

USER VOICE

IMPACT REPORT

2025



OUR 2025 IN NUMBERS

WE WORKED WITH

16 COMMISSIONERS



34 RESEARCH PROJECTS

CONDUCTED WORKING WITH

4,321 PEOPLE

35 PRISON COUNCIL PROPOSALS



ACCEPTED AND IMPLEMENTED

WE SUPPORTED

2 PARTNERS

TO UNDERTAKE PEER COMMISSIONING



2 THEMATIC REPORTS

PUBLISHED FOR HM INSPECTORATE OF PROBATION



WORKED WITH

243 VOLUNTEERS

90%

COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERS SAID THEY HAD DEVELOPED NEW SKILLS

76%

COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERS SAID THEY FEEL MORE EQUIPPED TO GAIN EMPLOYMENT SINCE JOINING USER VOICE

90%

COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERS SAID THEY FEEL MORE MOTIVATED IN DAY-TO-DAY LIFE SINCE JOINING USER VOICE

95%

COMMUNITY-BASED VOLUNTEERS SAID THEY FEEL MORE CONFIDENT SINCE JOINING USER VOICE

93%

OF OUR PRISON COUNCIL MEMBERS SAID THAT BEING ON THE COUNCIL MADE THEM FEEL MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THEIR TIME IN PRISON AND THAT PARTICIPATING IN THE COUNCIL HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THEIR PERSONAL GROWTH AND PROGRESS

OVERALL, WE HAVE GIVEN A VOICE TO 8,626 PEOPLE IN 2025

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WHO WE ARE

WHY WE EXIST

The criminal justice system is overstretched, under resourced, locked in crisis response and poor value for money. User Voice exists to reduce the damage caused: to those in the system, their families, victims, communities and services.

WHAT WE DO

To improve the justice system, it is vital to meaningfully involve both those running it and those with lived experience of it. That's why our mission is to bring these voices together to create much needed transformative change.

We do this at every stage - from Diversion, Police Custody, Courts and Sentencing, to Prison, Probation and Post Release.

Our work also creates a range of development opportunities for people with lived experience. This both supports their journey out of the justice system and gives them the skills they need to influence change.

75% of our staff, and all our volunteers, have convictions, meaning we've been there - in court, in prison, or on probation - we own our own pasts, so we understand the challenges first hand, and we are credible role models.

OUR VALUES



COLLABORATIVE

We centre lived experience in everything we do, co create solutions that work for everyone, and partner with others to drive lasting system change.



INCLUSIVE

We affirm everyone's worth, informed by our own experience of exclusion within the system, challenge inequality, and ensure marginalised voices shape decisions and solutions.



RESILIENT

We learn from setbacks, adapt to change and stay committed to making the justice system better.



COMPASSIONATE

We act with empathy, without judgement and fundamentally believe people can and do change.



OUR IMPACT, IN OUR STAKEHOLDERS' WORDS

ELEAZAR, ONE OF OUR LIVED EXPERIENCE STAFF MEMBERS BEGINS OUR 2025 IMPACT REPORT WITH HIS OWN STORY OF HIS JOURNEY FROM PRISON TO BEING EMPLOYED BY USER VOICE.

Eleazar's time with User Voice

My journey with User Voice has been incredibly meaningful, and it will always be a big part of my life. When I was first released from prison, I was trying to figure out how to rebuild my life and what direction I wanted to take. Being involved with User Voice allowed me to turn my lived experience into something positive and use it to help others.

Instead of letting my past simply be my past, User Voice gave me the chance to use it in a way that could make a difference. They placed me in spaces where my voice and my experiences could actually help people and contribute to improving the system. That meant a lot to me. It showed me that the things I had been through could have value and purpose.

One of the most important parts of my journey with User Voice was being trusted with real responsibility. I have had the opportunity to facilitate focus groups, listen to people inside the justice system speak openly about their experiences, and help bring those insights forward so they could be heard by the people who are in positions to make change.

Another highlight for me was working with young people through the Out of Court Resolutions project. Being able to speak with them and share my experiences allowed me to really connect with them. I understood where they were coming from because I was once in a similar position. My goal in those moments was to show them that the path they are on does not have to define their future.



User Voice is an organisation that truly uplifts the people it works with. They empower people with lived experience and give them opportunities to grow. I've seen this not only in my own journey but in others as well especially our fantastic lived experience volunteers who work alongside us in prisons and the community.

Throughout my time with User Voice, I also feel genuinely supported by the staff. There were moments in my life that were difficult, including losing family members, and the patience and understanding I have received during those times meant a lot to me. That level of support is something I will always remember.

