders which raises staff confidence to advocate for black and mixed heritage boys in their work and within other systems

- **training** that **equips staff and managers** with the skills and confidence to engage with black and mixed heritage boys and their families in a meaningful way
- staff supervision that focuses on diversity in every case, so that **structural barriers are explored and mitigated**
- **well-coordinated work** with third-sector and community organisations that **enhances** the quality of service delivery
- culturally competent support to **parents and carers** of black and mixed heritage boys, to promote their engagement
- the effective use of **data to understand** the needs of black and mixed heritage boys and make sure that the right services and resources are in place
- **ongoing evaluation** of the effectiveness of services delivered, including referral rates, uptake of services and outcomes which include gaining feedback from black and mixed heritage boys and their parents or carers.

Delivering effective case supervision

Effective case supervision allows the child and their parents or carers to address their offending behaviour, supports desistance and promotes the safety and wellbeing of the child and wider public.

We found that black and mixed heritage boys diverted from the statutory youth justice system also require high levels of support and intervention. Therefore, it is important that these disposals are not seen purely as a diversion from court, but are also able to drive desistance and support the safety of children and the public. Thus, the expectations remain the same as outlined in our standards section, in that recommendations for out-of-court disposals should be sufficiently well-informed, analytical and personalised to achieve these outcomes and should be followed through in assessments, planning and the delivery of appropriately tailored interventions.

In this section, we explore learning from the front line and key stakeholders regarding key themes impacting black and mixed heritage boys, and we speak to practitioners Angelique Flemming, from Liverpool YOS, and Jeremy Shortall, from Sheffield YOS, regarding cultural competence in their work.

Learning from the front line and stakeholders

HM Inspectorate of Probation identifies engagement as a central tenet to youth offending work. During the course of court orders, in three-quarters of cases workers developed meaningful, trusting relationships with children, and in two-thirds of cases this also extended to relationships with parents or carers. We saw that, by the end of the intervention, or up to the point we inspected the cases, there had been improvement in strengths and protective factors for just under two-thirds of boys. There had been progress, in terms of desistance, and safety and wellbeing, in just under half of cases.

In order to improve strengths and protective factors, we know that it is important to develop meaningful, trusting relationships with the child and their parents or carers. To promote the connection further, more attention should be paid to:



identifying



analysing



addressing structural barriers that may impact on the child's progress.

During the course of our inspection and subsequent enquiries, we found several themes which we feel are important to consider within the supervision of black and mixed heritage boys, as follows:



Library image

Trust: This was a central theme of the Lammy Review. A 'trust deficit' among ethnic minority groups was linked to several negative outcomes in the CJS. Lammy emphasised the need to engage and work actively, not just with children, but also with their parents or carers, to strengthen family support and promote trust.

Multiple and complex needs: In post-court work, in 60 per cent of cases the child was, or had been, excluded from school, the majority permanently. Over a third of the boys had been affected by criminal exploitation. In half of cases (where the information had been recorded), there was evidence that the child had experienced racial discrimination. A third were subject to child in need or child protection plans, the majority were not heavily convicted (one or no previous convictions), and in over a quarter of cases (where the information had been recorded) the child had a disability.



Library image



Library image

The ethnicity of staff and diversity awareness: Only two of the 38 boys felt that the fact that their YOS worker was black meant that they could better relate to their experiences, such as being stopped and searched by the police. For them, this understanding helped foster a positive relationship with their YOS workers. However, for the great majority, the approach and commitment of the case manager was key, with their ethnicity not seen as important. One child stated that his white YOS worker had spoken to him about an employment opportunity, specifically for black teenagers, which aligned with his interests. The young person felt that this demonstrated that the YOS worker had considered his ethnicity, and that when the subject had arisen, the worker had spoken comfortably and not created an awkward atmosphere.

It is important, when thinking about diversity, that practitioners consider 'intersectionality' – a term used to explain how different aspects of our identities (for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, physical appearance, height, and so forth) combine to create unique advantages (often described as 'privilege') or disadvantages (often described as 'discrimination').

