

# USER VOICE

ONLY OFFENDERS CAN STOP RE-OFFENDING

## YOUTH ON REMAND

November 2023

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## FOREWORD

HM Inspectorate of Probation is the independent inspectorate of probation and youth justice services in England and Wales. As part of our inspection approach, we believe that it is important to give a voice to those who are impacted by the services we inspect, including those on probation and young people in the criminal justice system.

We know that taking part in our inspections can have a positive impact, from wellbeing and recovery to future ambitions for those in the criminal justice system. As part of our commitment to participation and increasing user involvement, we commissioned User Voice to conduct interviews with people on probation and young people for our inspections. The inclusion of user feedback in all our inspections is now a key part of how we work.

Our thematic inspection of custodial remand in the youth justice system was undertaken jointly with Ofsted and HM Inspectorate of Prisons. As part of this work our inspectorate reviewed 125 children's remand cases. Alongside this, User Voice held a consultation to gather the views and experiences of young people with experience of custodial remand. The findings from this consultation are presented as case studies here in this report by User Voice.

Through the case studies, we can see that communication between staff and children on remand could be improved and more support could be provided throughout the remand process. But it is positive to hear about what went well during the remand process for those interviewed. This report also sets out some peer-led solutions which have come directly from insights from young people with experience of remand.

We would like to thank User Voice for their work on this report and for contributing towards our important goal of increasing the voices of young people with experience in the criminal justice system. It is essential that we continue to give a stronger voice to those who are supervised by the services we inspect.



**Sue McAllister**  
HM Chief Inspector of Probation

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

User Voice is a nationwide UK charity created and run by people with lived experience of the criminal justice system.

We exist to reduce offending by working with the most marginalised people in prisons, probation, and youth offending services. We ensure they have the opportunity to be heard and to influence change. User Voice operates elected Peer Councils and peer-led, solution based, research consultations in prisons and the probation service throughout the UK.

User Voice and HM Inspectorate of Probation share the same goal of creating change that results in high-quality probation and youth offending services that change people's lives for the better.

As part of User Voice's relationship HM Inspectorate of Probation, over 2,500 people have had their voice heard as part of thirty-four regional inspections of Probation Deliver Units and three thematic inspections over the past year. This relationship between the two organisations continues to grow as thousands more will have their voices heard in the years to come.

This report that outlines the voice of young people with the experience of custodial remand for the inspection titled 'A joint thematic inspection of custodial remand in the youth justice system of England and Wales.'

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## **APPROACH**

This consultation is the first of its kind and aims to better understand the experience of young people with the experience of custodial remand.

Specifically, we wanted to speak with children that have experience of custodial remand via the Prison Service in youth detention, experience of a secure training centre, or experience of a local authority secure children's home.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the consultation were:

- To better understand young people's experience of their arrest, their interaction with the police and their experience in the build up to their sentencing.
- To better understand young people's experience of custodial remand and to understand how the service meets their needs. In cases where the service falls short, we aim to understand how it failed to meet their needs.
- To better understand young people's experience with their Youth Offending Team (YOT), and what support they have (or haven't) had whilst attending the service.
- To collate young people's views on what both the Prison Service and their YOT need to do to better support young people in the future.
- To highlight any good practices that could be built upon by both services.

## **PRE-FIELDWORK**

At User Voice we make sure lived experience is involved at every possible step in the consultation process. The discussion guide used for interviews was designed in collaboration with a lived experience panel. This panel consisted of young people that attend the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime's (MOPAC) Youth to Adult Service Hub.

User Voice contacted 12 Youth offending teams to facilitate interviews with young people that met the following criteria:

- Those that have experience of custodial remand via the Prison Service in youth detention, experience of a secure training centre or experience of a local authority secure children's home.
- Those that either are currently on a community order with the YOT or have finished their orders no earlier than April 2022.

The 12 YOT regions contacted for engagement were: Bolton, Derby, Essex, Kent, Lambeth, Leeds, Lewisham, Norfolk, Salford, Sheffield, Walsall, and Waltham Forest.

Many of the YOTs contacted did not have any young people under their supervision that fit the sample criteria, whereas some only had a few that did. Therefore, access to participants for the consultation was limited resulting in User Voice conducting interviews with young people from 5 out of the 12 regions.

One of the main reasons why YOTs did not have any young people that fit the sample is because there were high numbers of young people that have experience of remand currently serving custodial sentences. Many of which are currently serving a custodial sentence as adults which speaks volumes to their journey through the criminal justice system. This shouldn't be a surprise given the high reoffending rates of young people and already begs the question of the factors affecting their experience and the support young people get whilst both on remand and in the community.

## **FIELDWORK**

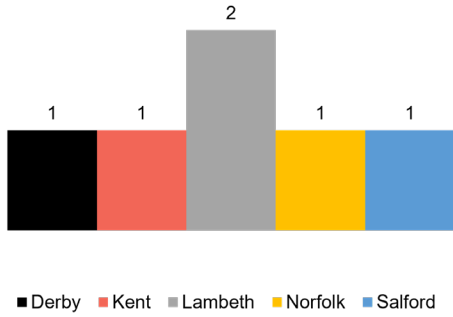
7 semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely by a lived experience peer researcher across 5 YOT regions. 1 interview was deemed as not containing sufficient data to be included in the report as the participant left the interview after the first few questions.

