

ROOM 2 RISE

Society often views convicted criminals as dangers to society, who have chosen to live a life of criminality with no intention of curbing their illegal activities. This leads to stereotyping and struggles to escape the stigma that surrounds ex-offenders even though they have paid their debt to society.

Room 2 Rise is a design proposal for a music-based educational facility with an integrated live music venue for ex-offenders to provide opportunities to learn, create, and showcase their music.

Its ultimate aim is to 'Break the chain' of re-offending and provide a safe, comfortable, and respectful space allowing ex-offenders to work towards future goals whilst assisting with any addiction and mental health issues.

The project was inspired by the disconnection between society and ex-offenders during and after their incarceration. A critical element of the project development was collaboration between myself, the interviewees, and academic research allowing multiple perspectives and ideas to be considered concerning the overall design.

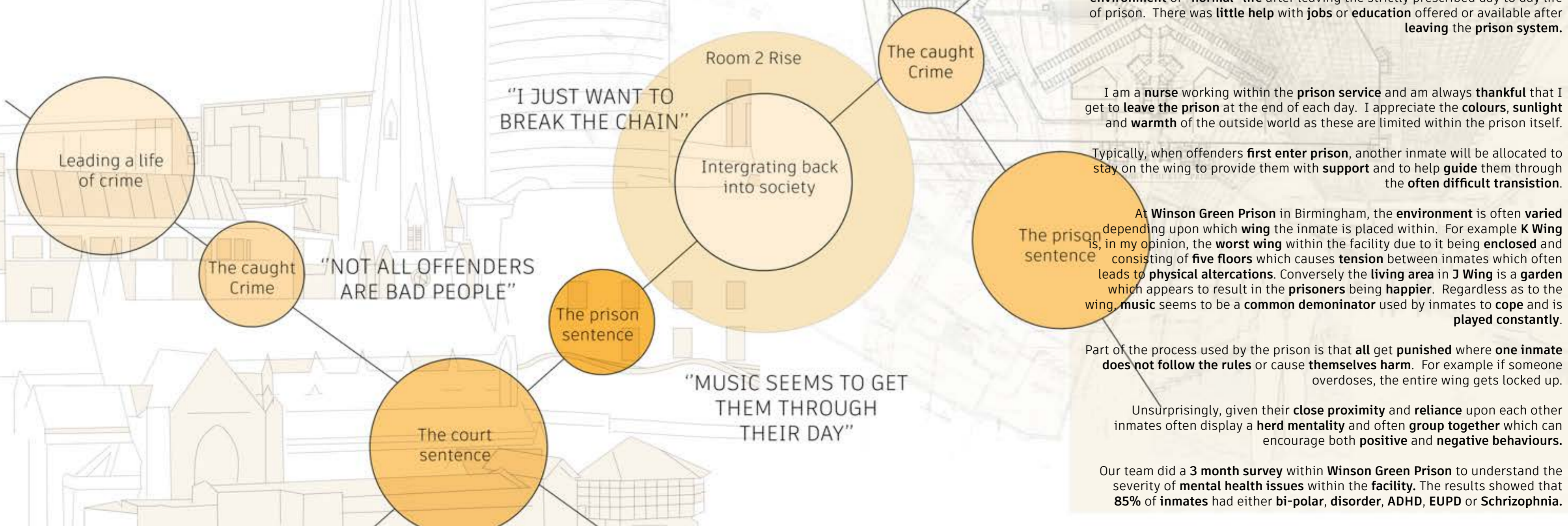


COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

The inspiration for the project was my personal experience of living in a deprived area where gangs, violence, addiction, mental health issues, and poverty were part of everyday life. Moving to an affluent area helped me understand the extent of the economic and social divide and fuelled my desire to help ex-offenders make positive and healthy changes following their release.

One of the main drivers of the project was interviews carried out with ex-offenders, a prison nurse, a prison designer, Nacro, and Changing Tunes. The time spent with each of these contributors provided me with important information about current issues surrounding the prison system, their own personal experiences, and an understanding of some of the excellent support already in place to support ex-offenders.

The common themes among interviewees were their experiences with the use of music at challenging times and its positive influence, the dull, depressing, and cold environment of prisons, and the lack of specialist support within these facilities around mental health and addiction. My research indicated that offenders often suffer from mental health and addiction issues, lack of education, and lack of appropriate support. The interviews, together with my wider research helped shape the entire project and allowed the design to be developed with the needs of its users as a primary consideration.



I had what would be considered a **“normal” upbringing**. However, I **struggled academically** and socially which I later identified as being due to suffering from **ADHD and Bipolar**.

I turned to **drugs** to deal with **post-natal depression** following the birth of my first child. This led me down a path of **criminality** having to shoplift to fund my drug habit resulting in me being arrested and **convicted of theft**.

During my one-year prison sentence, I dealt with the **loss of my freedom** and the loss of my son both of which were devastating. I also had to overcome my **drug addiction** and received **minimal support** from the prison to deal with all these issues. The only useful support I received for my mental health was speaking to my mentor/listener, who was another prisoner appointed to the role.

Following my **release** from prison, my first thought was **“where is my dealer”** but thankfully my partner arrived to collect me to take me home before I could make the call. My partner is **passionate about music**, its creation, and its **mental health benefits** due to his mental health issues. Music became something for me to **focus** on over the next few months **replacing my drug addiction** with something not only **healthier** for me **physically** but that also had a **positive impact** on my mental wellbeing.