WHAT PEOPLE IN PRISON HAVE SAID ABOUT USER VOICE



I felt really isolated and alone before being on the Council, I felt like no one believed in me because of my ADHD, Autism and self-harming but [the Project Lead] listened to me and her, me and the Council worked to create boundaries and things for me which have really helped me learn how to cope and work in groups. I feel like I am making huge changes for me and helping everyone else as well, it's the most positive thing in here to do because you get to make these big and small changes that affect everyone and learn about yourself too.

Prison Council Member



I've been at [Prison X] and [Prison Y] and know the Council aims to improve life for everyone in the prison system. It's good to know people are fighting your corner who've been to prison themselves so come from an understanding point of view.

Prisoner



My mental health was bad due to coming to prison but knowing I'm part of something that can bring change is a definite gamechanger for my mental health.

Prisoner



WHAT COMMISSIONERS AND PARTNERS SAY ABOUT WORKING WITH USER VOICE



Previous attempts at running a prison Council were less successful than the current one because a meeting can quickly turn into a moaning session. The independent facilitation of the weekly meetings [by User Voice] means this no longer happens and so I value working with prisoners a lot more now.

Prison Security Manager



User Voice should be everywhere, in every setting, commissioning is one setting, it should be everywhere... So if you're delivering a service and you have all these outcomes, using coproduction as an activity itself will deliver you better outcomes for the people. It can also be a pathway to paid work.

West Yorkshire
Combined Authority



[Prison Z] have always relied on input from the prison population, but we have found that [User Voice's] prison Council is our most reliable, sensible and constructive source of opinion.

Prison Director





FOREWORD

2025 has been a year of progress, challenge and renewed purpose for User Voice. As CEO and Chair of Trustees, we are immensely proud of what the organisation has achieved over the past 12 months, and of all our staff and volunteers who make this work possible.

Our Impact Report highlights the milestones we've achieved, the challenges we've overcome, and the lives we've touched through our collective efforts.

This year, we launched our new Strategic Plan, setting out our new strategic objectives and how we will continue to evolve and grow our crucial work. We also engaged with over 8,600 people across prisons and the community – a highly significant achievement for a charity of our size.

Our Prison Councils continue to bring staff and people in prison together for open, constructive dialogue on how conditions and services can be improved. 35 Prison Council proposals were accepted and implemented across the Sodexo prisons we work in, resulting in those prisons being safer, running more effectively, as well as improving healthcare.

We have also worked closely with NHS England gaining insights to reduce health inequalities for those in the prison system across London and the East and West Midlands. We have worked with HMIP conducting thematic inspections on Adults at Risk of Harm, and Out of Court Disposals, and with a range of academics on Police Drug Diversion Schemes, Parole and Court Fines.

We were also commissioned by the North London Forensic Collaborative to embed patient involvement across inpatient forensic services, and have been preparing to launch two new flagship programmes: The Bridge Hub, for people leaving prison and on probation to access a range of community volunteering opportunities, harnessing their desire to give back to their communities and The Siblings Project, working with young people with

experience of a sibling in prison to co create a toolkit to help many others navigate the stigma and isolation caused by this experience.

Central to doing all this vital work are the range of opportunities we also provide for people on their journeys through and out of the system, whether that's being a lived experience consultant running Prison Councils or doing focus groups and surveys with people in prison, as a volunteer doing research to reduce the health inequalities of those in prison, or as one of our Bridge Hub volunteer co leaders.

This demonstrates that we don't just improve the system; we also change lives too.

Our work is built squarely on collaboration, and we are therefore deeply thankful to the commissioners, policymakers, voluntary sector colleagues, prison and probation staff, and the many people with lived experience who work alongside us and shape what we do. We are also so grateful to our funders, trustees and partners for standing with us during a particularly challenging period for the charity sector. Above all, we want to thank our remarkable staff and volunteers. Their passion, insight and commitment to creating change are at the very heart of everything User Voice does.

Looking ahead, we remain utterly committed to deepening our impact and strengthening the sustainability of our organisation. And you can be a key part of that by collaborating with us, through partnerships, funding and advocating for us to be in every setting, because embedding lived experience is crucial to both creating and actioning equitable and truly effective justice.



Lucie Russell
CEO



Michael Barnett
Chair of Trustees

WHY WE ARE NEEDED

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

The criminal justice system is stuck in repeated cycles of crisis. Despite renewed political focus and some new investment – particularly in prisons and probation – it remains fragile and increasingly unable to deliver justice, safety or rehabilitation without deep reform.

KEY SYSTEM PRESSURES

Courts

Long-standing backlogs and delays affect both Crown and Magistrates' Courts.

Impact: victims wait longer, cases collapse and trust in justice is damaged.

Prisons

Overcrowding remains severe, with prisons operating close to capacity and early release schemes offering only short-term relief. Near-record prisoner numbers are driving rising violence, poorer safety, and limited access to healthcare, education and rehabilitation.

