

## Errol's story



I grew up in care. I did know my mum, but I went into care from one to five years old, and then I was in and out until I was finally given a care order at 14 and stayed. That's where I learnt to be a criminal – it was my training ground. The other boys and the staff all said I'd end up in prison, and before I knew it I was in a detention centre and then Borstal. It was my rite of passage.

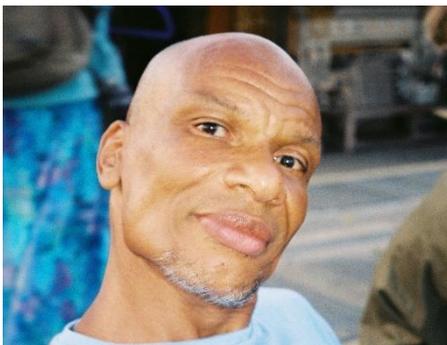
When we're young, we look for things to shake up our existence. I had no prospects and school was boring, so I had to find other ingredients to change my life. I chose criminal damage – smashing windows in shopping centres, letting off loads of car alarms - until I achieved the aim of going to prison. I was in and out of prison for years. In between I'd work - I was a family learning tutor at London Southbank University and then an AV assistant at London Business School – but I'd always end up back inside.

In 2016 I took part in a Good Vibrations course for the first time at HMP Thameside. I'm rhythmic, but not very musical. I signed up for it because I was in my 50s and in prison *again*. I wanted to do something different. It wasn't what I expected. We had to carry all these ancient delicate instruments into the hall to start with – I was interested straight away. With gamelan, there's a lot of space for people who haven't got a clue about how to play music. If you can drum a pattern with a pen on a desk, you can play gamelan, you can make a rhythm that someone else can add to.

I remember there were people there from some of the other prison wings, including a couple of guys I wasn't getting on with. There was real tension, even though it all started over a packet of biscuits. I remember threatening this geezer one minute, then the next suddenly we're sharing a xylophone! You can't play music, trying to find melody and rhythm, and still have beef. It's impossible. Something has to take over – either the tension takes over, or the music, shared co-operation and collaboration does.

After I was released I bumped into Kieran, a Good Vibrations facilitator, at an event one day. He got me back in touch with Good Vibrations. They got me on a course at the Southbank, but I just couldn't get it, so I dropped out. It was too stressful to fit in. I was diagnosed with ADHD around that time and I think that had something to do with it. But later I tried again, and I performed with other musicians at a conference using gamelan instruments and music tech, and I also did a gamelan and poetry course called Beyond Performance at the University of York. I even spoke and performed at a Good Vibrations board meeting. It's good to keep in contact with organisations like Good Vibrations. I go to conferences about reading in prisons too because the Shannon Trust helped me out in prison, and am involved in Breathe Smart, who do mindfulness in prisons. It keeps me on the right track.

Now I'm an actor and a spoken word artist. I've been in two feature films and I run workshops for charities and in prisons. You can see some of my work here [www.wordonthekerb.com](http://www.wordonthekerb.com). When I perform, I realise I



have the power to influence people. It can be very easy to lead people in the right or the wrong direction, so it has to come with responsibility. I'm writing a poem at the moment, exploring patterns and repetition. I can see the rhythm of my childhood so clearly – people around me should have been able to see where I was heading. There, I did it again - when you grow up in care it's easy to put responsibility onto others. We mustn't be seen just as victims. We can't hang about waiting for someone to save us, we need to save ourselves. Sure, help each other and give each other a leg up, but the ultimate responsibility is with me. I always try to be better today than I was yesterday.