

**ANOTHER CHANCE
– INSIGHTS FROM
CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
EXPERIENCE OF OUT
OF COURT DISPOSALS
A **THEMATIC** INSPECTION**

SEPTEMBER 2025

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FOREWORD

This report presents a powerful and deeply human insight into the experiences of young people who have received Out of Court Disposals (OoCDs). Commissioned by HM Inspectorate of Probation and conducted by User Voice, a charity led by people with lived experience, this research is unique in its peer-led approach. It places the voices of young people at the heart of the findings, offering a rare and authentic perspective on how OoCDs are experienced, understood, and valued by those directly affected.

An overwhelming 94% of children and young people described their OoCD experience as positive, and all participants reported a strong, supportive relationship with their Youth Justice Service (YJS) worker. These relationships were often described as transformative, with YYS workers praised for their empathy, consistency, and ability to connect on a personal level. Many children and young people credited their YYS worker with helping them reflect, grow, and ultimately avoid further involvement in crime.

However, the report also highlights areas for improvement. While most young people believed they understood their OoCD, interviews revealed confusion and gaps in understanding. This disconnection suggests a need for clearer communication and more accessible information about their OoCD, particularly for those with neurodiverse conditions. 56% of participants identified as neurodivergent, and many reported that standard programme materials and activities were not adapted to their needs. This is a critical insight, one that calls for more inclusive and flexible approaches to engagement and support.

This report is also extremely timely and important because it sheds light on the broader context of these young people's lives. Many have faced significant adversity, including poverty, poor school attendance, exclusion, unstable home environments, mental health challenges, and abuse. These early life

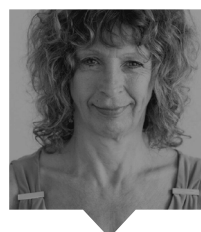
experiences often intersect with their offending behaviour, underscoring the importance of holistic, trauma-informed support.

For children and young people impacted by these adverse experiences diversion away from the Criminal Justice System is key, because receiving a conviction at a young age is a major barrier to effective rehabilitation. It is also a trajectory that can often propel them into further criminal activity. OoCD's are therefore a really welcome antidote to this, and their focus on tackling the route causes of children and young people's offending is pivotal in creating more meaningful and effective transformative change.

Encouragingly, most children and young people felt that their OoCD had helped them "stay out of trouble" and offered them a second chance. They spoke of improved mental health, better family relationships, and a renewed sense of purpose. Yet, they also expressed a desire for more tailored support, both during and after their OoCD.

The children and young people's solutions to improve the OoCD process included consistent staffing, age-appropriate resources, and extended support beyond the formal end of the OoCD process.

We are truly grateful to the children and young people who shared their experiences with honesty and courage, and to our peer researchers who ensured those experiences were heard. Their insights are extremely valuable, and it's vital that both the positives of OoCD's and the areas for improvement are heard and acted on. Action is also needed urgently on the contextual drivers of these children and young people's lives that are so damaging and enduring.



Lucie Russell, CEO

THE PROJECT

This is a research consultation commissioned by HM Inspectorate of Probation and conducted by User Voice.

User Voice is a charity led by lived experience. User Voices' participation ensures that the research is truly peer-led at every stage.



The overall objective of the consultation was to better understand children and young people's experience with Out of Court Disposals (OoCD) and whether they meet their needs. Furthermore, our objectives were:

- To understand what support children and young people, have or haven't had during their OoCD.
- To better gauge children and young people's understanding of their OoCD.
- To better understand the quality of their relationship with their Youth Justice Service (YJS) worker.
- To understand children and young people's perspectives on whether their OoCD experience would help them avoid future incidents of crime.
- To understand any specific positive or challenging aspects of their OoCD experience.

APPROACH

PRE-FIELDWORK

- Research materials were co-produced with the involvement of a lived experience panel.
- Participant recruitment involved support from the Youth Offending Teams to facilitate interviews and gain consent from children and young people and parents.

FIELDWORK

- 50 12- to 18-year-olds took part in the consultation.
- Four lived experience peer researchers conducted 45 interviews and three focus groups.
- Each participant was asked four Likert-scale summary questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

- All focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed in verbatim.
- Thematic data analysis was completed on all qualitative data.
- Statistical analysis was completed on all Likert-scale responses.

KEY FINDINGS



94% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THAT THEIR OUT OF COURT DISPOSAL EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN POSITIVE.



100% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THEY HAD A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR YJS WORKER. Reasons cited were staff being non-judgmental, genuinely caring, and being good listeners.



94% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THEY GOT THE SUPPORT THEY NEEDED. However, 'fun activities' were more common than tailored support.



80% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THEY UNDERSTOOD THEIR OUT OF COURT DISPOSAL. However, during interviews participants displayed confusion and inconsistencies in their understanding.



86% OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THEIR OUT OF COURT DISPOSAL EXPERIENCE WILL STOP THEM FROM BEING INVOLVED IN FURTHER CRIME. Young people feel like they have been given a second chance by not receiving a criminal record.

The main challenge children and young people cited was the need for the programme to be adapted to their neurodiverse condition(s).

The report also shines a light on the broader context of these children and young people's lives. Many have faced significant adversity, including poor school attendance, exclusion, unstable home environments, mental health challenges, and experiences of abuse. These early life experiences often intersect with their offending behaviour, underscoring the importance of holistic, trauma-informed support

and the need for more concrete strategies to deal with the contextual drivers of children and young people in the criminal justice system.

