



Ministry  
of Justice

# Improving parental engagement

Considerations for practitioners and policy officials on empowering and meeting the needs of parents of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children in the Youth Justice System

**Youth Justice Policy Unit**

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## **Third-sector organisations:**

- Race Equality Foundation
- Barnardo's: Believe in Children
- Partners of Prisoners
- Break4Change
- Safe Ground
- Who's in Charge

## **Local government and Youth Offending Teams:**

- Southwark Council
- Sutton Integrated Youth Service
- Barnsley Youth Offending Team

## **Executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies:**

- Youth Justice Board
- Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Services
- Youth Custody Service

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## Introduction and objective

In his 2017 independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System (CJS), David Lammy MP was keen to draw on the importance of having appropriate support and accountability for parents of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) children in the Youth Justice System (YJS). Lammy suggested that the system had given up on parents and wasn't fully realising the impact that responsible adults, including parents and carers, could have on assisting BAME children in turning their lives around and moving past their previous behaviour, particularly in the wider context of the youth court and community involvement.<sup>1</sup> The importance of considering the role of parents and wider family, including siblings and close relatives, in engaging and rehabilitating children who offend is also supported by broader evidence, both from within and outside England and Wales.<sup>2</sup>

The overarching aim of the Youth Justice Policy Unit, in producing this document, is to present feedback received on the understanding and participation of parents of BAME children, and to suggest what might work to better empower them to become enablers in their child's rehabilitation. It is not to present a comprehensive summary of views in this area, indeed, it is important to note that the feedback received may not generalise to the wider population. Therefore, care must be taken when trying to draw conclusions from the feedback received. As well as engaging with parents themselves, through focus groups, in preparing this document, the MoJ engaged with voluntary sector organisations and youth justice practitioners, each of whom work with a focus on the justice system, youth offending or familial interventions. We have considered the child's journey throughout the YJS, from the first point of contact with the police and youth offending teams (YOTs), through to resettlement and leaving the system. As such, this document proposes broader points for consideration, as well as more focused suggestions for certain stages and processes within the YJS.

A number of comments need to be made with regards to some of the terminology used in this document. The term 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic', abbreviated as 'BAME', is an umbrella term used to refer to different races and ethnicities. We understand that this term leaves little room for individuality or distinction, and are aware of its limitations. This term is used for consistency and ease of reference only, and we intend the most inclusive meaning in terms of the range of people of different races and ethnicities signified by 'BAME'. We recognise that there is huge diversity within this term, the 'ethnic minority' category, and in preferences on language, and that the individuals and groups captured by this term will have different needs, concerns and experiences. Another term we use in a broader sense is the term 'parents'. Whilst references to 'parents' are made throughout the document, the term is used to also include the legal guardian or carer of a child, and the points made apply, in most cases, equally to legal guardians and carers.

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<sup>1</sup> David Lammy, 'The Lammy Review: An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System', 2017, pp. 6, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Justice, 'What works in managing young people who offend? A summary of the international evidence', 2016.

There are three aims listed in this document, each of which have been identified through engagement with parents, practitioners and third-sector organisations. These fall under the broader, overarching aim of understanding the experiences of parents with a BAME child in the YJS, and any specific needs they might have, in order to increase their participation and understanding. The three aims are:

1. To acknowledge and address the potential **for a multi-generational lack of trust in the CJS within BAME families**, through the promotion of transparency and concentrated engagement.
2. To understand the value of, and to develop, **closer partnerships with peer and community organisations** in supporting parents with a BAME child in the YJS.
3. To ensure that parents can access **appropriate resources to understand and navigate the system**, to facilitate and encourage them to support their child and to challenge the decisions and actions of their child, where necessary.

There is a degree of overlap between the aims listed above and there are a number of cross-cutting themes. These themes have also been identified through discussions with parents, practitioners and key stakeholders, and include: the importance of improving communication with parents, having empathetic professionals that BAME children and their parents could identify with, delivering individualised support, and embracing whole-family approaches. These themes appear throughout this document and often form the basis of suggestions for improvement.

