

February 2024 Initial findings pre-report release

The Nejma Collective have been collating our findings from almost two years of correspondence with people in prison. We plan to release our full report in April 2024 insha'Allah, but for now we share with you an executive summary of our initial findings

Initial Overview

Between August 2022 and August 2023, the Nejma Collective were contacted by **633 people** through our grant scheme explained in detail [here](#). Letters were received from **80 prisons across Britain**, which accounts for 58% of prisons located here. Nejma Collective has been in contact with **228 women**, and **404 men**.

From the grant request forms that were analysed, the average amount of money in an incarcerated person's prison account was **£9.66, with some people having as little as 70p** in their account. **10% of people had no money** in their accounts. Many people enter prison with nothing, and most are unable to receive financial support from family or loved ones outside, even when they are in communication with them. This no doubt corresponds to the rising numbers of households falling into poverty, especially amongst Muslims.

Clothing, toiletries and other essential needs

Of the grant request forms that have been so far analysed, clothing and toiletries are the most highly requested items that people seek support for. **86% of applications included requests for support with buying clothing and 71% included requests for support with buying toiletries**. Requests for clothing included basic items such as underwear, bras and socks, as well as many requests for winter coats due to the lack of adequate heating within cell blocks.

Just as costs have risen on the outside, the price of essential items - including clothes and toiletries - have also risen within prisons. People who are incarcerated are also only able to buy items from **pre-approved catalogues, which leaves them with limited options regarding clothing preferences and price**. Additionally, many people experience fluctuating weight gain and loss due to limited prison dietary options and the toll on mental health. This leaves many with ill-fitting or inappropriately sized clothes. People who are unable to afford their own clothing are limited to wearing prison-issued clothes, which are often visibly used (including underwear) and not appropriately warm.

For Muslims, prison-issued clothing has often been raised as a specific concern because of the **religious requirement for clothes to be free of impurities for prayer**. Moreover, Islamic attire is usually limited and prison catalogues do not have appropriate options.

Ms Dean from HMP Downview requested that her grant be sent to her sister on the outside in order to purchase a prayer dress: "I would like to order a new [prayer dress] from Amazon. However, I can not order this direct from prison. I would have to get a family member to do this on my behalf."

People who do not have support systems outside of prison are left with items that are available through the chaplaincy, which rarely has enough to provide to everyone.

Phone Credit

71% of analysed grant applications included requests for phone credit, making it one of the most highly sought forms of support. People who are incarcerated in the UK cannot receive phone calls from outside of prison and so if they wish to speak to their family or friends, they must use phone credit to make phone calls to phone numbers that are on a pre-approved list. However, prison call rates are exorbitantly expensive, and a single weekly phone call can often use up their entire weekly allowance forcing people to choose between meeting their own basic needs and hearing from their loved ones or even from their solicitors.

JG at HMP Downview, "I have no support from outside and I entered prison with the [clothes] I had on my back. And they are now too small for me. I need phone credit to keep in touch with my nephew who is suffering with autism + I'm the only one that can get him off to sleep every night if I've got credit on my phone."

Call rates are even higher for calls made abroad, which further increases the social isolation experienced by incarcerated people who do not have an established support system within the UK. **HS in HMP Northumberland, "I rely on £11 pound a week all this money going to phone credit every week just to speak [to] my children and my wife for 10 minutes to make sure they are all right. I can't speak [to] my children more than 10 minutes because phone credit in here are very expensive to call Afghanistan..."**

Prisons exist to isolate people from their communities, first by their physical removal from their homes and then violent displacement to prisons located far from their communities. Once there, bureaucratic and financial constraints make communication difficult and slow. Despite this, people in prison continue to play significant roles in the lives of their family and community outside and phone credit is essential for this.

Food

Over 50% of analysed grant forms mentioned needing support with food costs. Access to food varies significantly across prisons, and can be made harder for people with specific dietary requirements, such as eating halal food, having food intolerances and allergies or being diabetic. In particular, **concerns about cross-contamination make access to appropriate food unreliable and expensive** as people are forced to purchase their own food and snacks. **CB from HMP Liverpool requested support with buying food due to his allergies: "I have [a] citrus and tomato allergy and so I react to some prison food so some funds towards suitable food would be really helpful."**

As Cradle Community found from speaking to members of their community, "The prison administration often refuses to meet people's dietary requirements, such as eating halal, being vegetarian or eating gluten-free. In [a women's prison in the South East of England], a Muslim who eats halal was lied to by the officers, who turned out not to know what halal meant." (Cradle Community, 2021).

Much more can be said about this and will be in our upcoming report insha'Allah. We hope this initial briefing into some of the themes raised by our two years of work is beneficial for now.