Taking the limited access to participants into consideration, it was judged that there was not sufficient data to thematically analyse and be representative of the population. Therefore, the 6 interviews are presented in this report as individual case studies.

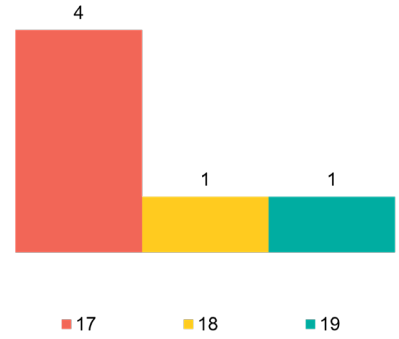
The identity of the participants are protected in this report. A pseudonym for each participant is used instead of including the participant's real name.

# RESEARCH SAMPLE

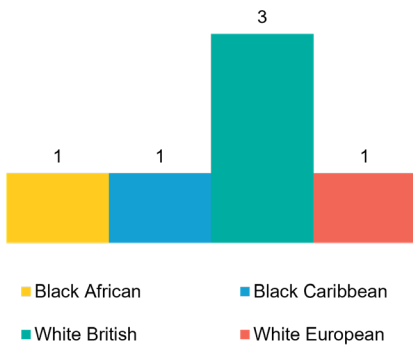
### YOUTH OFFENDING TEAM



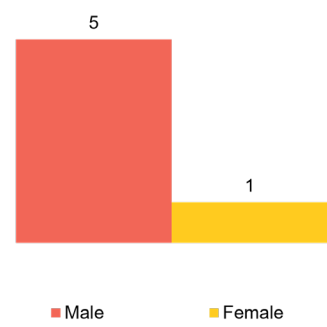
### AGE



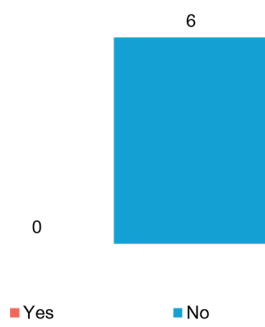
### ETHNICITY



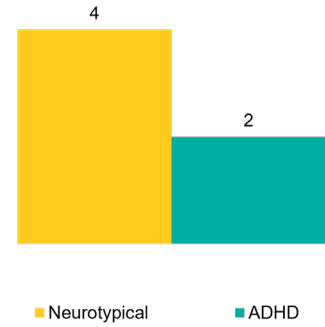
### GENDER



### DISABILITY



### NEURODIVERSE CONDITIONS



## CASE STUDY 1: MARCUS

Marcus, a young man of Black African heritage who self describes as having mental health concerns, was 17 years old at the time of the interview. Prior to the incident for which he was charged, Marcus was living with his mother and his three siblings.

Around a year before he went into custody, Marcus was expelled from school. He described himself at a time as someone who was constantly angry. Marcus wouldn't let anybody help him at that point in his life and felt like he had issues that only he could help himself with. On reflection, Marcus expressed that he thinks the youth justice system could have helped him get back into education or into full time employment.

After he was removed from school, Marcus decided that he would rather make some money than try get back into education. This eventually led to the index offence for which he was charged.

*"Before the incident I was living with my mum, and I was living with my three siblings, that's kind of it..."*

*...Oh no, do you know what it is? I literally got kicked out of school and I thought to myself, I'll just go and make some money for time. I don't really know what to say as to why it happened.*

*I was just always angry though, all the time, every single time I was angry. Nobody could really help me to be honest. I'm being very honest. Nobody could really help then. I don't know, maybe it's just me but certain things you've got to just sort out by yourself.*

*The youth justice service could have helped me out a lot at that time. They could have helped me get back into education or work. I left education a whole year before I went custody."*

The arrest for which Marcus spent time remanded was not his first interaction with the police. Despite this, he felt like he hadn't had any serious dealings with the police in the past but never had much trust in the police.

He expressed that during his interactions with the police he wished they treated him as a juvenile and not as a criminal.



*"Before I got arrested... it wasn't the first introduction. Nah I can't be like "I had very bad interactions with the police." I didn't like it at all. I had situations like just being picked up and all of these of things.*

*I used to tell youth justice service this as well, but with the police, nothing bad used to happen. I don't have a problem with the police to be honest, but I don't really trust their character. But that's just standard, just from my general experiences and everything...*

*I wished they would actually treat me like a juvenile not a criminal. At the end of the day, no matter what happens I'm still a juvenile do you know what I mean? It wasn't murder or something serious."*

In the build-up to his court case, Marcus was complementary of the legal advice he received, describing it as "beautiful," and found no fault in the support he got leading up to his court appearance. He was advised to state "no comment" throughout being questioned by the police was also advised to not give a testimony in court.

Although Marcus felt like he was supported and advised well during and up to his court appearance, he also felt like more could have been done to allow him bail rather than going to a Youth Offender's Institute (YOI) on remand.

*"No comment innit. They said to say no comment. My legal advice, I'm not going to lie, has always been beautiful. I just didn't want to get into detail too much. It has always been good, I've had no problems with legal advice..."*

*... They could have tried to get me bailed. They didn't try hard enough just saying. They didn't try a lot of things...*

*...I didn't have to do that [give testimony in court]. The consequences were explained to me...*

*...I've been supported yeah yeah. I felt supported in court. They could have tried to get me bailed. They didn't try hard enough just saying. They didn't try a lot of things."*

When Marcus first arrived at the YOI, he felt uninformed about what to expect and blamed poor communication from YOI staff for how unaware he was about what he was going to experience.