Feedback indicates that lack of trust in the system can be a multi-generational issue, and that trust deficits could potentially be passed down within families. Stakeholders were clear that parental involvement throughout the system should not be tokenistic, and that the role of the parent as a guide, influencer, and vehicle for rehabilitation should be recognised and enabled by criminal justice agencies. Whilst some of the findings of this report apply equally to all families, others are specific to BAME families, and it is important for practitioners to note and act in response to additional, or simply different, concerns or needs that BAME families specifically might have. Furthermore, considerations regarding the wider family and community context, including the role of siblings and other close relatives, should also be made when supporting BAME children in the YJS. This echoes the argument made for parental engagement, and wider community involvement, put forward by David Lammy.

This document can be used flexibly, as a prompt for operational staff, policy officials, and other criminal justice agencies. It can support, both current and future, policy and working practices. We encourage agencies to consider this document as an assurance tool to better understand the concerns/needs of parents with a BAME child in the YJS. This report is developed as an output for a policy project by YJPU and in no way places commitments or raises obligations on the part of YJPU or MoJ to implement its findings. It is intended to be a reference tool which can inform and assist various stakeholders in undertaking their respective roles.

## **1. To acknowledge and address the potential for a multi-generational lack of trust in the Criminal Justice System within BAME families, through the promotion of transparency and concentrated engagement.**

Feedback from parents and third-sector groups predominantly focused on the fact that many BAME families may not trust that their child will be treated fairly or safely within the YJS, which reduces the chances of them wanting to engage with the system. This was attributed to various factors, including:

- statistics and recent trends on BAME overrepresentation and outcomes in the YJS;
- heightened media interest and reporting on disproportionality across the CJS, and concerns that negative media portrayals of BAME children in the YJS perpetuate stereotypes about BAME communities;
- a fear that a parent's concerns will not be listened to/taken seriously due to their ethnicity;
- parents' own negative experiences (or the negative experiences of friends/family) with authorities and/or with the CJS; and
- a parent's personal experiences and needs (e.g. economic situation, being a single parent, mental health illness).

Whilst some of these concerns can characterise the experiences of all parents with a child in the YJS, feedback noted that they might be more strongly felt within BAME families.

It has been suggested by practitioners that, as a result, the families of BAME children are more likely to reject formal services and instead look inwards for support, to family and close friends. Whilst looking inwards for support can help parents avoid isolation, this can often result in families not receiving appropriate or correct advice and resources before, during, and after their child's journey through the YJS. Looking inwards to the family, for support, direction and legal services, is not the same as families who refer themselves to non-statutory and independent community services. Anecdotal feedback from stakeholders suggests that such services are generally a good source of support and provide an independent and transparent view to both the child and their families.

Whilst some parents successfully engage with formal or community support services to understand their and their child's rights, as well as the journey of their child in the YJS, others feel isolated when finding out that their child entered the YJS, and find it difficult to identify the services that could support them. Parents who preferred to turn to family and friends for advice did so either because it was not clear to them what type of service they needed to access, or because they felt that the services they had already engaged with, either part of or outside the CJS (for e.g. schools, mental health services), were not able to provide them with individualised support, relevant to their child's needs. This could also potentially be an indication of parents feeling that professionals could not relate to their BAME child.

Feedback from one charity noted that informal early intervention, particularly within some BAME families, tends to use pastoral or family networks (i.e. sending the child to live with relatives as a form of prevention and/or protection) as opposed to external agencies, who may be more effective in certain cases due to the training they receive and the contacts they can employ to assist in a case. It is important to note, however, that whilst some families turn towards their communities and families, others prefer to turn towards their closest relatives only, due to feelings of 'shame' and stigma associated with having a child in the YJS within their communities. Another organisation suggested that, before a child reaches the YJS, parents tend not to get involved with formal services and agencies until a 'dire' situation arises. By this time, it can often be the case that it is 'too late' - the child has already come into the YJS and/or has been a victim of an offence.

This lack of engagement with formal services before a child formally enters the YJS was, again, largely put down to negative connotations, feelings of 'shame', or previous negative experiences with authorities and/or the CJS. Although this is an issue which can apply equally to any family, anecdotal evidence from some practitioners suggests that such sentiments are more likely to be felt in BAME communities.

