Neurodivergence, specifically ADHD, in prison – a conversation

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While the term 'neurodivergence' is increasingly heard in discussions about the prison population, you are not alone if it feels unfamiliar. A 2021 report found that 86 per cent of the study's prisoner sample were also unclear about its meaning.[1] The term was first introduced in a doctoral thesis by Judy Singer, in 1998.[2] Singer offered a different lens through which to view the variability of the human nervous system. She argued that the world is a neurodiverse place, since no two individuals are exactly alike in the way they think.

As such, the concept of neurodiversity recognises a broad spectrum of neurological experiences. Singer's work initiated a movement aimed at reducing stigma around what she referred to as 'neurominorities'. These may include conditions such as:

- ❏ Attention Deficit/hyperactivity (ADHD)
- ❏ Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- ❏ Dyslexia
- ❏ Dyscalculia
- ❏ Learning Disability
- ❏ Traumatic brain injury

Encouragingly, the use of the term has facilitated a shift away from deficit-focused language like 'disorder' towards a more empowering framework, acknowledging the unique skills and perspectives of individuals with a neurodivergent diagnosis. However, the recent surge in interest around neurodiversity has also led to some misunderstandings of Singer's original concepts. While she intended to broaden the understanding of neurological differences as a natural and valuable aspect of human variation, this concept has often been narrowed down or oversimplified.

For instance, neurodiversity is frequently equated solely with autism, neglecting its application to a wide range of neurological differences. Additionally, there is a tendency to either overlook the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals or to overgeneralise their experiences and needs, deviating from Singer's original nuanced perspective. Furthermore, the longstanding view of neurodivergence as a disorder remains challenging to overcome, as it is deeply ingrained in both medical perspectives and societal attitudes. This traditional viewpoint often emphasises deficits and pathologies, rather than the acceptance of neurological differences as natural variations instead of abnormalities.

Neurodivergence in the prison system

Research tells us that all neurominorities are more heavily represented in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) including autism, traumatic brain injury and learning difficulties. When looking for estimates of these conditions within the prison estate, there is considerable variation between studies, and between conditions. Some examples are:

- ❏ A 2018 UK based study found the percentage of cases of ASD and learning disability in prison were 9 per cent and 9 per cent respectively, suspected to be higher than the general population.3
- ❏ 50 per cent of the prison population were found to be dyslexic, compared with 10 per cent of the general population.[4]
- ❏ Acquired Brain injury was found to be present in 24.7 per cent of prisoners,[5] rising to 64 per cent in a women's prison.[6]

1. User Voice. (2021). *"Neuro. What?" Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System.* User Voice.
2. Singer, J. (2017). NeuroDiversity: *The birth of an idea.* Self-published.
3. Young, S., González, R., Mullens, H., Mutch, L., Malet-Lambert, I., & Gudjonsson, G. (2018). Neurodevelopmental disorders in prison inmates: comorbidity and combined associations with psychiatric symptoms and behavioural disturbance. *Psychiatry research, 261,* 109–115.
4. Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021). Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System- A review of evidence. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf
5. McMillan, T., Graham, L., Pell, J., McConnachie, A., & Mackay, D. (2019). The lifetime prevalence of hospitalised head injury in Scottish prisons: A population study. *PloS one, 14(1), e0210427.*
6. The Disabilities Trust. (2019). Making the Link: Female Offending and Brain Injury. https://www.headway.org.uk/media/6461/making-the-link-female-offending-and-brain-injury-brief-report.pdf

Looking at the whole picture, the recent 2021 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection report into neurodiversity stated that *'half of those entering prison could reasonably be expected to have some form of neurodivergent condition which impacts their ability to engage.'*[7] Needless to say, this represents a significant number of people for whom this paper is relevant. Importantly, the inspection report also highlighted how neurodiversity is often associated with the term *'difficult'* in terms of prisoner presentation and management, which alludes to the fact neurodivergent people can experience challenges and barriers on their journey through custody. Indeed, we (and others) recognise that while understanding neurodivergence can feel difficult to some operational staff, the prison environment and processes can also feel *'difficult'* to navigate when living with a neurodiverse condition. Research has referred to the 'insufficient support, inaccessible processes and intimidating system' for those with ADHD,[8] and this is the lens through which we look at the system in this paper.