Overall, Marcus described his experience as negative. Whilst Marcus was in prison, one of his friends passed away, something he understandably described as very difficult to deal with. Marcus stated that he felt like he didn't get support for the situation but also believes that they couldn't have done anything to help him cope.

*"Yeah I was in a YOI. It was all negative bruv...My biggest issue? Communication. It was horrible, horrible... No, I didn't even know what was going to happen to me to be honest. If they were communicating with me more, telling me what is actually happening, being real with me, then a lot of things would have went a lot better. Do you know what I mean? So, for me, if my communication with them could have been better, a lot of things could have been better..."*

*...Man I felt mad I'm not going to lie to you. Mad still. The only traumatic thing that happened to me while I was inside was that my friend passed away. That was the only thing. To be honest I don't know. I don't think they could have done anything to help me cope with that to be honest."*

Despite Marcus believing that the YOT service ensures that his needs are catered for, he struggles to connect with YOT staff. He believes that his case worker and other YOT staff will never understand him or where he's come from. In his eyes, there's a lack of relatability as they come from different and often less challenging backgrounds.

Marcus has had the same case worker for years, but he doesn't believe the relationship is where it should be. He has mentioned to more senior staff that he would like someone he can relate to but hasn't got his wish yet.

Marcus currently attends in-person appointments up to three times per week which he describes as "crazy." Marcus would prefer more flexibility with more of a blended approach to supervision. Something which he believes somebody should earn over time.

*"You know the problem with the services yeah. You can't relate to the person you're working with, your case worker. That's the way I see it. No, they can't relate to me. So, they don't know how I'm feeling. If they can't understand me or what I'm feeling. How can you actually help me? You know there are some professionals on our side though. I've seen them. This wasn't in youth services, this was in school though. I've told them numerous times. I need someone that I could actually relate to. That I could actually work with properly..."*

*...I've had the same one for years. Obviously, it's natural it should get better and better, it's not where I want it to be.....That's the thing though as well the appointments were way too frequent. Way too frequent still. They can't expect someone to come and see them three times a week. That's crazy... I guess just try to have more phone conversations or something.....Well, they should be helping us instead of them trying to punish us. When you make a little mistake, they should try and edge us on to do better things and help us even more. Do you get it?"*

User Voice asked Marcus what he would have told himself prior to the incident occurring. He stated that he wouldn't tell himself anything but that if he had the knowledge he has now back then, he would not be in the situation he is now. He believes that he would have had a head start in life if he knew how to harness his natural intelligence better.

*"A lot. I didn't even think I would be here knowing what I know now. Honestly. What would I tell myself? It's not about what I would say, it's about what I would do. I would get all my intellect and educate myself and trust me, I would not be where I am today if I had all the intellect I have right now.*

*I'm a very intelligent and articulate young man so you know. All of this intelligence, if I had this at a younger age it would have been crazy. I would've got a head start in life because I started early. Do you know what I mean?"*

## CASE STUDY 2: JOSEPH

When Joseph was younger, he rarely spent time at home other than to sleep. At the age of 16, a change in school ended up in a change in friendship group. Joseph made a new friend at sixth form and started to socialise with his friends.

At that time, Joseph's mother noticed he was starting to misbehave and sent him to live with his father. However, despite her good intentions, this experience had the reverse effect of his mother's motives for making him move. He was now living closer to his new group of friends who were affiliated with a gang. As he puts it, "When you start chilling with people then you start getting involved in the things that they're doing." Before Joseph knew it, other gangs started to notice he was involved and at that point his mindset was "I can't change nothing, I'm involved."

*"I was rarely home, so there wasn't really a living situation. I was always out, and if I was home, I was only at home to sleep.*

*Things were stable in the household. I was attending a Sixth form; I went to a football college. When I left secondary school my friendship group changed, I stopped hanging around with all the people I used to hang around with in year 11.*

*Then I started hanging around his friends, and coz around this time I was being bad, like my mum realised that I was smoking and things like that, she said "go live with your dad for a while" and kicked me out. She just wanted me to go live with my dad, change and then come back.*

*That was the worst decision she could make because where I moved with my dad, my dad lived closer to [friends name] so I was around these boys more.*

*I fell out of love with football because my coach would say "if you're not coming college or training then you can't play matches, you have to do both" so then I fell out of love with football, started losing confidence and things like that.*

*It was a big change. and when the opponents and other gangs start seeing you with these people that you're involved, there's no going back. My mindset at the time was "I can't change nothing, I'm involved."*

Three months prior to the incident for which he was remanded, Joseph was arrested for intent to supply. This was the first time he had ever been arrested. He felt like the police were supportive and treated him well because it was his first arrest.