Trauma: From the cases we inspected, it was evident that almost all of the boys had experienced loss and significant trauma in their formative years, and that racial discrimination had been a feature of their lives. The impact of this on their development and identity cannot be ignored. Where children have committed serious offences, we cannot minimise the risk that they pose – doing so can add to their stress and anxiety, especially if they themselves recognise how damaging their behaviour has become. Equally, their circumstances and life experiences have to be considered fully in analysing their behaviour and their vulnerability.



The delivery of youth justice services has focused increasingly on trauma-informed practice in recent years. The trauma recovery model¹¹ (TRM), as shown in Figure 2, which has been adopted by many YOSs, provides a theoretical framework which assists practitioners in their work. It recognises the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that it can play in children's lives.

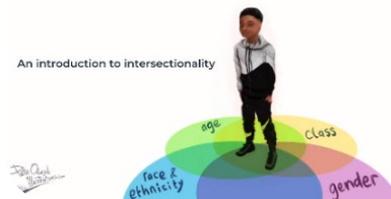
Many of those who have histories of trauma often do not recognise the significant impact of it upon them; either they do not draw connections between their experiences of trauma and their presenting problems or behaviour, or they avoid the subject altogether.

'Listen Up', a company established to amplify lesser heard voices in child safeguarding practice, policy and research, has produced this video, which explains what **intersectionality** is and its application to practice.



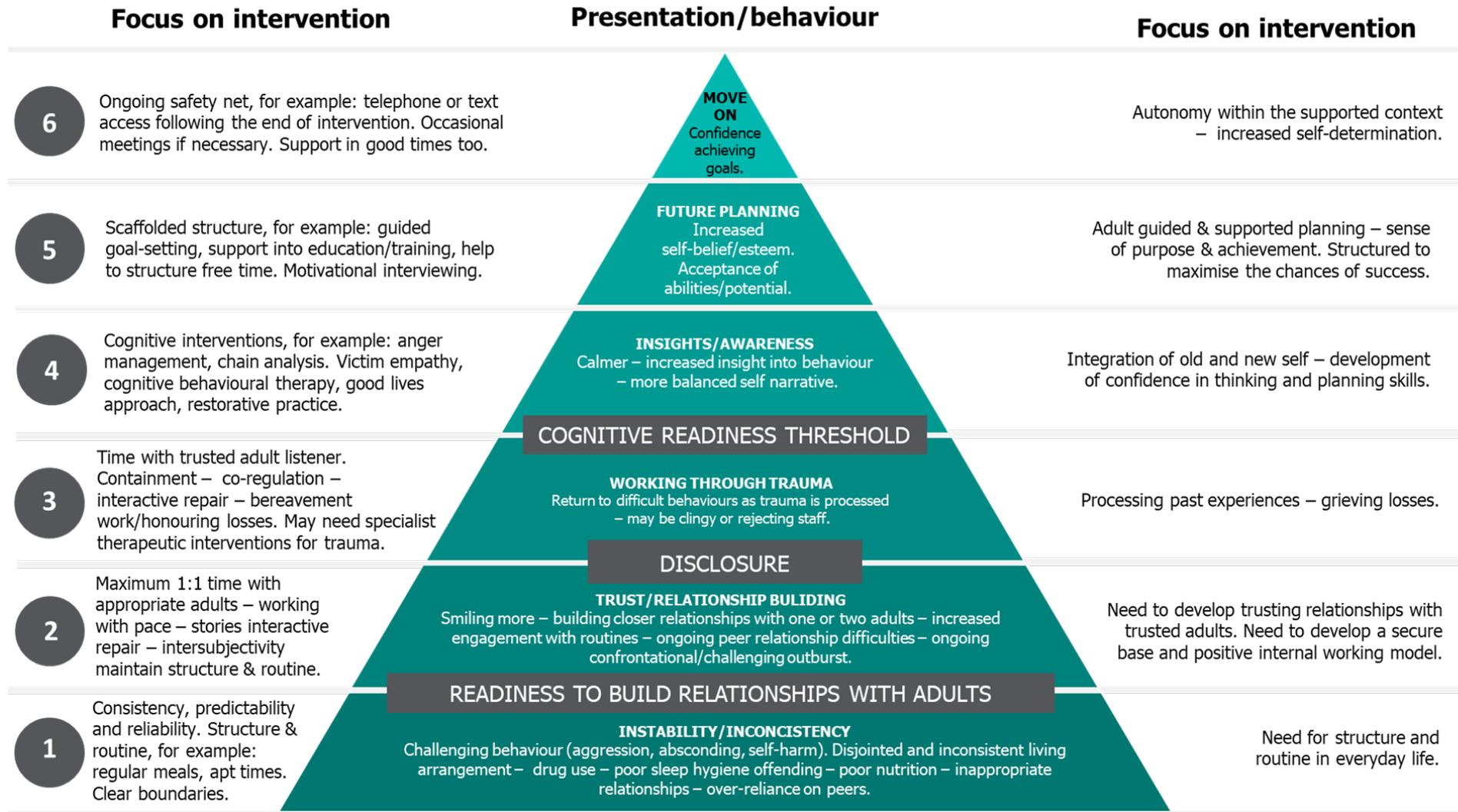
[Video \(Listen Up, 0:58\): Intersectionality](#)