As a result of the apparent lack of outreach to effectively engage communities with an entrenched distrust of the CJS, a wariness to engage with formal criminal justice agencies is highly likely to be carried over in the community and through generations. We need to acknowledge the potential multi-generational lack of trust, in order to formulate what must be done to build trust and meaningful expectations of what services can deliver in BAME communities. In trying to improve parental engagement, we need to step back and try to understand parents' needs, but also fears, within the local community and wider societal context. In doing so, we could potentially impact on parental engagement and patterns of offending, through the creation of trusting channels of communication and meaningful support.

### **What might work?**

- When considering early intervention, it must be recognised that many issues start well before a child comes into contact with the police or a YOT. For example, a child's first experience of authority (outside of the family dynamic) is often within the education system. As such, some third-sector groups were keen to highlight the link between negative experiences with school authorities, and an unwillingness to engage with criminal justice practitioners later in life. This suggests that consideration should be given to extending preventative and intervention-based programmes into pre-arrest avenues.
- It was suggested that educating parents about their and their child's rights, as part of targeted interventions (e.g. flyers, information materials, workshops or parental programmes) delivered in schools, health fora or in the community, has the potential to impact on the experience of parents and children in the YJS, and on preventing children from entering the YJS in the first place.

- Where interventions are delivered in schools, professionals should avoid creating an unwelcoming context which stigmatises BAME children and parents, and should consider the extent to which children and parents from BAME communities are comfortable with engaging in these interventions. Some BAME parents suggested that they would be more likely to engage with interventions that are delivered in the community, rather than schools.
- The Ministry of Justice has recently undertaken a project on BAME children's experiences and engagement in police custody, including the reasons for declining to comment in police interviews. The findings also highlighted the need to educate children and their parents on the arrest process and their rights. Factors such as: community experiences, media, youth culture, can have an impact on perception. Education can help to eliminate any existing misconceptions and improve how families trust the police decisions.
- Many stakeholders were clear that, should a child have negative experiences during their education, which was considered more likely to be the case for BAME children, a trust deficit for authority figures can easily be carried forward into the YJS. An assumption could be made here that these feelings of distrust and disenfranchisement may not just be limited to the YJS, but extend to other aspects of life and authority. To counter this, professionals across the board should be empathetic towards both parents' and children's needs, being realistic about the support that they can and cannot offer and making this clear to both parents and children.
- There are already processes in place for education providers to refer children who are at risk, or are presenting difficult behaviour, to support services. However, feedback noted that a lack of funding can prevent these referrals from taking place. If support services could ensure that the support they offer is in response to the specific needs of the child, we may see families who are more comfortable to engage with them. Where education providers do not have the resources to offer specific support to the family, efforts should be made to refer families to other relevant, available services and/or resources. For instance, the Troubled Families Programme successfully operates in this preventative space. If a child's family requires support, practitioners should speak to their local Troubled Families Coordinator, so that support can be coordinated and built on trusted relationships.
- Parents of BAME children in the YJS also mentioned that negative experiences within educational settings (e.g. fixed or permanent exclusions) make it harder for them to access services that can provide the support their children need. Practitioners should, therefore, consider the obstacles that parents might face in engaging with the services they provide and proactively seek to engage and signpost parents to appropriate support.
- Trust in the police was reported as low by the parents of BAME children with whom we spoke, with some reporting negative experiences during stop & search instances and

arrests. Some parents felt that negative experiences with the police (e.g. being stopped and searched regularly) can have a knock-on impact on a child's likelihood to enter the YJS and their experience once in the system.

