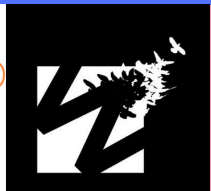


TRANSCRIPTS

WOMEN FLIP THE SCRIPT



Chapter 3: Mental Health



“

I'm not so easily
defeated now.
Before I thought I
was a fighter but
now I know...

I will fight through.

Panellist



contents.

01

INTRODUCTION **THE PROJECT**

Outlining the vision and the steps taken to create 'Women Flip the Script.'

INFORMATION **COLLABORATORS**

An overview of the services involved in creating this project and a message from the producer.

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POEM **RIDE**

by Donna Walton. Written and inspired during difficult times.

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PANEL DISCUSSION
UNDER PRESSURE

A group discuss their experiences of navigating housing services and some of the obstacles.

CONSIDERATION
DEPENDING ON YOURSELF

A brief note on drug and alcohol use which may initially create obstacles in seeking support.

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INTRODUCTION
IN(SIDE) OUT

Josie introduces 'mindfulness' meditation for stress reduction and wellbeing.

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INFORMATION
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Some services mentioned or relevant to the themes discussed throughout this chapter.

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the vision.

Women Flip the Script is a combination of audio and written material created in collaboration between:

- Advance
- Prison Advice & Care Trust (Pact)
- Wanda Canton
- Women in Prison (WiP)

This project sought to create a resource for women living in the community who have had some interaction with the criminal justice system. It combines personal testimony with practical tips, advice and peer support. The four key themes to which it speaks and as identified by women are:

1. **Relationships**
2. **Housing and finance**
3. **Mental Health**
4. **Services**

A fifth 'bonus edition' includes stories shared by women.

This booklet provides transcripts to a podcast series produced in March 2020, available online.

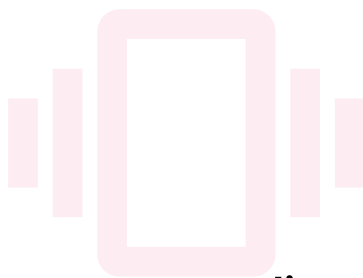


the journey.

Workshop

A group of women met with Pact staff and the producer to identify key themes to be discussed.

STEP
01



Recording

Women are asked to independently record their own material on their phones.

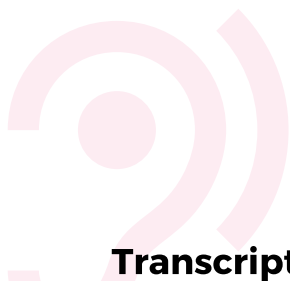
STEP
02



Production

Audio submissions are reviewed, collated and edited into episodes.

STEP
03



Transcripts

A booklet is designed and created for each podcast episode.

STEP
04

Distribution

Written and spoken resources provided for women living in the community.

STEP
05



advance

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES



Support for those experiencing domestic abuse living in:

- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Westminster
- Brent

Support includes referral to an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA), finding services including safe housing and advocating on your behalf, such as speaking to the police. Tailored services include for mothers, addressing problematic substance use, mental health support and housing support.

The Minerva Centre is a women-only service for women who have experience of the Criminal Justice System. The Centre seeks to reduce re-offending and prevent family breakdown. Referrals are primarily made directly from the police, prison and probation services. Aside from specialist advice services, the Centre also provides group workshops including arts, emotional management and practical skills.



020 8741 7008



admin@advancecharity.org.uk



advancecharity.org.uk



Prisoners · Families · Communities
A Fresh Start Together

A national charity supporting prisoners, people with convictions and their families. Pact works to build stronger families, safer communities and reduce the risk of harm to prisoners and their families. This includes advocating on behalf of people affected by the criminal justice system and influencing public services, policy and legislation.

Services include befriending schemes, visitation support, peer-support groups, mentoring, short courses and one-to-one casework. Pact work with people at all stages of their journey including pre-custody Court support, in prison courses, Through the Gate mentoring and community resettlement.