*"Couple months before I was arrested for intent to supply because when I was arrested, I had baggies on me, and they said it was intent to supply..."*

*That happened in March, so 3 months before I got arrested for the current incident. I guess they were supportive because it was my first time ever being arrested and put in custody and cells.*

*My mum was there. Seeing as I was arrested, I was taken to my house and my mum was informed so she just came to the station straight away, so there was no need for a call.*

*I was treated well, every time I was at the station I was treated well but then again I don't really speak to them too much. As soon as I'm in my cell I just sleep."*

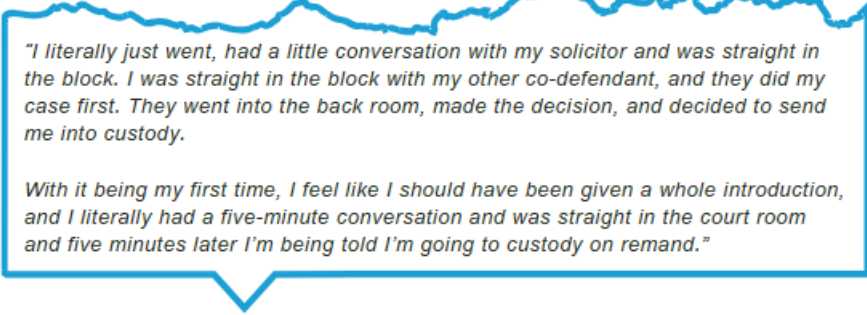
Joseph was advised by his solicitor to state no comment throughout his dealings with the police. He was held for three days in total.

*"I was given advice to say "no comment" by my solicitor. Actually, when I was in the station, they did change my crime a few times. They would say like "burglary" and then they would say it's a "aggravated burglary" then they would say it's a "burglary" again, they kept changing it. They kept me in there for about 3 days. Obviously in their eyes the crime was serious."*

Joseph's initial experience in court was brief, everything passed by very quickly, too quick for him to understand what was happening and too quick for him to be able to give testimony.

As it was Joseph's first time in court, he felt like he should have been better informed about what was going to happen. He felt like he was left in the dark. All Joseph had was a five-minute conversation beforehand and he was whisked into the court room.

His experience in the court room was not much longer, he mentioned that it took only five minutes for it to be decided that he would be placed into custody.



*"I literally just went, had a little conversation with my solicitor and was straight in the block. I was straight in the block with my other co-defendant, and they did my case first. They went into the back room, made the decision, and decided to send me into custody.*

*With it being my first time, I feel like I should have been given a whole introduction, and I literally had a five-minute conversation and was straight in the court room and five minutes later I'm being told I'm going to custody on remand."*

Joseph felt like he had a brief but good induction onto the wing from prison staff. However, when he was getting shown round the other side of the wing, there was a group of boys on the landing that recognised him as part of another gang on the outside.

When everyone was let out for exercise the next day, a fight ensued with Joseph and the group. In Joseph's opinion, the guards were not quick enough to break up the fight and let it go on for a couple of minutes before intervening. He also thought they could have been more supportive afterwards.

For Joseph, this typified his experience with some prison staff. As he describes it, "Some govs were nice and they were very loving. They understood that people make mistakes, but I felt like others were out to get you."

*"I was just on remand. When I got there, the prison gave me a little introduction, this is the introduction wing that you're going to be on, this is B side, this is A side, they gave me a little introduction, but that's what they were meant to do.*

*When I joined the whole landing, there were boys on that landing that weren't in my class that had problems with me, so when we got out to do exercise the next day, I've had a problem with three boys.*

*With that experience there, the guards did not handle that well, I feel like the guards that were in the jail that I was in were unprofessional because they just stood and watched. It took a whole two to three minutes for them to stop the fight. There were two guards. Then when I asked for an icepack when the fight had finished, they weren't giving me an icepack, they didn't give me an ice pack...*

*When I was on remand for a whole time, I didn't know when I was getting out. I didn't get to see no friends while I was inside. I just saw my brother, my mum and my family...*

*Some govs were nice and they were very loving. They understood that people make mistakes, but I felt like others were out to get you."*

Joseph wasn't given a custodial sentence but instead ordered to serve a community order with a YOT team in Lambeth. Upon release Joseph was living semi-independently in supported accommodation.

Help with such accommodation was one of the reasons Joseph describes the YOT staff in Lambeth as "very supportive." He had nothing but positive words for the staff there who were understanding and worked with him because it was clear to them that he was trying to make a change.

In his lived experience, nothing needs to change regarding this YOT experience. Although he recognises some young people may need more support than others and may have a different experience.



*"When I came out I was living semi-independently. My mum and my family members would come every Sunday to come and see me...I feel like my YOT team were very supportive, we used to have weekly appointments with them. Yeah, I've been supported very good, very well. He was very supportive and can see that I'm trying to change, so yeah.*

*He's very supportive and understanding. I had another caseworker, and she was supportive as well and yeah tried to help me as much as possible. I don't have a bad word to say about the YOT team...I feel like with me I wouldn't change it because they've been very supportive and helped me. But then again it changes with different people, some people need different help. I don't think anything needs changing, I'm talking of my experience."*

When asked what he would tell his younger self, Joseph simply stated that he would want to know that there is help out there, like the help he has experienced from his YOT team. He would tell himself that he has the potential to succeed.

*"That there is help out there. It's not the end, back then I used to think it was the end there's nothing to live for but there is something to live for. I would tell myself that you have the potential."*

### CASE STUDY 3: MAX

When we spoke with Max it was clear that he didn't want to open up much during the interview. Often giving short, unresponsive responses.

Max grew up in what he describes as a "normal" environment and had a positive relationship with his parents. At the time of the arrest, he was living with his parents but was only at home for a few days a week, also spending time at another apartment. When he was arrested, he stated that he hadn't been in education for a considerable amount of time despite him being 17 at the time of the interview.