- If trust within BAME communities is to be built, all agencies involved in the early stages of entering the YJS need to ensure that BAME children and parents are treated fairly, with respect and are not being stereotyped or stigmatised. Parents highlighted the need for empathetic law enforcement professionals, who understand the potential overlap between a child as a victim and as an offender, and listen to and carefully consider the difficulties that some parents might experience (e.g. having one or more children with special education needs).
- The Ministry of Justice 'Experiences in Police Custody' project revealed similar findings. It found that many police officers are not trained to work with young people and may struggle to see them as children. They may misinterpret young people's behaviours and responses. The project recommended further training to better understand diverse young people's needs, including racial, ethnic and cultural aspects.
- In the context of multi-generational trust, it is important to consider broader issues on safety and the reputation of the YJS. Feedback has indicated that widely reported issues on safety in the youth estate have led to growing concerns amongst parents. It may be that more can be done in the sector to improve transparency and to effectively communicate the work being done to improve safety and the experiences of children, particularly BAME children. YOT workers provide the link between parents and their child in custody, and are encouraged to effectively communicate with parents about their child's experience in custody, including regarding concerns about their safety. YOT workers should also invite parents along to review meetings, to encourage them to maintain a consistent, positive relationship with their child whilst in custody.
- It is vital that, across criminal justice agencies, policy leads are ensuring that future work and operational procedures consider parental engagement. Reassurance that safety is a priority across the YJS and championing the work that is being done will change the outward face of the YJS from a system that, for some, is not transparent enough (especially with regard to the treatment of BAME children), to a system that is open about the issues it faces and can relay what is being done to combat them. It is also essential to ensure that the local needs of parents and children inform the ways in which youth justice professionals address increasing the transparency of the system.
- While it is important to ensure that the YJS does not discriminate on the basis of race and ethnicity once a child enters the system, the feedback noted in this section raises the additional issue of entry into the YJS. To increase familial and third-party confidence and trust in the YJS and its interventions, there should be an understanding of upstream drivers and pre-arrest interventions that could prevent distrust in, or even entry into, the YJS. Holding services to account, in their engagement with children and their families, and how they divert them, is important in this context.

## **2. To understand the value of, and to develop, closer partnerships with peer and community organisations in supporting parents with a BAME child in the YJS.**

As noted above, personal barriers, negative connotations and negative experiences with authorities can deter parents from seeking advice from criminal justice agencies and formal facilitators. This can be more pronounced for BAME parents, or parents with a BAME child in the YJS. In some cases, it can discourage families from engaging with organisations they have been put in touch with, or who they may have had previous interactions with.

General feedback was that parental support programmes, whatever their format, are often useful and can initiate important conversations within families. However, the same stakeholders recognised that some intervention programmes are relatively structured and formal, which may not be appropriate for all parents, especially those who have had negative experiences with authorities in the past. Anecdotal evidence showed that some parents who have already undertaken such a programme, either voluntarily or as part of a court-imposed order, may be reluctant to complete one again. Given the suggestion that parents of BAME children may not approach external agencies for support, especially where they have had a negative experience with such organisations, or know someone who has, this may explain the anecdotal trends for parents being more likely to look inwards for support.

Both parents and other stakeholders acknowledged, therefore, that child-focused, tailored support, that takes into account a child's background, of which parents, siblings and close relatives are an important part, is essential. Where formal, structured parenting programmes resulted in positive engagement from parents, they were focused on empowering them and involved well-trained, empathetic practitioners, able to highlight how the general advice could be tailored to individual circumstances.

Feedback from third-sector organisations suggests that getting parents to take small steps and gradually commit to a programme, rather than asking them to fully commit to an intensive programme from the beginning, could also help with gaining their trust and ensuring that they receive support that is helpful to them. Where resources allow it, feedback suggests that having the option to attend one-to-one sessions, as well as group sessions, could also help with building trusted relationships and identifying parents' and children's specific needs.

Stakeholders were clear that parents with a child in the YJS often value the shared support and experiences of those who have been on the same journey, and knowing that they are not alone. Much emphasis was placed on the positive impact and weight given to 'community champions' – these being individuals who are highly regarded and well-known members of the local community, with whom parents feel they can identify and form a closer affiliation than they might do with formal practitioners. Feedback noted that parents are more likely to engage with grassroots services led by such figures. This was particularly in the

case of BAME families who may be sceptical of the CJS and their, or their child's, welfare and best interests on entering any formal parenting or prevention programme. This was also in line with feedback received from third-sector organisations who mentioned that parenting programmes delivered through local NGOs, or services who already have the trust of the community, appeared to be more effective in engaging BAME parents and parents of BAME children. As such, it is important to be aware that 'community champions' and services close to the community can provide gateways to delivering support to parents and children.

