

MANIFESTO 2019

INTRODUCTION

For over 50 years, we have supported people to get where they want to be and give them the best chance at a second chance. We all have different paths through life, some harder than others. In fast moving and challenging times, we believe in a society that removes the barriers that stop people moving forward and supports them to get back on their feet.

This election is an opportunity to make real, impactful changes that will help thousands of people build a better future for themselves. The next government needs to commit to reforms that see no one left behind. This means giving people opportunities to thrive in education and training, somewhere safe to live and the best chance at a second chance when things go wrong.

In their first 100 days, we are calling on the next government to:

- Implement a Pupil Premium Plus, to provide support for disadvantaged young people post-16 who need more time to catch up with their peers
- Increase the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 so children do not get swept into the criminal justice system from which they struggle to escape
- Pledge to give every prisoner the essential items they need on release from custody to make sure they have the best chance at a second chance

By the end of the next parliament we believe there should be:

- Qualified mental health practitioners in all education settings up to 19, including Alternative Provision and further education to ensure the most vulnerable get the earliest support they need
- A fundamental change in the way we respond to children caught up in crime, by offering them the right support and not getting them involved in a stigmatising criminal justice system
- A pledge to truly rehabilitate people leaving prison, with a system that is accountable, giving people what they need on release so they can build a future away from crime

‘A CHANCE FOR EVERYONE’

At Nacro, we believe everyone should have a chance at the best start in life, to build for a future for themselves and those around them.

For all of us, childhood should be a time of happiness and development, but the reality can be very different for those young people who develop mental illness as a child or teenager or fall behind in education and struggle to catch up. One in eight children and young people has a mental health condition, having a devastating impact on their education, physical health, relationships and chance to progress.

We believe that every educational setting in England should have access to a trained mental health practitioner. This must include non-school based education and 16-19 further education provision. By embedding mental health practitioners in all education settings that have responsibility for vulnerable children and young people, we can ensure that children have access to the services they need, in a setting where they have trusted relationships with the people who support them. The links between poor childhood mental health and barriers later on in life are clear: they include involvement in crime, substance misuse and further mental health problems.

Estimates suggest that nearly **half a million 16-24 year olds are claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance or Universal Credit**. With exclusions on the rise, more and more children and young people are not being given the opportunities to reach their potential in an environment that can help them get to where they want to be. We believe that the average £56,000 lifetime cost of someone NEET could be better invested into funding specialist post16 to ensure they get the support they need.

Currently, the Pupil Premium - additional investment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds – stops once someone gets to 16, yet young people are expected to stay in education and/or training until they’re 18. This means thousands of young people fall off a cliff if they can’t access the extra support and help they need to fulfil their potential. We believe implementing a Pupil Premium for disadvantaged young people between the ages of 16 and 19 would give more young people the tools and skills they need to build a future for themselves.

CHILDREN AS CHILDREN

We believe children should be treated as children, supporting them to overcome the barriers they face and create a positive life for themselves.

However, over 26,500 children were cautioned or sentenced in 2017/18. That is over **26,000 opportunities to work with children in a different way** – to provide them with the tools and support to move away from offending behaviour and towards getting the mental health, education or personal support they need. This needs to take place away from the stigmatisation of a criminal justice system. Figures suggest that, every year, £342 million is spent on children in the criminal justice system – money that needs to be reassigned to diversion schemes and investment into mental health interventions and education.

We believe **no child under the age of 14 should be labelled a criminal** and where criminal behaviour has happened, the right support needs to be in place to address the root causes of it. We know from our work the life long impact labelling a child as a criminal can have.

We also know that, by locking children up, we are doing even more damage. Just under 1,800 incidents of self harm in custody were reported last year, the highest number seen in the last five years. Almost a third of all young people held in custody are on remand, with only a third of these actually ending in a custodial sentence. The impact this can have on a young person's life is devastating.

As a society, we are keeping children in a broken system and wondering why almost three quarters of them released from custody go on to reoffend within a year. **We are failing the children as well as the communities around them.**

With the average cost of sending a child to custody at £118,000 a year, we believe this money could be spent in delivering community-based alternatives that address the causes of offending, investing in children and preventing further victims. It is estimated that up to £113,000 could be saved if even just one in ten young people were diverted from the criminal justice system. Alternatively, a package of intensive therapy, mental health support, family liaison, education and welfare work would be an earlier intervention option that would also provide overall cost savings of over £20,000 per child.