Impact: prisons prioritise containment over rehabilitation, worsening outcomes.

Probation

Probation is overstretched after years of high

Impact: delivery risks remain high, innovation is constrained and person-centred support is squeezed.

Funding

Funding focuses on crisis recovery rather than long-term repair. The voluntary sector faces shrinking funding pots, intense competition and short-term grants that make planning difficult. Full cost recovery is rarely achieved, meaning organisations deliver far more than they are funded for.

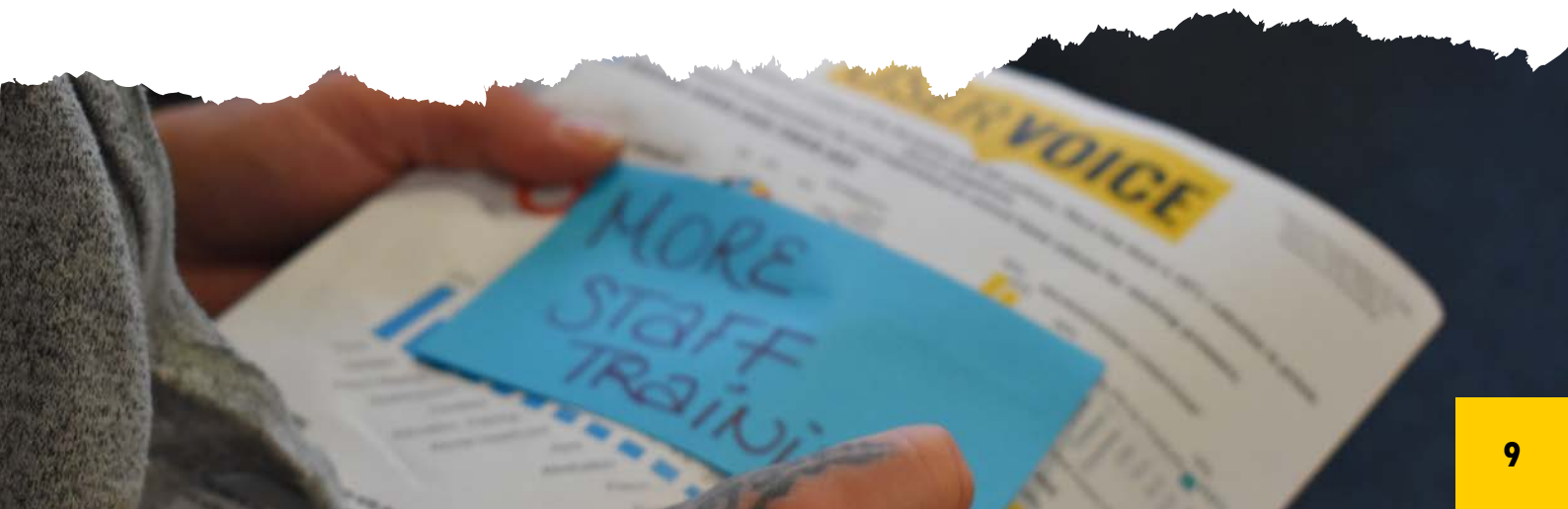
Impact: the system is being patched up, not rebuilt.

IMPACT ON PEOPLE

For people in the justice system, these failures mean lives on hold: long waits, unsafe prisons, overstretched probation and charities struggling to survive on short-term funding.

WHAT IS CHANGING?

The new Sentencing Act aims to ease pressure on prisons and strengthen probation, but its success depends on delivery, capacity and genuine investment in rehabilitation. The government has committed to additional investment, including new Commissioned Rehabilitative Services and more Probation Officers. There is also growing recognition of the value of lived experience, although barriers persist.



OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-28

Our strategy, co-created with our staff, volunteers and Trustees, sets out User Voice's purpose and direction for the next three years, grounded in its history and lived-experience-led approach.

It illustrates why systemic change in the justice system is urgently needed, and focuses on our three core priorities:

1. Inspiring people with convictions to play an active role in improving the justice system.
2. Supporting and developing lived experience leaders who help reshape prisons and probation.
3. Transforming criminal justice policy and practice through collaboration and influence to create a safer and fairer society.

The strategy also includes our refreshed values, our set of enablers and our ambitions covering what success will look like in three years' time.