When considering the importance of community relations and local figures, it is also pertinent to consider the stigma that may come with having a child in the YJS and its associated sensitivities (e.g. parents feeling judged as 'bad parents'). While all cultures will likely have some form of stigmatisation around entry to the justice system, feedback suggests that the 'shame' attached to this may be experienced on a higher scale by some BAME families, possibly because it adds on top of existing disadvantages or due to cultural considerations. Feedback also suggests that the work done by formal agencies may not effectively reach out to such communities or consider the vast cultural differences within the wider BAME cohort, with some formal practitioners not recognising or not being trained to address this stigma through their interventions. There is a further risk that this unintended oversight may be mirrored through other formal interventions, beyond the CJS, such as educational or mental health programmes.

### **What might work?**

- Work to increase partnership working with community and grassroots organisations can boil down to simplifying the 'layers' of professionals that parents will encounter in navigating the system and asking for help. In order to reach out to BAME parents in communities, a more transparent and contextualised approach should be adopted to improving trust.
- Stakeholders suggested that facilitating whole-family, strengths-based discussions, that consider the circumstances of the child in the family and community context, rather than offence-focused conversations, that look at issues in isolation, can help build trust and create a more open forum for discussion and advice. Stakeholders suggested that this type of discussions can have a positive impact not only on the child entering the YJS and their parents, but also on their siblings and other close relatives, and therefore considering the needs of the family as a whole is crucial.
- Practitioners have also strongly advised engaging both parents, where possible and where other considerations (e.g. domestic abuse cases) allow it, through offering forums for discussion for both mixed groups of parents and for mothers/fathers only. Stakeholders mentioned that this advice also applies to courts, who should seek to engage both parents, where appropriate, and involve them in their child's journey in the YJS. In such cases, YOTs can advise courts on whether it is appropriate for both parents to be engaged, signalling any potential issues. Feedback from one YOT suggested that where criminal justice agencies fail to engage one of the parents, usually the father, the

parent left out sometimes refuses to further participate in and support the rehabilitation process.

- Practical considerations, such as making services available at hours that suit working parents, could also be a vehicle through which parents can be encouraged to seek support. Employers can take steps to be supportive of parents whose children enter the YJS, for instance by offering special leave for parents to attend court hearings.
- Feedback suggested that more could be done to ‘de-mystify’ the YJS and its stages. An example of seeking to ‘de-mystify’ the system comes from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). The CPS undertakes work with children and young people to increase their awareness of the CJS and the role of the CPS. This activity is organised and undertaken by local area Inclusion and Community Engagement Managers, who are based in all 14 CPS areas. It includes: going into schools and colleges to talk about the role of the CPS and how they prosecute hate and other crimes, as well as offering work experience opportunities. It also includes designing resources that can be used by parents and young people to understand the CJS. For instance, the CPS worked with Basis Boys, a Leeds-based organisation supporting boys who have experienced exploitation, to design resources that make the process from arrest to going through court easier to understand for children and young people.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that some parents of BAME children found navigating the higher-level courts more difficult than the youth courts, which supports the need to simplify and clarify procedures across the court system. Enabling clear, simple communication for both parents and children through text messaging, video calling or online material to maximise engagement and understanding is a key theme that has emerged from this work.
- Aiming to have a representative workforce, and BAME professionals who might be able to engage more easily with BAME communities, was also flagged by third-sector organisations as a way of increasing parental engagement. This was particularly mentioned in the context of the workforce in courts. However, overall, this was seen as less important than having empathetic, well-trained and culturally-aware professionals, who proactively seek to engage with these communities.
- It is important to note that some organisations have flagged concerns surrounding the effectiveness of one-off cultural awareness training, which was thought to lead to more bias against certain communities. Therefore, criminal justice agencies and other organisations, should seek to train professionals carefully and consistently, ensuring they are equipped with the right skills to effectively engage parents of BAME children.
- Issues of trust and simplifying the system could also be remedied, in part, by taking on the feedback of local communities and visibly working with local parents to make sure services are tailored to the needs of the community, and those parents who are using it. Parents were critical of services who do not consider the individual needs of the family

and simply provide standard advice, which is usually underpinned by certain assumptions, positive or negative, about the families that receive it. One way of taking on board this type of feedback could be through the introduction of parent and community user groups (see, for example, user groups that sometimes operate within the youth court), with a focus to include BAME representatives of local communities, relevant to the specific demographics and cohorts of the local areas the body is seeking to serve.

