



RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

LIVED EXPERIENCE INSIGHT SERIES - REPORT 01

BEYOND THE GATE

The Reality of the First 90 Days After Prison

25 people with convictions shared their experiences of the first 90 days after release.

Creating Second Chances. Building Stronger Futures.

Executive Summary

Leaving prison can be a moment of freedom, relief and hope. It can also mark the beginning of an intense period of adjustment. Beyond Convictions spoke to 25 people with convictions about their experiences during the first 90 days after release.

The conversations were different, but seven recurring themes emerged: the pressure of release day, housing, employment, practical barriers, health and wellbeing, relationships with professionals, and the continuing impact of stigma.

Across the interviews, people repeatedly described successful resettlement as something built through stability, opportunity, supportive relationships and hope - not through one intervention alone.

“You spend so long thinking about the day you get out. Nobody really prepares you for how much you have to sort out once that day arrives.”

— Marcus, 38

Seven themes emerged

- Release day can feel like the beginning of another challenge
- Housing is the foundation
- Employment means more than a paycheque
- Small practical barriers can become big problems
- Health and wellbeing cannot be an afterthought
- Relationships with professionals matter
- Stigma can become an invisible sentence

About This Lived Experience Insight Report

Beyond Convictions spoke to 25 people with convictions who had experience of leaving prison and rebuilding their lives in the community. Participants reflected on their first 90 days after release and the factors that helped or hindered their progress.

Areas explored

Housing and accommodation • employment and training • money and financial stability • health and wellbeing • probation and services • family and relationships • stigma and disclosure • practical barriers • support • what could have been different

A note on the voices in this draft

The named quotations in this draft are illustrative quotations created to represent the themes of the proposed report. They are not transcripts from the 25 participants. Before publication, they should be replaced with genuine participant quotations, with explicit consent for any name or identifying detail used.

Context

Recent official statistics reinforce why the transition from custody matters. Ministry of Justice statistics for the year to March 2026 reported that 83.3% of people in scope in England and Wales were housed on the night following release, while 81.0% were in settled accommodation three months after release. Government health evidence also identifies stable accommodation, employment, family connection and continuity of healthcare as important influences on health after prison.

1. Release Day Can Feel Like the Beginning of Another Challenge

Walking through the prison gate can represent freedom, but it does not automatically bring stability. Participants described having to manage appointments, travel, money, accommodation and relationships almost immediately.

“Everyone thinks getting out must be the best day of your life. I was happy to be out, but I was terrified as well. Suddenly everything was my responsibility again.”

— Marcus, 38

“In prison I had a plan in my head. Once I was outside, everything happened at once - probation, benefits, somewhere to stay, seeing family. It was a lot.”

— Daniel, 31

OUR INSIGHT

Release planning should prepare people for the practical and emotional transition into the community, not only the administrative process of release.

2. Housing Is the Foundation

Housing was one of the strongest themes. People described how difficult it was to focus on employment, health or relationships while their accommodation remained uncertain.

“People kept talking to me about finding work. I wanted to work, but I didn't even know where I was going to be sleeping the following week.”

— Leon, 42

“Once I had somewhere I could actually call home, I could start thinking beyond tomorrow. That changed everything.”

— Aisha, 35

OUR INSIGHT

Safe and sustainable accommodation provides a base from which people can address other priorities and build stability.

3. Employment Means More Than a Paycheque

Participants spoke about work as more than income. Employment could provide routine, confidence, identity, social connection and evidence that life was moving forward. Disclosure and fear of rejection remained important barriers.

“Getting that first job changed how I saw myself. I wasn't just someone who had been in prison anymore. I was a colleague and people relied on me.”

— Nathan, 29

“Every application felt fine until I got to the conviction question. Then I wondered whether everything else I'd written would stop mattering.”

— Sophie, 40

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Fair and proportionate recruitment can allow people to demonstrate their skills, progress and current circumstances.

4. Small Practical Barriers Can Become Big Problems

Identification, banking, phones, internet access, transport and benefits were frequently described as interconnected. One unresolved practical problem could quickly prevent progress elsewhere.

“I didn't have photo ID. Without ID I couldn't sort the bank account. One little problem suddenly became five problems.”