We believe custody is the wrong place for children, who have often been victims themselves. For the very few that need a place of protection and support, they need to receive **personalised education and health support, in an environment free from violence and pain-inducing restraint**. We are calling for a dramatic reform of the use of secure settings – for those children with the most serious violent and sexual offences, they need to be in an environment that will support them to address the causes of their offending behaviour and prevent further victims.

PRISONERS AS PEOPLE

We all make mistakes throughout our lives, some much worse than others. The sad truth is that, when people become homeless, face drug addiction or go into prison, they are swept into a current they can feel powerless to escape from.

We believe we are sending too many people to prison who shouldn't be there. Many of them enter prison **homeless**, experiencing **mental health problems, drug addictions**, are **unemployed** and/or have bad experiences of the education system. For far too many this stays the same when they are released: the system is not doing what it should to help them move on.

Every year, around 30,000 people go to prison on sentences of six months or less, and it's often in this time that they lose the important things in life - housing, employment and relationships – that can be the difference between your life falling down around you and otherwise. It's hardly surprising that people who serve short prison sentences are the group most likely to reoffend and to commit more offences. Repeat offending costs society more than £18 billion a year, over and above the immeasurable and devastating impact crime has on victims and those around them.

The average cost of holding someone in prison is £37,543 a year, which means that **we spend almost £200 million every year holding people in prison on short sentences**. Using intensive community sentences not only reduces reoffending but could also save in the region of £180 million. We want to see investment into robust community alternatives that address the root causes of offending and we support widespread support to ban short prison sentences.

Almost everyone who goes to prison will re-enter society at some point. We believe that people stand the best chance of moving on and creating a better life for themselves and their families if they feel like members of our society. However, many people who get swept up in the criminal justice system have never felt that they are part of society nor do they feel valued by it. By giving people both the rights and responsibilities of membership in society, a sense of participation and responsibility is created.

Prisons need to be places of learning, earning and true rehabilitation. This means establishing a **National Prisoner Wage**, reviewing current wages which at the moment do not give people the opportunity to buy the things they need on release and to support their families. By paying income tax and national insurance, they can contribute to society and pay off debt to start afresh. Real work and pay to help people to create a new life and do things differently.

Alongside this, prisons should be places of **learning and skilling up**, equipping people to leave and move forward to a more positive future, away from crime. People in prison should have a truly personalised education and training pathway that follows them through the estate and into the community, which leads to meaningful opportunities to work or continue training when they re-enter the community.

RESPONDING TO VULNERABILITY AND DISPROPORTIONALITY

We know that women who come into contact with the criminal justice system can be among the most vulnerable of all. Many experience chaotic lifestyles involving substance misuse, mental health problems, homelessness and offending behaviour – these are often the product of a life of abuse and trauma. Around 60% of women prisoners do not have homes to go to on release and may be at risk of returning to abusive relationships on leaving. It's hardly surprising that women released from prison are more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner, than those serving community sentences.

Sending women to prison often makes problems worse. We do not believe that prison is the right place to address the root causes behind offending behaviour. With the average cost of a women's prison place at £42,766 a year, **eradicating short sentences for women would mean a cost saving of around £24 million.** This could be invested in wraparound, intensive support-led women's centres, proven to reduce reoffending and run at around £1,000 per person. The impact this would have on women and the families and communities around them would be huge.

People from BAME communities are overrepresented at just about every part of the criminal justice system, from arrest to reoffending rates. Research has shown a clear link between the likeliness of getting a custodial sentence and ethnic group, yet progress is slow to address this disproportionality. We believe there needs to be strong and focused commitment to creating better responses at all stages of this currently failing system.

A PLEDGE TO REHABILITATE

We believe everyone should have the best chance at a second chance when they are released from prison. Having somewhere to live and the means to support themselves and their family is the most basic of what people need, but all too often people are leaving homeless, unemployed and feeling lost. From our experiences, we've seen the race against the clock people face when they're released on a Friday. We believe this needs to end to give people the best chance at getting what they need. **Around half of those released from prison will commit another crime within a year.** The system is broken and it needs to be fixed.

By strengthening the focus on rehabilitation and the commitment to put in place the basics, we believe more people who go through the criminal justice system will get a real second chance. This means making a pledge to every prison leaver to ensure they do not leave prison without:

- **Safe and stable housing**
- **Photographic identification**
- **A Universal Credit claim set up where needed**
- **The essential items for the first few days and nights**
- **Medication to see them through at least a fortnight where needed**

This pledge should be supported by clear responsibilities and accountability from a joined up prison and probation system and other agencies to equip everyone with the essential ingredients on release from prison.