During the arrest and the subsequent interactions with the police, Max felt that he was treated well by the police and that they didn't act in a way that was inappropriate. However, he did say that he wasn't allowed to make a phone call whilst he was being held in custody.

*"I was staying at home for a few days then I was at an apartment, just chilling and they come and arrested us. They were kicking the door in for ages and ages and yeah, they arrested us. I was a nervous, yeah..."*

*...Not been there for ages. Not had education for a time." No not really because, it wasn't really like that. It wasn't like it was early or late at night, it was throughout the day if you know what I mean? Like at 6 o'clock at night or something. There was nothing anyone could of really done to stop that..."*

*I think it's my second time with the youth justice system. But I have like cautions off the police. During the arrest they didn't twist me up or anything they just put cuffs on me. Took me to the car... Yeah they were alright. I just went to asleep anyway.*

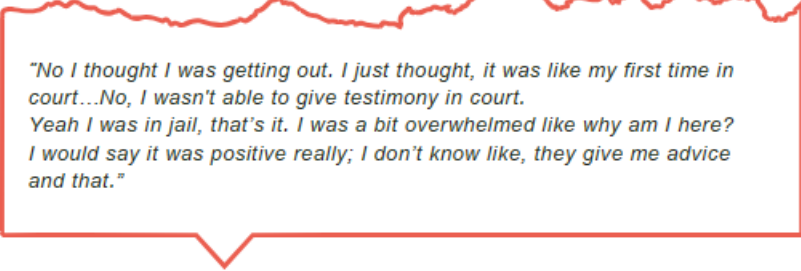
*They couldn't do anything to help. They didn't say anything just took me from my interview back to my cell and woke me up for court." Yeah I was in jail, that's it. I was a bit overwhelmed like why am I here?"*

During his court appearance, Max stated that he wasn't given time to give testimony and when asked if he was well supported, he said, "not really."

Max thought that he was going to be released but was held on remand for a week and a half in total. A time in which he felt safe but didn't quite know what to expect. This is because nothing was explained to him at the start.

Max didn't experience any incidents of violence or anything that he would describe as traumatic during his time on remand. For him, it was just simply waiting to be released.

Prior to his release, Max's YOT team was in contact with him which Max felt helped him to understand what he was going to experience whilst on his community order. This set the basis for a positive YOT experience in which Max described his relationship with YOT staff as "positive."



*"No I thought I was getting out. I just thought, it was like my first time in court...No, I wasn't able to give testimony in court.  
Yeah I was in jail, that's it. I was a bit overwhelmed like why am I here?  
I would say it was positive really; I don't know like, they give me advice and that."*

At this point in the interview, it became clear that Max wanted to leave the conversation and the interview was terminated without any further questions.

## CASE STUDY 4: NOAH

Growing up, Noah shared many comorbidities with other young people that end up in the criminal justice system. He has Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), he also has experience of living in care and has family members that have experience of incarceration themselves.

At the time of the arrest, Noah was living in supported accommodation but stated that the staff there didn't support him very much. He also described that he didn't have a particularly productive relationship with his mother.

Noah was expelled from school at the end of year 8 and therefore wasn't in education at the time of his arrest. In his own words, at that time he "had a lot of mental health issues going on because there was a situation." Noah didn't want to elaborate on the situation, but it was clear that it was a lot for him to deal with and was the reason he was in care.

*"My dad's in jail, I've been to jail before, my uncle's been to jail, my brother's been to jail...I was in a care home. I was in supported living, there was staff, but they weren't really supporting me too much. The one I am in now is better. I talk to my mum occasionally, but she can be a bit of a b\*\*\*h sometimes. I got kicked out of school end of year 8 beginning of year 9 and I'm starting college this September. I'm doing an ICT course.*

*I wasn't in education at the time. I had a lot of mental health issues going on because there was a situation... I don't really like talking about it. Even with my friends I didn't really like talking about the situation that happened at that point because it was very recent, that was the reason I was in care."*

Noah believes his arrest was unjust and stated that the whole situation could have been avoided by the owner of the property he was trespassing had dealt with the situation in a different manner.

Noah described himself as being "angry and upset" at the time of the arrest by the way the police dealt with him. He felt like the police were overly violent with him, especially for an offence in which for him didn't require the severity of treatment.

When arriving at the police station, Noah was offered cups of water but felt like more could have been explained to him about what was happening. He was left further

frustrated by not being allowed to make a phone call himself but having an officer call somebody for him.

*"I don't think I should have been arrested, no, because technically trespassing is a civil matter, I didn't need to be arrested for it. They should've asked me nicely, not rudely to get off the property and I would've left, but because they asked so angrily, and they were so aggressive that I didn't..."*

*I was angry and upset. They were quite violent with me. They kept pinning me to the floor and hurting my wrists with the handcuffs and things...When I got to the station I had a couple cups of water, that was about it. They could've explained it a little bit better but I already understood a little bit...*

*...No, they did the phone call for me. I didn't really want to call anyone anyway, but the person I did want to call they said I couldn't call and said they would do it for me. Yeah, they made the phone call for me but I wanted to speak to them myself."*

Noah chose not to have a solicitor whilst at the police station, but he did have a representative during his court appearance. He held the support of his solicitor in high regard as he explained everything well to Noah. This was particularly important for him due to his issues with his mental health and his ADHD.