I was placed in the **care system** at a **young age** and did not complete my formal education. I grew up without anyone who believed in me and without any real **emotional support**. Growing up in the **care system** based in a city filled with drugs and violence meant that the only way I knew how to make money was through **criminal activity** which led me down a **path of drugs** and resulted in me completing **two prison sentences** by the age of **26**.

Whilst in prison I recall that we were only allowed **one hour of physcial exercise per day** and this was never always guaranteed. The **prison environment** destroyed my **mental health** more and more each day until I shared a cell with a man who had a **passion for song-writing**. We spent our days making up **lyrics and beats** together with **objects** in our cells and looking back I believe that this is what helped me get through my sentence.

Following my release, I was completely **unprepared for the fast paced environment of “normal” life** after leaving the strictly prescribed day to day life of prison. There was **little help** with **jobs or education** offered or available after **leaving the prison system**.

I am a **nurse** working within the **prison service** and am always **thankful** that I get to **leave the prison** at the end of each day. I appreciate the **colours, sunlight and warmth** of the outside world as these are limited within the prison itself.

Typically, when offenders **first enter prison**, another inmate will be allocated to stay on the wing to provide them with **support** and to help **guide** them through the **often difficult transistion**.

At **Winson Green Prison** in Birmingham, the **environment** is often **varied** depending upon which **wing** the inmate is placed within. For example **K Wing** is, in my opinion, the **worst wing** within the facility due to it being **enclosed** and consisting of **five floors** which causes **tension** between inmates which often leads to **physical altercations**. Conversely the **living area in J Wing** is a **garden** which appears to result in the **prisoners** being **happier**. Regardless as to the wing, **music** seems to be a **common demoninator** used by inmates to **cope** and is **played constantly**.

Part of the process used by the prison is that **all get punished** where **one inmate does not follow the rules** or cause **themselves harm**. For example if someone overdoses, the entire wing gets locked up.

Unsurprisingly, given their **close proximity** and **reliance** upon each other inmates often display a **herd mentality** and often **group together** which can encourage both **positive** and **negative behaviours**.

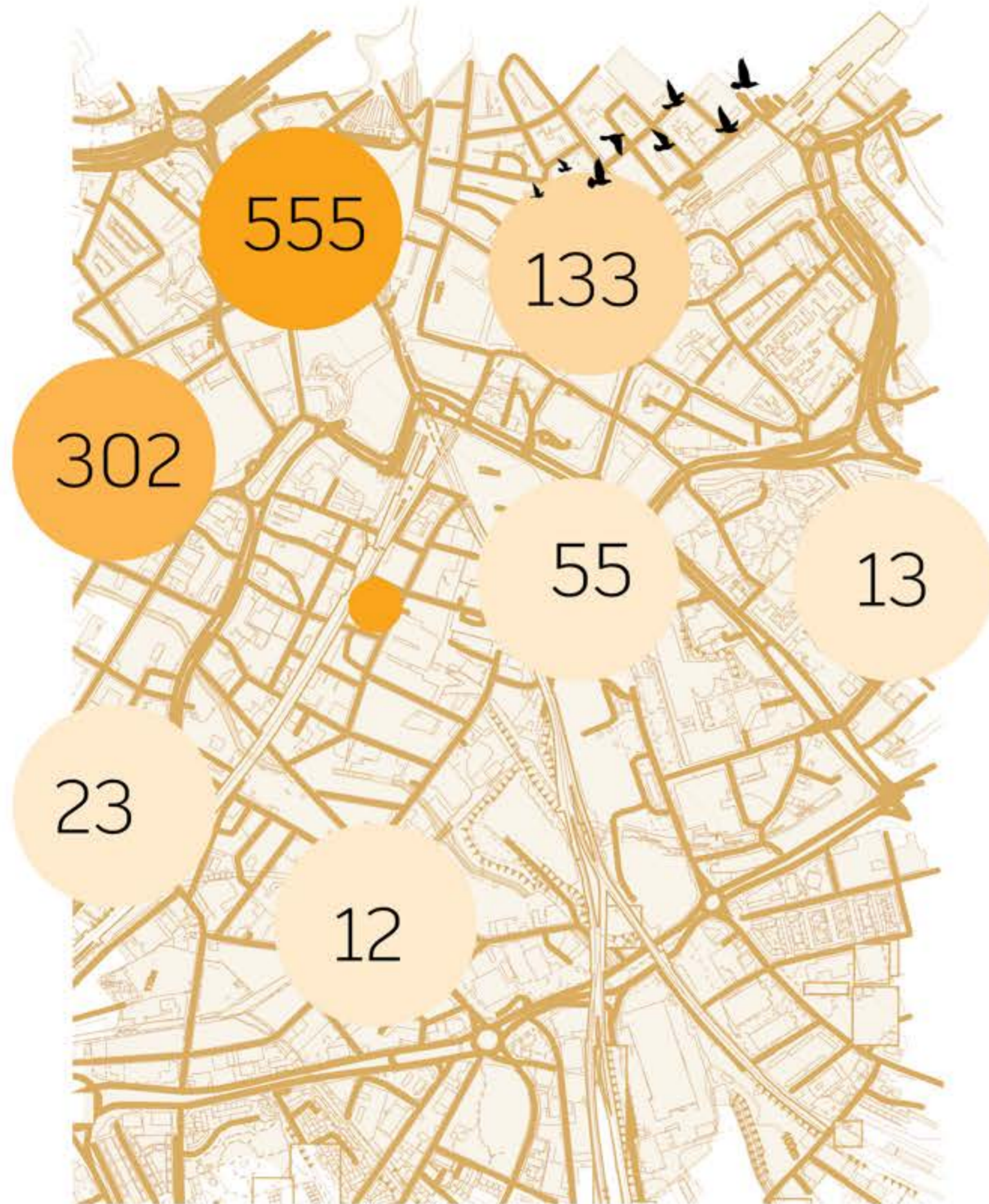
Our team did a **3 month survey** within **Winson Green Prison** to understand the severity of **mental health issues** within the **facility**. The results showed that **85% of inmates** had either **bi-polar, disorder, ADHD, EUPD or Schrizophnia**.