There were not many differences across the data by descriptive characteristics other than age. Older participants generally had a better understanding of their out of court disposal.

Peer-led solutions include adapting to the needs of neurodivergent children and young people, consistency with YJS workers, and additional support after their out of court disposal ends.

WHO DID WE GIVE A VOICE TO?

8

YJS REGIONS

50

PEOPLE HAD
THEIR SAY

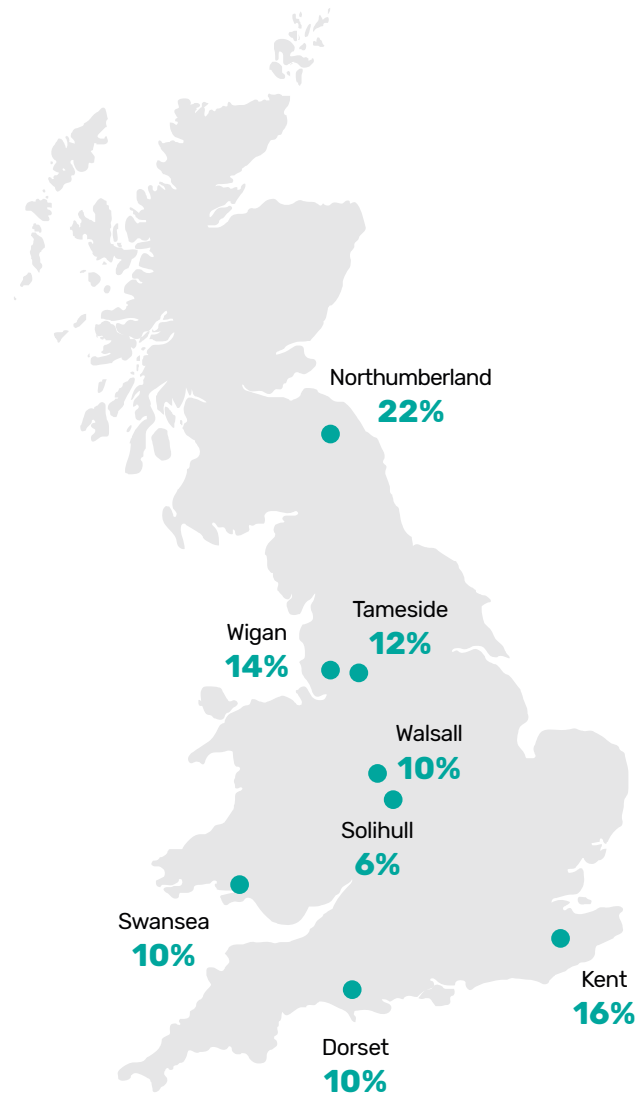
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FOCUS GROUPS

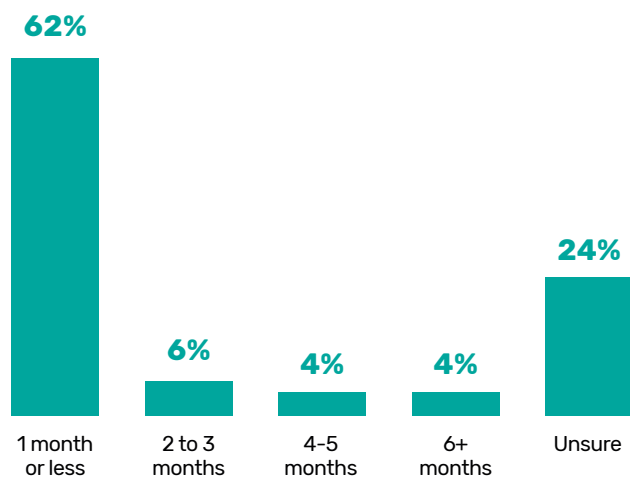
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INTERVIEWS

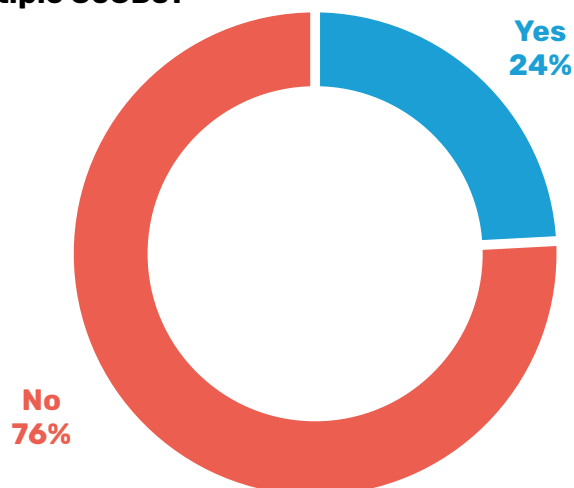
Participant breakdown by region



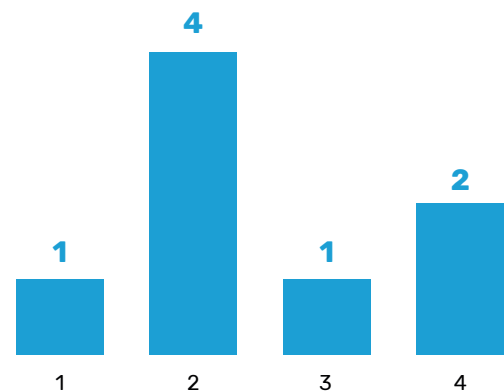
Time waited for OoCD to start



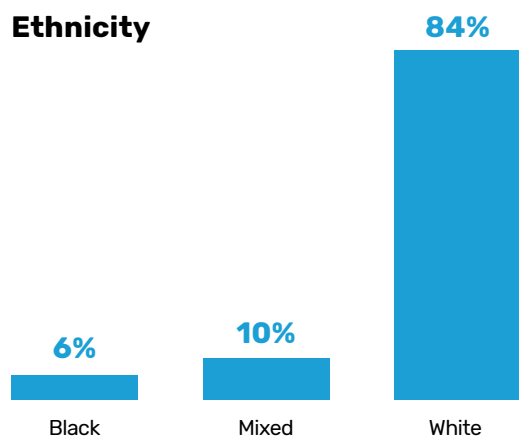
Multiple OoCDs?