About this paper and co-authorship

This paper is a collaborative effort among three friends and colleagues, each bringing a unique perspective to the topic.

James is a man with personal experience of a prison sentence and neurodivergent conditions (ADD and Dyslexia) and is, in his own right, a published author. As well as having his own lived experience of imprisonment, he has also worked for many years within the prison system and in a therapeutic setting supporting others.

Lucy met James a decade ago, when they began working on a shared vision to improve outcomes for people in prison. Lucy's experience spans 20 years in the Criminal Justice System, blending practical expertise with academic insight.

Chloe, an emerging researcher with a strong interest in neurodiversity in the prison environment, complements the team. Her role involves providing support to the EPIC team and contributing fresh perspectives to our collective understanding.

Together, we represent a blend of lived experience, professional expertise, and academic enquiry. We are committed to the lived experience movement within criminology, believing that it offers an invaluable dimension to our understanding. Our learning tells us that listening to lived experience adds depth, emotion, and context; a depth and richness of perspective often missing from theoretical studies. Personal experiences help validate or challenge established theories, offering real-world insights that enhance our comprehension of various aspects of life within the criminal justice context. Yet we often observe lived experience being used in an extractive manner. To better understand co-production, we turn to the ladder of participation as a conceptual framework based on the 'ladder of citizen participation'.[9] This ladder illustrates the steps towards co-production:

- ❏ **Educating with No-Participation:** Where individuals are informed but have no input.
- ❏ **Consultation:** Seeking input and feedback, but with limited influence on outcomes.
- ❏ **Engagement:** More active involvement in discussions and decisions.
- ❏ **Co-Design:** Collaborative development of solutions or approaches.
- ❏ **Co-Production:** Full partnership where lived experiences are integral to decision-making and implementation processes.

Progressing on this ladder ensures that people with lived experiences are actively involved, based on their unique perspectives and ideas, and are not merely tokenistic figures without the power to influence or affect change. The significance of co-production has been underscored by many, highlighting the unique value and sense of hope and pride it brings—elements rarely seen in traditional approaches.[10] It is especially impactful when individuals with lived experience are valued as equal partners within an organisation.[11] The co-authorship of this paper is a manifestation of this principle.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four parts. Firstly, we consider the concept of inflated neurodiversity within prisons. Then, we refer to the experience of being neurodivergent in prison. Thirdly, we investigate the necessary steps towards achieving greater neuro-inclusivity. Finally, we provide some concluding thoughts around how prisons might be able to achieve this. Throughout, James' relevant and direct experiences are indented and italicised to emphasise to readers where they are able to engage with lived experience accounts. We have intentionally used plain English throughout, aiming to create and share accessible and understandable insights.

7. Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. (2021). Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System- A review of evidence. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf
8. Gormley, C. and Watson, N. (2021). Inaccessible Justice: Exploring the Barriers to Justice and Fairness for Disabled People Accused of a Crime. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice, 60:* 493-510.
9. Arnstein, S. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. Journal of the *American Institute of Planners, 35*:4, 216-224.
10. Lewis, A., King, T., Herbert, L., Repper, J. (2017). Co-Production – Sharing Our Experiences, Reflecting on Our Learning. https://imroc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ImROC-co-pro-briefing-FINAL-4.pdf
11. BHT Sussex, Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership. (2022). What is Co-production? BHT Sussex. https://www.bht.org.uk/fulfilling-lives/co-production/what-is-co-production/

Due to the length of this paper, we will be focusing on just one neurodivergent condition. Given that one of our co-authors has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (known as ADD or ADHD), this condition will be our primary focus. However, we anticipate that some of the experiences discussed may be relevant to multiple conditions while acknowledging the significant differences that also exist.

Prevalence of AD(H)D within prison

In a similar way to the other neurominorities mentioned earlier, research indicates a higher prevalence of ADHD in prison at around 25 per cent,[12] when compared to a prevalence of 2-5 per cent of the UK general population.[13] But what is ADHD, and why might it be prevalent in prison? ADHD is associated with executive functioning deficits, including difficulties in impulse control, planning, organisation, and attention. Impulsivity, a common trait in ADHD, can contribute to impulsive decision-making and risk-taking behaviours.[14]

'I believe neurodivergence formed part of my journey into the criminal justice system. From childhood, I had been impulsive and hyperactive. And though the hyperactivity was no longer part of my condition as an adult, I still found myself reacting impulsively and taking dangerous risks. I had little regard for authority, I think I also had something called Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) growing up, though it was never diagnosed, but nor was the ADHD or dyslexia.'