INTERVIEW ONE:

INTERVIEW TWO:

INTERVIEW THREE:

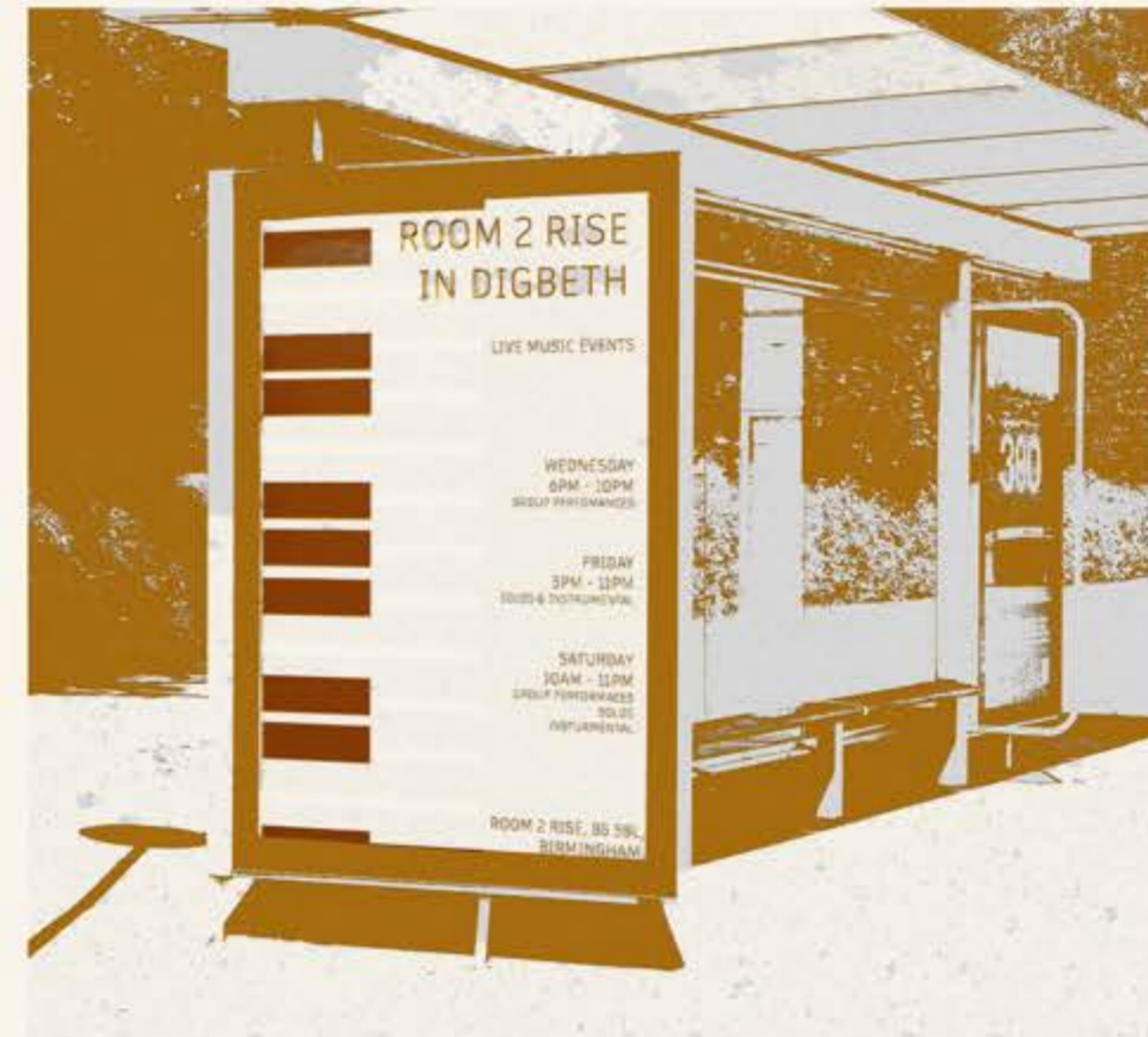
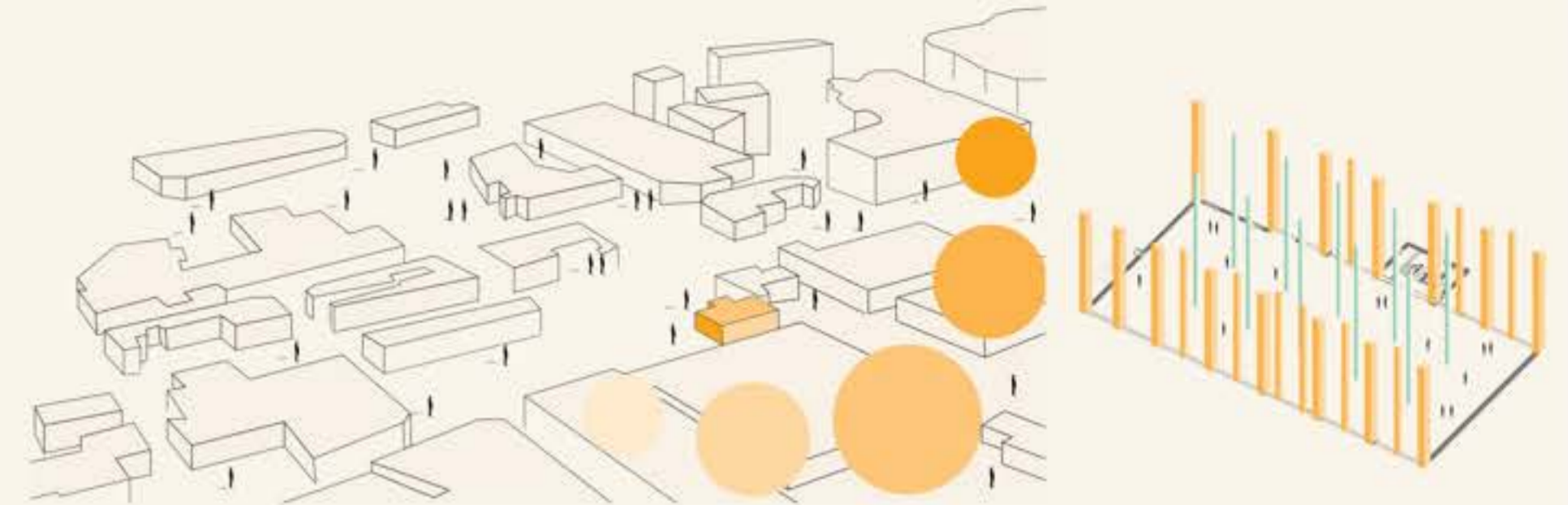
COLLABORATION THROUGH SITE



