

**CLiNKs**

supporting voluntary organisations that  
work with offenders and their families



Clink**thinks**

# **Criminal justice policy** and the voluntary sector

2017



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**Criminal justice policy** and the voluntary sector

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## Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations in the criminal justice system.

Our aim is to ensure the sector and the people they support are informed and engaged in order to transform lives and communities.

We are a membership organisation with over 500 members including the voluntary sector's largest providers as well as the smallest. Our wider national network reaches over 4,000 voluntary sector contacts.

Clinks advocates for change on policy issues raised by our members. We believe there are key actions which could be taken, across sectors, to ensure that people in the criminal justice system get the support they need to change their lives for the better.

**For more detail please visit [www.clinks.org/policy](http://www.clinks.org/policy)**

## Value the voluntary sector

The voluntary sector consists of charities, community groups and social enterprises. Many provide opportunities for people in the criminal justice system to change for the better through providing housing, training and employment, improving mental health, mentoring, drug and alcohol support, debt advice, or other services.

Many provide opportunities for people in the criminal justice system to change for the better; whether that is through housing, training and employment, mental health, mentoring, drug and alcohol, debt advice, or other services.

The voluntary sector is more than a provider – it ranges from small volunteer-led groups to large organisations that all have expertise, knowledge and experience that make them a crucial partner in the design as well as the delivery of services.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the voluntary sector's role as a forward-thinking designer and provider of services needs to be recognised. Voluntary organisations should be pro-actively engaged as a valued partner by policy makers and service providers throughout the criminal justice system at a local, regional and national level.

## Strengthen the sector's voice

The voluntary sector has shaped and reformed the criminal justice system for over 200 years.

Throughout its rich history the sector has used its knowledge and expertise as a driver for positive change. From early steps to reform prison conditions in the 1800s to more recent developments pioneering distinct services for women in the criminal justice system, developing support services for families of prisoners and championing service user-led approaches.

The voluntary sector should be encouraged to play a full role in criminal justice reform. To do that it must be allowed and encouraged to advocate, campaign and speak out on behalf of the people it exists to support.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the voluntary sector's role as a campaigner should be protected, allowing it to speak freely on behalf of service users and communities.



## Put **people at the heart** of services

The voluntary sector has pioneered an approach which supports people to change their own lives.

Desistance from crime is not a one-off event and it is different for each individual – people make progress and experience setbacks which can make rehabilitation a long and difficult road. There are many factors that positively support desistance from crime, including employment, housing, improved health and well-being, better family relations, a positive self-identity, and forming constructive bonds with peers, support workers and communities.

The voluntary sector has driven the need for more person-centred services. These services are flexible, tailored to the individual and often delivered at a local level by highly trained staff and volunteers.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the Government and local services should do more to put people in the criminal justice system at the heart of policy making and service delivery. Policy and practice should be person-centred, acknowledge that people need long-term support, and that relapse can sometimes be part of the journey to rehabilitation.

## Reduce the **prison population**

Our prison system is struggling under the pressure of an increasing population and aging infrastructure.

Imprisonment represents the greatest cost in the criminal justice system. Fewer prison officers, overcrowding, drug use, violence, self-harm, suicide and a lack of adequate rehabilitation are all issues in need of urgent attention.

Prison has a place in the system, reserved for the most serious of crimes and the protection of the public, but the vast majority of our prison population is held for non-violent crimes. The money spent on these prison places would be better used for services in the community which genuinely support rehabilitation. These include mental health services, drugs and alcohol support, quality housing and getting people a job.

The best way to reduce re-offending and make communities safer is to increase the use of early intervention, prevention and alternatives to custody – getting people the right support as early as possible.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the Ministry of Justice should develop a clear strategy for reducing the number of people in prison by increasing investment in preventative services, diverting people away from the criminal justice system and expanding the use of alternatives to custody.



## Implement a **distinct approach for women**

Women in the criminal justice system have very different needs to men.

