

# YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

We have collated here what young men and young Black men with lived experience of prison have said about their wellbeing; of being young in the prison system; and of being a young Black man in the prison system. These voices and perspectives are drawn from a range of sources including Spark Inside's work with young people, reports from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, and voluntary sector organisations that provide services and advocate for young people living in prison, including Leaders Unlocked.

## IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING IN PRISON

"... you're not developing those social skills, and you're not developing those skills how to interact with different sorts of people... If you go to the adult estate you don't know how to deal with somebody who's volatile, and you don't know how to... stay out of their way... The point of a young offenders' institute for young people is to ready them for the adult estate." - Unnamed person in prison

- <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/02/What-happens-to-prisoners-in-a-pandemic.pdf>

"To be honest the main problem for me over the last couple of months is having nothing of any meaning or consequence to do; i.e., the usual feelings experienced in prison but taken to the extreme." - CAPPTIVE respondent, PPN, adult male prison 6 June

- [http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/CAPPTIVE2\\_regimes\\_and\\_progression\\_web\\_final.pdf](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/CAPPTIVE2_regimes_and_progression_web_final.pdf)

"At the beginning you could put up with it because you had the mental strength... you wonder how much more you can actually tolerate."

- <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/02/What-happens-to-prisoners-in-a-pandemic.pdf>

"It felt like I forgot myself, cos I was hardly talking... in my pad for that long I'd end up counting myself to sleep... I'd be that bored... cos I'd been in my pad for that long, I was counting every day, I'd count my toes, I'd count my fingers, I'd count my hands... I'd sit on my bed thinking, why am I counting? It felt like I forgot myself." - Unnamed person in prison

- <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/02/What-happens-to-prisoners-in-a-pandemic.pdf>

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING IN PRISONS

"...the way I found therapy [was by] relating to the others... relating to others and getting to know other people's stories...[...] 'Cos you know it's not just you, that's in a messed up situation..."

- Young Black male participant in Spark Inside project

"Many prisoners feel they are not given sufficient support from their Probation Officers (POs) or Offender Management Unit (OMU) which relates to being a low risk prisoner"

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Putting more support in place for prisoners. More courses just key skills for when you’re outside. Ones that will help people to reach goals in life that they want in life”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Not enough courses tailored”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“They don’t understand what prisoners need. We have to have a better relationship with officers and not always be punished if we get in trouble”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Prisoners feel angry and often violent due to lack of support and understanding from prison staff [or mentally unstable”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“You get officers giving out too many negatives and no positives at all”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Some people use Spice and/or violence to cope with their thoughts, which leads them to get put on basic and this makes it worse”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Basic [meaning reduced access to the outside world] does not help prisoners with mental health - they are just left to rot in a cell for 23 hours with nothing to keep the mind occupied. Some do not read which makes the whole basic thing extremely dark – being left alone can make their condition even worse than it was”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Lack of social time leading to isolation which contributes to disbelief in reforming one’s self”

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice\\_final-pdf.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/luwp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YoungAdvisorsonCriminalJustice_final-pdf.pdf)

“Overall there is a lack of support and understanding from prison staff about mental health “

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“[Being in custody]... I think that’s one of the worse periods for my mental state.”

- Young Black male participant in Spark Inside project

## BEING A YOUNG BLACK MAN IN THE PRISON SYSTEM

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

(Workshop participant, Leicester)

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race\\_criminalJusticeReport\\_v6-1.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race_criminalJusticeReport_v6-1.pdf)

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

(Workshop participant, Leicester)

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race\\_criminalJusticeReport\\_v6-1.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race_criminalJusticeReport_v6-1.pdf)

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

(Prisoner, East Midlands)

“There should be equal opportunities. Some people get everything thrown at them whereas others don’t.”

(Prisoner, East Midlands)

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race\\_criminalJusticeReport\\_v6-1.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race_criminalJusticeReport_v6-1.pdf)

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

(Workshop participant, Leicester)

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race\\_criminalJusticeReport\\_v6-1.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race_criminalJusticeReport_v6-1.pdf)

“If you’ve got anger issues, in prison it will get worse.”

(Interviewee, East Midlands)

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race\\_criminalJusticeReport\\_v6-1.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race_criminalJusticeReport_v6-1.pdf)

“When you’re in youth offending you are just a kid, you have your whole life ahead of you, they should sit down with you. It’s just about someone sitting there and saying ‘I see where you are.’ It’s compassion that’s missing.”

(Workshop participant, Leicester)

- [http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race\\_criminalJusticeReport\\_v6-1.pdf](http://leaders-unlocked.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Race_criminalJusticeReport_v6-1.pdf)

## THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING BLACK OR FROM AN ETHNIC MINORITY BACKGROUND IN PRISONS AND ACCESSING SUPPORT SERVICES

“Staff can be judgemental, and I always feel I am being watched. I observe negative body language in some staff. It’s predominantly BME and Traveller prisoners who get this attitude. White prisoners will get into trouble and keep their place here. Whereas BME prisoners make one mistake and go straight back to closed”

(Black/black British – Caribbean man in prison, open prison)

- <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“OMUs [Offender Management Units\*] have been fairly OK in the few dealings I have had. The main positives have been the Resolve programme and the Forward Trust – both were brilliant. It’s all about the person they give you to work with – also relationships.”

(Black/black British – Caribbean man in prison, open prison)

\*OMU’s are responsible for managing prisoners’ sentences, including access to rehabilitative programmes, access to ROTL, etc

- <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“The key worker scheme started very high profile, lots of posters, but in reality, it doesn’t deliver and is appalling – it doesn’t get done properly – the officers feel they have to do it but they count you popping into the office as your weekly key worker interaction.”

(Black/black British – African man in prison, category C prison)

- <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“She’s a very good officer but has no time [...] She has had so little contact with me I can’t say she’s unfair.”

(Mixed – white and black Caribbean man in prison, category B prison)

- <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“He’s a lovely guy, but when it comes to getting things done, he’s not proactive [...] my key worker isn’t covering the sentence plan. He doesn’t talk about that stuff.”

(Black – any other black/African/Caribbean background man in prison, category C prison)

- <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“TSP [Thinking Skills Programme\*] presented me with options on how to lead my life. These options were always there but I didn’t know they were there [...] now I see that I should have made better choices.”

(Black/black British – African man in prison, category C prison)

\*TSP is thinking skills programme, described in this document; it’s a very coaching like programme but looks like more CBT type focus

- <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprisons/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“I just see probation as a thing let me just get over with... ‘cause she doesn’t even remember what we talk about. I tell her that I’m doing this carpentry [...] thing and then I have to repeat it the next time I talk to her”

- Young Black male participant in Spark Inside project

“I did TSP and found the groupwork discussions useful to gain other people’s perspectives [...] it helps you manage the stress you are feeling and understand the impact your imprisonment has on your family.”  
(Black/black British – African man in prison, open prison)

\*TSP is thinking skills programme, described in this document; it’s a very coaching like programme

- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/449290/glossary-of-programmes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449290/glossary-of-programmes.pdf)  
<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

“I am still getting letters from my council telling me I have outstanding debts. I have not received effective help to tackle these debts. I have still got that burden on my shoulders after release.”

(Black/black British – Caribbean man in prison, category C prison)

- <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprisoners/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/Minority-ethnic-prisoners-and-rehabilitation-2020-web-1.pdf>