Birmingham is the second biggest city in the UK with a population of 1,114,900 (Census, 2021). The crime rate for Birmingham is 17% higher than that of the overall crime rate for the West Midlands. Therefore, the placement of the building is important as placing ex-offenders back into an area with high crime rates may result in them engaging often with those associated with criminal activities.

Digbeth has the lowest crime rate within the city centre and it is also known as the Creative Quarter. Locating the facility within this area will provide ex-offenders with opportunities to spend time with artistic and creative people which in turn will hopefully help reduce stigma and assist in a successful reintegration back into society.

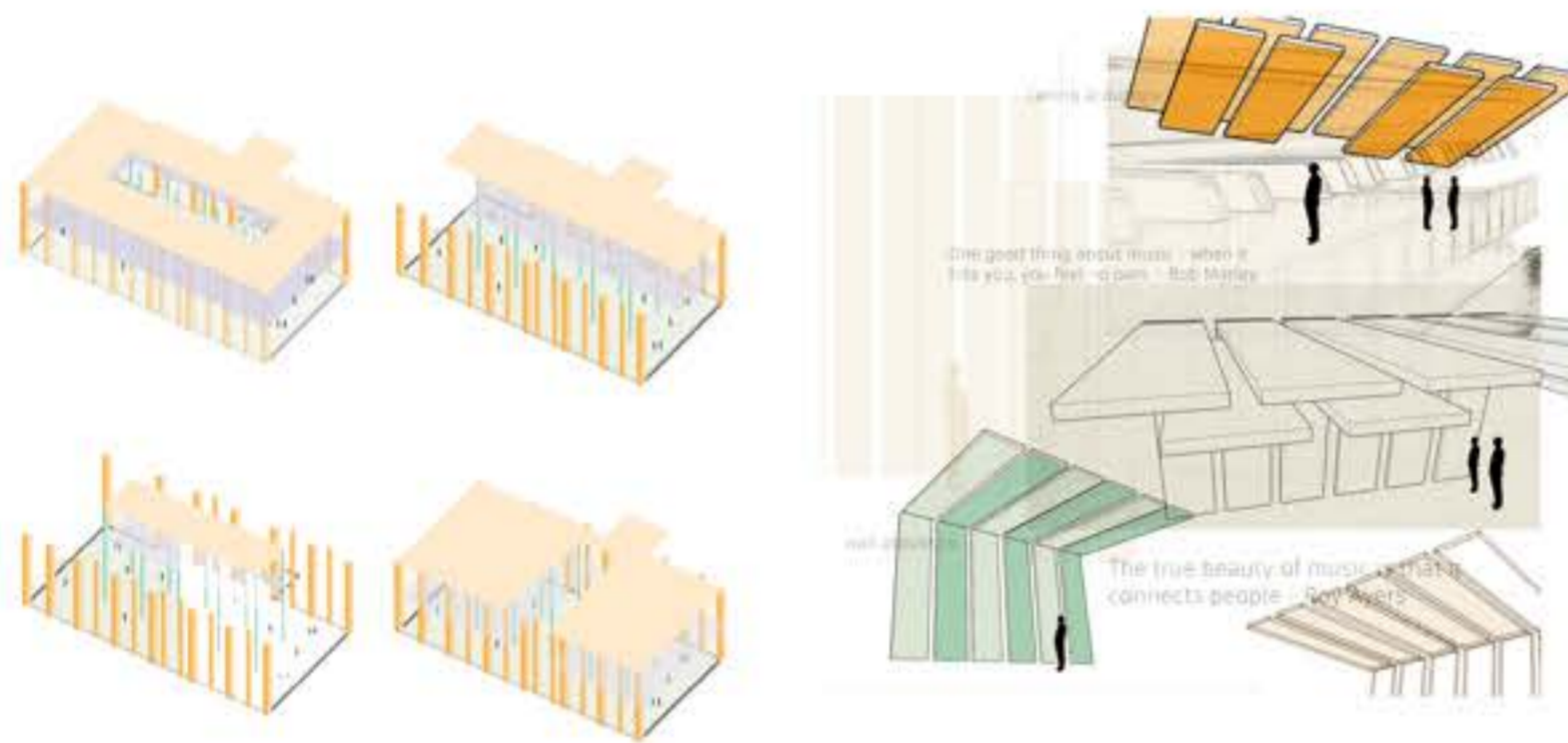
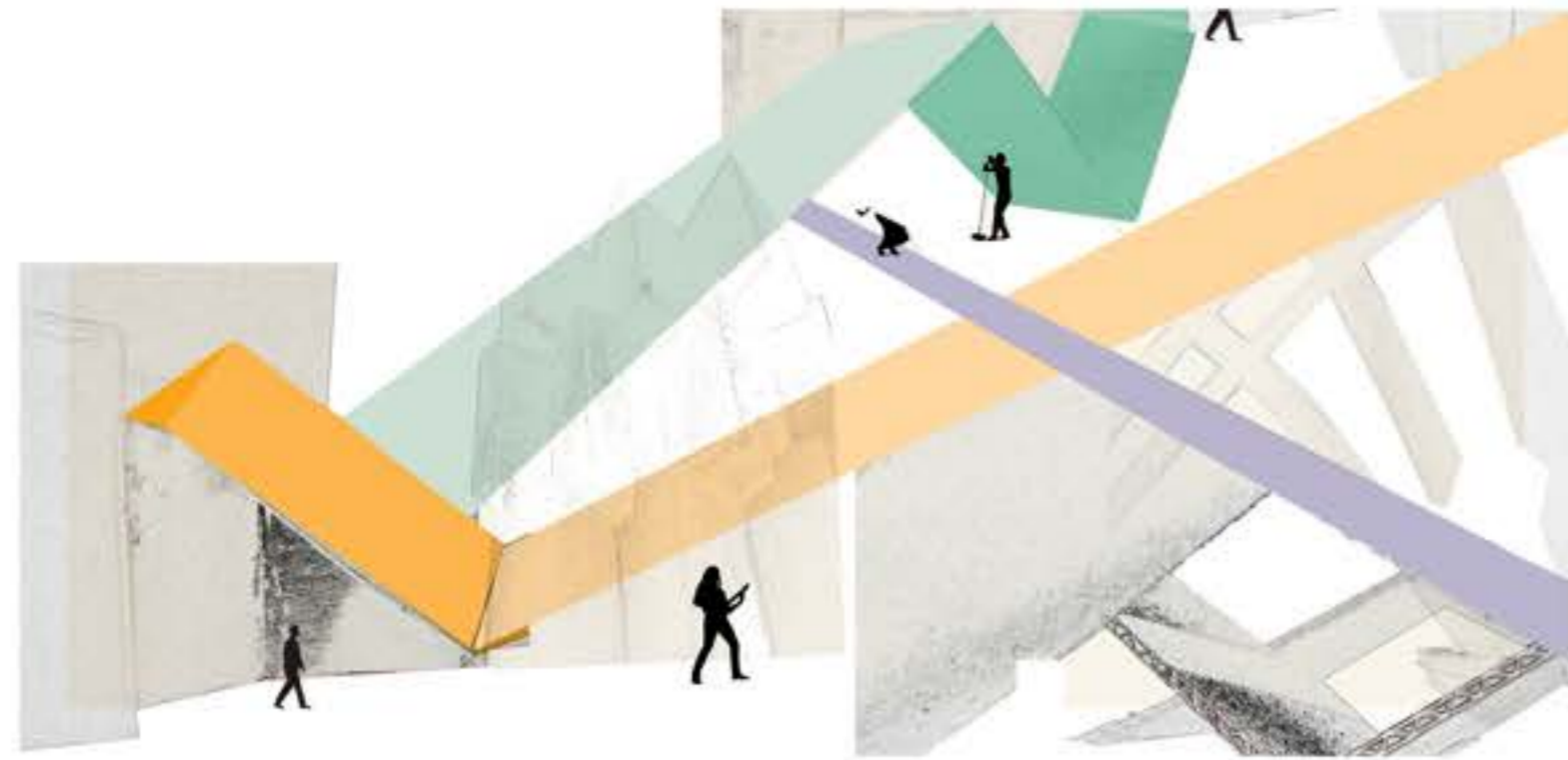
The proposed site for Room 2 Rise at 26-35 Borsesley Street, Digbeth is situated far enough away from the high crime rates in the City Centre yet close to Digbeth's creative quarter. It aims to offer users opportunities to avoid re-offending and encourage collaboration in an environment where creativity is recognised and commended.



Working with **local recording studios** and **music facilities** will hopefully help to **reduce stigma** and create a **positive perception** of **ex-offenders**. As **staff** at the studios and music venues will be working closely with the users, they will have an opportunity to base their opinion of individuals on **first-hand experience** as opposed to **second hand stories** or **generalised beliefs**.

Creating opportunities for the **users** to **engage** with **businesses** in the **local area** will help provide them with **confidence**, a sense of **belonging to a community**, **knowledge**, and possibly further opportunities around **employment** and/or **collaboration**.

COLLABORATION THROUGH DESIGN



Following on from the collaborative research, it is clear that prisons can be dull, depressing, and clinical environments often lacking in natural light, colour, or materiality. As prisoners spend much of their time within the prison itself, they may suffer from mental health issues and trauma related to their experience.

