



# Community Development Workers: Criminal Justice Strand

**“Engagement isn’t always easy. Many of the people I work with have been let down so many times that trust doesn’t come quickly. They’re understandably wary of new faces or systems.”**

My name is Stephen, and I work across Birmingham and Solihull as a Community Development Worker, specialising in mental health support for individuals in or leaving the criminal justice system.

I support individuals in prison and those recently released, as they navigate their mental health and wellbeing during resettlement. Many face long-standing mental health challenges, often combined with trauma, substance misuse, social exclusion, or undiagnosed neurodivergent conditions such as ADHD or autism. Traditional services haven’t always worked for them and part of my role is understanding why and finding new ways to support them.

Engagement is a slow process. It begins with trust. Through one-to-one conversations, creative workshops, gym sessions, and group wellbeing activities, I offer safe, non-judgmental spaces where people can explore their mental health often for the first time.

**“Many of the individuals I meet have never been asked how they feel. For some, even identifying emotions is unfamiliar. But with time, creative approaches, and patient support, we can help them begin to understand themselves.”**

Working closely with HMO’s (Homes of Multiple Occupation) and supported housing providers such as Green Square Accord and other probation-approved accommodations, I continue supporting people after release offering practical and emotional support as they navigate life outside of prison.

## Tackling Health Inequalities Through Insight and Inclusion

A major focus of my role is amplifying the voices of those with lived experience. The insights I gather directly inform mental health service commissioners, helping to shape more inclusive, flexible, and effective services across the region.



## Seeing the Person, Not the Label

**“It’s hard to shine a light on this community. Once someone is labelled an ‘offender,’ society often stops seeing the person behind it. Their struggles become invisible and so does their potential.”**

This work is challenging, but it’s also deeply rewarding. When someone feels seen, heard, and valued often for the first time it’s hugely impactful. When we help people move forward with confidence and support, it doesn’t just benefit them, it strengthens families, stabilises communities, and reduces reoffending.

## Why It Matters

Without consistent, compassionate support, prison leavers are at high risk of returning to crisis and crime. But when services recognise the whole person beyond their past we open the door to healing, growth, and long-term change.

Stephen has worked as Community Development Worker (CDW) with Birmingham Mind for over 15 years. The CDW Team, made up of a service manager and 7 workers, work with communities across Birmingham to promote discussion around mental health and wellbeing through various training, workshops and activity sessions.

Focusing on working with all communities groups and leaders; they work to increase knowledge of mental health and wellbeing, encourage greater self-awareness and self-management as well as to increase community engagement and cohesion citywide. Working across seven underrepresented communities, one of which include our Criminal Justice strand, you can read more about the work of the team here

<https://birminghammind.org/what-we-do/community-development-worker-service/>