*"So I was allowed a solicitor, I didn't choose to have one in the police station but I did in court. The court is much nicer than what the police station is. My solicitor was really good, he explained everything really well to me. Because I got a lot of health problems, I don't translate thing very well, so he explained it all to me properly. Yeah, my solicitor explained everything really well."*

Noah had little understanding of the process when he was being sentenced and wished they would have gone through it at the start of the hearing to put his mind at ease. However, they just went straight to his sentencing without him having a very good understanding or the time to speak to make his case.

*"I am not sure, don't think I was given a chance to speak, they just said we're going straight to sentencing..."*

*...Not really no. I don't think my mental health needs were taken into account. During it they could've explained the process a little bit better to me. I feel like it would have put my mind at ease and I would have known what was actually going on."*

Upon arriving at the secure training centre, Noah was put at ease by the staff and felt like his mental health and wellbeing were taken into account. This ultimately allowed him to feel safe.

Noah understandably felt nervous throughout his first few days at the secure unit, but the feelings eased after a couple of days when he became more comfortable.

During his time on remand, Noah noticed that a lot of the young people there had similar issues to himself and many struggled with their mental health. He often tried to help others cope using tools that he had been taught himself. But at some point, he struggled to do so as he had a battle with his own mental health.

*"So when I actually got to the secure unit they was all very supportive and talked to me a lot about my mental health and stuff and I actually felt safe around them. The first day was obviously a little nervous because I didn't know anyone in there and everything was new to me. I didn't know what was really going on but after a few days it started to get easier, I started to get to know the staff and others there.*

*...No I didn't see any violence or anything like that. What I saw was more mental health problems. I tried to support others because I know how it is with that but after a while it was playing on my mind as well...There was nothing really negative when I was at the secure unit, it was actually quite positive. Everyone was very supportive."*

Noah was not given a custodial sentence after his remand period and was given an order to attend appointments with his local YOT. The staff were supportive with his mental health, and he thought that they were there for him if he needed them.

A big thing for Noah was that the YOT team helped him get into a different care home. The same home where he was living at the time of the interview. This has been a positive change for Noah as he feels they're much more supportive than the previous establishment.

*"They [YOT staff] were supportive with my mental health and everything, just made me talk to them when I needed them. They helped me get a new care home. I'm still there, they are very supportive and I like it more than my other one..."*

*...It was alright I guess [YOT experience]. They just check up on you and make sure that you're there, you go to your appointments and that."*

## CASE STUDY 5: TOMAS

Tomas was born in the UK to Lithuanian parents. He was home-schooled up until he was 16 years old when he went to college.

Throughout his childhood, Tomas found it difficult to concentrate on his education due to his ADHD diagnosis. In his words he “couldn’t sit in one place for a long time.”

At the time of his arrest, he was living with his family but his relationship with them became estranged because he was associating himself with criminals. Tomas stated that he wasn’t involved in gang activity at the time but was involved with illicit drugs.

*“I was there at my mums with my mum, my brother and my sister. I wasn’t talking to them because I was involved with criminals. So wasn’t talking to them...I was home-schooled till I was 15/16 then went to college when I was 16...Yeah it [his ADHD] did affect me quite a lot. I couldn’t sit in one place for a long time...”*

*I wasn’t involved in any gangs at the time but I used to sell drugs... I wouldn’t say I was happy at that time. I was just kinda going through the motions.”*

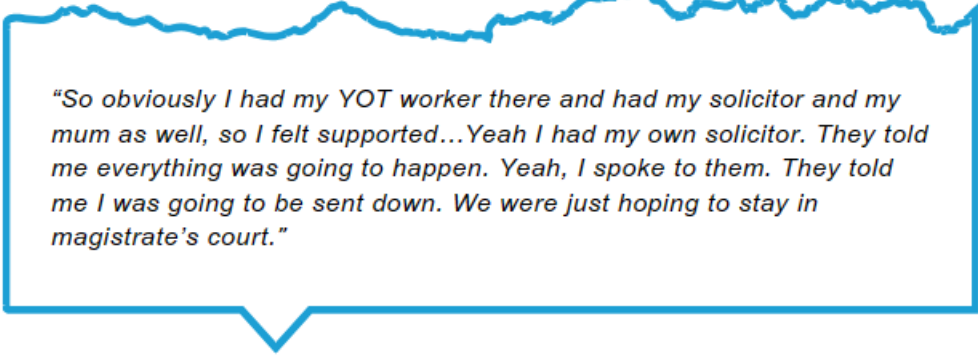
Tomas did not experience anything which he perceived to be improper during his arrest. However, whilst he was at the police station, he wasn’t offered a phone call and didn’t know that it was his right to have one. He was only allowed to speak to someone over the phone when he was eventually remand in youth detention.

*“Yeah they arrested me but there was no chance of me running away so they said just give them my hands and they handcuffed me. And yeah everything was alright...”*

*...No they didn’t I only rang them when I was in prison. No they didn’t even offer, I didn’t know I could even do that.”*

Tomas felt well supported during his court appearance as he had good representation from his solicitor, YOT worker and his mother.