Room2Rise want to ensure that nothing in the design of the facility could exacerbate any mental health issues and provide a comfortable and safe space for its users. Therefore careful consideration was given to the layout of the building in collaboration with the first-hand experiences provided by the interviewees.

Accordingly, one of the main concerns when considering voids within the building is the placement of the existing steel beams. In their current position, they steer the design towards a layout very similar to that of a prison i.e. a central void including staircases surrounded by rooms. This is not appropriate given the proposed nature of the facility.

Further, the principles of colour psychology were applied in order to create a welcoming, calming and sometimes fun environment with a view to aid create a space that nurtures and encourages creativity.

Ex-offenders experience separation from the remainder of society both during their incarceration and following their release. Therefore a concept exploring both music and separation was developed to highlight this and showcase how music can be used to reconnect.

A musical score is made up of lines, notes and various other shapes and these forms were disassembled to reflect separation and then used as part of the development.

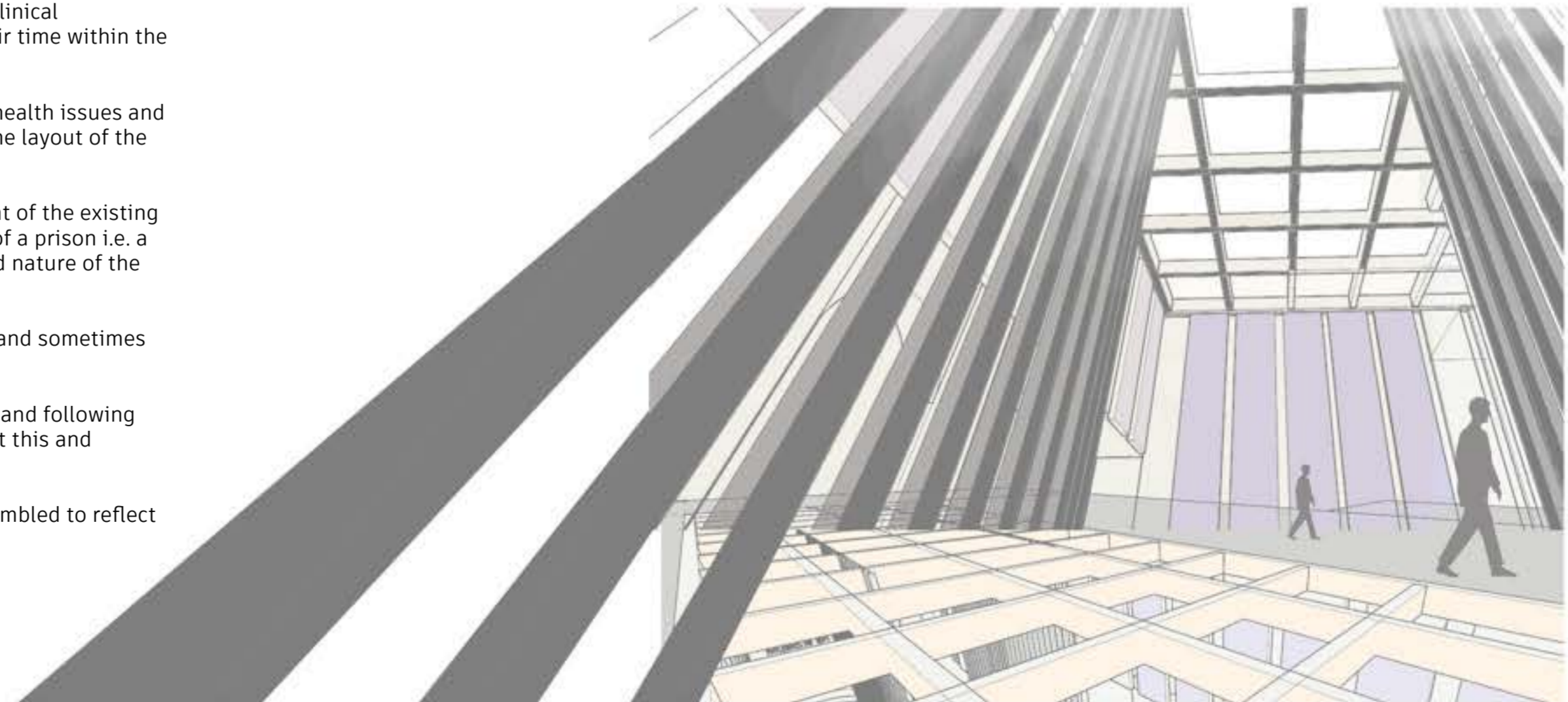


The precedent explores how connections and collaborations can be developed through the use of furniture.