Pact runs the National Prisoners' Families helpline:
0808 808 2003

There are also volunteering and employment opportunities and a number of guides and resources available online.



020 7735 9535



info@prisonadvice.org.uk



prisonadvice.org.uk



Women in Prison

A women-only organisation that provides gender-specialist support to women affected by the criminal justice system alongside a number of campaigning initiatives.

- WomanMatta in Manchester
- Beth Centre in Lambeth
- The Women's Support Centre in Woking

These Centres focus on holistic (all-rounded) support and advice for women living in the community.

WIP's staff are gender-specialist practitioners, providing support across all the difficulties and barriers commonly experienced by women affected by the criminal justice system - domestic and sexual violence, poor mental and physical health, addiction, homelessness, debt, and unemployment.

Their magazine 'Ready, Steady, Go!' is available for women in prison and online, with some services provided for women prior to release to support re-engagement with the community.



wanda canton: producer

Having joined the Pact team to produce a resource for women living in the community, I was keen to explore how women could be directly involved and empowered through the process itself.

In my experience, the physical act of speaking our stories can be as powerful as writing. Given the marginalisation of people with criminal convictions and subsequent stigma, the opportunity to both speak and be heard is fundamental.

This project was therefore designed to produce both audio and written material made **by women, for women**. As experts of their own experience, we asked women to independently record their stories, advice and thoughts on their phones. The podcast and this booklet compile these recordings and include both the difficult realities of life in/after prison and the achievements, hope and lessons learned.

The spirit of the contributors was brilliant. Not only did individuals and peers work together to create content without formal training, but sharing personal accounts aloud is no easy feat, let alone offering it to provide comfort and support to others. I hope the finalised audio and booklet does justice to the remarkable women who collaborated, that it might reach those who need to hear them and even to speak themselves.

Wanda Canton



"If we're preaching rehabilitation,
then everybody really
needs to be on board."

Panellist



ride.

by Donna Walton

Immortal sin...
Oh how you shine...
Your pleasure truly is all mine...
So step right up,
Let's take a ride
On Donna's manic mental slide...

Hold on tight now, buckle up,
Sip with me from insanity's cup,
Before this frenzied mind does spin
So fast it sucks you deeper in...

This isn't for the faint of heart,
So make your choice before we start.
However! If your mind is grim
Then step right up and hop right in!

For dark and nasty is my forte
All things evil bad and naughty!
Beware! It's not a pretty trip
For those that fight the manic slip.

So take it! Feel it! Make it work!
Liberate the thoughts that lurk.

Allow your mind to run amok
Forget the timings of the clock.
This ride's not run on normal time
Just chaos, mayhem, blood and grime!

Oh feel the thrill!
Such joyous rush
But wait... a single moment's hush.
NOW! Comes the screaming.
Such evil!
Such spite!
My mind is ablaze with this glorious sight!

Pulsing with envy the green swirling mist
Lips ripe and crimson. A true Devil's tryst.
Sapphire blue eyes turn your blood icy cold,
There are things on this ride that can *never* be told.

Watch as the orange and yellows leap high,
Flames spouted forth in a sulphurous sigh.
So toxic, so thick, a black writhing form,
To show you it's wrong to desire the norm.

Such exquisite delights, never meant to be seen,
Are yours to devour, if you unpick the seam.
Give madness free reign, total power of you,
To unleash all the darkness that hid as it grew.

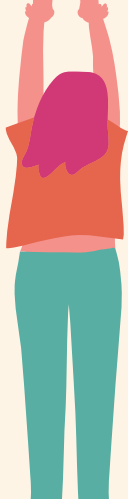
Please don't be frightened, I'll hold you real tight
While I tear out your throat with my venomous bite!
Please do not fear, just accept, feel the joy,
While I torture and tease you my deviant toy!

Do you feel brave? The door's open wide.
Come closer, jump in, let's go for a ride.
Hedonistic, selfish glee
Is how *this* ride prefers it's fee,

Just give your mind for me to spoil
I promise you, it's not a toil.
This magic ride feeds on it's host!
It craves the thing you value most.

