



USER VOICE

THE IMPACT OF GIVING PEOPLE ON PROBATION A VOICE

TRANSFORMING REHABILITATION 2015 - 2021

JULY 2021

A MESSAGE FROM MARK

Overall, I want to thank the thousands of service users that gave their time to provide their insights, the volunteers and the staff champions in all the regions. I can still remember the day in 2015 when I found out that overnight we were going to be working in two-thirds of the private sector probation Community Rehabilitation Companies due to our user-led, independent, democratic and solution focused approach.

For the last 6 years that's all we have been doing. Thinking globally about the issue of including people on probation, and acting locally. We know we have made a major contribution not only in delivering solutions and innovation locally but also influencing national policy. It's something that as people with lived experience we should be incredibly proud of. We were one of the few third sector providers working on a national level at the start of the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms and have remained until the end.

Our mission was for the system to see the value of listening to, including and acting on the insights of the people in prison and on probation.

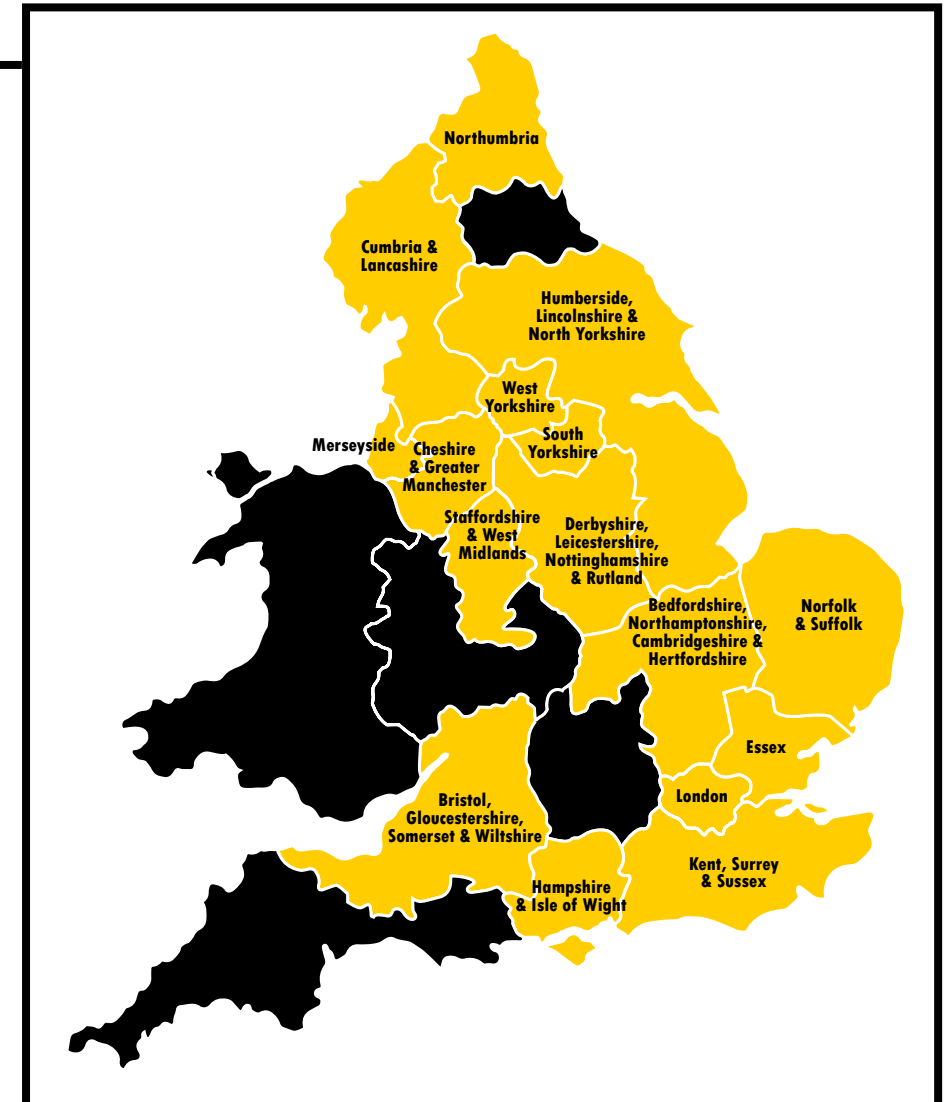
However, there is now a real risk that the very thing that has drawn through that talent – the independent, user-led and democratic approach – is lost. It will need probation leaders who have a willingness to understand the power imbalance and who have the funds to address it. It will need leaders to see beyond this being another service that is contracted. And it will need leaders who are ambitious for the role that people with lived experience can play and recognise the difference between inclusion and leadership for my group.

This covers a very small amount of what we have achieved and some impact is just immeasurable. But the fact that we exist to give opportunity, encourage and support in a peer to peer way is my measurement.