An introduction to intersectionality



¹¹ The TRM was developed by Dr Tricia Skuse and Jonny Matthew, based on their work with young people serving sentences at Hillside Secure Children's Home, or who were subject to secure accommodation orders. It draws on: theories about child development and attachment; neurological impairment and the impact of maltreatment and behavioural conditions; the mental health of young people in the youth justice system; and interventions, effective practice and treatment attrition (Skuse and Matthew, 2015). Taken from *Aspiring Psychologist: A Journey into Clinical Psychology*. [Trauma Recovery Model \(wordpress.com\)](#).

Figure 2: Trauma recovery model (Skuse and Matthew, 2018)



Acknowledgement of ACEs: Linked to the TRM, increased attention has been paid to understanding the impact of ACEs (see Figure 3).¹ There is substantial evidence of an association between different aspects of childhood adversity and increased risks of negative outcomes in later life. ACEs can be identified in terms of both direct child maltreatment (abuse and neglect) and a wider set of experiences related to family and household circumstances.

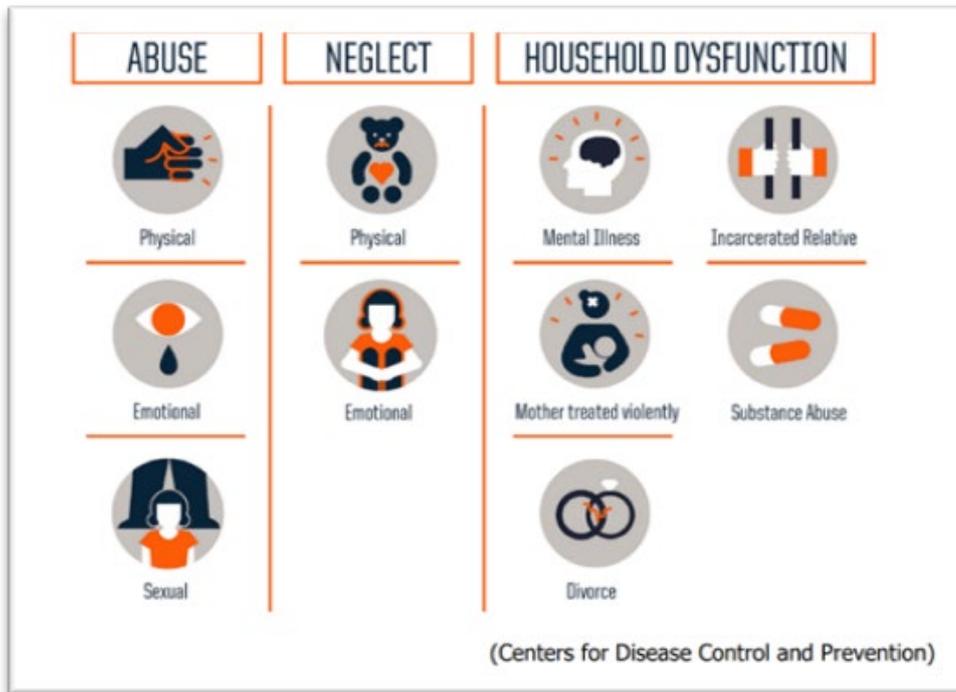


Figure 3: The three types of ACEs, taken from the *Academic Insights* paper, ‘Trauma-informed practice’

More recently, the conversation has broadened, with increasing recognition that other childhood experiences can generate a stress response, including those that are felt at community, rather than household, level. Racism, discrimination, bullying, community violence and poverty are being acknowledged as comparable, if not greater sources of adversity and as risk factors for toxic stress.

When considering ACEs, the cumulative impact of prejudice and discrimination are associated specifically with increases in binge drinking, depression, adolescent pregnancy and engaging in antisocial behaviour. Children who are exposed to violence on a regular basis often experience many of the same symptoms and lasting effects as those who are victims of violence themselves, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Children feel the emotional and physical effects for months or even years. They can relive the event again and again in their minds and be less able to function normally in their day-to-day lives. Some may become more aggressive, violent and self-destructive.



[Academic Insight: Trauma-informed practice \(HM Inspectorate of Probation\)](#)



Deprivation: A striking feature, across eight of the nine YOSs, was that children grounded their offending in their environment and the influence of their peer group, which was an ongoing challenge and cause of stress.