Our Strategic Plan 2025-2028 was launched on 7th April 2025 hosted by EY with a panel discussion on 'People in Prison are Victims Too' featuring panel speakers:

Leroy Logan MBE: Former Metropolitan Police Superintendent, a founding member of the Black Police Association and its chairman

Dunia Shafik: Mother of a son serving a long prison sentence, who is also the founder of a Life of Choices, facilitating courses in prison, and an advocate for families of those in the justice system

Jacob Dunne: Author, facilitator, coach and presenter, delivering restorative interventions and training

Paula Harriot: CEO of Unlock, for people with criminal records, and lived experience leader

Dr Jamie Bennett: Research Associate at the University of Oxford and former prison governor



OUR AMBITIONS

12,000 PEOPLE

a year in the Justice system are **engaged and involved in how to improve it**, through our research, consultations and Prison Councils.

300 PEOPLE

with convictions a year **reshape prisons through our Prison Councils** and other leadership programmes, transforming their lives and their communities on release.

70%

of our **recommendations for improvements in the justice system will be actioned** by practitioners in criminal justice services including Prisons, Probation services, the Police and policy makers.



OUR APPROACH

We train our staff and volunteers to develop their skills and mindsets. They then act as the bridge between justice services and thousands of people in the system to co create solutions to improve it.

Our work includes:

- Advocacy through peer research to spotlight lived experience insights, including with NHS England Health and Justice, the Probation Inspectorate and a range of academic partners.
- Skilling up lived experience role models and leaders, who transform justice through Prison Councils and community-based programmes.

- Influencing policy and improving service delivery to create a safer society.

We currently work in 40 prisons across the North East, Midlands, South East and the North West engaging with around 1,000 people a month.

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

To effectively illustrate the breadth and depth of our work, this report is structured to convey the impact User Voice has had over the past year over each section of the Criminal Justice System. This ranges from Diversion, Police Custody, Courts and Sentencing, through to Prison, Probation, and Post Release.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE DIVERSION FROM THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Over the past year, User Voice has been commissioned to gain insights into the effectiveness of schemes designed to divert people away from the Criminal Justice System through early intervention support for drug and minor offences.

Evaluating Police Drug Diversion

As the lived experience partner in a national evaluation of Police Drug Diversion (PDD) schemes, User Voice ensured that the voices of people directly affected by diversion informed evidence used by policymakers and police leaders.

What we did:

- Following our peer-led interviews with 103 people diverted from the criminal justice system, we have continued this project generating robust insights into how PDD schemes are experienced in practice and what enables or undermines engagement.
- Findings identified concrete improvements to scheme delivery, including clearer police communication, reduced reliance on custody, and better support for neurodivergent people.

Impact: Our evaluation strengthened the case for diversion as a fairer and more effective response to low-level drug offences, while demonstrating that meaningful lived-experience involvement leads to more actionable, inclusive, and credible evidence for system reform.

This research will feature in an academic article due to be published in 2026, which identifies key benefits from involving peer researchers at all stages of the research process, including increasing the quantity and quality of data collected and the diversity and authenticity of its analysis.

Gaining Insight into Children and Young People's Experiences with Out of Court Disposals

Commissioned by HM Inspectorate of Probation, this project brought the voices of children and young people directly into national scrutiny of Out of Court Disposals (OoCD).

What we did:

- User Voice generated clear evidence that OoCDs are largely experienced positively, with 94% describing their experience as beneficial, while also identifying critical areas for improvement.
- The findings highlighted a significant gap in provision for neurodivergent children, who made up over half of participants, showing that standard materials and approaches often failed to meet their needs.

Impact: This research strengthened understanding of the wider adversities shaping young people's contact with the justice system, reinforcing the need for trauma informed, holistic responses rather than purely behavioural sanctions. These insights directly informed HMIP's service review and will shape future inspection and improvement activity across youth justice services.

Liaison and Diversion (L&D) Outreach - East Midlands

Focusing on services across the East Midlands, User Voice gathered evidence from staff and people using L&D, an often overlooked but critical part of the criminal justice system.

What we did:

- This work exemplified the crucial role of outreach in enabling people with complex needs to engage with health, social care, and justice services. Participants consistently reported reduced isolation and improved ability to access support as a direct result of outreach involvement.

Impact: The findings made a clear case for expanding outreach capacity, improving neurodiversity awareness and training, and strengthening communication about L&D services, providing practical recommendations to improve outcomes for some of the most marginalised people in contact with the justice system.

IMPROVING POLICE CUSTODY, PAROLE, COURTS AND SENTENCING

Researching the impact of the Court Fines System

Partnering with the Centre for Justice Innovation, User Voice ensured that lived experience directly shaped research into how court fines operate in practice and why the current system can deepen inequality.

What we did:

- Through accessible, peer-led focus groups in London and the Midlands, participants with lived experience highlighted how financial assessment processes, particularly use of the MC100 form, create significant barriers for people on low incomes, limiting their ability to provide accurate information and increasing stress and risk of non-payment.

