ERASED, NOT REPLACED

From National Recognition to the Silencing of a Proven Black-Led Diversion Programme

By Us, For Us- Until It Didn't Fit the System

For over six years, The Call In delivered an award-winning, community-led diversion model rooted in cultural humility, contextual intelligence and lived experience. It was Black-led, embedded in East Central Bristol and grounded in trusted relationships with young people, families and grassroots organisations.

Led by the founder of Mwanzo Project and shaped by lived experience and racial equity expertise, The Call In responded directly to disproportionality, over-criminalisation and the absence of culturally credible diversion pathways for Black and racially minoritised young people.

Its strength lay in co-production, sustained relationships, flexibility and accountability to the community, not institutional bureaucracy.

Recognition and National Credibility

When Avon and Somerset Police first initiated The Call In in collaboration with Golden Key, it was celebrated nationally and cited as innovative practice. It received the South West Mentoring Scheme of the Year award and the Howard League Community Award for tackling racial disproportionality. After transitioning to Mwanzo Project, it was recognised as promising practice in a report by Revolving Doors and the Youth Justice Board and spotlighted across the country.

The programme was also featured in national and international media and used by the Constabulary as evidence of good practice and community credibility. These accolades reflected independently assessed impact and measurable outcomes.

The Pause: Context and Good Faith

In 2024, The Call In was paused following the application of national charging guidance, specifically the CPS Director's Guidance on Charging. We were informed that the guidance limited diversion in certain offence categories, particularly drug supply.

This decision was driven by national policy and statutory interpretation, rather than by Avon and Somerset Police alone. We accepted the pause in good faith, despite expressing concerns about the disproportionate impact on Black and racially minoritised young people, on the understanding that solutions would be sought.

The Emergence of Chance to Change

Following the pause, Avon and Somerset Police introduced Chance to Change, presenting it as an innovative deferred prosecution model to address disproportionality and framing it as the first of its kind, without recognising the established impact and legacy of The Call In in its public communications.

We were invited to share learning and feedback to inform its design. However, in practice, the process prioritised scale and national branding over specialist expertise, local leadership and community trust.

From the outset, we were clear that it represented a diluted version of The Call In. It lacked cultural grounding and relational depth, and participation would have required us to compromise our integrity within bureaucratic structures lacking local credibility.

This is not about competition. It is about protecting effectiveness, integrity and community trust.

Our position is not that only one diversion model can exist. We have never opposed Chance to Change operating as an additional option, and different approaches may have distinct priorities, specialisms and offence categories. However, its continuation or expansion should be based on transparent evidence that it is effective, particularly for the Black and racially minoritised young people it was intended to benefit.

Our concern is that it has been allowed to absorb and replace the space previously occupied by The Call In, rather than operating alongside it, without first demonstrating comparable impact.

Consequences, Impact and Expansion

What has followed is deeply concerning. Specialist experience has been marginalised, Black-led leadership has not been embedded, national organisations have been prioritised over grassroots partners, community accountability has weakened, and local impact remains limited.

In East Central Bristol, Chance to Change has limited meaningful presence: it is not known by most community partners, its outcomes are not visible and Black youth voice is absent. Limitations have been attributed to referral levels, while shortcomings in outreach, partnership-building and community engagement remain unaddressed.

Rather than addressing these limitations, the scheme has been proposed for expansion into other offence categories, including areas in which The Call In operated successfully for years. It has also been positioned as 'groundbreaking', despite being a stripped-back, cost-driven version of an already proven framework.

Scale has replaced impact. Reframing has replaced accountability.

Leadership Responsibility and Erasure

Our concern is not with the original pause; it is with what followed, and this sits with police leadership.

There was no visible advocacy for The Call In, no protection of its legacy and no serious attempt to adapt or sustain a successful Black-led intervention. Instead, its work was allowed to fade while weaker alternatives were promoted without acknowledging their foundations.

This is not neutrality; it is complicity in erasure.

Cost, Reach and Misrepresentation

The Call In was increasingly framed as "expensive" because of its lower volumes and geographic focus. This misrepresented both impact and disproportionality.

Despite operating locally, we believe it worked with more Black and racially minoritised young people than Chance to Change has reached across the force area. It also demonstrated clear

cost savings through reduced prosecutions and custody. This evidence was known but disregarded.

In contrast to The Call In, Chance to Change operates without its depth of community connection, established trust, specialist local knowledge or long-standing partnerships. This is not adaptation; it is replacement without understanding.

A Familiar Pattern

We are witnessing a familiar pattern: Black-led solutions are celebrated until they challenge control; local expertise is extracted, marginalised or ignored; national models are prioritised; grassroots organisations are underfunded; and integrity is treated as incompatibility.

This is not partnership. It is not accountability. And it is not justice.

Our Call

We call on Avon and Somerset Police to:

- **Publish full details of *Chance to Change* partners, including their roles, funding received and decision-making authority;**
- **Disclose investment in Black-led and local organisations, including referral numbers, involvement in service design and evaluation;**
- **Publish outcomes for Black and racially minoritised young people, including evidence of youth voice, consultation and co-production;**
- **Explain how local communities have been meaningfully consulted, involved, and engaged.**

If Chance to Change proves effective, that evidence should be clear and open to scrutiny. What we do not accept is the expansion of Chance to Change being used to overwrite The Call In, appropriate its space or erase the Black-led expertise and community relationships on which effective diversion depends.

Sometimes, something by us, for us must be allowed to exist without being reshaped to fit systems that continue to fail our communities.

We will not dilute our model.
We will not compromise our integrity.
And we will no longer be silent about erasure.