Your conscience is it's chosen prize
And lust it uses as it's 'guise.
Blinding colours, fierce and hot!
A tantalising, beating pot,
Just brimming full of wanton greed,
Immortal! No more heart to bleed.

There's *nothing* that you cannot do,
It simply makes your dreams come true.
So step right up, let's take a ride on
Donna's
Manic,
Mental,
Slide.



“

There was no difference in the circumstance, but there was a difference in how we dealt *with* the circumstance.

”

under pressure.

Panel discussion.

B: So, after coming out of prison, I did feel that my mental health was...under pressure.

A: I did feel like, kind of like I'm being penalised.

B: Yeah - stereotyped.

A: Yeah, exactly. So then, I shouldn't have to keep on kind of, telling myself, 'I've proved myself.' Isn't this what this whole system was supposed to have been about? To have proven your change or whatever else, so it's kind of like... could I kind of get a break here somehow kind of thing?

So I'm trying to like, stand on my own two feet and when you're in there as well, you know when you're in there as well, they say like 'you're a strain on society' - I'm sorry, I paid my taxes as well but you feel bad already 'cause you're already taken away from people's children because you know, you're in prison and that's however many thousands to just keep you there and whatever else. So, for me it was a point of proving I'm gonna stand on my own two feet, I'm gonna give back, wherever you lot say I've taken away from.

I accept my wrongdoings but I'm also being told that doing

all of this leads to this at the end and when you get out and it's still really hard – and I think people need to realise that, it is still really hard, it really does knock your self-esteem and like, have you questioning like 'am I the problem?'

I don't know, I just think like, you're putting them in prison and then you're not preparing them fully enough... especially I think like, mental health wise.

B: Yeah, you're not helping like, the root issue of why they were in prison. That's it.

A: To the flip side, of the mental health side of things, it has an impact because you literally are feeling like, I need help here. I know that on paper – yes, I do have a brain cell. I made a mistake, I paid for the mistake but paying for that mistake has kind of put me back in society – it's proven that prison does pull us, like it puts us back when we're going back into society. So, when you're going back into society and you're going back in and you do have all of these issues and responsibilities – not even so much issues, but responsibilities – where is that support?

Honestly, what I would say is I don't know like... prison made me have to stop and be a little bit more grateful for the things maybe I weren't taking time to be grateful for. So now, even on the outside it's like... 'girl, remember the nights when you was literally dying inside because you weren't able to be out there to appreciate each moment.'

Don't let these people get to your head like. Things have gotten to me and things will get to us because you know we're just human and we feel, but little things is like, I would always say like, you know, I am in charge of... directing my... it sounds corny but my destiny. And maybe I didn't understand or take it serious enough before, that journey. But more so now, I was able to see how much I was able to turn my sentence into a positive thing for me.

B: Because like I said to you earlier, when I actually listened to everyone's 'before and after' story, actually there was no difference in the circumstance, but there was a difference in how we dealt *with* the circumstance. You came out and you was in the same circumstance for the reasons you went in. But, you've handled them so much different.

A: And it's been more positive for me, and everyone around me on the whole.

B: I feel more like it was more like a self-healing process -

C: I was gonna say, I think it's more of a personal thing for everyone.

A: You have to realise that as well - that everyone's gonna it in different ways. And even when you come out, some people will come out on a high. And something might happen for them to find themselves in a stick place. But some people come out - like me, I was so in tune with

-

reality and the tough struggles that I may face, that when I then came up against them, it wasn't so soul destroying. If my experience has had an impact on my mental health, it has also had a positive one because I'm not so easily defeated now. Before I thought I was a fighter but now I know like... I will fight through.



"I am in charge of my destiny."

depending on yourself.

Making the most of community services

Wanda: Mental health is not an isolated issue and, for many of us, it intersects with other difficulties we face. Whilst it is not always recognised as a mental health problem, drug and alcohol use might be symptomatic of other underlying issues.