ADHD is associated with executive functioning deficits, including difficulties in impulse control, planning, organisation, and attention.

James found he was frequently in trouble at school, and as a consequence, found himself with a disrupted education, challenges at home, social isolation and associated risks; all clearly impacting on his journey into the criminal justice system.

'I think my condition and the subsequent feeling of being different, led to social isolation early on. I was deemed too naughty and struggled to keep friends. There were some very lonely times, I had been labelled as a troublemaker. I learned to make my own fun. So it wasn't just the neurodivergence that was the issue but the social impact and consequences of an unmanaged, undiagnosed condition.'

'After being expelled from two primary schools, the local authority arranged for a teacher to visit me one hour a day at home. The rest of the time, I was allowed to roam the streets and ended up spending time in video game arcades with other kids who had dropped out of school. That's when I fell in with the wrong crowd. Looking back, I was unhappy in my family, as all they could do was criticise my behaviour. I was looking for somewhere to belong, another family. And I found it in the group of 'friends' who took me in. Before long I was playing the role of Oliver Twist, as an 11-year-old, helping 18-year-olds break into houses. By age 13 I was in court for burglary.'

In many ways, given the connections highlighted in James' story, it amazes us to think that ADHD has not always been recognised within the prison system. It is arguable that screening should be considered across different points of the CJS, including within courts and police stations, as well as on entry into prison and within the probation service.[15] However, at the current time we know this is not consistent, and that there are many people living in prison who remain undiagnosed, despite exhibiting signs of the condition.

Several factors can complicate a diagnosis, particularly relevant to the prison population, and merit highlighting here. Firstly, ADHD often coexists with other mental health disorders, such as conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and substance use disorders.[16] Remarkably, research has stated that

12. Young, S., & Cocallis, K. (2021). ADHD and offending. Journal of neural transmission (Vienna, Austria: 1996), 128(7), 1009–1019.
13. BMJ Best Practice (2023). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in adults. BMJ Publishing Group. https://bestpractice.bmj.com/topics/en-gb/814
14. Shoham, R., Sonuga-Barke, E., Aloni, H., Yaniv, I., & Pollak, Y. (2016). ADHD-associated risk taking is linked to exaggerated views of the benefits of positive outcomes. Scientific reports, 6, 34833.
15. Takeda. (2022). ADHD in the Criminal Justice System: A case for change. Takeda. https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Takeda_ADHD-in-the-CJS-Roundtable-Report_Final.pdf
16. Martinez-Raga, J. (2019). When ADHD and Substance Use Disorders Coexist. Attention Magazine. https://d393uh8gb46l22.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ATTN_Ap2019_ADHDSubstanceAbuse.pdf

'around 96 per cent of prisoners with ADHD have a comorbidity' and that there is an increased risk of co-occurring psychiatric disorders compared to prisoners without ADHD.[17] These comorbidities can complicate the management of ADHD symptoms and increase the risk of involvement in criminal behaviour.

> *'It wasn't until many years later, after I had gone back to university and started using party drugs, that I became addicted to cocaine, which, in hindsight, I believe was self-medication for the ADD. The cocaine was a stimulant, but whilst a lot of people got very excited on it, I found it calmed me down and helped me focus, very much in the way my ADD medication had previously.'*

Further, there have been concerns raised over the overlap between ADHD symptoms and those of complex trauma, particularly childhood trauma. This, it has been argued, can complicate diagnosis and access to appropriate support. This is particularly important in the context of the CJS, where there is a higher prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), or childhood traumas, when compared to the general population. In a study conducted in a Welsh adult male prison,[18] it was found that 84 per cent had experienced at least one ACE compared with a Welsh average of 46 per cent, and nearly half of prisoners (46 per cent) reported they had experienced four or more ACEs, compared to 12 per cent in the wider population.