What we know from information provided by the YOSs is that the majority of black and mixed heritage boys come from the poorest areas, where people are living in close proximity, often on large estates where children have less control over who they come into contact with. In this setting, they do not have the same opportunity to opt in or out of relationships in the same way that other children might have. It is in these same circumstances that they can fall vulnerable to grooming and child criminal exploitation, something that we saw in a significant number of the cases that we looked at.

Experiences of discrimination: The concept of 'adultification' was raised consistently across the majority of the services inspected. Staff felt that other professionals and services often perceived black and mixed heritage boys to be older than they were, and we saw evidence of this in the work we inspected. By attributing inappropriate maturity to a child, their difficulties or anxieties with engaging with services, for example – which is not unusual, given their young age – is interpreted as 'choosing not to engage' or not wanting help. What we learned from the boys who spoke to us is that they often do not know that they need help or, if they do, they do not know what it looks like until they receive it.

A number of boys highlighted that they felt stereotyped by the CJS, based on their ethnicity, and that this led to them being treated unfairly.

Experiences of discrimination were not limited to the CJS; one young person spoke of racism he had experienced at college, which had forced him to drop out of his course as he had feared for his safety.

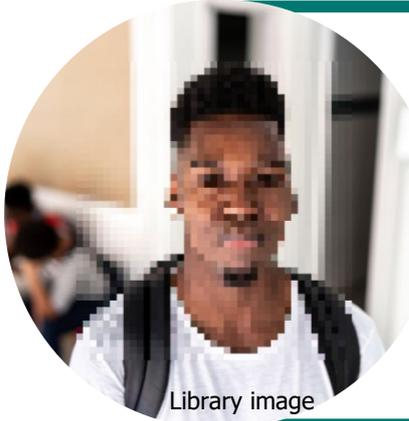


'Listen Up' have also produced this video, which explains what 'adultification' is and its impact on child safeguarding.



[Video \(Listen Up, 1:11\): Adultification](#)





Relationships with the police: The boys spoke extensively about their experiences with the police. For many, the number of times they had been stopped and searched was attributable to their ethnicity. They felt that they were targeted and profiled, in a way which did not happen to their white friends. It was felt that the profiling they experienced could lead to them retreating from society or giving up on any aspirations for the future. There were, however, regional differences when the young people spoke about their experiences with the police. The boys demonstrated a degree of acceptance that they are often treated differently based on their ethnicity.