A large majority have experienced trauma, including sexual and domestic abuse; many are primary carers for children; suffer from mental ill-health including post-traumatic stress disorder; are engaged in street sex work; and have chronic substance misuse problems. Only a tiny proportion of women who have offended are assessed as a high risk of harm to others and as such most women could be effectively managed in the community, thereby avoiding the need for prison.

Voluntary organisations have developed gender-specific responses to this challenge, including a one-stop-shop approach which delivers a holistic package of support in a safe and women-only environment. We know this approach works.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks a cross-departmental strategy for women and girls, led by the Ministry of Justice, should ensure that women are diverted away from the criminal justice system at the earliest opportunity. To do this we need to increase the use of gender-specific community sentences and make sure we invest in specialist voluntary organisations including women's centres.

## Tackle **racism and discrimination**

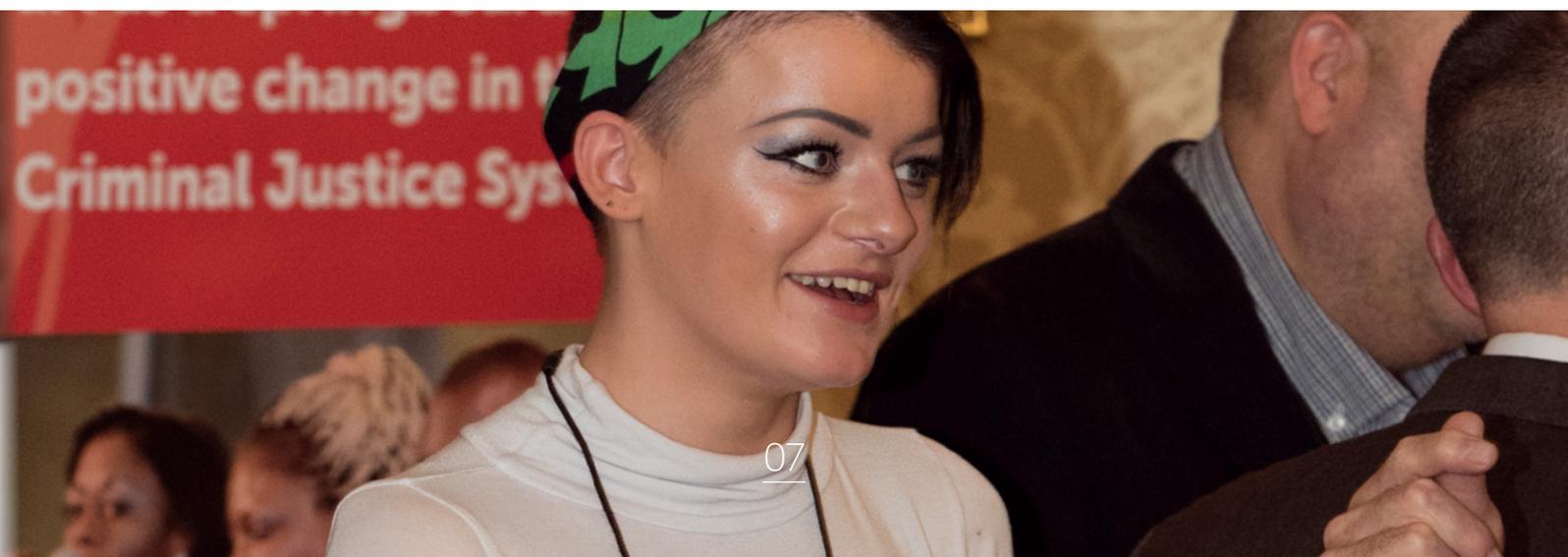
Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people are disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal justice system. This needs to be addressed if we are to create a just and equal system.

People from BAME communities are more likely to be arrested, more likely to have decisions go against them in court, they are over represented in the prison population, and in probation caseloads. We need better and more consistent responses to reduce the number of BAME people in our justice system.

Some specialist voluntary sector organisations provide tailored services to people from BAME communities, but these grassroots initiatives have been particularly affected by recent cuts in public spending and rapid changes to the local policy and commissioning environment.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks all sectors working in criminal justice must work to tackle racism and discrimination by ensuring that they are using evidence and examples of good practice to meet the needs of BAME people. Government should have a comprehensive strategy which gives race equality a central place in all policy making and should have ambitious aims for reducing the inequality across the system.