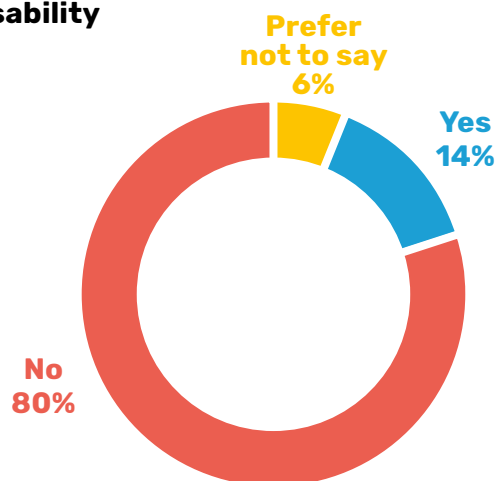
If multiple, how many?



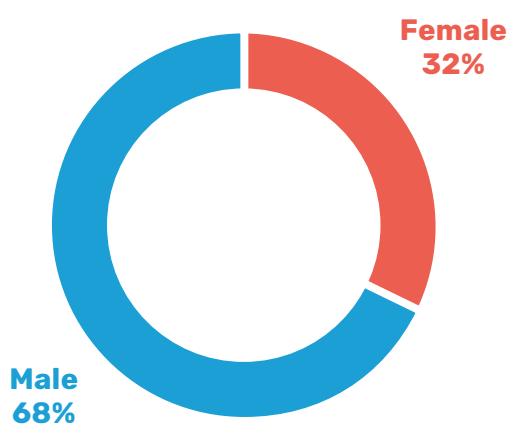
Ethnicity



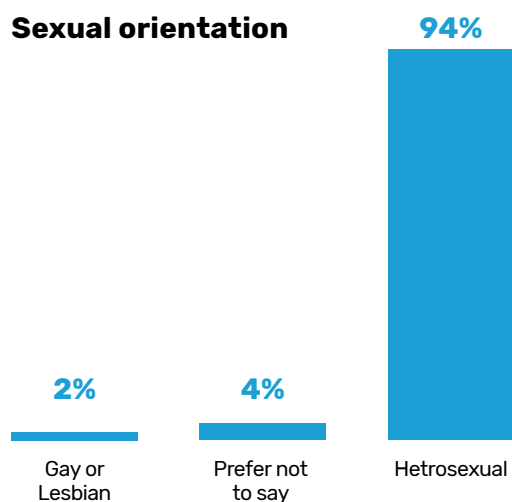
Disability



Gender

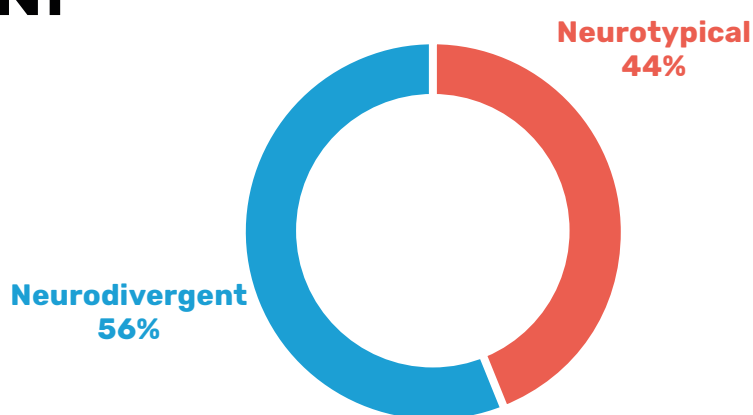
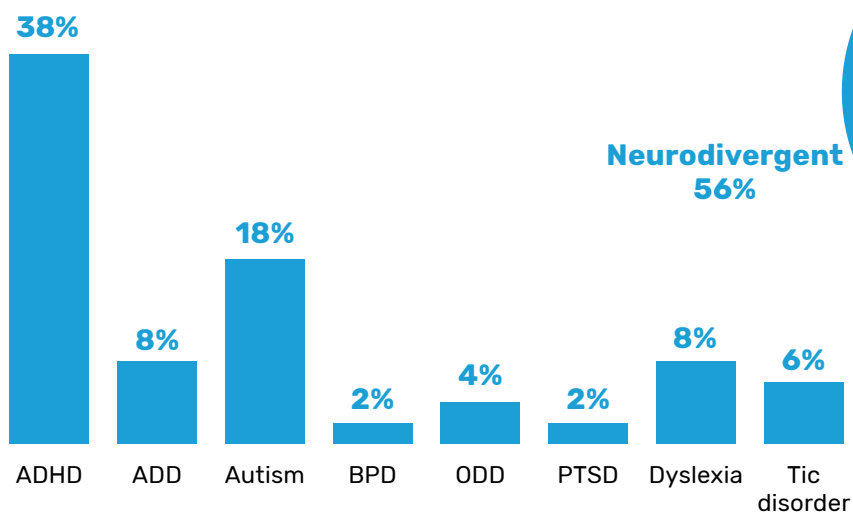


Sexual orientation



MORE THAN **HALF** PARTICIPANTS WERE NEURODIVERGENT

Neurodiverse conditions



EARLY LIFE EXPERIENCES

Many children and young people reported poor school attendance.