Programmes and interventions: A quarter of the boys we spoke to felt that offending behaviour programmes and interventions met their needs fully, while half reported that they sometimes met their needs. Some children reported that interventions helped them most with their decision-making and understanding the consequences of their actions on victims and other people affected by their offending. Others discussed how they benefited positively from specific programmes, such as those focusing on music and sport.

Just over a quarter of the boys we spoke to reported that programmes and interventions rarely or never met their needs. For these boys, there was a sense that they did not understand the purpose of the interventions and that they got little out of them. They did not always find the interventions to be relevant or focused on their specific needs. Many felt that they were already aware of the consequences of their actions and, therefore, that that element of the programmes was of limited value. It was felt that the programmes did not address the underlying problems and difficulties that were driving their offending or how hard it was to extricate themselves from risky situations and the manipulation of others. The boys we spoke to said that they did not always know or understand the intervention plan that had been put in place for them, so it is possible that they did not recognise the purpose of their interventions and the overall aims of the work.



Summary: the themes, what practitioners should do to address these, and why it is important for the boys.

Example of effectiveness: Culturally competent practitioner with Liverpool targeted services for young people

When children offend, it is a pivotal moment in their lives; they are in crisis. To help them to change their behaviour, we must understand what underlies their offending and any barriers that may hamper their progress. The role of case managers in advocating for the child is critical. For children who have been let down often by adults who have not noticed when they needed help and support, it is important that they experience a positive relationship with a professional. They may not want to discuss what has happened to them or what is continuing to happen in their lives. This can be painful and shameful for them, and their perceived reluctance to engage must be responded to appropriately. Practitioners require a high level of skill, support and reflection to ensure that they are attending to the underlying issues linked to the child's offending if they are to get to the root causes of the behaviour. To support engagement and progress, it is important that children are involved fully in planning their intervention, that they know what is happening and why, and that their strengths are focused on, with long-term goals identified and supported. Practitioners and organisations, as a whole, need to have high aspirations for this group of children, as it can be difficult for them to do this themselves.

During our fieldwork in Liverpool, we were impressed by work undertaken by **Angelique Flemming in the targeted services for young people team**; this was illustrated within the case we inspected and through our general practice discussions.



Inspectors commented that her practice illustrated:

- an ability to work effectively with **families from diverse backgrounds**
- a **cultural awareness**, evidenced by her consideration of race and ethnicity throughout her assessments and delivery across a range of areas, such as education, family, associates and even the ability to get to a specific location for an intervention (for example, how safe the child would be on their bus journey)
- an ability to **promote discussions about discrimination and advocate for children and families** when discrimination is evident
- a **culturally sensitive approach** to all of the children on her caseload, regardless of background, promoted through an inquisitive approach, asking questions and allowing each child to explain their identities
- an **understanding** of the **long-term effects of racism and discrimination**, and the **impact on the child**, their thinking and their behaviour.

Consequently, we interviewed Angelique for the specific purpose of this guide and asked her to share practice tips which others might find beneficial. In summary, she advised:

- Don't be afraid to get personal and ask the questions, and don't be afraid of the response.
- Assume that all black and mixed heritage children have experienced discrimination on some level.

- Ask all children about their experiences.
- Let these children know that you are always ready to hear, when they are ready to talk about their experiences.
- Let the children know that you see them, and that you recognise that they are individuals.



[Transcript of interview with Angelique Flemming.](#)

Example of effectiveness: Culturally competent practitioner at Sheffield Youth Justice Service

During the thematic inspection, only two of the 38 boys we spoke to said that the ethnicity of their YOS worker was significant to them. This suggests that the skills, understanding, knowledge and integrity of the worker, and the relationships they form with black and mixed heritage boys are the most important factors in supporting and promoting meaningful and effective engagement.