This can affect not only those struggling to cope with their experiences in prison, and the path that led them there, but may also be a way in which friends and family cope when a loved one is inside.

Drug and alcohol use may even have played a direct role in committing crime and may therefore be as much a part of our recovery as anything else.

It might be worth considering your options of support in the community and whether engaging with drug and alcohol services could prepare you to get the most out of others.

Dependency is often a coping strategy and there is no shame in admitting you need some support to find alternative ways to deal with your reality. And to find the happier, healthier and potentially sober life you deserve.

Ellen: I think drug and support needs can actually be a real barrier in addressing other needs and I know we find a lot of the time, we'll be working with women who clearly need an intervention by mental health services but mental health just come back and say 'well, until she's stabilised her heroin use, until she's stabilised her drinking' or whatever, 'we won't be seeing her, this isn't a mental health condition, this is a drug and alcohol use.' And that actually, drug and alcohol use can be such a barrier in accessing mental health provision or physical health or housing or accommodation or anything - but that there's that willingness from agencies to dissolve any trouble or any difficulties a woman is facing, into her drug and alcohol use and refuse to look at what's really going on and the full picture. The host of other barriers or support needs that she might have.



in(side) and out.

with Josie Sensier

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction courses for those with anxiety and depression. These courses are 8 weeks long but taster sessions are provided for the general public.

To give you a bit of an idea of what mindfulness is all about, we'll start with a quote given by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the creator of mindfulness. Which is that mindfulness means simply 'paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and without judgement.'

Essentially when we break that down and we look a little bit at the origins of mindfulness, Jon Kabat-Zinn started the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course when we went and lived with Buddhist monks for a year in the 1970s. And what he was trying to do was to work out ways in which the Eastern world were dealing with things like depression and anxiety and long-term health conditions.

What he found was that this concept of mindfulness was really, really helpful in preventing and treating mental illness. And so he brought it back to the US and created the 8 week course that we teach away. And it's all around the concept that mindfulness helps us to come into the present moment. Because when we're in the present moment, we aren't dealing as much with the emotional pain about the

future or about the past. So essentially what mindfulness does is it helps bring us into the present so we stop focusing so much on 'what if that happens in the future' or reliving the past. This kind of mental time travel that we can get stuck in.

A simple way for us to kind of understand this concept is by thinking about the favourite things that we might enjoy doing. That might be going for a walk, having a chat with a friend, having a really nice piece of chocolate, or a nice, hot bath.

Those activities that we tend to enjoy are ones where we're really connecting our body to the present moment. So when we step in a hot bath and we feel the warm water, that allows us to come back to the present, disallowing those difficult thoughts that can come in about the future or the past.

Mindfulness can be a really good way of becoming more aware of your moods. So knowing, I suppose, when you're feeling down or angry or upset or even happy and content. When we become more aware of this through the practice of meditation, it means that we have a bit more control over how we let those moods impact our decisions and our thoughts. Meaning that we can become slightly less impulsive and be more considerate of ourselves and the consequences of our actions.

A great way to start with mindfulness is just to begin by taking a few moments every day. This could be no longer than 5 minutes. But every day, perhaps setting an alarm on your phone just to come into the present moment. And a really, really simple way of doing that is by holding your belly or your chest and simply feeling the breath moving in and out of your body. Allowing yourself to feel the sensation of inhaling and exhaling, and just doing this for a few moments can be a really great place to start.

One of the most common questions we get asked as Mindfulness teachers is 'am I doing it right? I don't feel like I'm doing it right because my mind's wandering. I'm thinking about all sorts of things so I'm not able to pay attention.'

One of the biggest myths in mindfulness is that we could ever get to a stage where our minds wouldn't wander. Actually, our mind is always going to wander. It's a really normal part of thinking.