OUR HISTORY OF TRANSFORMING REHABILITATION

- In 2015 probation was split into 21 private and voluntary sector run Community Rehabilitation Companies and the National Probation Service.
- Overnight User Voice went from working in 7 of the previous 35 Probation Trusts to 14 of the 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies.
- Since 2015 User Voice has worked in 16 of the 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies and 3 of the 7 National Probation Service Regions.
- User Voice was contracted by each of these to ensure that people on probation (service users) played an instrumental role in the design and delivery of their services by establishing Service User Councils.
- With the reunification of the probation service, now is a time to reflect on what has been achieved in partnership with people on probation and probation staff.



**USER VOICE COVERAGE IN THE 21
COMMUNITY REHABILITATION COMPANIES**

WHAT IS A SERVICE USER COUNCIL?

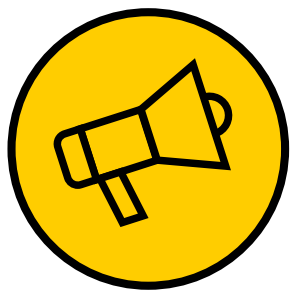
User Voice was created for and is run by people who have been in prison and on probation. A Service User Council is an elected group of people on probation who meet with the most senior person in a particular probation service or region on a regular basis to put forward solutions. The solutions are developed from engaging with other people on probation. If the solutions are accepted, the Council members work with the service to implement them.

So our Councils are:

- Democratic – engaging large numbers and representing the diversity of people on probation
- User-led – facilitated and led by people with lived experience of being on probation
- Independent – as we do not deliver services, we don't have an agenda to filter what we hear
- Solution focused – we support people not only to raise problems, but to present solutions



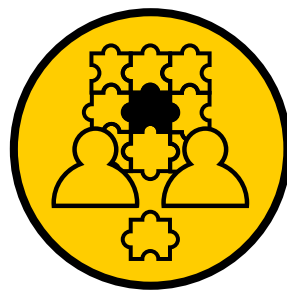
WHO WAS INVOLVED AND WHAT DID THEY DO?



SINCE 2015, USER VOICE HAS
GIVEN A VOICE TO
126,871
PEOPLE ON PROBATION.



FROM THESE, WE HAVE
RECRUITED, TRAINED AND
SUPPORTED MORE THAN
1,398
COUNCIL MEMBERS.



THEY HAVE DEVELOPED
448
SOLUTIONS, PUTTING THESE
FORWARD TO PROBATION DECISION
MAKERS AT 253 COUNCIL MEETINGS.



92%
OF THE SOLUTIONS WERE
ACCEPTED AND 72% WERE
IMPLEMENTED.



88%
OF ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICERS
AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED
THAT USER VOICE COUNCILS HAD
BENEFITED PROBATION.

"The opportunity to really examine our practice by asking service users to evaluate our delivery of service was a new way to work, but it enabled in depth thoughtful discussion which allowed both staff and the council to problem solve collaboratively. It has proved a positive and rewarding development in our practice which really makes you question your own beliefs and places service users at the heart of our intervention. The Service User Council has enabled the organisation to realise positive change by valuing service user contribution and opinion, providing hope for the future and appreciating that changes to service delivery are best realised in partnership."

**Interchange Manager
and Service User Lead**

"When anyone asks me what I am most proud of during my time here, without a doubt it is the way service user involvement has not only been embedded but evolved. From a few people in a small cold meeting room, to over 40 people filling a board room, the rise and success of our Service User Council has been unstoppable. Service users and probation staff working collaboratively with energy and creativity, challenging each other respectfully to ensure the best service possible is delivered will be a legacy for the unified probation service as we move forward on the next stage of the probation journey."

**Assistant Chief Probation Officer,
Community Payback**

"It's been an absolute privilege to work with the Service User Council and User Voice. The power of coproduction and the difference that participation makes to service users is inspiring to see. I have loved with service users grow and flourish over the last few years. The CRC really has been a better place to work thanks to the Council contribution."

**Service User Engagement
and Diversity Lead**

WHAT DID THEY ACHIEVE?