- The most prominent theme regarding children and young people's early life experiences was poor school attendance.
- Exclusion was common among children and young people, and many had been homeschooled.

"I hate school so much. I actually hate it. I was homeschooled."

"I got kicked out of school, and then in September I came in this one. My behaviour was okay at the start and then it just went downhill."

"I was just constantly stressed out, and I was really misbehaving... been banned out of two schools, but I'm at an approved [school] now, and I've already been suspended once."

"I was living at home. I was involved in the school, but I wasn't there physically. I had to do it at home because I was just in the school setting. Because I was constantly absconding away from school and stuff. And I was being heavily bullied."

Neurodiverse conditions made early life more difficult for many.

- 56% of the children and young people we spoke to were neurodivergent.
- ADHD and Autism were the most prevalent conditions.
- Many participants were waiting for assessments for neurodiverse conditions.
- Some told us they were labelled as "naughty" in school because of their condition, with reports of both poor treatment from staff and peers.
- Some told us they believe their conditions impacted their offending behaviour.

"100%. Yeah. See, I think because of the ADHD, because it's impulsive decisions. You don't think of the consequences before you do it. Or you don't think about what you're saying before you say it, stuff like that. So, I think having ADHD, it's just, you do."

"[ADHD] definitely impacts me. I don't think before I do stuff."

"I was just living on the streets. I got taken off my mother. And then my dad came and got me and my siblings, and that's when I went to live with my dad. And then I put myself in care. Yeah, I have [autism, dyslexia, ADHD and ADD]. I was involved with drugs. My mental health got affected."

Many children and young people had experienced difficult home lives.

- Some told us about the difficulties of growing up in the care system.
- Some 12- to 18-year-olds had experiences of homelessness.
- Many children and young people said their relationships with key family members had broken down.

"I was living with my mother. My life was better when I was in care."

"I used to play up loads of times again, the trouble all the time in there. I've been homeless. YJS always helped me find a place, so staying with my auntie. [The relationship with my family] wasn't great."

"A girl lived with us for three years and she was my girlfriend... she just kind of like left after my mam had done a lot for her... so I went about downhill a little bit because like I went from being with someone every single day to nobody at all. Other than like my little sister. So, it was like I lost my best friend I was grieving someone that wasn't even dead."

Experiences of abuse and anger issues were common among children and young people.

- Children and young people reported experience of different forms of abuse and neglect.
- 42% had suffered with their mental health – some to the point of self-harming.
- Many children and young people told us they struggle with anger.
- Some reported issues with substance misuse.
- One individual told us he experienced grooming from an online hate group that influenced his offending behaviour.

"So much happens every day and obviously like I've already had like a court case because I went through sexual abuse as a child and things like that, so I just go through things everyday."

"I probably suffered [with mental health], mostly angry."

"I had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression. I've got anger issues."

Some reported issues with substance misuse.

"It was fine, my life was fine, really. I was just climbing into my grandma's window when she wasn't in and stuff."

"Yeah, so I lived with my mum, my dad, my little sister and my little brother... Good, to be honest, yeah, it's actually good."

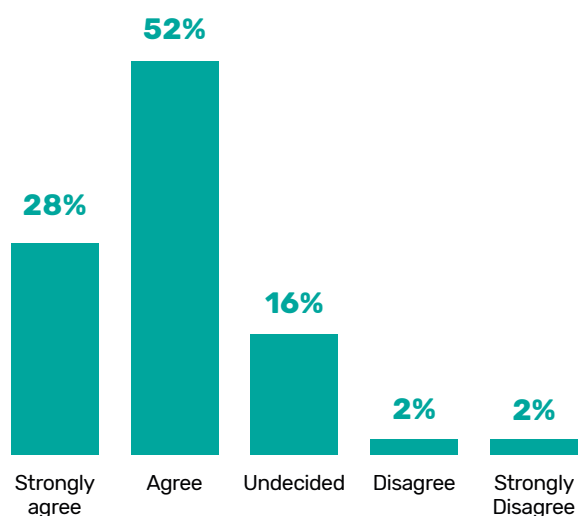
"Yeah. Just, yeah, fine. At home. [...] It's just me and my mum and my sister. [...] Well, my brother just moved out with his girlfriend. And then we live with my stepdad, but he doesn't live with anymore. Nothing special. Just boring."

UNDERSTANDING OF OoCD

4 in 5 said they understood the OoCD at the time they received it.

- A total of 80% of participants agreed to the statement 'At the time of receiving my Out of Court Disposal, I understood what I received and what it involved.'
- However, during interviews participants displayed confusion and inconsistencies in their understanding.
- In conversation, the vast majority couldn't tell us which out OoCD they were given.
- Nearly 1 in 4 reported having multiple OoCDs.

Q: At the time of receiving my out-of-court disposal, I understood what I received and what it involved



"I got a Youth Caution... didn't really know what it meant at first. So, all they said was it was a voluntary interview. The thing I didn't understand was, if it's a voluntary interview, then, why were you turning up to my house trying to arrest me."