We felt that this point was illustrated well in the case highlighted below:

Daniel was 16 years old when he was sentenced to a youth referral order for offence of robbery. He is of black African descent and has immigration issues, as he was not born in this country.

The assessment noted his cultural heritage and, while it did not negate any risk issues of knife carrying, it also recognised that he remained vulnerable to child exploitation, and considered how experiences of discrimination at school and from the police impacted on his thinking and behaviour, and wellbeing.

There was a clear plan, which focused on him accessing education, participating in a knife awareness programme, receiving support for his mental wellbeing, and completing a reparation order focusing on the Black Lives Matters movement.

Daniel received excellent engagement from the practitioner. He undertook work on Black Lives Matter, the Lammy Review, and stop and search. He was selected to be part of an arts project with the Koestler Trust and was supported to find accommodation. One-to-one work with his practitioner explored some of the discrimination he had experienced, and his feelings of being marginalised, and helped to improve his relationship with his parents (who were supportive).

Reviewing was an ongoing process throughout the order, and the risk was reviewed appropriately, taking into account changing circumstances – for example, improved home life, attendance at college, level of engagement and period of desistance. By the end of his order, Daniel was in an education placement that he enjoyed and was able to see a future for himself.

His order was revoked early, as he had completed all elements of his order successfully and made good progress. It was noted that this may well assist him with his ongoing application for a leave to remain.

Inspectors said:

"The case manager was curious about the child's self-identity, including their ethnicity and how this impacted on them.

"The engagement with the child was a strength in this case and there was a real focus on harnessing the child's strengths and protective factors.

"Reviewing was an ongoing process throughout the intervention, which means that the plan of work was delivered in a timely way, including those from other agencies, due to the high level of joint planning and coordination".

Jeremy Shortall, formerly a YOS practitioner with Sheffield, spoke to us about the work in this case. He shared that the child was:

"a remarkable young man, with limitless capabilities. I knew he was gifted, so I had high expectations of him. He was an outstanding individual".



He explained that it is important for workers to take a real interest in the children they work with, and demonstrate this intentionally in their actions and interactions. An example of this with Daniel was that he knew he played American football at the weekend, so spoke to his coach and made this part of the order; he invested in him and went to watch his games at the weekend. Jeremy was keen to broaden the offer of interventions to children and had an interest in creative arts – hence Daniel's involvement in the Koestler Trust exhibition. This is important, given the benefits of a personalised approach, tailored to the individual child.

Jeremy also shared some of the exercises he undertook with Daniel to open conversations around race, ethnicity and offending behaviour. He explained that he wanted Daniel to write letters to the Chief of South Yorkshire Police about stop and search, and to the district judge about his experiences within the CJS. He wanted to understand Daniel's experiences, to advocate for him, and for Daniel to understand that he could also hold people to account in an attempt to address 'them and us' thinking. He also wanted to let Daniel know that it was fine for him to challenge the unacceptable, and to do so in an appropriate manner.

He highlighted one piece of work, where he wrote the names of Daniel and Jay Z, as an influential and solvent businessman, on a piece of paper and noted that there were two routes to get to Jay Z's position – legal and illegal – and spoke about what this meant. This was a good piece of work to initiate important conversations, which allowed Jeremy to assess Daniel's attitudes, and challenge some of his thinking and behaviour.

We asked Jeremy to share tips to enable other practitioners to work effectively with black and mixed heritage boys, and these features below.

Initially, he shared why he believes that he feels comfortable having such discussions:

"I am a white male; I know there is an imbalance and I therefore know that it is people like me who are the benefactors of this imbalance. So, I have a part to play in addressing it and I can do that through my work – I feel like I have a responsibility to address it... I think part of the reason I feel so comfortable addressing discrimination is that both of my parents are gay; while

I have never experienced direct discrimination myself, I experienced the concept of discrimination from a very early age. The idea of being different from others or being concerned about other people's negative perception has informed my character. I have also lived in multi-cultural areas and I am proud of my cultural heritage as an Irish man, so I am interested in other people's cultures and backgrounds. While it is clear that people are marginalised or discriminated against because of their culture or ethnicity, I don't think this is a reason to hide one's cultural identity. People should be able to celebrate their cultural identity – this is why I always tried to make it central to my work with young people.