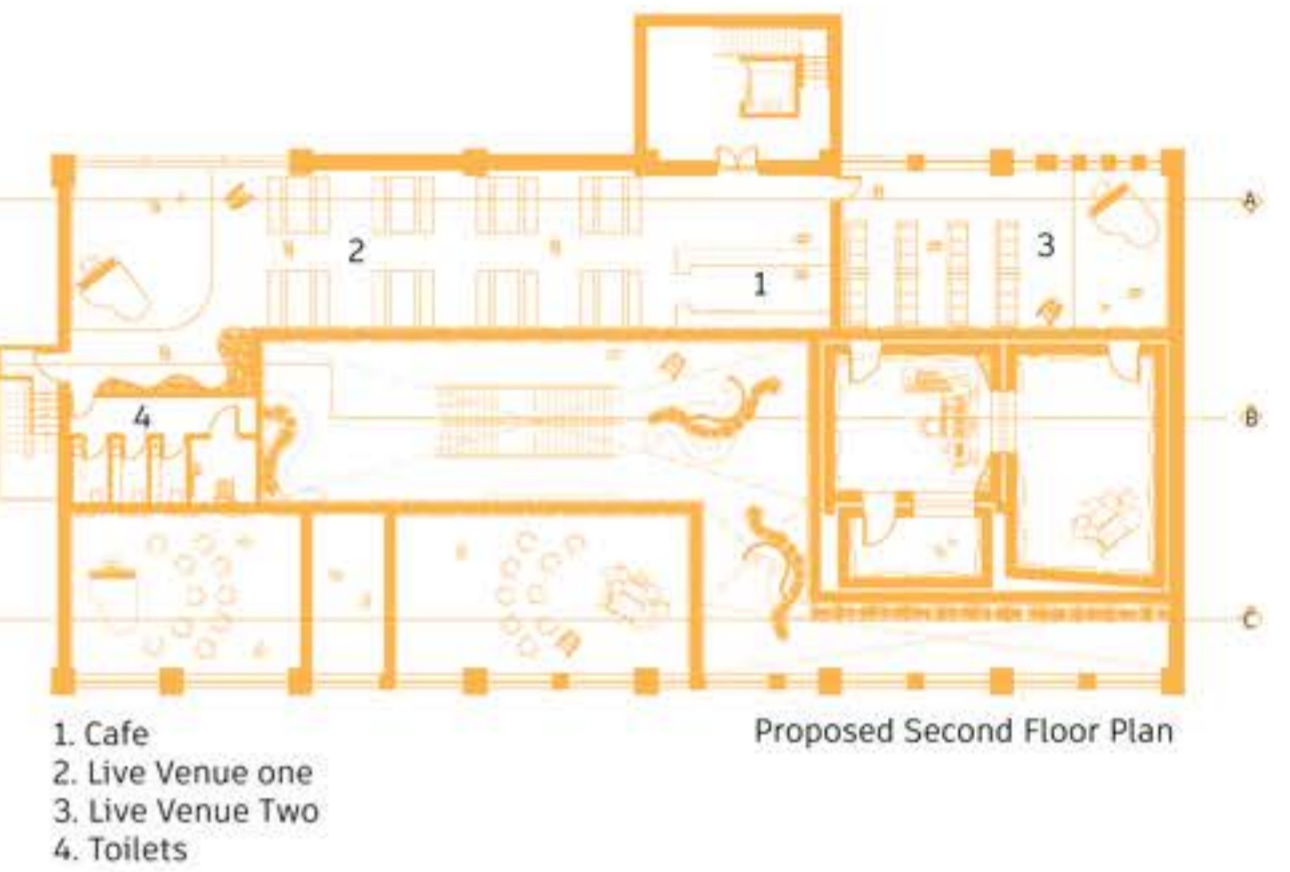
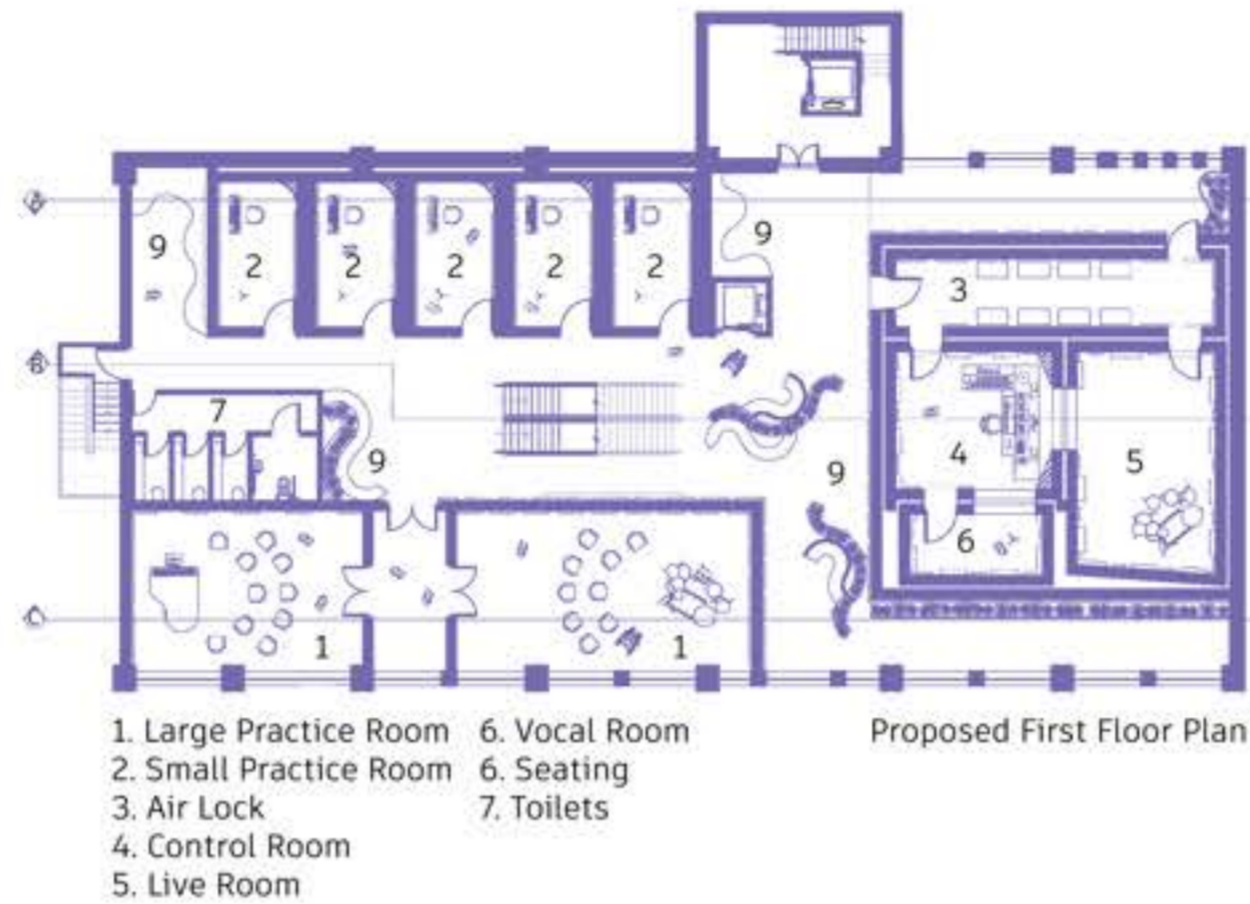
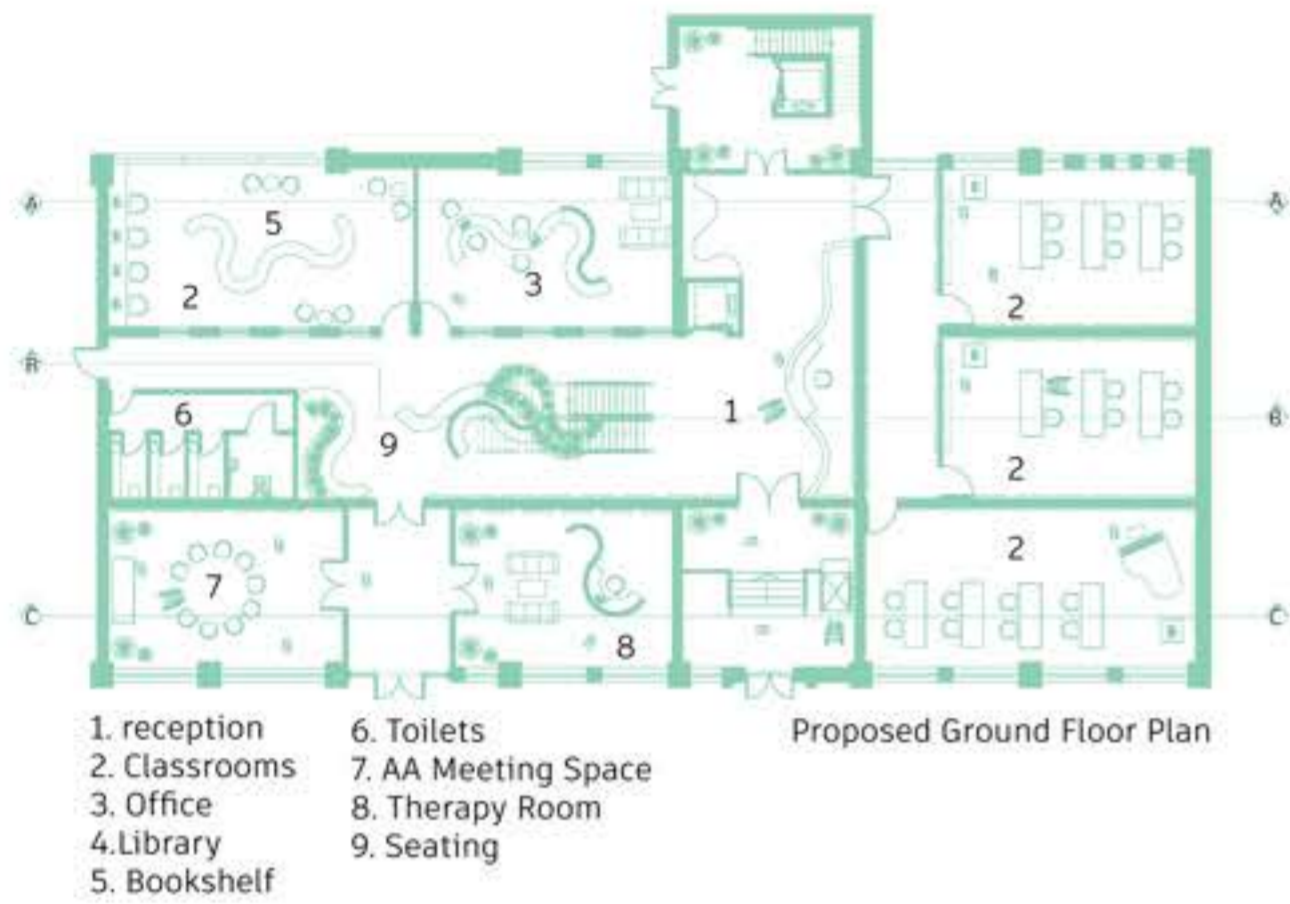
As the center is a dedicated music facility, the collaboration between users is an important part of its aims. Whilst incarcerated, offenders often only get to converse within communal areas for set periods of the day. Therefore, creating communal areas that bear no resemblance to those in prisons.



The communal areas within room 2 Rise contain furniture designed with curvaceous forms to encourage collaboration, socialisation, and a sense of community. Given that each bench has two seats either side this allows for multiple users to sit comfortable and converse whether by conversation or music.



COLLABORATION THROUGH PROPOSAL



■ -New beginnings & healing.
- Education/rehabilitation, ground floor.

■ -Creativity & reducing stress levels.
- Music making, first floor.

■ -No negative emotional associations & sociable colour.
- Live music venue, second floor.