"I didn't really understand a lot of stuff she was saying. She'd say, like, out-of-court disposal. I've never heard it before."

"It was the lowest one. I don't know what it was called. I think so [I think it was fair]. I think it could have gone worse."

There were mixed feelings whether given OoCD was 'fair – however, more agreed it was.

"Yeah, I think it was fair. I mean, if anything, I'm surprised that I got less than I did for what I did. I'm surprised that I got let off a little bit."

"Yeah, it's fair enough, at least I ain't going to prison."

"No [I didn't think it was fair]. 'Cause it was just for no reason that they had done it. No reason, you know what I mean?... Well, I don't know really. It's fifty-fifty. 'Cause what I've done was illegal so I kind of had done it."

Some had signed their OoCD without fully understanding what it was.

- Some said they had full understanding of what they were signing and the next steps.
- However, some had signed the document to get the experience over with without fully understanding what it was.
- Responses regarding having an appropriate adult present when signing paperwork varied. Many did not know how to answer the question.

"I've never been arrested. I don't really know what goes on, so I was just a bit surprised. Not really, they just told me it was better than going to court. I didn't know what it actually involved [when signing the paperwork]."

"They went through like a list of things, asked us loads of questions and they just kept making us sign things... I just signed it really; I wanted it over... Then they made us sign something that was an agreement that they could have my phone."

"I think I signed something before I had my initial interview. To basically state my rights. But then yeah, I signed some like declaration thing to say I signed off X amount of money. Yeah, I knew what I was signing, I knew what was going on, I knew what I'd done. Yeah, it was all quite clear."

YJS staff were helpful in explaining the OoCD to children and young people.

- Many 12- to 18-year-olds told us that YJS staff helped them understand their Out of Court Disposal and what it meant for them.
- Some people told us that the police were not helpful when explaining their OoCD.

"They explained it all to me. Yeah. For the out of court disposal, I did sign something, yeah, I do remember."

"They have [explained it], but I just feel like I just forget everything."

"Oh, the staff here? Yeah. The staff here were amazing. There was no problem at all. It was just the police. They were crap."

SUPPORT

Over 9 in 10 told us they received the support they received.

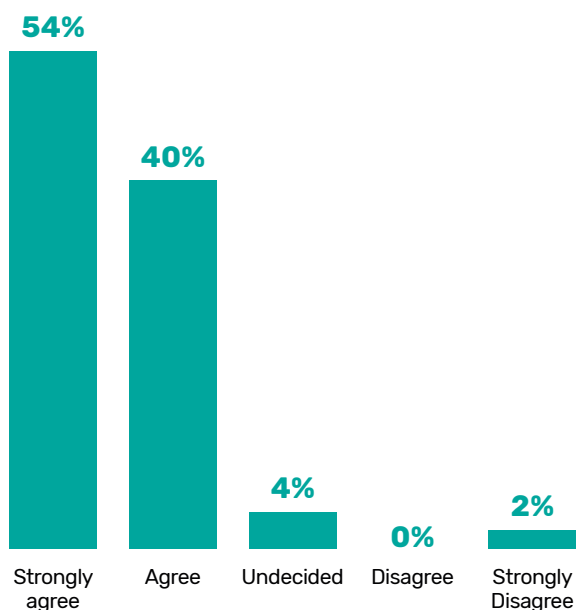
Despite the majority of children and young people agreeing they get the support they need, User Voice Peer Researchers who conducted the interviews observed that there was lack of assessment of children and young people's needs, and that many children and young people did not seem to know what support they needed to change their behaviour.

From our engagement, we saw that the support offered to children and young people was similar regardless of the type of OoCD.

"Kinda did need support, but kinda not... I needed someone to chat with."

"I didn't have to [do any courses or activities]. No, they didn't explain what was on offer, they just explained the outcomes I could get and the one that I got and how their job is to make sure I understood everything and didn't do it again."

Q: I got the support I needed during my out-of-court disposal



'Fun activities' were more common than tailored support

- Children and young people reported going out for fast food, ice cream, and for activities such as bowling more frequently than attending tailored support programmes.
- 'Fun' activities were praised for improving relationships and making the young person feel comfortable.

"She took us for ice cream and everything. I was loving me life. She took us on drives and everything. It was actually quite fun... And I think that makes people feel more comfortable as well."

"Well, actually, yeah, because we've got some walks coming up. Like, I don't know if they're sponsoring it, but we've got some walks. ... We're going to the Lake District next."

"So, I was over a couple of days a week, okay, doing different stuff, so like going for walks, going on our bikes, and then I'd go YMCA, they'd have like, clubs on there."

Some were getting access to the services they needed.

- Some children and young people reported getting support with the underlying issues they were facing in their lives.
- Support which children and young people were signposted to included:
 - Drug and alcohol programmes such as SIPS (Shortened Inventory of Problems).
 - Mental health support.
 - Employment support.
 - Anger management courses.

"Yeah. Even now that the court disposal's over, if I needed anything, I could just go to Switch and I could just say 'I really need help with this', and she'd be there and she'd help me."

"Compass groups. So, around emotional and mental well being and resilience. Also do boxing on Monday night. I've now got other professionals that I see regularly, twice a week. I've got a group I go to on Tuesdays. I made some friends."