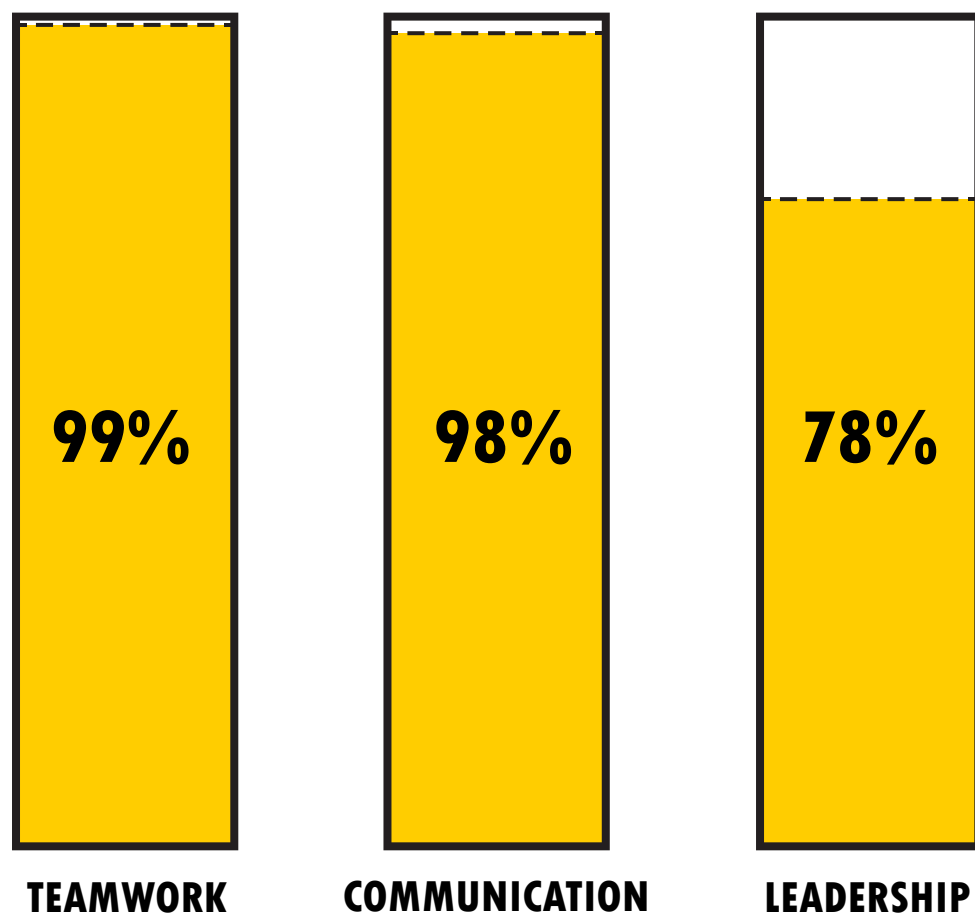
There are too many changes to list them all. Some were seemingly small and others much larger. Importantly all came from listening to the experiences of a large number and diverse group of people on probation, representative of their local community. Some of the best include...

- **Engagement Officers:** one service employed 3 engagement officers with lived experience, one in each county, offering huge support to service users.
- **One stop shops:** enable service users to make initial contact with a variety of agencies and third parties in one place as they sometimes struggle to address complex needs and follow up multiple appointments.
- **Mental health training:** service users co-designed and co-delivered mental health training to both new and established probation officers.
- **Peer support mediators:** sessions with a peer mentor made available for service users finding the relationship with their probation officer difficult or frustrating.
- **Little Book of Numbers:** a credit-card sized fold out information booklet containing contact details of support organisations for service users.
- **Through the gate services:** were reviewed in a CRC to ensure all residents that are due to leave the prison are now seen within their last 12 weeks to ensure that they have the relevant support needed.
- **Women's reporting:** introduced women's only Hubs to ensure a safe space and reduce levels of anxiety.
- **Inspiration Awards:** recognition of excellent progress that a service user has made whilst being on probation.
- **Sentence Plan consistency:** simple leaflet with better information on the sentence plan process.
- **Induction review:** new Induction process designed, trialled and rolled out across 5 CRCs.
- **Accommodation champions:** experienced in the area, these champions support those who need accommodation advice.
- **About Me:** a form that allowed service users to record the important things about them that they wanted their probation officer to know, so that they did not have to repeat this information again and again.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT ON THEIR JOURNEY?

For Council members, being involved has been transformational. Just being given a voice is an intervention in itself.

Over 90% felt they had developed skills, including:



84%
REPORTED
IMPROVEMENT IN
THEIR SELF-ESTEEM
AND SELF-CONFIDENCE



76%
STATED THEY
WERE LESS LIKELY
TO REOFFEND



OVER 250
HAVE GONE ON TO FURTHER
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES,
INCLUDING BEING EMPLOYED
WITHIN PROBATION SERVICES &
OTHER REHABILITATION PROVIDERS

"I like being able to talk to other service users and that I can be the one to make a difference for other people. By saying I've been an offender, I'm showing that if you put your mind to it you won't go back."

"Because I feel I can relate, being an ex-offender who has developed a can-do attitude. I feel I can help people who have been in the situation I was in."



WHAT NEXT?

When User Voice was founded in 2009, involving people with lived experience was largely unheard of and not funded.

It has now become a core part of the system.

Importantly, the legacy of what we have achieved together in partnership with people on probation and probation staff will live on.

The Ministry of Justice has developed Standards of Excellence, developed a Toolkit, published a Service User Involvement National Plan and committed to service user involvement in the new probation Target Operating Model.

So, we are proud of our legacy, optimistic for the future, but cautious, waiting to see that there remains a defined space for people on probation not just to be involved but to be leaders in the new Probation Service.

USERVOICE