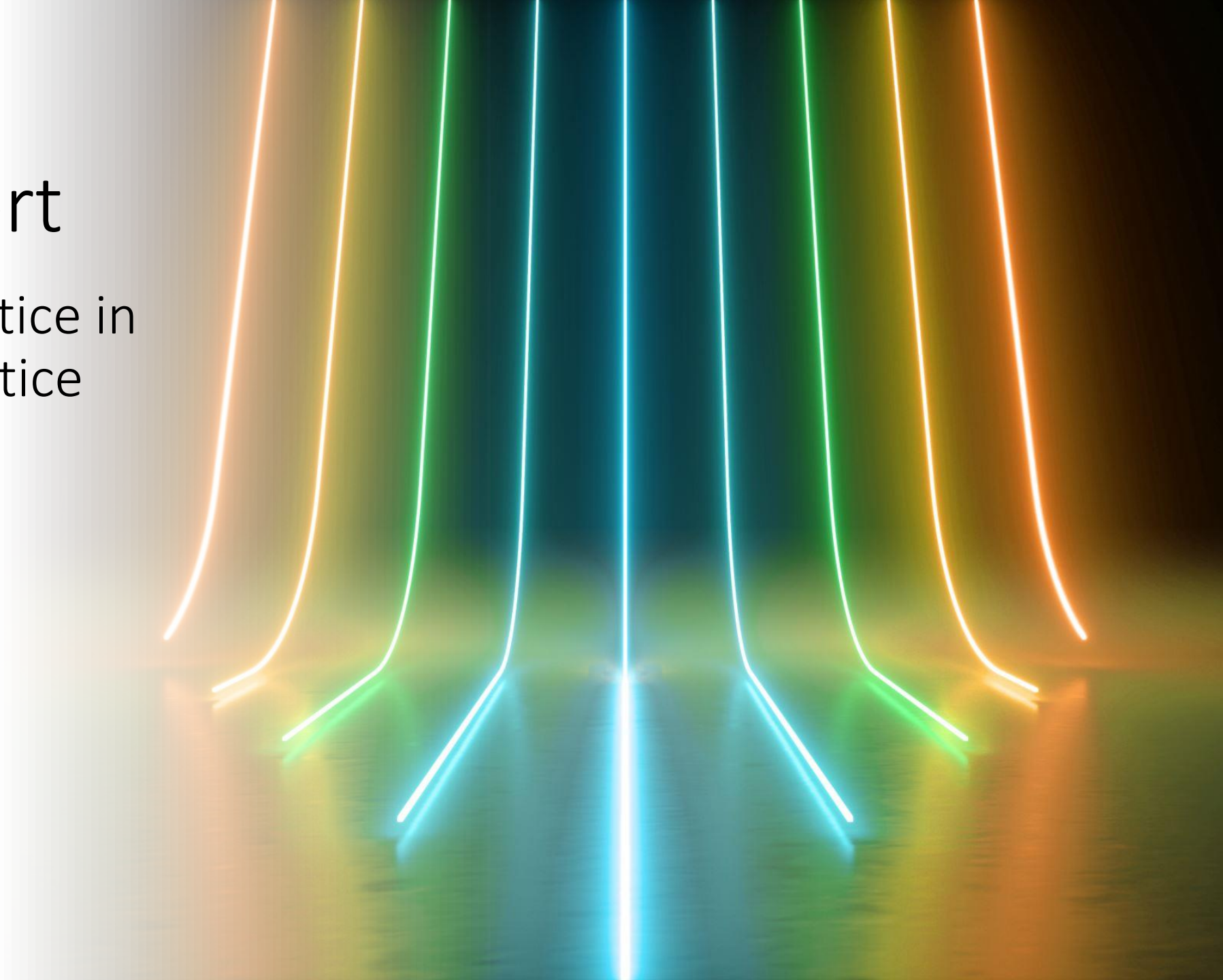
Just Support

Supportive Practice in the Criminal Justice System

Danny McDowell

Tracy Hammond



Do people with learning disabilities REALLY end up in prison?

- Up to 50% of male prisoners may be neuro divergent
- We don’t have a screening mechanism which covers all CJS
- The general prevalence of low literacy etc. may mean that other difficulties are hidden
- Community support needs may not be recognized

I couldn't pay my fine

I didn't know I'd go to prison

After months of bullying, I snapped

I was there - it must be my fault

I used to buy my friends - one day I bought a drugs dealer!

My flat was cold & damp with no furniture - my mental health got bad

Arrested for a burglary I didn't know was happening

My flat got taken over.