"We did a lot of work. They gave me a drug worker again, [Name] from Branching Out. So, I did some work with her, finished that. And then, with [Name], we were just going through work on how to not come back."

Some children and young people have engaged in reflective practice and found it useful.

- Most children and young people said that appointments were "just a chat", but that they were keeping them on the right track away from trouble.
- Many had engaged in activities that helped them to understand how their offence may have impacted others.
- Some had engaged in reflective practice and worked on activities specific to their offence.

"I did a one-on-one session and we just talked about what happened and if anything's improved or hasn't... It was literally just chatting."

"I have to work with them every week... Just sit and have a chat with them. Aye, it keeps you on track, from not getting in trouble."

"Most of the stuff we did was stuff on what not to do and how to deal with certain stuff. Do you know what I mean? Like writing a piece of paper about how to deal with certain stuff."

RELATIONSHIP WITH YJS WORKER

All participants reported a strong relationship with their YJS worker.

The relationship with their YJS worker was the most mentioned positive thing for children and young people. In fact, no one had a bad relationship with their YJS worker. The reasons for the positive relationships included:

- A non-judgmental approach.
- Genuine care about the individual.
- Helpful advice.
- Increased understanding and awareness.

Some children and young people told us they have experienced multiple YJS workers which meant that they had to explain their experiences and situations multiple times. One individual told us he finds it hard to differentiate between who's who and from what service.

"I reckon I had a good relationship with [Name]. We had laughs. The work she had to do with me, obviously, some paperwork and stuff. But she'd never make it all about that, she'd make it fun. Make it so I'd actually want to keep sat there."

"Oh yeah the work that they do is bang on, they do all the work that they should do and more like they've got a good duty of care."

"There's loads, like four or five people come out to see us... Yeah, it would have been better if you had the same one every time."

Children and young people praised their YJS workers for being non-judgemental.

"No, she's dead nice. Oh, yeah. I was talking about my dogs with her, and she's one of them people you can sit with and not feel judged by them. She's not going to sit there and be like, "oh, why did you do that then?" She's a really, nice type of person to talk to."

"Worked with her before the out-of-court disposal because my mental health was really bad at the time, and I was running away... Actually, she listens. She doesn't look at you like you're stupid, like you're a little kid, she talks to you like you're on the same level."

Children and young people told us their YJS workers listened and were there for them.

"It helped anyway. On the Friday, I just come and speak to her whatever was going on at home."

"I think it was good to be honest. Everyone was respectful and everyone was nice to me, and they was caring. That, I think, is what helped me a lot through it."

"I saw her as someone I look forward to go and see. Yeah, good relationship, honestly. She was so sound. She knows how to understand, really. She's not just some old lady. She actually understands. She knows how to joke as well. She won't just sit there and be all bland. It's not all just work. She keeps things casual."

"Good. I like him. He's a nice guy. He helped me gain some common sense."

YJS workers were described as mentors who help with personal development.

- Children and young people described what they learned from their YJS worker as 'eye opening'.
- Children and young people felt supported in their personal development by their YJS worker.
- Some described their YJS worker as a mentor.
- Some told us they relied on their YJS worker for good advice.

"To summarise it, it would be literally be the best thing that's ever happened to me. I don't know where I would be without any of them, but especially [Name]... We spend like an hour just talking about coping mechanisms or animals or something really strange, but it's just helped."

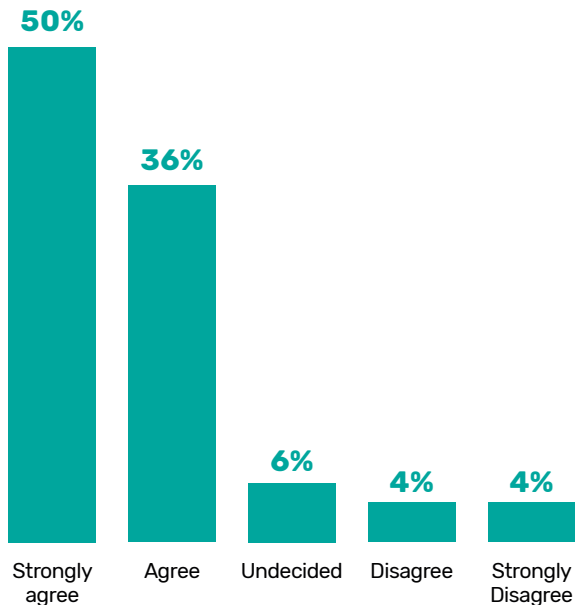
"I mean, it's been a good relationship. I speak to my YJS worker quite a lot. She's helped me out a lot and gave me advice when I needed it."

"Yeah, it showed me if I carried on the way that I was carrying on, that this could have had a very different conversation. Cause the way I would go on it, it wouldn't have ended good. And obviously she opened my eyes. Showed me what could happen if I carried on. And then that helped me with it."



DESISTANCE

Q: Receiving an out-of-court disposal has or will stop me from getting involved with further incidents of crime



- Over 4 in 5 said receiving an OoCD will stop them from getting involved in further incidents of crime.
- Children and young people told us that the OoCD had helped them “stay out of trouble”.
- Some described their experience as an “eye opener”.
- Children and young people said that it had allowed them to make changes to their personal life and futures.
- Many felt like they had been given a second chance and were thankful that they didn’t get a criminal record.

Many children and young people told us the OoCD has helped them to “stay out of trouble”.

“No. I haven’t been in trouble since actually. Well, I have but not with like the police. Yeah. I’ve had like arguments with people and that but like.”