## Prevent the imprisonment of children

Children should be treated as children first and offenders second, and their welfare and safety should be our primary concern.

All efforts should be made to divert them away from the criminal justice system. When this fails we should prioritise alternatives to custody.

The youth justice system has shown how a focussed approach on reducing youth custody can dramatically reduce the number of people in prison. The local and multi-agency approach of youth offending teams highlights the potential for a different way of delivering criminal justice interventions that works to reduce re-offending.

However, the youth justice system needs ongoing investment to divert more young people from custody and continue to keep caseloads small and provide flexible one-to-one specialist support. It must also ensure that where young people are held in custody their welfare and safety is the foremost consideration. Furthermore we must tackle the over-representation of young people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in the system, which has increased as overall numbers have reduced.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the youth justice system needs to remain focussed on reducing the use of custody, increasing the use of early intervention and diversion, and provide a locally-owned and multi-agency approach to all services. A national strategy needs to be produced and published to both address the causes of over-representation of black, Asian and minority ethnic young people in the youth justice system, and address the reasons why reducing a youth custody approach has failed this group.

## Deliver a **distinct approach for young adults**

Young adults, defined as 18-25 year olds, have the highest rates of breach for community orders and are the most likely group to re-offend. But they are also the most likely group to desist from crime with the right support.

Young adults account for less than 10% of the general population, but make up a third of those involved in the criminal justice system. Despite clear multi-disciplinary evidence and recognition from the Ministry of Justice that the criminal justice system should take a distinct approach to young adults, there has been almost no specific policy or legislation focused on this age group.

The majority of youth and adult justice policy and legislation remains arbitrarily split on the basis of a person being older or younger than 18. As a consequence, implementation of the evidence within local service delivery has moved ahead of policy in many parts of the country, but with an inconsistent application across England and Wales.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the Ministry of Justice should utilise the evidence gathered by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance to produce a national strategy for the management of young adults aged 18-25 at all stages of the criminal justice system (as recommended by the Justice Select Committee). This needs to deliver a distinct approach to young adults and design services which support desistance from crime, based on evidence and service user consultation.



## Involve people with lived experience

People and families with experience of the criminal justice system are a vital source of intelligence about how to improve services.

Listening to the voice of people with lived experience can improve the quality and impact of the services on offer; contribute to wider outcomes, including reducing re-offending; and enable individuals to build a new identity which supports them to move away from crime.

The voluntary sector has a long history of pioneering service user involvement in the criminal justice system. It has designed a number of ways to listen to the views of 'experts by experience' and involve them in the design and delivery of services. These approaches amplify people's voices to make sure the criminal justice system benefits from their insights.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the Ministry of Justice, commissioners, and all service providers should embed the involvement of people with lived experience throughout the criminal justice system to inform policy and practice.

## Join up services to respond to multiple needs

People in the criminal justice system often face multiple needs that require support from a range of agencies.

People commonly experience a combination of homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse problems and mental ill-health at the same time. However, a lack of coordination between services and commissioners means that these individuals are often passed from pillar to post, whilst facing multiple assessments and different referral criteria. This can be confusing and means that people are unable to receive the support they need.

The voluntary sector has led the way in piloting new approaches which break down the barriers to services. They have created new partnerships with a range of organisations from all sectors, set up new services, involved people with lived experience in their design and delivery, made their approach more flexible and changed their culture to get people the support they need. These new approaches are changing the way local systems work for the better.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks decision makers, commissioners and service providers should use learning from the Making Every Adult Matter coalition and the Big Lottery's Fulfilling Lives programme to develop new policies and better coordinated services which support people with multiple needs.



## Support **healthy relationships**

Positive and consistent social relationships play a key role in reducing the likelihood of reoffending. They provide motivation to stop committing crime, reinforce positive identities and support integration into the community.