Impact: The findings showed how complex procedures, lack of support and poor communication after fines are issued can escalate financial hardship and lead to further justice system involvement. This work provided concrete evidence of how the fines system can unintentionally disadvantage people already facing economic insecurity, and identified clear opportunities for reform, including more accessible assessment processes, improved communication and tailored support to ensure fines are fair, proportionate and achievable.

Gathering the experience of children in police custody

Working with King's College London and the University of Nottingham, User Voice ensured that children's lived experiences directly informed research into how a 'Child First' approach is experienced in police custody.

What we did:

- Insights from 18 children aged 14–18 with direct experience of arrest and detention revealed that child-centred practice is applied inconsistently and is often dependent

on individual officers rather than embedded systems. While some children reported feeling listened to and supported, many described fear, confusion, and distress, particularly during arrest and overnight detention, with basic needs and clear information not always provided. Parental presence significantly improved children's sense of safety, yet contact was frequently delayed.

Impact: The findings provide clear evidence that 'Child First' principles are not yet consistently realised in custody settings and highlight the need for more reliable safeguards, communication, and support to ensure children's rights and wellbeing are upheld in practice.

Facilitating the sharing of Peer Support/ Advice around Parole and Recall Hearings

Working with Sheffield Hallam University, User Voice amplified the voices of people with lived experience to improve understanding of how parole and recall hearings are experienced, including those conducted remotely by telephone or video link.

What we did:

- The research highlighted how remote hearings can affect participation, understanding, and perceived fairness, with language and communication playing a significant role in shaping outcomes compared with face-to-face hearings.

Impact: In response, User Voice co-produced a practical, lived-experience-led infographic resource for use in prisons, supporting people to prepare more effectively for parole and recall hearings. By translating research findings into accessible guidance, the project improved access to information, reduced uncertainty, and supported fairer engagement with release-critical decision-making processes.

KEY SPOTLIGHT: IMPROVING HEALTH

We have completed extensive research and engagements with people in prisons and the community over the past year to get insights into the reality of healthcare in prison and what solutions could be implemented.

While much of our commissioned work to support healthcare improvement was based across the West Midlands, East Midlands and London, many of our findings throughout the year provide insights relevant to prisons nationally.

East Midlands Lived Experience Panel

Working in partnership with NHS England in the East Midlands, User Voice embedded lived-experience insight directly into Health and Justice commissioning, procurement, and service evaluation. A dedicated Lived Experience Panel of 15 volunteers with recent experience of custody and/or Liaison and Diversion provided structured input to ensure services were informed by real experiences across the care pathway.



The input from our panel is invaluable for us to ensure we have the lived experience voice embedded throughout and is the golden thread. Having feedback from our patients enables us to ensure the services commissioned meet individual needs of our diverse patients as well as give us an on the ground insight into what our patient needs are. Lived experience feedback from our panels in supporting and ensuring the patient voice is at the heart and vital to our patient needs.

Mala Dhakk, Health Inequalities Manager and Lead for Lived Experience/ Patient Engagement



What we did:

- Through this work, User Voice supported Clinical Quality Care visits in multiple prisons, engaging with 10% of the population in each prison, and feeding patient insight into NHS evaluations of healthcare providers.
- We conducted research into cancer diagnosis in custody, which highlighted the need for clearer and more compassionate communication, improved privacy and dignity in healthcare settings, stronger emotional and mental health support, and better continuity of care during and after release.
- Further peer-led work shaped recommendations for older people and those with long-term conditions, identifying barriers to access, medication continuity, and involvement in care decisions, as well as improvements to short reception screening, particularly around mental health and neurodiversity.
- We also helped develop a patient engagement dashboard to integrate all the data collected, analyse engagement metrics and identify key themes.

Impact: Our work on the patient engagement dashboard has enabled us to uncover gaps in patient interaction, improve communication strategies and drive more targeted, bespoke and data-informed engagements.

Collectively, this programme improved the quality and relevance of commissioned services while creating meaningful development opportunities for people with lived experience, ensuring their insight translated into tangible system learning and service improvement.

West Midlands

Across the West Midlands, User Voice delivered a comprehensive programme of lived experience engagement to improve healthcare delivery across 12 prisons, embedding patient insight into commissioning, service evaluation and improvement.

What we did:

- Engagement with 546 patients and staff on vaccinations highlighted widespread gaps in information and understanding, leading to a “You Said, We Did” process with commissioners and heads of healthcare to implement practical improvements. Large-scale cancer care engagement with 947 people in custody and 57 healthcare staff revealed significant barriers to screening, diagnosis, continuity of care, and dignity, with findings presented to the West Midlands Cancer Alliance to inform service reform.
- Additional work on dementia service provision exposed critical gaps in staff awareness, training, and referral pathways, while Clinical Quality Care visits captured the experiences of 10% of prison populations to strengthen provider accountability and communication.
- Our research into long-acting buprenorphine treatment demonstrated ‘life changing’ transformative benefits for people experiencing opioid dependence, including improved wellbeing and prison safety, while highlighting the importance of inclusive, trauma-informed support and continuity of care on release.