“Personally? Yeah [I think receiving an OoDC will stop me from getting involved with incidents of crime]. I wouldn’t see myself getting in trouble again anyway.”

“It like it makes you like not want to get back in trouble because like you’ve been in trouble... You can get so much more support with the youth justice team like with mental health and everything that you can’t get if you haven’t. So I feel like people would just get in trouble with the police to get a youth justice teamwork.”

OoCD had led to 'a change in perspective' about further offending

- Many children and young people told us that their Out of Court Disposal experience had changed their perspective and led to personal development.
- Children and young people spoke about improvements to their mental health, education, and family life, which can all help them avoid committing further offences.

"Probably my overall confidence. Not even just going to college and stuff. Just overall gave me good communication skills and stuff. Just from having to speak to loads of other people... it's me making myself become my own person a bit better... It's helped my mental health."

"It's changed my perspective on a lot of things, so you realise that you do have to be careful, it's better to control what you're doing... It just kind of helped me realise the different points of perspective there is to like these situations."

"One positive would be building up the relationship with my mum. Because before the incident, me and my mum were best friends, and then we wouldn't talk at all during the day. If she would talk to me, then it would become an argument and then I'd run away and it was just better that we didn't talk. But now we talk every day."

Children and young people told us functional aspects of their support will help them avoid further incidents of crime.

"Any of the things that could help you get a job they offered. They offered to set up like my CV and all to help me. So, it definitely helps you future in life, not just there and then."

"It was definitely helpful. It helped me in certain aspects. Because some of the stuff that I've been taught, I didn't know obviously previously, like some of the crimes that you can get done for and stuff I'm like, What!?"

Children and young people feel like they have been given a second chance by not getting a criminal record.

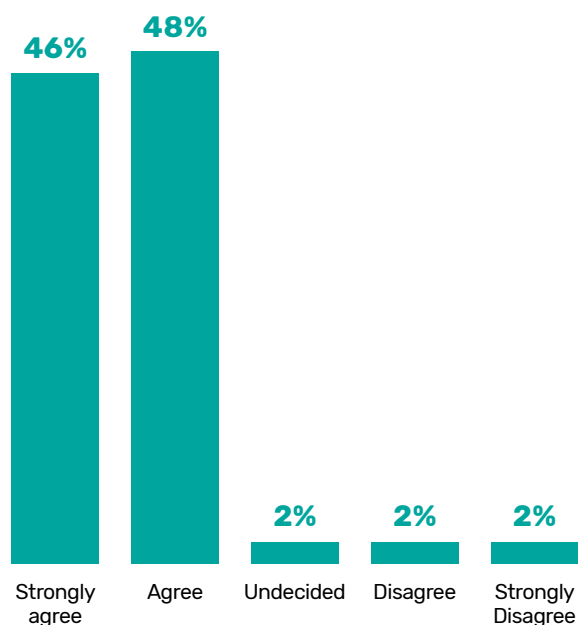
"Being saved from getting a criminal record. You know, it's like getting another chance."

"The best thing was that I didn't have to go to court. It was a relief to sort things out without all that stress."

"The biggest thing that helped me was probably the chance to not have a criminal record. I didn't want to mess up my future, and the support from my YJS worker helped me see things differently."

CHALLENGES

Q: Overall, my experience with my out of court disposal has been positive



Since most had an overall positive experience, there were not many reported challenges.

"No, it was all sweet. keeping me active and doing stuff instead of sitting in the house doing nothing to get I mean, so it's quite good thinking. So, a good thing they gave me that, but it is quite a good thing."

Programmes were not adapted to neurodivergent needs.

- The main challenge children and young people cited was their overall understanding of the programme. Some neurodiverse children and young people found it difficult to understand and to be able to take part in core activities such as reading and writing.
- Some older participants told us that the materials were not age appropriate for them and therefore felt "childish".
- Some could not fault their experience at the YJS but did state that their experience with the police has been challenging.
- Some said they would have liked to get a mentor.

"Me, I'm like... puzzled... Yeah, yeah, definitely. It's just a lot of stuff coming in at once that I couldn't really take in as much."

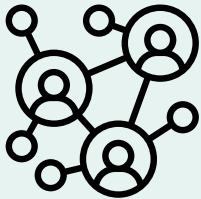
"I had this assessment thing that I had to follow through. It basically had to circle how I saw myself, how my friends would see me. It would be like you'd select like an emoji, do your friends think of you as a happy emoji, sad emoji. I saw all of that as a bit childish, obviously. I was like 17."

Some children and young people said that they would like to change their own attitude.

"I think I would change how I approached it... I feel like if I took it more seriously at the start, I probably would've got more out of it."

"I could have thrown myself into it more. There were more things I could have done that would have put me in a better spot."

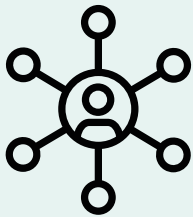
PEER-LED SOLUTIONS



THE ISSUE: Some children and young people have numerous different workers and services interacting with them, which can lead to confusion about who's who.

SUGGESTED PEER-LED SOLUTION: Where possible, have a small team of consistent people that work with the individual.

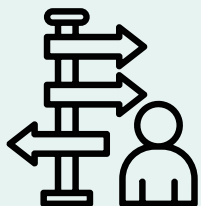
"There're loads, like four or five people come out to see us... I've got one for drug worker, because I smoke weed and then I've got, I can't remember her name and that's like youth justice. Then a few other people... Yeah, it would have been better if you had the same one every time... Because if, when there's new ones, they come out asking all the same questions."