- To give an example of the above in practice, a YOT in an area with BAME communities might seek the opinions of parents from that community, who have come into contact with the system, and what went well/could be improved in their own experience. This approach could be paralleled with Lammy's recommendation on referral order panels, encouraging certain communities to participate and diversify the panels.<sup>3</sup>
- Criminal justice agencies should also consider how well their interventions are tailored to the specific needs of those involved. Although not specific to the engagement of BAME communities, the general principle of innovative and tailored support is considered in the YJB's "[How to Make Resettlement Constructive](#)" guidance, which places at its core the idea of enabling the child to move ahead through both individualised personal support and personalised structural support.<sup>4</sup> Although the guidance was written with children leaving custody in mind, its principles can be mirrored in engagement practices for parents and families across the YJS.

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<sup>3</sup> David Lammy, 'The Lammy Review', 2017, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Youth Justice Board, 'How to Make Resettlement Constructive', 2018.

### **3. Ensuring that parents can access appropriate resources to understand and navigate the system, to facilitate and encourage them to support their child and challenge their decisions, where necessary.**

Feedback raised concerns that there may be instances where parents have limited opportunities to participate fully during their child's journey through the system, or to support their child during formal proceedings. This was predominantly raised with regards to courts and the youth estate, but feedback suggested that YOTs also vary in the emphasis they place on engagement with parents. As children are considered the key subjects of any process in the YJS, some feedback noted that not enough effort is being made to explain the system to parents or to allow sufficient inroads for parents to play a more engaged role in proceedings.

For example, where parents are not available to attend court with their child, there are few alternative avenues by which they can still play a role in proceedings and have their views heard. Good defence lawyers will request parental letters to be written and read in court, in parents' absence, with the absence explained. In most cases, when compiling the pre-sentence report (PSR), the YOT worker should have a discussion with the parents/carer, during which parents' attendance in court could be confirmed. Where this is not possible, YOT workers should consider requesting written statements from parents to include in the PSR or to be read in court. Home visits should also be conducted on a regular basis to involve parents and provide feedback on progress and discuss behaviour at home. Other Orders, such as Referral Orders, have Panel reviews which include parents. However, outside of these occasions, the availability of input may depend on a range of factors, including the solicitor involved and the parents' involvement in their child's journey through the criminal justice process to date.

Where parents are not fully present in the child's life, social workers can be a pillar of support and guidance in the process, and should play a role in proceedings. However, anecdotal evidence from Charlie Taylor's "Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales" (2016) suggests that social workers are not always attending court for under-16s.<sup>5</sup> Taylor recommended that court summons should make clear that both parents are expected to attend court hearings, unless there are specific reasons in relation to the child's welfare why they should not, and looked-after children should always be accompanied by their carer or social worker.<sup>6</sup> Corresponding evidence from practitioners and Magistrates noted that some social workers who do attend do not know the child, or their file, in any detail.

In considering the engagement itself, where parents do not speak English or for whom English is not the first language, have learning difficulties or disabilities, or poor literacy, YOTs will make home visits as part of the PSR process and engage with parents either through an interpreter or with information available in other languages or in an accessible format. However, this is only possible once the child has been convicted. Interpreters should be made available for defendants during hearings/judgments in criminal proceedings, in the

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<sup>5</sup> Charlie Taylor, 'Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales', 2016, p 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p 52.

interest of justice. For parents, there is no obligation to provide interpretative assistance, or indeed there is no obligation for a child to translate for their parents. Anecdotal feedback has suggested that there have been incidents of children having to translate for their parents during court proceedings, and it is advised that such situations are avoided.