Impact: Collectively, this programme ensured that lived experience directly shaped more equitable, effective, and responsive health services across the West Midlands prison estate.

London – Public Patient Voice (PPV)

Over the past year, User Voice has strengthened healthcare delivery across London prisons by embedding lived-experience insight into service design, commissioning, and training. This work has been driven by a team of trained PPV representatives, all with lived experience of the criminal justice system, ensuring that insight is grounded in real experiences.

What we did:

- Through peer led engagement with people in custody across multiple healthcare priorities, including nutrition, sickle cell care, mental health access, neurodiversity, continuity of care, and deaths in custody, this work generated system wide evidence on barriers to care and clear, actionable improvements.

Impact: Co-produced outputs, including training resources, digital mental health pathways, and emergency response materials, improved access to information and equipped both staff and people in custody with practical tools to safeguard health and wellbeing.

A key highlight was the development and review of a prison-based emergency response training film, which equipped individuals with knowledge of life-saving interventions such as CPR which is set to be accessible in all London Prisons in the near future.

Findings directly informed service planning, staff training, and commissioning decisions, contributing to renewed contracts, redesigned services, and improved responsiveness to complex and long-term health needs. By maintaining strong feedback loops with commissioners and providers, the programme ensured that lived experience translated into tangible change, improving equity, safety, and health outcomes across the London prison estate.



Over the past year, User Voice has made a significant and demonstrable impact through the effective use of lived experience. Their contribution has meaningfully informed both service design and delivery, ensuring that patient perspectives are embedded throughout decision making processes.

Through PPV onsite engagement and delivery, lived experience has provided more responsive, and person centred insight, while supporting our healthcare staff to better understand the needs, barriers, and priorities of the populations they serve. This has contributed to positive, practical changes that improve patient experience and support staff in delivering safer and more effective care. Overall, User Voice's work has strengthened co production, informed service improvement, and reinforced the value of lived experience as a core component of continuous improvement.

Ian Brown, PPV (Patient & Public Voice) Lead & PPV Commissioner



IMPROVING PRISONS AND FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH FACILITIES

North London Forensic Collective

Through our work with the North London Forensic Collaborative (NLFC), User Voice has supported a sustained shift towards embedding lived experience within forensic mental health governance, service design, and delivery.

What we did:

- By establishing and facilitating a Patient Council, the project created structured, consistent routes for service users to influence priorities and share insight across the pathway.
- We also worked with partners to strengthen governance arrangements, improving transparency, clarifying routes for service user input, and promoting more consistent approaches to co-production across organisations.

Impact: This work has supported the development and confidence of people in lived experience roles, enabling more informed and meaningful participation.

While embedding lived experience remains an ongoing process, the project has contributed to a more inclusive, responsive and joined-up approach across the NLFC, where service user voice is increasingly recognised as integral to decision-making and service improvement.



Prison Councils

100% of Council members we spoke to felt participating in the Council improved their mental health and wellbeing

97% of Council members we spoke to said that their relationships have changed while being on the Council (including prison staff/ other prisoners/ family and friends). They spoke about more engagement and trust with their peers and feeling more able to speak openly and frequently with prison staff.



There feels like there's more of a 'we can change things together' attitude than 'staff vs prisoner' which means there's better understanding between prisoners and staff.

Prison Custody Officer



The Council use their influence to help calm the environment which promotes good behaviours. They spend time demonstrating how sensible conversation trumps conflict and I think that's really important in this environment.

Prison Director



“

Being on the Council makes you want to do more, working with staff more and be part of the bigger picture more because it makes you positive.

Prison Council Member

”

“

We all used to be a bit "oh nothing will ever change" but now we're like "let's bring that up at the next meeting!" That's a big change.

Prison Council Member

”

User Voice's Prison Councils, delivered in partnership with Sodexo Justice, exemplify our commitment to coproducing meaningful, system level change with people in custody.

What we did

- In 2025, we gathered the voices of almost 5,000 prisoners through engagement and bespoke consultations across six prisons.
- These changes addressed key operational priorities including peer support, violence reduction, purposeful activity, and improved engagement with the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme. Alongside this, nine bespoke consultations informed service and practice improvements across areas such as education, trauma support, early days in custody, remand experiences, food, debt, and youth offender provision.

Impact: 39 prisoner led proposals were accepted and 35 implemented.

Collectively, the Prison Councils strengthened collaboration between staff and residents, ensured services were more responsive to lived experience, and delivered practical improvements that enhanced safety, wellbeing, and rehabilitative outcomes within the prison estate.