"I think it is really important in this work to see the best in everything and everyone. I have faith in humanity and sincerely care about those I am working with".

This, and his working experience in the education and justice system, has informed his work and the tips shared here:



Show mutual respect – I ask the children to do things, rather than tell them; they are engaged actively in the assessment and planning.



Always ask where people are from – I ask about culture and context, and what makes up the child's identity.



Take an interest – I try to have an awareness of different cultures and show genuine interest when the children share.



Be comfortable with making mistakes – you learn from the mistakes you make, and sometimes you can learn together with the child, which can be very empowering.



Be aware – these children have often been let down by the people who should be looking after them, so think about what their behaviours are actually saying.



Have immutable expectations – often, others have no expectations of black and mixed heritage boys, so it is important to provide hope and aspirations, and see real value in the child's life.



Be persistent and determined – the work can be hard and sometimes you do not feel like you are making progress, but keep going. Focusing on the small wins, like receiving a text back, can really help.



Recognise the efforts of the child – for example, if a child is late, I still recognise the fact that he has attended.



Show empathy – this improves communication and strengthens the working relationship with the child.



Challenge – the children we work with also need challenge; it helps them to see things differently and recognise that something needs to change.



Reflect on your practice – take opportunities to consider what works and what you may want to do differently, so you can constantly refine your practice. For example, I attended an 'adultification' training course and afterwards was able to think about how the children I worked with were often seen through this lens.

Key take-aways: delivering effective case supervision

- Effective work in this area has **engagement at its core**, grounded in desistance principles and procedural justice.
- **Discrimination should be considered** not only as a contributory factor to children's involvement in the youth justice system, but also as a potential barrier to them moving on with their lives.
- **Enquire** about diversity, racial profiling and discrimination, take opportunities to explore these concepts with the boys and leave these open throughout your period of work with them.
- Staff undertaking assessments should **ask children about their self-identity**, including their ethnicity, personal circumstances and experience of discrimination.
- When undertaking assessments, the **child's offending must be placed in context**, along with their lived experience; the challenges they have faced and continue to face must also be detailed.
- **Children** should be **fully involved** in planning their interventions, so that they understand what will happen and why; the interventions should focus on their **strengths** and **promote agreed long-term goals**.
- Interventions should be tailored to the **needs of the individual child**. We found that they worked best when the worker took a **thoughtful and creative approach** to engaging the boys. Interventions should **both support and challenge** the child, so that they are engaged actively in the process of change.
- Practitioners should share **high aspirations** for this group of children.
- Practitioners should take **opportunities to reflect on their practice** themselves, with colleagues and with managers, and take thoughtful action as a result to improve their practice consistently.

Conclusions: black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system

Overall, we identified that our standards are delivered effectively in relation to black and mixed heritage boys when the following are in place:

- ✓ multi-agency commitment and contribution to the services to support black and mixed heritage boys' desistance, and to keep them and others safe
- ✓ coordinated leadership and a clear strategy to address disproportionality in the work of the YOS and partner agencies
- ✓ an anti-racist approach which acknowledges the nature and impact of racial trauma
- ✓ effective engagement with sentencers to understand the life circumstances of the black and mixed heritage children which bring them before the courts
- ✓ staff who are well trained and supported to work with black and mixed heritage boys who have experienced multiple disadvantages; and practitioners who understand trauma-informed practice, and how to support vulnerable children to desist from offending
- ✓ assessments that consider each child's identity, including their diversity, vulnerability, safety and wellbeing
- ✓ practitioners who can elicit conversations with the boys regarding diversity, racial profiling and discrimination, and who will advocate on their behalf and have clear escalation routes to address any barriers to black and mixed heritage boys accessing the services they need
- ✓ management oversight focusing on diversity and what this means in practice
- ✓ specialist provision for black and mixed heritage boys, either through in-house delivery or by commissioning it from appropriate local community organisations and referral; uptake rates for the services provided should be evaluated
- ✓ suitable and appropriate support and interventions are offered to the parents and/or carers of black and mixed heritage boys, with a regular review of the uptake and suitability of this provision
- ✓ commitment by leader and practitioners to continuous professional development, evidenced in reflective practice, delivery and engagement.