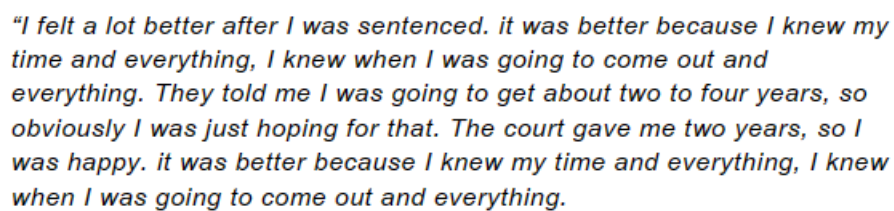




*"So obviously I had my YOT worker there and had my solicitor and my mum as well, so I felt supported...Yeah I had my own solicitor. They told me everything was going to happen. Yeah, I spoke to them. They told me I was going to be sent down. We were just hoping to stay in magistrate's court."*

Tomas was held on remand for two weeks awaiting his sentencing. During these two weeks he faced no problems but struggled with not knowing what his fate was going to be.

Tomas was sentenced to two years at a YOI, which came as a relief to him as not only did he now have a clear vision of his future, but his sentence was also half of the maximum four years he could have been told to serve.



*"I felt a lot better after I was sentenced. it was better because I knew my time and everything, I knew when I was going to come out and everything. They told me I was going to get about two to four years, so obviously I was just hoping for that. The court gave me two years, so I was happy. it was better because I knew my time and everything, I knew when I was going to come out and everything."*

Tomas didn't see any violence in the two weeks he was remanded but said there was a lot of violence in the YOI. He believes that the environment of youth detention fosters violence. For example, he said that it is easy for someone to get involved in violence in a YOI even if they haven't had a history of violence.

Prior the pandemic and the resulting strict lockdown of young people in YOIs, Tomas perceived that the lack of officers on the wings in his YOI was one of the contributing factors to the high levels of violence. He advocates for better staffing to reduce incidents of violence.

*"No, there wasn't any violence [whilst on remand], but when I got sentenced yeah, there was a lot. I don't know [how they could reduce the amount of incidents of violence], there was not many officers so they couldn't handle the violence, then in the end it was lockdown..."*

*...They just need to make it less violent. More officers, I think. Some people when they go to prison turn more violent, do you know what I mean?"*

Tomas had the opportunity to complete various courses whilst he was serving his custodial sentence. He stated that he had good access to services and found real benefit to his interactions with the drug and alcohol team regularly and attending yoga therapy.

*"Yeah, I used to talk to all the services in prison like the drug and alcohol team. What else, I used to do yoga therapy. I done a few courses too."*

During his custodial sentence, the threat of deportation was Tomas's biggest issue which he believes caused him to behave badly.

Despite spending his life in the UK, Tomas was threatened with deportation to Lithuania which caused him a lot of distress, especially given his close family reside in the UK.

However, Tomas appealed both the deportation and his sentence, and he was successful. At that time, he had already served enough time on his sentence and was released.

*"It was just difficult, first few months it was good and everything, I found out I that they were going to deport me and got a deportation letter. The women who was working for the immigration services, she told me there was no possible way for me to get out of this. They were saying they were deporting me straight away so I changed and stopped being good.*

*I don't know everything was alright obviously when they told me about the deportation I stated doing bad things...Then I appealed the sentence again and I got less time. The officers came to my room and said that they cancelled the deportation and I said I could get released."*

Tomas looks back on his experience in the YOI as beneficial. For him it was an opportunity to change for the better and his time in prison helped rekindle his relationship with his close family members. The support he had whilst he was detained from his family showed him that they truly cared.

*"It helped me after the arrest after prison it helped me. So I changed in a better way. Prison helped my relationship with my family. It got better and everything. Because I didn't see them for long it just showed that they really cared about me. I was in prison and they used to pay a lot of money to come visit me."*

Tomas is currently serving a community order, he has not had a bad experience so far with his YOT. He stated that he has a good relationship with YOT worker, who alongside his family, is supporting him in what he wants to do in life. Tomas plans on starting his own construction business and looks forward to the future.

*"I just want to do my own business. I'm more interested in construction. Yeah, that's what I want."*

## CASE STUDY 6: KATIE

Katie, who was 17 years old at the time of the interview, didn't have a very good relationship with her mother despite living with her and her sister.

By the time of the incident for which she was arrested, Katie had left education to go into full time employment. Katie made it clear that she both didn't enjoy school and the staff seemed to dislike her. She got in a lot of fights that ultimately ended up in her being kicked out.

Katie was as she put it, in a very rebellious stage of her life when she was arrested. She didn't want to listen to anybody and was not happy with others telling her what to do.

*"I'd been living with my mum, at home with my mum and my sister. Me and my mum did not get along whatsoever. Well just before I went in, I wasn't in education because I left to work full time, but before that in secondary school, I got kicked out as I wasn't doing very well anymore.*

*Well, in school I wasn't the best behaved, I had a lot going on. I got me kicked out because I had a fight with someone, which obviously that's all I used to get in trouble for. In that school they just didn't like me to be honest. And then they got rid of me...*

*At the time of the accident I was in like a very rebellious stage of my life. So, I was in one of those stages in life, wasn't very happy being told what to do, and don't want to listen to anybody and got myself into that situation."*

Katie now recognises that she deserved to be arrested for the incident she was involved in but didn't think so at the time. In that regard, the police helped her better understand the situation and in general, Katie felt like she was treated with respect.

However, one thing that Katie has an grievance with is that she was not allowed to make a phone call to her dad despite her directly asking to do so. It was her understanding that this was a right that she was not given.