I wasn't getting any support

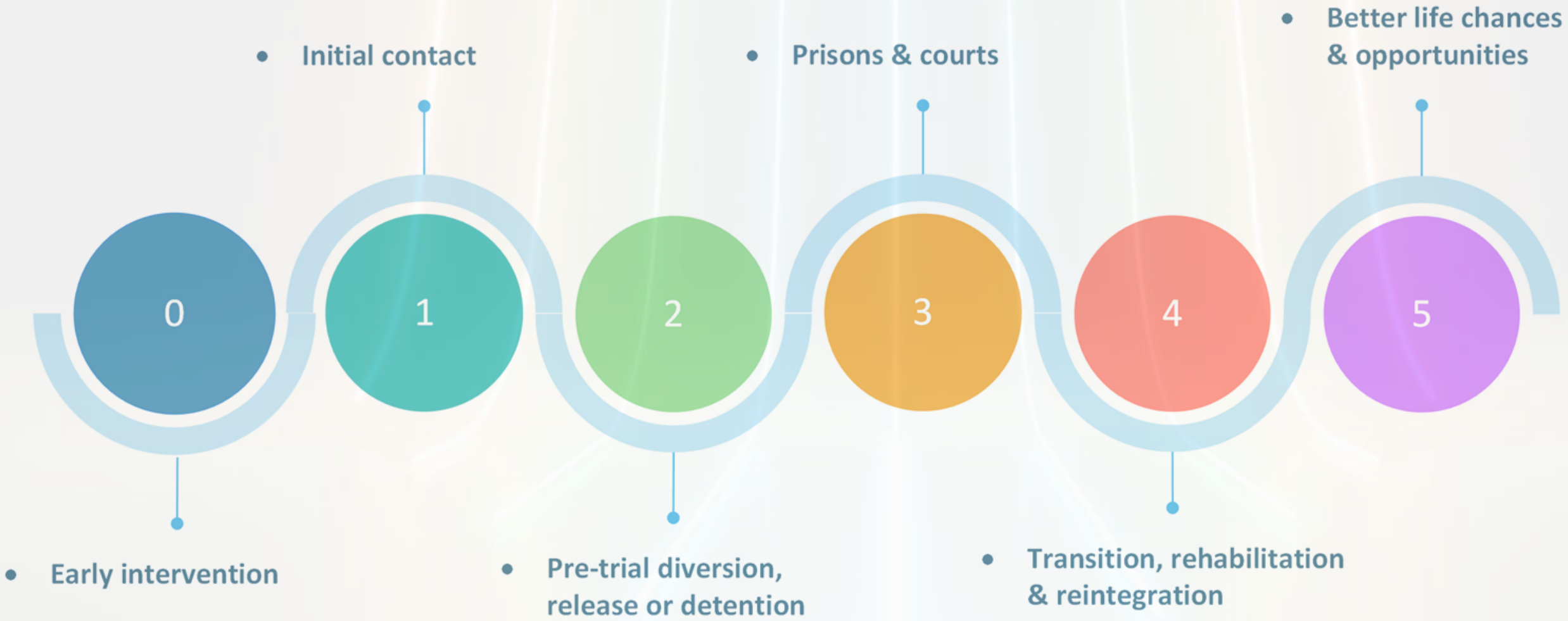
It wasn't me: I pleaded guilty as I was scared

Danny’s story

- Early life
- First time in prison
- A life of crime
- Getting back inside
- What it took to stop the cycle
- My life now

What does a journey through the CJS look like?

The Sequential Intercept Model



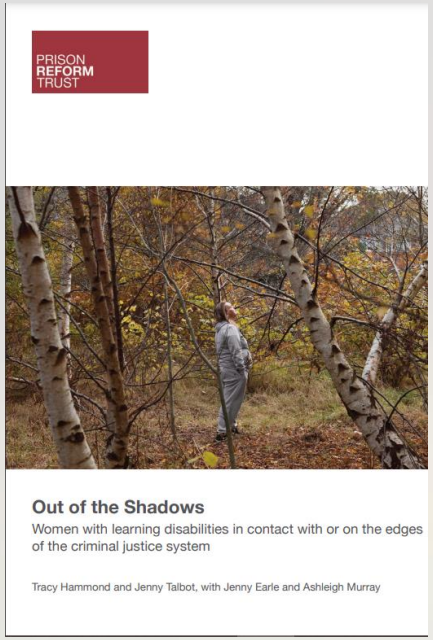
The overall landscape

- People are falling through the cracks of health and social care
- Care Act eligibility is a problem for our group
- Gang membership, county lines and cuckooing are a risk
- The emphasis on neurodiversity has great potential
- We need to recognise intersectionality and make all services accessible
- Consider where we can make the transformational difference

What kinds of difficulties might be encountered?