Family relationships are often the main source of emotional, practical and financial support for people in contact with the criminal justice system – from the time of arrest, to prison and in the community. But they can also be problematic, with difficulties or estrangement sometimes caused or exacerbated by contact with the justice system. Others may have little to no social ties and need support to develop positive and consistent relationships. The family – both adults and children – also experience a negative emotional impact due to their loved one's involvement in the criminal justice system.

The voluntary sector has played a leading role in designing and delivering services which develop and maintain social relationships, as well as supporting adults and children affected by a family member's involvement in the criminal justice system. These services are vital, but the criminal justice system in England and Wales does not offer a consistent service to support these relationships.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks a clear government strategy is needed to advocate for consistent and specialist services which support positive social relationships for people in the criminal justice system in custody and post-release, and which support children's wellbeing.

## Improve **health and wellbeing**

People in contact with the criminal justice system experience significant health inequalities.

Mortality rates for people in the justice system are up to three times higher than those in the general population. There is a high prevalence of mental health problems, substance misuse, smoking, learning disability and difficulty, long-term medical conditions and disabilities.

Health and care services in prisons and the community must meet the needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system in order to reduce health inequalities and improve health outcomes.

This group often has little, or ineffective, contact with statutory health services. Voluntary sector organisations are key to providing effective health and social care for people in the criminal justice system. As well as delivering frontline health services, they can support people to access and engage with health providers, provide holistic support, accompany people to appointments, and assist them to understand and manage their health needs.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks commissioners and providers in the health and criminal justice systems should work together to prioritise improving health and wellbeing and continuity of care. This should include investment in prevention, early identification of people with health needs, diverting people into treatment where appropriate and ensuring continuity of care for people as they enter prison, move between different prisons, or on release back into the community.

## Champion volunteering

The voluntary sector has a long tradition of recruiting, training, and managing committed and passionate local people as volunteers.

By providing a bridge between communities and the criminal justice system, volunteers engage and motivate people who are trying to change their lives. Volunteers can add expertise, capacity and flexibility to services. This includes involving peers as volunteers, where people with lived experience of the justice system can provide practical advice and support.

Volunteering is not free, it requires ongoing and consistent investment, support and co-ordination. Quality recruitment is needed to ensure that volunteers reflect the diverse range of service users they will engage with. Appropriate training and supervision of volunteers requires investment if they are to be properly supported. Voluntary organisations have worked alongside criminal justice agencies to develop best practice, but it needs to be more widespread.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks volunteering should be championed by the Ministry of Justice, courts, probation services and prisons. They should work with the voluntary sector to create a culture and operating environment which encourages and supports volunteers.

## Encourage **creativity** and **inspiration**

Arts have a long and established history in supporting rehabilitation and resettlement in prisons and in the community.

Evidence shows that engaging in music, theatre and the visual arts can contribute positively towards desistance from crime. The arts face numerous overlapping challenges, from a difficult funding climate to public opinion, but there is clear need for access to the arts as a springboard to positive change. It can address underlying issues including lack of self-esteem and confidence to support a person's journey away from crime and towards a new identity.

### Clinks**thinks**

Clinks thinks the Ministry of Justice, commissioners, and all service providers should ensure access to arts activities for people involved in the criminal justice system. To this end the Ministry of Justice and the Arts Council should develop a joint strategy to support the arts within criminal justice settings.



# Get **involved**

Clinks members can access the full range of policy support, including monthly policy e-bulletins, consultation events, expert seminars and a range of other member benefits.

To become a member and keep up to date with the latest information visit:

**[www.clinks.org/membership](http://www.clinks.org/membership)**

To ensure that Clinks effectively represents the voluntary sector we regularly consult our members and others by convening workshops, roundtables, conferences and through our online networks.

Everything we submit to Government on behalf of our members is published online. You can read our policy briefings and responses by visiting:

**[www.clinks.org/policy](http://www.clinks.org/policy)**



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Photos on pages 2-3, 8-9 and 10 are of young people supported by Clinks members 1625 Independent People – a Bristol-based charity supporting young people who have been faced with homelessness – including specialist support for those who have experienced care or custody through their award winning Future 4 Me project. All photos © Ian Cuthbert / cuthbertdesign.com