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Ex-offender led employment agency needed to tackle crime

The government should support the creation of an offender-led national employment agency as part of its wider strategy to reduce unemployment and crime, according to a report published by User Voice today (07 April 2011).

What's Your Story? is the final report of a major consultation with 582 excluded young people between the age of 12 and 27 undertaken by User Voice. It sets out their recommendations including the proposal for a new organisation led and staffed by ex-offenders aimed at helping ex-offenders and ex-addicts into work. This should be coupled with government incentives that encourage employers to employ ex-offenders.

The young people involved said one of the biggest challenges they faced was being unable to find employment: for many offenders criminal record details must be legally disclosed in job applications a number of years after an offence has been committed. Many felt an employment agency staffed by ex-offenders who understand the challenges facing job-seekers leaving prison would be a more successful approach. Other recommendations to come out of the report include:

- Increasing local opportunities for excluded young people to work with the police in tackling local crime and improving community relations;
- A new duty for courts and relevant agencies to ensure that offenders' children have their views taken into account in sentencing and receive support triggered when a custodial sentence is handed down (regardless of whether the offender is a single parent or not);
- Ensuring that the current review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders' Act seeks to strike a better balance between risks and employment, with particular focus on giving young people a fresh start and on proportionality.

Mark Johnson, Founder of User Voice said: *“Despite the level of exclusion these young people experienced, and the chaotic nature of many of their lives, this project has shown they have much to add in improving criminal justice services.*

“The overarching conclusion of this work is that excluded young people be given more opportunity to engage in improving the services that seek to address their offending. This is more not less important as public spending cuts impact on services. Local justice agencies need to work together in developing more effective feedback procedures and in enabling excluded youth to play a collective role in securing better outcomes.”

User Voice is led and staffed by ex-offenders. As part of *What’s Your Story*, it engaged with nearly 600 of the most marginalised young people talking directly to 325 through 22 discussion groups throughout England.

A copy of What’s Your Story? can be found [here](#). For more information please contact Daniel Hutt (07904 008 084 / daniel@uservice.org). User Voice has quotes, case study material and facts and stats available.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. User Voice’s Excluded Youth Project was launched in summer 2010 and included 22 discussion groups in six regions with 325 of the most marginalised young people in England. User Voice also conducted a survey, which was completed by 582 excluded young people between the ages of 12 and 27. The final report came out of discussions that took place in December 2010 between 30 of the young people – nominated by their peers – and 25 policy makers, including MPs and representatives from the Ministry of Justice, National Offender Management Service, the Youth Justice Board, prisons, probation trusts and private contractors currently managing prisons.
2. Of the young people we spoke to:
 - A fifth of them had received 10 or more different types of sentence.
 - 43% had spent time in a young offenders’ institute or prison.
 - 45% said they had drink/drug problems.
 - 16% said they had experienced mental health problems.
 - 17% of participants had been in care at some stage.
 - Nearly one in 10 had never lived with either parent.
 - 71% had been excluded from school

- Just under a third had been tested at some stage for learning difficulties.
3. [User Voice](#) exists to reduce offending. Our work is led and delivered by ex-offenders who foster dialogue between service users and providers of the criminal justice and related services. We enable unheard voices to make a difference and enable policy makers and practitioners to listen directly to service users.
 4. The Excluded Youth Project has been supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, v, Saatchi and Saatchi, T-Mobile, KPMG and Partizan.
 5. A dedicated [microsite](#) also launched today contains further information including photos, stats, videos, quotes and music produced by participants.