James reflects on his personal experience of both childhood trauma and receiving an ADHD diagnosis, and feels it is crucial for practitioners to recognise the potential interplay between the two, despite current research being inconclusive.

> *'I've thought a lot about the correlation between my childhood trauma and neurodivergence. There's something about feeling 'different' that has contributed to a lack of self-love over the years. I rarely felt safe with others, as I feared I would say something stupid or lash out in anger for whatever reason and be rejected. Much of the therapy I've had since being released from prison has focused on undoing the effects of those traumatic childhood experiences. I think these things have had a cumulative impact on my neurodivergence.'*

As is often the case, the most effective approach seems to be a preventative one. Recognising and supporting neurodivergent conditions early could potentially disrupt any existing link between ADHD and criminal behaviour. Ultimately, most people living with ADHD do not enter the CJS, and the condition is known for strengths such as creativity and resilience.[19] However, it is understood that community teams are stretched, and waiting times for screening can be lengthy.[20] Without adequate support, there is an increased risk of entering the CJS and as such, it is vital to understand how neurominorities experience custody and to consider how prisons might become more neuro-inclusive environments.

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Experience of prison with ADHD

Research indicates that individuals with ADHD may face specific challenges within the prison system. The environment, particularly, is cited as being problematic and since it is unavoidable for prisoners, heighted awareness of the interaction of environment and neurodivergence is beneficial.

> *'The impact of ADD in prison was significant for me. For starters, there's the physical environment. My attention was regularly pulled in different directions in such a noisy environment. There are heavy doors slamming, keys jangling, many conversations*

17. Takeda. (2022). ADHD in the Criminal Justice System: *A case for change.* Takeda. https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Takeda_ADHD-in-the-CJS-Roundtable-Report_Final.pdf
18. Ford, K., Barton, E., Newbury, A., Hughes, K., Bezeczky, Z., Roderick, J., Bellis, M. (2019). *Understanding the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in a male offender population in Wales: The Prisoner ACE Survey.* Wrexham: Public Health Wales NHS Trust, Bangor University.
19. Crook, T. and McDowall, A. (2023). Paradoxical career strengths and successes of ADHD adults: an evolving narrative, *Journal of Work-Applied Management.*
20. Takeda. (2022). ADHD in the Criminal Justice System: *A case for change.* Takeda. https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Takeda_ADHD-in-the-CJS-Roundtable-Report_Final.pdf

happening around you and constant television chatter or music being played as loudly as possible. A houseblock or wing can feel like a cavernous, echoing chamber, full of random sounds.'

Interestingly, a recent publication explored the 'soundscape' of prison, suggesting the importance of sound to both prisoners and staff, alerting them to potential danger, and evoking certain emotions. They argue that sounds can be associated with poor outcomes for several wellbeing issues and conditions, which includes those with neurodivergent needs.[21]

In addition to the noise, the structured and rule-bound nature of the prison environment may lead to challenges for individuals with ADHD. Difficulties in maintaining focus, following instructions, and adhering to schedules may lead to disciplinary issues and the removal of privileges as a result (such as the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme).

'Another symptom of ADD is forgetting things, which can also be a challenge in prison. You might receive a set of instructions from an officer but if there's a conversation happening over there, and in prison they're happening all around you, you're taking in more information than just what one person is telling you. There's a good chance you'll also forget what was told to you and there might be a consequence, like being disciplined for not following an instruction.'

The 'soundscape' of prison, suggesting the importance of sound to both prisoners and staff, alerting them to potential danger, and evoking certain emotions.

Without sufficient support, a significant number of prisoners will continue to face difficulties within the current system unless some form of assistance is provided. In a recent prison consultation,[22] only 15 of the 104 neurodivergent service-users interviewed said they had been offered adjustments around their neurodiversity while in prison. Adjustments included being given single cells, being let out for a walk when they felt overwhelmed or frustrated, having access to the gym to burn energy, access to noise-cancelling headphones, and being given specialist plates that kept certain foods separate. The report made no reference to the impact of the support, although providing reminders for appointments while on probation was listed as an area of good practice, and one participant said he had improved 'a hell of a lot' since he was supported in his neurodivergence. Concerns persist about the difficulty of accessing support, particularly where awareness of neurodivergence is limited or when prisoners expressing their additional needs are not taken seriously.