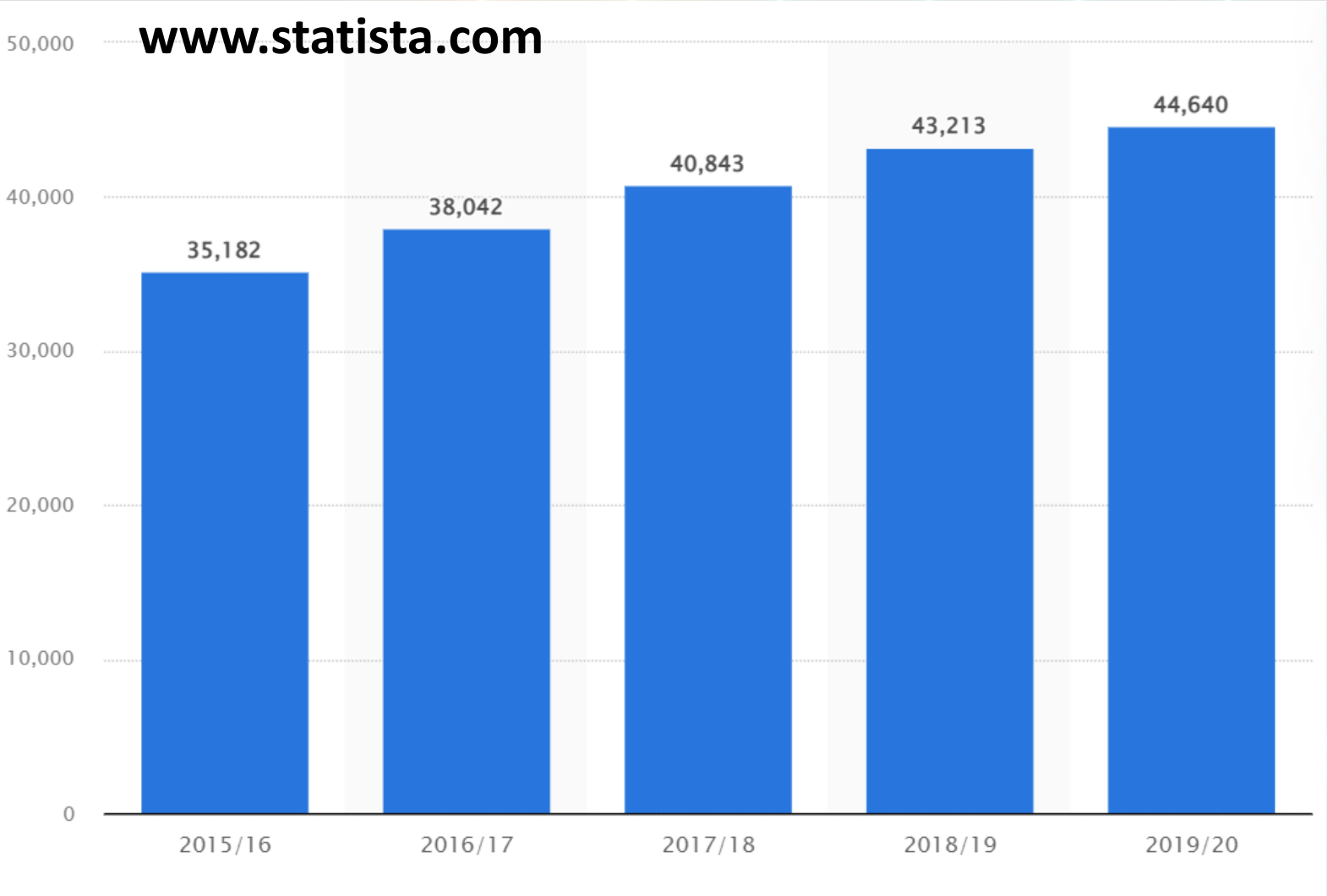
- Understanding the sentence, prison rules, release conditions
- Showing progress for release (adapted courses)
- Loss of support as some everyday living skills are not needed in prison
- Processes are hard to learn & form based, punctuality is prized
- Sensory sensitivities, claustrophobia
- Mental health and other problems may not be recognized
- Victimization/bullying (VPUs are open; people seen asking for help)

Women with learning disabilities



- More trauma than criminal intent
- Coercion and control
- Nowhere to flee
- Housing is a huge issue
- Women's Centres do an amazing job

At what cost?



The annual cost of a prison place in 2019-20 was £44,640

Professionals who may be needed

- Social services & health - prevention services
- Appropriate adults
- Intermediaries
- Liaison and Diversion and at the other end, Reconnect
- Solicitor who knows the person's needs
- CPS – need all the facts to make a public interest decision
- Pre-sentence reports need to reflect the whole person & judge needs to know sentencing options

What other support might be needed?

- Communication is key throughout the whole CJS journey
- Understanding what will happen and why
- Understanding rights & responsibilities
- Support to access the full prison regime & stay safe
- Additional support on release
- Easy read information only WITH SUPPORT
- Support to comply with community sentences and conditions

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