THE ISSUE: Some children and young people have had multiple different YJS workers which doesn't help with progress.

SUGGESTED PEER-LED SOLUTION: Put measures in place to have a single consistent YJS worker for every young person.

"To be fair, yeah, every worker I get leaves, everyone leaves. Everyone. Even [Name] now, she's leaving. I actually called her when I got her. I went, 'you're going to leave me at one point.' And she's like, 'no, no, no.' And she's literally leaving now."



THE ISSUE: Most children and young people valued their experience, and some wanted the support to continue post OoCD.

SUGGESTED PEER-LED SOLUTION: If a young person asks for it, try providing additional support after the OoCD finishes, to make sure they are staying on the right path and have all their needs supported.

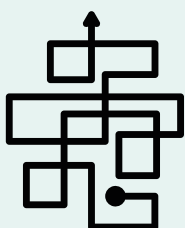
"Yeah. I think like they should get like an option to like get finished their work. With the youth justice team. Like I think you should get a like an option whether I like you continue for a few more weeks. And then see how we feel. And then like ease out a bit or just stop."



THE ISSUE: Some children and young people told us the activities and assessments were not age appropriate.

SUGGESTED PEER-LED SOLUTION: Create and develop age-appropriate resources and activities for all the age groups.

"Yeah, I mean [that assessment could have been that.] more aimed at my age] it was more for like a 12-13, but then I understand that the youth justice is, I think, between the ages of 12 to 18 or something like that. So, I can understand why the assessment was like how we feel. And then like ease out a bit or just stop."



THE ISSUE: Many neurodivergent children and young people found the assigned activities difficult.

SUGGESTED PEER-LED SOLUTION: Make reasonable adjustments to resources and teaching methods so neurodivergent children and young people have the same chances to learn and communicate. E.g., better use of images and technology.

"I think the people, maybe if they did a bit better with like... because certain people might learn better off like showing them instead of like reading it and saying it. So I think maybe if they had something else that could help."



PEER RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

PEER RESEARCHER 1

As the peer researcher on this project, I felt that my lived experience helped create a level of trust with the children and young people we spoke to. Everyone responded well to me, and I think that made a big difference, especially with kids who might not normally feel comfortable opening up. It felt like they saw me as someone who could actually relate, not just another professional asking questions. Because of that, I think they were more honest, more real.

One thing I noticed was that all the kids felt listened to. That stood out to me. I heard the same few key worker names mentioned over and over again, which says a lot about who's actually making an impact. It didn't feel like any of these children and young people were "bad" kids or had terrible upbringings. They were good kids who'd made mistakes, or were just in the wrong place at the wrong time. For most of them, I think just being involved with the police or getting an OoCD was enough to make them not want to go through it again. That said, I do think there's a limit to what we were able to learn.

We mostly heard from the children and young people who engaged, the ones who showed up. We didn't hear from the ones who didn't take

part, and they might have had very different experiences. So, in a way, we might've only heard the "good news" stories. That's something I kept thinking about during the fieldwork. Another thing that really stuck with me is how all the kids had different types of OoCDs but were basically doing the same overall tasks. It made me wonder, what's the point in having different kinds if they're treated the same? And if they're supposed to mean something different, why doesn't anyone seem to know the difference? It also made me question how we know what kind of support is actually needed. Is there a proper assessment done at the start? Because from what I saw, the support might be "good," but it's not always clear how it's tailored to the individual. Mental health came up a lot, and there were two stories I'll never forget.

One was a girl who had been bullied throughout school. She's such a kind person, but when she finally cried out for help, it was seen as a hoax—and that led to her getting an OoCD. The other was a 17-year-old whose dad called the police on him. If your own dad is putting you in trouble, who do you have left to turn to? Both stories really hit me, and they remind me that behind every OoCD, there's a whole life and a whole history we don't always see.



Image: Andy Atchison

PEER RESEARCHER 2

At both locations, it became clear that most of the children and young people hadn't been properly informed about who they would be speaking to or what the interviews would involve. As a result, they appeared somewhat caught off guard. This was even the case for some children with communication passports that clearly stated preparation was key to ensuring their engagement. I was taken aback by the percentage of children and young people I spoke to that had diagnosed neurodiverse conditions or were awaiting a diagnosis.

Most did not believe their condition was a factor in the incident that led to their OoCD, though a minority did. None of the children and young people were certain about the specific name of the OoCD they had received, though most understood what it entailed and felt it had been explained to them. When I asked them to summarise their experience, most struggled, indicating that the OoCD process lacked structure and clear outcomes. It may be worth exploring whether a structured plan was created for each young person and whether clear

objectives were set. Younger participants (ages 12–14) were particularly unclear on the details of the OoCD, whereas some older participants (ages 17–18) demonstrated a better understanding and more aware of the additional support available and mentioned that they were signposted to further services.

Overall, feedback about the OoCD experience was positive, particularly regarding their relationships with their Youth Justice (YJS) workers. However, when asked about their appointments, all described them as casual conversations, walks, or drives, with little focus on identifying support needs or achieving specific outcomes.

Most children and young people were unable to articulate what support they required, raising the question of whether a needs assessment had been conducted. While most had completed their OoCD, one was still in the process. On reflection, while the YJS's offer a variety of beneficial activities to engage children and young people, there seemed to be a lack of targeted interventions and structured support to address their needs.





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