Our Prison Council initiatives have tangible impacts frequently recognised by Prison staff and residents:

“

Self-harm down by 50% so thank you to the EDIC [Early Days in Custody] members as their efforts contributed to this.

Prison Deputy Director

”

“

[Our biggest achievements included] the two-hour visits for Enhanced prisoners because it gave people a really good reason to become Enhanced...

Prison Head of Residence

”

“

Working directly with the Council to improve healthcare across the prison has been huge. By listening to women, we've identified why some don't attend appointments and can adapt services to make them more accessible and welcoming. This has reduced missed appointments and improved engagement. Creating healthcare forums has also been fantastic for giving women access to information. They encourage women to take charge of their health and improves their confidence in asking questions.

Prison Patient Engagement Lead

”

Prison Consultations

Assessment of Resettlement in a Women’s Prison

User Voice carried out a trauma-informed resettlement assessment in a women’s prison, bringing lived-experience insight into the barriers women face before, during and after release.

What we did

- Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, the work highlighted systemic gaps in housing, substance misuse support, family communication and domestic abuse provision that directly affect women’s ability to reintegrate successfully.



I just feel like they're waiting for you to ask for everything. They don't really come to you. Like, you need to be asking about everything.



- Participants identified the lack of suitable CAS-2 accommodation and limited options for women with no fixed address as major risks to safe release, alongside insufficient access to drug and alcohol support and unclear pathways to services on release. The findings also emphasised the importance of timely information-sharing with families and the need for more flexible, personalised domestic abuse support that reflects women’s differing experiences.



I go back on the street. Yes, I've got nowhere to go.



Impact: The assessment provided prisons and partner agencies with clear, evidence-based recommendations to strengthen resettlement planning, reduce the risk of homelessness and harm, and improve long-term outcomes for women leaving custody.

Health and Social Care Review

User Voice supported a women’s prison to strengthen its local health and social care delivery plan.

What we did

- Our work highlighted clear priorities for improving support, including greater access to outdoor space to promote mental health and wellbeing, expanded mental health provision beyond abuse related support, and improved training for staff and peer mentors to better understand neurodiversity and mental health needs.
- Residents also identified the need for more holistic substance misuse support beyond medication, including peer groups and education, and more detailed, personalised plans for pregnant women covering nutrition, mental health, parenting advice, and ongoing support.

Impact: This work ensured women’s voices directly informed service planning and improvement.

IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE OF PROBATION

The Experience of Vulnerable Adults on Probation

Commissioned as part of HM Inspectorate of Probation's 2025 thematic inspection, we undertook a study bringing lived experience insight into whether 'vulnerable adults at risk of harm' on probation felt safe, supported, and properly safeguarded.

What we did

- While many participants described positive relationships with individual probation practitioners, the findings exposed significant inconsistencies in practice, including gaps in pre-release planning, frequent changes of practitioner, and limited continuity of care. High levels of neurodivergence, mental ill health, housing insecurity, and concerns about safety in probation offices highlighted the complexity and overlap of vulnerabilities experienced by people under supervision.

Impact: The research challenged simplistic distinctions between 'victims' and 'perpetrators' and made a clear case for more trauma-informed, consistent probation practice.

Participants and peer researchers identified the need for stable practitioner relationships, safe and flexible access to services, stronger care and release planning, peer support, and a firm commitment to preventing homelessness on release, directly informing HMIP's assessment of safeguarding effectiveness.

We produced 7 peer-led solutions as part of the research, which went on to inform HMIP's Action Plan.



INFLUENCING POLICY AND COMMISSIONING ACROSS THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Partnerships

Influencing policy effectively requires effective and strategic collaboration. Partnerships are key to our mission, and we magnify our influencing capabilities through playing a key role in a range of partnerships. These include being on the Steering Group of the Better Justice Partnership, playing an active role in the Criminal Justice Alliance and Clinks as well as being a member of the National Women’s Justice Coalition.

WYCA Peer Commissioning Restorative Justice

Commissioned by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, User Voice established and facilitated a lived experience commissioning panel that directly shaped the design and procurement of a new restorative justice service across West Yorkshire.

What we did

- Over the course of a year, people with lived experience acted as Peer Commissioners, contributing directly to service specifications and the evaluation of bids, bringing critical insight into trauma, vulnerability, and system barriers.



The potential is there. We hope other authorities across the country will see the value of it and participate in it. With us doing the pilot they have the grounding. It can be beneficial for other regions.

**West Yorkshire
Combined Authority** ”



Impact: Their involvement strengthened the quality, credibility, and accountability of the commissioning process, increasing confidence among commissioners and providers and helping to ensure services are trusted, accessible, and responsive to need.