*"Well, I did deserve to be arrested for what I had done, but at the time I didn't understand. You know what, when I got arrested, it wasn't bad, some of them were respectful and polite but you know how you're supposed to get to call someone? I wasn't allowed to do that. They didn't let me call no one. I told them 'I need to call my dad' and they told me no. I was like, what the hell?"*

*"...Yeah, I think that they explained everything to me pretty well. Like at the time I didn't actually understand the seriousness of the case, so I didn't actually understand what was going on but they made it clear."*

In her opinion, Katie received sound legal advice and felt well informed about what to expect on the day. Katie found the court experience to be very stressful which wasn't helped by issues going on in the courthouse around her. She stated that it was a stressful day for both her and her family.

*"When I got my solicitor off the court, he explained everything to me and let me know what was gonna go on. They all explained everything to me so I did know. They told me that I wouldn't get asked to speak whilst I was there. All the solicitors spoke for everyone else..."*

*"It was alright [court experience]. It was really just very stressful. And I was just on edge and everyone was getting annoyed a lot, and I'm pretty sure there was a fight outside the court at one point. Like it was a very stressful day for my family to be honest."*

Katie ended up serving five months at Oakhill secure training centre and was granted early release. As she knew she was likely going to be given a custodial sentence, a

family friend briefed her on what to expect. However, her experience at Oakhill was lot better than she was expecting.

The effective and caring staff at Oakhill allowed for Katie to feel well supported and comfortable to open up when she had an issue. Once Katie had settled into Oakhill and got used to the fact that she couldn't get some fresh air when she wanted to, she started to enjoy the experience and see the true benefit of it.

*"I was there for 5 months cause I got early release. one of my mum's friends I used to work with, he had been in prison before and was basically telling me what to expect. I knew I was gonna go, so he told me what to expect. But when I got there, it was a lot better than what I was expecting.*

*I liked the fact that in Oakhill you have the company of the staff a lot more than you would have in other places. You get more support, and if you need to talk about something or you have a problem, even if you don't want to talk about it, the staff will be there to take you aside and try to help you anyway. They're very caring...*

*...I just did not like the fact I was looking around in my cell and thought 'I am in prison at the age of 16, like why am I here?'. Obviously, you can't go outside whenever you want to go outside to get fresh air, that's what hit me the most ...*

*...Yes, there was fights. I think I only seen one fight, but it was really bad. And obviously there were other kids there, I actually made some friends while I was there. All in all, it wasn't that bad. To be honest, once I settled in I actually loved it."*

If Katie could change one thing about her experience in Oakhill it would be the lack of a consistent regime. The regime the young people would experience would depend on which staff were on shift that day or night.

Katie stated that one of the best ways to resolve an issue she was having was to "kick off," which in her eyes was rewarding bad behaviour and giving incentive for people to act out again.

*"You know in Oakhill they don't have consistency, because you have different staff and different units, they don't all have the same rules if you know what I mean. It's like, when you're in custody you expect a routine, but it's all different depending on who's there. The only issue I had was the inconsistency and the way they would deal with certain situations."*

*"In the sense that, let's say I wanted something that I'd been waiting for something for ages, they wouldn't sort it out and keep lying to me. And then I'd end up getting what I wanted when I kicked off. But I don't think that's how should be. If I am being patient and constantly asking, you don't listen until I kick off that's not going to teach me anything is it. I think it's getting more experienced people. Because how are you going to sort that out if you don't know what you're talking about?"*

Upon release, Katie went home to stay with her family and was on an electronic monitoring tag. Katie wanted space upon leaving the constraints of youth detention and believes she was given it to a degree in which her order allowed for.

Katie had nothing but good words for her caseworker who she described as someone who went out of her way to make her feel comfortable. It is this type of staff member that Katie respected, somebody that was caring and for whom it wasn't just a job.

*"They gave me my own space. To be fair, I did say that I wanted time to myself once I came out and obviously I got tagged when I came out. But I was seeing the YOT team every Tuesday and still got space at the same time..."*

*"My worker came to visit me a few times, and would let me know what was going on and stuff like that. She was really good. I love her, she's doing her job, but she also makes you feel comfortable. She doesn't make you feel awkward because sometimes it can get awkward. She just makes me really comfortable and feel like everything is alright. But she's still doing her job at the same time. She's so lovely. So caring."*



## PEER-LED SOLUTIONS

All the solutions below came directly from insights from young people with experience of remand. The solutions are aimed towards amending specific parts of their experience in custody, improving the YOT service and the quality of staff performance.



**Incorporate more lived experience into the YOT service and employ more relatable staff**

*"Sometimes they don't even know what they're talking about. They don't know what it's like to go through that, but then they think they know it all, but it doesn't make sense. Like unless you actually know and you have experienced it, I don't actually want to hear it."*



**Improve modes of communication at all stages of a young person's journey through the criminal justice system**

*"If they were communicating with me more, telling me what is actually happening, being real with me, then a lot of things would have went a lot better... So for me if my communication with them could have been better, everything could have been better."*



**Hire more and better able staff at Youth Offenders institutes to reduce incidents of violence**

*"They just need to make it less violent. More officers, I think. Some people when they go to prison turn more violent."*



**Consistency with regime at Secure Training Centres and rewarding good behaviour rather than bad behaviour**

*"They need to have more consistency... obviously you have different staff and different units, because there's different ones, they don't all have the same rules if you know what I mean. It's like, when you're in custody you expect a routine, but it's all different depending on who's there."*

# USER VOICE

ONLY OFFENDERS CAN STOP RE-OFFENDING

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