— Jamie, 33

“Bus fares, phone credit, food, clothes for an interview - none of it sounds huge on its own, but when you've just come out it all adds up.”

— Michael, 46

OUR INSIGHT

Timely practical support can prevent relatively small barriers from escalating into larger problems.

5. Health and Wellbeing Cannot Be an Afterthought

Some participants described trying to manage physical or mental health needs while simultaneously dealing with housing, probation, benefits and family life. Others spoke about loneliness and the emotional adjustment to life outside.

“My first few weeks were appointments everywhere. My mental health was getting worse, but dealing with it felt like another appointment I had to somehow fit in.”

— Rebecca, 37

“People assume that because you're free, you're automatically happy. I felt lonely. Prison was gone, but I hadn't built a life outside yet.”

— Aaron, 44

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Continuity of healthcare and accessible wellbeing support should be treated as core parts of resettlement.

6. Relationships With Professionals Matter

People often remembered how they were treated as clearly as the practical support they received. Feeling listened to, respected and involved could strengthen trust and engagement.

“My probation officer didn't pretend my conviction didn't matter, but she didn't make it the only thing she saw either. That made a massive difference.”

— Caroline, 36

“You know quickly whether somebody sees you as a person or just an offence. If you feel judged, you stop telling them what's really happening.”

— Mohammed, 39

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Trust, consistency, dignity and professional curiosity can help people raise problems before they become crises.

7. Stigma Can Become an Invisible Sentence

Participants described consequences that could continue after the formal sentence: rejection, disclosure anxiety, housing barriers and the feeling that their past remained the first thing others saw.

“I served my sentence and accepted what I'd done. I just wanted the chance to show people who I was now, not be frozen at the worst point in my life.”

— Chris, 41

“I don't expect people to forget my past. I just don't want my past to be the only thing they know about me.”

— Priya, 34

OUR INSIGHT

Accountability and second chances can coexist. Recognising progress does not require ignoring the past.

What Makes a Difference?

Across the 25 conversations, five ideas provide a useful framework for thinking about the first 90 days:

A safe place to live

Stability creates the foundation from which other areas of life can be addressed.

Someone who listens

Trusted relationships make it easier to ask for help before problems escalate.

Practical support

Identification, transport, phones, banking and access to services can unlock progress.

Meaningful opportunities

Employment, education, training and volunteering can provide purpose and a pathway forward.

Hope

People need credible reasons to believe that rebuilding is possible.

“Someone believing in me didn't magically fix everything. But it made me start believing that maybe I could fix things myself.”

— Jordan, 30

Recommendations

1. Start resettlement planning earlier

Preparation for release should begin well before someone reaches the prison gate and should reflect both practical and emotional needs.

2. Prioritise safe and sustainable housing

Housing should be treated as a foundation for successful resettlement and linked to wider support.

3. Improve continuity of healthcare

People should be able to move between prison and community healthcare without unnecessary interruption.

4. Remove unnecessary practical barriers

Access to identification, banking, phones, transport and digital services should be part of effective release planning.

5. Expand fair employment opportunities

Employers should be supported to make proportionate and informed decisions about applicants with convictions.

6. Embed lived experience

People who have experienced prison and resettlement should be meaningfully involved in designing, delivering and evaluating services.

7. Recognise the importance of relationships

Good services are not only about processes and referrals. Trust, consistency, dignity and human connection matter.

Beyond the First 90 Days

Ninety days cannot determine the rest of someone's life, but those first three months can shape what comes next. The experiences explored in this report point towards a simple conclusion: motivation matters, but people also need realistic opportunities for that motivation to lead somewhere.

“Don't lower expectations for us because we've been to prison. Give us the support and opportunity to reach them.”

— Marcus, 38

Conclusion

The first 90 days after prison can be difficult, uncertain and overwhelming. They can also be the beginning of something different. If rehabilitation is to succeed, second chances need to exist not only in principle, but in practice.

Context sources

Ministry of Justice (2026), Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2026.

Ministry of Justice (2026), Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2026.

Department of Health and Social Care / Ministry of Justice (2026), The health of people in prison, on probation and in the secure NHS estate in England.



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