Some of the issues raised above have been mirrored in the context of the custodial estate. One charity explained that having a 'named personal officer' within custodial establishments, for some parents is generally not very helpful. Feedback from stakeholders suggested that many parents rarely know who this person is, or how they are supposed to contact them. This is consistent with feedback we have received from boys at one YOI, through ongoing work with MoJ Digital, and their own experiences with 'named personal officers'. As such, in developing the Custody Support Plan (CuSP) approach for children, which seeks to provide every child with an allocated CuSP officer, the Youth Custody Service (YCS) have sought to build personal officer work into the profile of operational staff, to ensure that all sites have additional required staff to deliver CuSP. The role of the CuSP is to work with the child on a weekly basis to build trust and consistency. Once CuSP is fully rolled-out, all children in HMPPS YCS should know who these officers are and should be meeting them on a weekly basis. One charity mentioned that consideration should be given by operational staff to providing cover for instances when the CuSP officer might not be available, to ensure consistency in the support that parents and children receive and to build trust.

### **What might work?**

- To fully involve parents in procedural events throughout the YJS, we should be giving them every possible opportunity to have their say, whether they are supporting or challenging the actions of their child - for example, by ensuring that courts are fully considering parental statements where a parent is unable to attend in person (and are not required to attend by law, as it is usually mandated when a child is under-16). This could also come through closer partnership between courts and YOTs. In considering courts, policy-makers should also give full consideration to the impact that video links in court may have on parental engagement and accessibility, through a combination of evidence-based policy development and operational investigations into the needs of local communities.
- Feedback from some parents suggested that support from YOTs could be critical in improving their experience and engagement whilst their child goes through the YJS. Positive feedback focused on YOTs regularly engaging with parents through various means of communication, including home visits, and providing them with advice in a clear, comprehensive language. Negative feedback highlighted YOTs not maintaining contact or consistent communication with the parents, or providing parents with advice that was not tailored to their needs. YOTs are encouraged to learn from each other's practices and from parental programmes delivered by other organisations, which have been proved to have a positive impact. Best practice is shared by the YJB through the [YJB Resource Hub](#). YOT workers and managers are also encouraged to proactively engage parents in drafting the PSR, considering their and their child's individual needs.

- Feedback from parents has also highlighted the importance of criminal justice agencies, including YOTs, making it clear to parents what information is being recorded about their child, how it is stored and how it can be accessed. YOTs should share PSRs with parents as early as possible, to ensure that parents understand the information that was included in the report. They should also discuss the outcome, after sentence, with the child and the parents, to ensure understanding and organise initial appointments. Aspects regarding data recording, sharing and access to children's files/records should be discussed with the child and the parents during these initial appointments.
- Most YOTs and parents consulted have not had experiences of parenting orders and data confirms that these are not widely used.<sup>7</sup> YOTs noted that they prefer to use voluntary parenting programmes, as they usually lead to greater compliance and more positive engagement from parents. Parents themselves were critical of the concept of parenting orders, mentioning that they could place an additional, sometimes unnecessary, burden on them, without directly impacting on the child's behaviour. Moreover, feedback from some stakeholders suggested that the breach of a parenting order, leading usually to fines, is not always effective in shaping the parents' behaviour. Nevertheless, feedback from one YOT suggested that parenting orders could have a positive impact, when they manage to create regular engagement from parents, and are used as a motivator, rather than a punishment tool. As with other parenting programmes, where parenting orders are used, they should consider the role of both parents, and not just the role of the mother/father only.
- Feedback suggests that one way of simplifying the process of moving through the YJS, potentially enhancing the channels of communication open to parents and their confidence to engage with the system, would be to consider the resources that are currently offered to parents when their child enters the custodial estate. This is particularly in regard to information on personal officers and other introductory information that parents receive. We envisage that the CuSP approach of the YCS will go some way in reaching this. Clinks have recently published a briefing on effective communication with families for staff in prisons. Although the briefing focuses on adults in custody, some of the principles mentioned, such as incorporating considerations regarding families in decision-making, equally apply to children, families and staff in the youth custodial estate.<sup>8</sup>
- More generally, there is no obligation (in most cases) for interpreters to be made available to parents. It could be beneficial for parents whose first language is not English if practitioners, from both formal agencies and third-sector organisations, across the CJS did more to signpost families to translation and interpretative services, paid or unpaid, that could assist in the translation of documents and proceedings.

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<sup>7</sup> Youth Justice Board / Ministry of Justice, 'Youth Justice statistics 2015/16 England and Wales', 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Clinks, 'Think Family briefing 1: Effective communication with families', 2019.