

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT...

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN CUSTODY

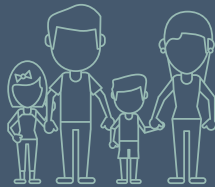
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in Scotland (HMIPS) is an organisation required by law to inspect all prisons in Scotland to find out how people are treated in custody.

HMIPS wanted to find out what life is really like for young people (aged under 18) in HMP & YOI Polmont. HMIPS created a survey to ask about people's rights, safety, education, health and wellbeing in custody.

Over two days in summer 2021 everyone under 18 in Polmont was asked to take part, and 13 out of 16 young people chose to complete the survey. Most young people were on remand meaning they had not been tried yet. This is what they told us.

LIFE BEFORE CUSTODY

Life before custody was often not easy for young people. Most young people had experienced the death of a close friend or family member.



Most young people's mum and dad no longer lived together. About half of young people had experienced physical abuse (been hit or hurt at home), and about half had often experienced emotional abuse (been sworn at, threatened, or humiliated).

Young people also said that their families had often faced lots of challenges such as mental health issues or drug use.

Most young people said that they had not had very good experiences at school and they had skipped school or been excluded. About half of young people had run away at least once and a similar number said that they had thought about suicide.

ARRIVING IN CUSTODY

Almost all young people had been searched when they arrived at Polmont, but all young people felt that this had been done in a respectful way.



Lots of people said that they were worried when they first arrived, although around three-quarters said that staff had helped them with their worries. About three-quarters of young people felt safe on their first night.

While lots of people felt that they were told what they needed to know about life at Polmont, quite a few young people said that they needed more information on arrival.

FOOD AND CANTEEN

Nearly all of the young people thought that they got enough to eat at meal times but almost half did not like the food provided.



LIVING CONDITIONS

All young people could get a shower every day and clean bedsheets every week. Most felt that the hall was kept clean. Three-quarters of young people felt that it was quiet enough to sleep at night.

Young people had to spend around 22 or 23 hours a day in their cell. Most young people only got out of their cell for 1 or 2 hours each day and they had to shower and make phone calls in that time.

Young people said that this was one of the hardest things about being in Polmont as it affected their mental health. Most young people felt that they did not have enough to do each day to keep busy.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Around half of all young people said that they felt stressed or anxious all of the time in custody. Half of young people described themselves as having a mental health issue, and most of those young people had received help for this in Polmont. One-in-three young people said that they were always concerned about their mental health in custody.



Just over half of young people felt that they could easily access a mental health worker in Polmont. Young people thought it was harder to access a doctor, nurse or dentist.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Almost all young people currently felt safe at Polmont, although about half of young people had felt unsafe at some point since they had been in custody.



A few young people said that the measures in place in Polmont (such as staff watching over everyone) made them feel safe. Sometimes other young people made some people feel unsafe, especially when there were lots of young people together and lots of noise.

Some young people had experienced bullying or unwanted behaviours from other young people such as being threatened, being verbally abused or being physically assaulted. Young people very rarely reported this to staff. Only about half of young people felt that they would be able to report bullying by staff if it happened to them.

RIGHTS IN CUSTODY

Only half of young people knew what their rights were in custody, but when their rights were explained to them most people felt that their rights were respected.



Almost all young people had been strip searched at least once. Some young people felt that they were routinely searched for no reason. Some young people had been placed in isolation as punishment, which could last for a few days, and young people often felt that this was not fair.

A small number of young people had been physically restrained. Some felt that this was fair, but those who had experienced pain or distress did not think that being restrained was fair. Staff did not always explain the restraint to the young person after the event.

STAFF

Staff at Polmont were seen as quite a positive aspect of life in custody. All of the young people felt that staff cared for them and respected them.



KEEPING IN TOUCH



Almost all young people were able to call friends and family regularly. However, few young people could speak in private and hardly any young people had a working mobile phone.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Most young people felt that staff encouraged them to attend education, training or work. Some young people said that they got very little education at Polmont. Young people have a right to education in custody. Only a few young people felt that they had learned something useful in Polmont that would help them on the outside. Most young people were not being helped to plan or prepare for their release.