'Trying to explain the symptoms of ADD to someone who doesn't know about it is challenging, all the more so for a prisoner. There's always the thought that they'll think you're just making up excuses for yourself, that somehow you have a choice not to feel or react the way you do. It's common for people not to believe you in prison. Also, by the time you arrive in prison, you've had so many negative experiences as a result of this undiagnosed condition that it can feel hopeless trying to convince someone else of it, if you even know you have it.'

An interesting Swiss paper,[23] highlights some of the attitudes of prison staff, which include a sense that ADHD is a 'fashionable' but also 'real phenomenon' that people can experience. Some tensions were articulated, which align with the aforementioned view that those with ADHD can be difficult to work with, and more likely to experience sanctions while in jail, including solitary confinement. James spent time reflecting on his experience of isolation, and how this impacted his personal progression.

'At one point early on in my sentence, I enrolled in a college course. I was given assignments to work on in my cell in the evening. But I was so stressed by the feeling of being locked up that it impacted on my capacity for concentration. In the end I had to drop out of the course because I just couldn't

21. Herrity, K. (2024). *Sound, Order and Survival in Prison: The Rhythms and Routines of HMP Midtown.* Bristol University Press.
22. User Voice. (2023). 'Not Naughty, Stupid, or Bad': The Voices of Neurodiverse Service Users in the Criminal Justice System.
23. Buadze, A., Friedl, N., Schleifer, R., Young, S., Schneeberger, A., & Liebrenz, M. (2021). Perceptions and Attitudes of Correctional Staff Toward ADHD-A Challenging Disorder in Everyday Prison Life. *Frontiers in psychiatry, 11, 600005.*

do any of the work by myself, all I could manage was to watch TV or play a video game. The combination of my neurodivergence and the stress of being locked up and isolated had such an impact on me that I couldn't process the information I was meant to be studying.'

We understand individuals with ADHD also encounter distinct challenges after release, during resettlement into the community, and for many of the reasons already stated. Challenges include difficulties in maintaining employment, adhering to probation requirements, and accessing support services. This can also result in heightened reoffending rates.[24]

'If anyone had told me that coming out of prison would be worse than languishing in custody I would never have believed them. But nothing could have prepared me for it. I felt so hopeless and stressed that it wasn't always easy to stick to my commitments to Probation. I never intended not to follow instructions but there were times when I was late to or forgot an appointment, which was really scary because these people had the power to send me back to prison.'

Continued efforts to understand the experiences of those with ADHD, along with consistent data collection regarding outcomes, are needed if the system is to better manage the challenges presented and experienced by those with ADHD, and for the effective planning and commissioning of services.

Looking forwards

Recognising and addressing ADHD in the prison system is crucial. Providing appropriate interventions, such as behavioural therapies and, in some cases, medication, can help manage symptoms and improve functioning. It is also important that every prisoner be granted access to assessments and screening for additional learning needs.[25]

The Prisons Strategy White Paper, published in December 2021,[26] refers to understanding the specific needs of people who are neurodiverse (including those with ADHD), and exploring what is needed to support them while in prison and on release.

Recognising and addressing ADHD in the prison system is crucial. Providing appropriate interventions, such as behavioural therapies and, in some cases, medication, can help manage symptoms and improve functioning.

There are clear training needs for all staff working in the prison environment. The 2021 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection report,[27] and other research,[28] has highlighted the need for frontline staff across all CJS agencies to gain a deeper understanding of neurodiversity. While not expected to be 'experts', staff should nonetheless be aware of these various conditions, their manifestations, the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, possible adjustments, and referral pathways for additional support or diagnosis. The value of incorporating insights from neurodivergent individuals into training programs has also been highlighted, stressing the importance of lived experience perspectives in training and awareness initiatives.

