

The cover of the Prison Service Journal features a photograph of a sunset or sunrise seen through the dark, heavy metal bars of a prison cell. The sun is a bright, glowing orb on the horizon, partially obscured by a layer of clouds. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and wispy clouds. The bars are in the foreground, creating a grid-like pattern that frames the view of the sky. The overall mood is one of hope and freedom, contrasting with the confinement of the prison.

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**Special edition:  
Care Leavers and the Criminal Justice System**

## Book Reviews

Shannon Trust support people in the criminal justice system to learn to read, so they can navigate daily life with more ease, pursue wider opportunities and thrive. They do this by training prisoners that can read to support prisoners that can't. The latest data shows that 56 per cent of people in prison have low literacy levels, which is currently over 40,000 people. Many non-readers in prison have experienced care, which is the focus of our book reviews in this edition. A quarter of the people in prison that have experienced care have had more than six different placements, which has interrupted their education. When in care, there is often less support around education at home, and this results in almost a third of care leavers having no qualifications. We believe that reading is the springboard into a life of connection, safety and purpose. It's the ability to connect with family and friends through letters, to read leaflets, posters or safety information, to understand a canteen sheet, get into education, get a job, fill in forms or complete benefit claims. What often starts with reading quickly turns into the first book ever read, the first certificate ever gained, and the first qualification achieved. Through this, confidence grows and other possibilities emerge. Shannon Trust mentors provide the support and encouragement that can be missing when someone leaves care, two mentors from HMP Northumberland have taken the time to share their thoughts on the following books.

### **The Brightness of Stars: Stories of Adults Who Came Through the British Care System**

By Lisa Cherry.

Publisher: Chris L Wilson

ISBN: 9780956331090

Price: £18.99

Lisa Cherry's book 'The Brightness of Stars' is about sharing the troubles, struggles and often traumatic experiences along with a few rare testimonies where the looked after/in care child was supported, nurtured, loved and reshaped to become a thriving member of society in their young adult life.

Lisa's book is there for all to see and maybe if willing, learn from. The testimonies show just how much the system has changed.

This book allows the reader to really understand just how much damage can be done to a child in care especially if the signs are not picked up on sooner so that intervention and support can be put in place before the child/young person will spiral out of control.

It has taken coming to prison to realise just how much my own abusive past has affected my adolescence and adult life. Support networks and therapy were non existing. Just like with Lisa's story and the others that shared theirs, between 16-18 years of age you are sent on your way into the world to fail and become hidden from society or for those rare cases you'll succeed and be able to take on the world for your future.

Lisa's own story highlights the social exclusion, rejection, suffering, isolated along with the severe

depressive and mental illnesses that can and often do come with every in care leaver as they step out into adult life.

Lisa has included other testimonies, seven are from adults who have been in care children. These testimonies are poignant, informative and suggestive to the change that is needed within children social services. More needs to be done to protect those that are in the system now and the future.

Lisa's aim for her book is to bring insight and further understanding to the issues that are common and to provide information on interventions that would benefit the 16-24 year olds. It is a small collection of unheard voices who share their experiences.

This book is highly beneficial to those who are policy makers, those of us who have had our own negative experiences of being in the care system, those who want to learn from the past and support change where it is needed.

Lisa's book has opened my eyes to just how bad the system is, I am just grateful that my children are one of those really rare cases where they are in a home that is supporting them to grow in to amazing people.

Lisa Cherry has laid out in easy to read and follow format, the suffering and issues that children leaving care have to go through often without help or support where it is needed the most.

I hope this book will serve to open your eyes to the injustice so that collectively change will come

for the better of those children in the system and those of tomorrow.

**Reviewed by JP, HMP Northumberland**

**Snap**

By Patrice Lawrence

Publisher:

ISBN: 9781444950205

Price: £1.00

This is not a book I would normally give a second glance let alone read but I'm glad I did. The story centres around two young

siblings coming to terms with the murder of their uncle.

Soroya and Farhad are teenagers growing up in a London which is painted as a bleak violent place with lots of crime and gang rivalry and I think the author explains the pressures of different ethnic groups and family values, ranging from the strict but loving father to absent parents and how this affects the thinking and attitude of the children.

Reading this made me feel sorry for the siblings more so because of Farhad's guilt, but also hopeful that Soroya may have

found love with her best buddy? The author also touches on how kids can see celebs as idols or gods and can be led astray.

Over all it is a real eye opener to growing up young and black in London. I am unlikely to read other stories by this author as it is not my normal choice and I feel that this book is aimed at a younger audience/reader than me and I expect the authors other works will be similar. Target read I expect to be 15-25ish.

**Reviewed by SM, HMP Northumberland**