The project also delivered accredited training and tangible development opportunities for Peer Commissioners, demonstrating the value of lived experience as meaningful influence rather than consultation alone.

- 100% of the peer commissioners rated the training phase of the program as ‘Very Good’.
- By the end of the programme, 100% of participants rated their understanding of the peer commissioning and the commissioning process ‘Good’ or ‘Very Good’.

The work provides clear evidence that co design with those most affected by the justice system leads to safer, more effective restorative justice services with greater potential to reduce harm and reoffending.

Met Police Reference Group on Out of Court Resolutions (OoCR)

What we did

- User Voice is a member of the Metropolitan Police External Reference Group on Out of Court Resolutions (OoCRs). This work directly influences policy through the new two-tier framework.
- We incorporated lived-experience insight directly into discussions shaping how OoCRs are designed and used across London.

Impact: By drawing on system-wide experience of what supports or undermines engagement, the group informs more effective, fair, and proportionate use of out-of-court approaches.

This contribution supports the increased and improved use of OoCRs as a credible alternative to prosecution, helping to reduce reoffending, avoid unnecessary criminalisation, and build greater trust and accountability in community-based justice responses.



INNOVATION: NEW PROJECTS DEVELOPED THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS

The wealth of lived experience on our team gives us rich insights into the unmet needs of those in and around the criminal justice system, that have been previously overlooked. We have used these insights to work with funding partners to launch two new flagship innovation programmes, that address some of these gaps.

The Bridge Hub by User Voice

Co-created with people with convictions, The Bridge Hub is a unique resource we have developed for people leaving prison, kindly supported by City Bridge Foundation.

Background

- The project concept came from our own experience of doing something positive whilst in custody, and when released, not having the chance to continue doing this in the community.
- Working alongside prisons, probation and the voluntary sector, it will harness the desire of so many people in the justice system to give back to their communities through volunteering; providing structure, purpose, skills development and confidence building.
- The Hub will also offer a holistic and connected service by partnering with a range of support organisations across London.

Progress: We recruited a project lead, redecorated our office building, conducted safeguarding and risk assessments, developed communications materials and approach, mapped partners, and initiated a recruitment drive for Hub volunteers.

Voices from the Shadows:

The Siblings Project

This project seeks to address a critical and overlooked gap in support for siblings of people in prison aged 18-25—particularly those who are care-experienced, in care, or face other adverse experiences. Kindly supported by the Linder Foundation.

Background

- The siblings of people in prison often face profound emotional fallout, grief, guilt, anger, and isolation, yet receive no formal recognition or support. Many are at risk of being drawn into the justice system themselves, perpetuating cycles of harm and disadvantage.

Progress: We recruited a project lead who developed partner mapping, communications, recruitment strategies, and designed and developed training packages. We also brought in a sibling of someone serving a life sentence to support effective and authentic outreach.

MOVING FORWARD

Looking ahead, User Voice will continue to deepen and extend its impact across the justice system. In the coming year, we aim to reach 12,000 people and work in partnership with universities, voluntary sector organisations, public and private sector partners, and NHS England regions to deliver evidence led improvements. Planned activity includes producing 12 research reports for NHS England in London and the Midlands, leading two HM Inspectorate of Probation thematic inspections, delivering 12 consultations for Sodexo, and progressing commissioned research on parole hearings, diversion, resettlement, and domestic abuse.

Alongside this, we will continue to develop and embed key programmes as listed below.

- The Bridge Hub - volunteering and skills development opportunities for those leaving prison and on probation.
- Voices from the Shadows - supporting the young siblings of people in prison.
- NLFC - leading the development and implementation of co production in forensic in-patient services.

- Continuing our 6 Prison Councils with Sodexo (HMP Peterborough x2, HMP Northumberland, HMP YO1 Bronzefield, HMP Altcourse and HMP Forest Bank).
- Our NHS England Patient Public Voice work in London and the East and West Midlands.
- Continuing our Police Drug Diversion study funded by the Cabinet Office in partnership with Kent University, Sheffield University, and The College of Policing.
- Undertaking an NIHR-funded project in partnership with the University of Sheffield examining the support available to women with experiences of domestic abuse following release from prison.

Internally, our focus remains on delivering our Operational Plan to a high standard, strengthening how we demonstrate impact, identifying new opportunities for innovation and collaboration, supporting staff and leadership, growing diversified income and ensuring that lived experience insight leads to meaningful and sustained system change.

If you want to find out more about our vital work or want to work alongside us, we would love to hear from you. Please contact info@uservice.org.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Everyone at User Voice would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated partners for their unwavering support throughout the year. Your contributions have been instrumental in advancing our mission; giving a voice to marginalised communities in the criminal justice system. Thank you for your commitment and partnership in driving positive change.






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