We encourage readers to think of these as guiding principles, and to reflect on and consider how they may improve their practice as a result of reading this guide.

We would welcome feedback on this guide, including its impact and any suggested improvements.

Please send your comments and ideas to Tammie.Burroughs@hmiprobation.gov.uk.

Further reading and resources

HM Inspectorate of Probation publications

Thematic review: [The experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system](#) (November 2021).

Academic Insight: [Exploring procedural justice and problem-solving practice in the Youth Court](#) (May 2021). This report provides an overview of procedural justice, the links to legitimacy, and the research evidence for its positive effects on engagement and cooperation.

Academic Insight: [Collaborative family work in youth justice](#) (February 2021). This report highlights: (i) the links between family relationships and criminal behaviour; and (ii) the research evidence on the effectiveness of family interventions for children in the CJS.

Research and Analysis Bulletin: [Multi-agency work in youth offending services](#) (July 2021). Learn about the significant benefits that multi-agency working can bring to youth offending teams, and more importantly to the individual children and to their parents and carers.

Tools and resources



Youth Justice Resource Hub

[Over representation and disproportionality](#) thematic section, which includes numerous links, including, but not exclusively:

- [Supporting children who are black, Asian or have specific cultural or religious needs: Effective practice briefing – YCS](#) (June 2021).
- [Supporting conversations about difference with children: Effective practice briefing – YCS](#) (June 2021).
- [Working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities: Effective practice briefing – YCS](#) (June 2021).
- [Supporting Muslim children: Effective practice briefing – YCS](#) (June 2021).
- [Desistance and diversity action plan 2021-23 – Barnet Youth Offending Service](#) (June 2021).
- [Disproportionality spotlight actions and decisions log \(management board\) – Tower Hamlets and City of London](#) (October 2020).
- [Therapeutic intervention for peace report – Power the fight – Youth Justice Resource Hub](#) (September 2020).
- [Cultural responses to trauma and serious youth violence using the therapeutic intervention for peace \(TIP\) approach – Power the fight - Youth Justice Resource Hub](#) (July 2021).



[Tackling disproportionality tools and case studies](#) London Council.

A website which contains examples of strategies, initiatives and interventions used by London local authorities and partner organisations to tackle and address disproportionality in the CJS.



[Innovations in learning, research & practice education event](#) Social work at London South Bank University.

A recording of the event regarding developments and innovations in our social work division. We will be sharing specific information about our qualifying programmes, how they meet Social Work England standards and give a flavour of the student experience of learning and assessment. We will showcase our extensive research programme through a series of bite-sized presentations. We will also be launching our enhanced practice learning offer and opportunities to collaborate with us to meet workforce demands in social care and the NHS. Specifically of note:

- 1:31 – Dr Tirion Harvard and Professor Andrew Whittaker with Professor James Densley discuss 'The evolution of gangs in London: From postcodes to profits'.
- 1:40:45 – Keith Cohen discusses Lewisham's trauma-informed group work programme.



The [London ACEs Hub \(LAH\)](#) is a network of multidisciplinary professionals, survivor activists and community advocates committed to spreading the fundamental lessons of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) research and practice in Greater London on individual and collective levels.



[London ACEs Hub \(LAH\)](#) website has a range of resources you can access. It also has a YouTube channel, providing access to a range of webinars and racial justice open conversations. [London ACEs Hub - YouTube channel](#).

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