'To me it's a no brainer. Just think of the paradigm shift if all prison staff were taught during their initial training, based on the findings that there are significantly more people with ADD in prison than in the

24. Young, S., Adamou, M., Bolea, B., Gudjonsson, G., Müller, U., Pitts, M., Thome, J. Asherson, P. (2011). The identification and management of ADHD offenders within the criminal justice system: a consensus statement from the UK Adult ADHD Network and criminal justice agencies. *BMC Psychiatry, 11,* 32.
25. House of Commons Education Committee. (2022). Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity: Government response to the Committee's First Report. https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/28707/documents/173902/default/
26. Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Prisons Strategy White Paper.* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61af18e38fa8f5037e8ccc47/prisons-strategy-white-paper.pdf
27. Criminal Justice Joint Inspection. (2021). Neurodiversity in the Criminal Justice System- A review of evidence. https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/07/Neurodiversity-evidence-review-web-2021.pdf
28. Revolving Doors. (2022). Exploring the links between neurodiversity and the revolving door of crisis and crime. https://revolving-doors.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Revolving-Doors-neurodiversity-policy-position.pdf

general population, that most of the people under their care were likely to be neurodiverse. It would help them better understand these individuals but beyond that it could contribute to lowering cases of violent reactions due to frustration — a win-win for prison staff and prisoners.'

Positively, there has been some clear progression in improving how neurodiversity is addressed and managed in prison. We have seen the implementation of Neurodiversity Support Managers (NSM), whose are responsible for ensuring the prison knows who neurodivergent, and what support might be available. Neurodiverse wings have also been trialled (for example in HMP Pentonville) and some prisons have even become 'Autism Accredited' (including HMP Parc, HMP Wakefield and HMYOI Feltham). It is our understanding that the NSMs will support prisoners through the screening and diagnosis process while in prison, something that James actively encourages.

'I think receiving a diagnosis of neurodivergence in prison would go a long way to decreasing rates of recidivism. For years I thought I was stupid, even when my university lecturers told me I could study at Cambridge. I was too impulsive to hold a job or get on with others in the work environment. Selling drugs was something I was good at; I was self-employed. So, to know that I am neurodivergent has been liberating. Turns out I'm not stupid. Even if it doesn't change the condition, knowing that means I can be less hard on myself, more compassionate.'

These initiatives represent a significant step towards creating more inclusive and supportive environments within prisons. Importantly, they can contribute to a shift in identity for prisoners, which could provide a foundational catalyst for positive change.

'For someone who has struggled their entire life with feelings of inferiority, to learn there's a name for what you've experienced, a way to begin to cope with it, I think could make all the difference.'

However, it is important to acknowledge the 'cliff edge' faced by prison leavers in terms of continuity of care in the community, and that connections are forged with community teams as prisoners approach release.

Concluding thoughts

As a team we were struck by how many of James' reflections on his ADHD focused on connections. These included his sense of loneliness in childhood and associated search for acceptance, his use of substances to calm him in social situations, and his reflections around trust and the importance of asking for help in prison. He also spoke of the value of trauma therapy in the journey to self-acceptance. It strikes us that any neuro-inclusive practices that come into the CJS must therefore be routed in connection.

'I know of men that resist sharing any of this kind of information with people in authority, in case it'll be written down and later used against them. That's understandable when you've been in the system for years. Some people feel they have been unfairly pathologised and labelled, that their humanity has been revoked. Understandably, this creates a barrier to engagement. But beyond negative labels, a truly neuro-inclusive environment would contribute to a culture of safety in admitting that 'I am different'.'

Prisons becoming more neuro-inclusive can benefit us all. Significantly, it has been stated that if ADHD is recognised in prisons and managed appropriately, we could expect to see a 32 per cent reduction in criminality for men, and 41 per cent reduction for women.[29] Prisons should also organise more peer support activities (group sessions, listeners, champions) for neurodiverse service users.

We believe neuro-inclusivity is achievable through the co-produced, collective efforts of policymakers, practitioners, and those with lived experience. Actions would include the rolling out of training to all prison staff, considering neurodivergence within new strategies and care pathways, and continued efforts to 'hear' the voices of neurodivergent prisoners.

Recent changes made within His Majesty's Prison Service are commendable, yet there remains progress to be made in engaging all staff and prisoners. However, by working together, we can strive for a more compassionate justice system, recognising the neurodiversity inherent in our society as an asset rather than simply 'difficult'.

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29. Takeda. (2022). *ADHD in the Criminal Justice System: A case for change.* Takeda. https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Takeda_ADHD-in-the-CJS-Roundtable-Report_Final.pdf