One thing I would encourage you to think about is to imagine your mind almost like a brand-new puppy. If we think that I've got this brand-new puppy and he's really, really excited to go on his first walk. I've taken him to the park and for the first time, I'm letting him off the lead. What's the first thing that puppy's gonna do? He's gonna run away. He's gonna run as fast as he can and when I call him back, he might take a little bit of time to come back to me. He might not recognise my voice so much. And this is very

similar to our mind, our mind might run away and start thinking about other things. Even when we call it back, it might take bit of time to come back to us.

But let's skip forward a bit now and say I've had this puppy about 7 years. He's a dog now and he goes to the same park every day, he knows it really well. What's he still gonna do when I let him off the lead? He's still gonna run away. And that's one of the things to really consider within mindfulness - your mind will always wander, it's always gonna run away. But, hopefully, with practice, when you call it back, it will come back to you a little quicker, you'll be able to refocus your attention on the present moment.

One thing that i really encourage you to do during your meditations or the moments of quiet that you might try and find in your life, is not to worry so much when your mind wanders, when it does start thinking about what you'll need to cook for tea or, what the shopping list is.

Just see if you can bring your attention back, each time you notice it's wandered. Even if you have to do that 10 or 100 times in a practice.

A stylized illustration of a person with dark skin and long black hair in a braid, wearing a pink hoodie and black pants. The person is holding a large, light yellow sign with black text. The background is a light pink gradient.

Listen and follow our
short mindfulness
practices in Episode 2
of our podcast.

alcoholicsanonymous

A fellowship for those identifying as alcoholics and/or wishing to end uncontrolled drinking. You can find local meetings via their website alongside a helpline.



0800 917 7650



help@aamail.org



alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

adfam

Support for families affected by drug and alcohol use. A national charity operating across the UK to improve relationships and wellbeing. The below no. is not a helpline.



020 3817 9410



admineadfam.org.uk



adfam.org.uk

al-anon

Support for those affected by somebody else's drinking including friends and family, even if the drinking has ended or contact with that person has ceased.



0800 008 6811



helpline@al-anonuk.org.uk



al-anonuk.org.uk

alcoholchange

Non anti-alcohol service providing information about alcohol harm and supporting those wishing to manage their drinking. Formerly Alcohol Concern/Alcohol Research UK.



020 3907 8480



contact@alcoholchange.org.uk



alcoholchange.org.uk

drinkaware

Helpline and information for those concerned about their drinking and online resources to self-assess. Other online resources include drinking tracker, apps and calculator.



0300 123 1110



contact@drinkaware.co.uk



drinkaware.co.uk

westminster drugs project

Also known as WDP. Providing services across London, the South East and East of England including a range of activities, group work and specialist support.



020 7421 3100



enquiries@wdp.org.uk



wdp.org.uk

maytree

A residential service for people in suicidal crisis. A free 4 night, 5 day one-off stay may be offered to adults over the age of 18 from across the UK.



020 7263 7070



maytree@maytree.org.uk



maytree.org.uk

mind

The info-line below provides signposting support to local services and resources, including to local Mind associations which provide a variety of community support by area.



0300 123 3393



info@mind.org.uk



mind.org.uk

saneline

A national mental health helpline offering specialist emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers.



0300 304 7000



sane.org.uk

samaritans

Confidential support line to speak to somebody. You do not have to be suicidal to use this helpline and it is available to anybody who needs to talk anonymously.



116 123



jo@samaritans.org



samaritans.org

youngminds

Children and young people's mental health service including information and guidance for parents and carers. The below number is a line for parents.



0808 802 5544



youngminds.org.uk

wearewithyou

Free, confidential support around alcohol, drugs and mental health including online chat support for yourself or if you are concerned about someone else. Formerly Addaction.



0333 230 9468 (partner org. Know the Score)



wearewithyou.org.uk



Tears are cleansing.

Panellist

"Paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and without judgement."

Jon Kabat-Zinn on mindfulness



Thank you to all contributors.
A fresh start together.

A community resource for women
in the community with experience
of the UK criminal justice system.



advance
SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Pact  **SOUND
OUT**

Prisoners · Families · Communities
A Fresh Start Together

