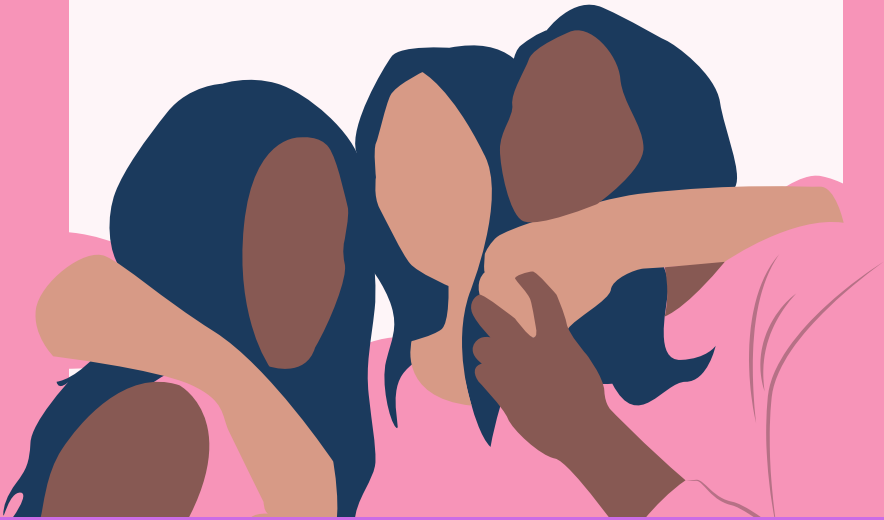


TRANSCRIPTS

WOMEN FLIP THE SCRIPT



Chapter 4: Services



“

Don't get fed up with knocking on doors and asking for support, don't stop reaching out...

To change your life, you deserve it – you can do it, you deserve a fresh start and you're entitled to it.

Katy Lawrence

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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.

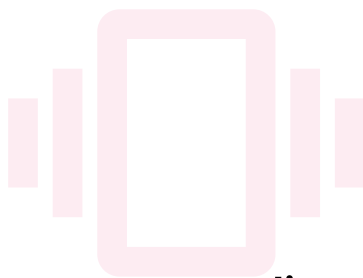


the journey.

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.

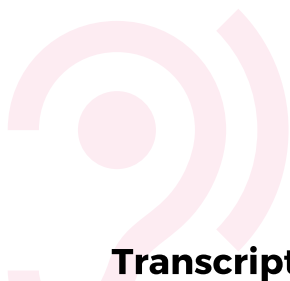
STEP
02



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

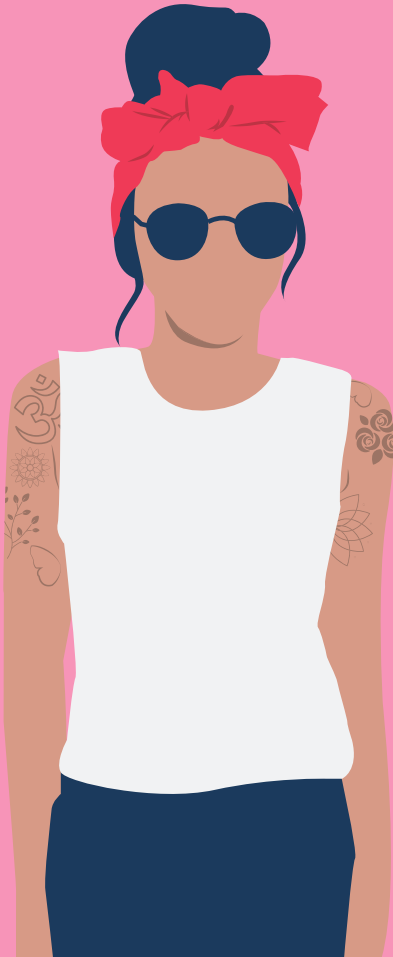


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They restored my faith in people.
But more importantly,

they restored my faith in myself.

Donna Walton



my koestler journey.

by Donna Walton.

It was my probation officer who told me about Koestler while we were doing the paperwork at my first appointment. I mentioned that I wrote poetry and she promised to dig out all the info for the following week, which she duly did. With her help, I applied for a mentor through their mentoring scheme and was really pleased when I received a letter several weeks later to say that I'd been accepted. However, it went on to say that mentors were usually reserved for people who were being newly released from prison and that was something I completely understood.

They also included five entry forms for the 2018 Koestler Awards and had encouraged me to enter. Now, writing to a deadline was completely new to me and for a while, I just dried up. But, as I was beginning to despair, the floodgates seemed to open and I penned three in one night and two more the following day.

The first, 'the Commuter' and the last, 'Bad Timing' both won awards and I was absolutely gobsmacked. I was still buzzing when another letter came to say that 'Bad Timing' was going on display at the Supreme Court, London as part of the '100 Years On' exhibition. I couldn't believe things

could get any better. Well, I was so wrong...

Both winners were part of Koestler's regional exhibition at the Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate, Kent and 'Bad Timing' was published in their second poetry anthology. You should have a copy in your library and it's on page 64 - hint, hint!

Through being mentored, I learned how to adapt and change, and I developed a new-found love of wordplay. The beauty of poetry is that you can bend words to fit, and it's absolutely OK. My confidence in my ability began to grow and after performing at the Southbank as part of the 2018 'Voices from Prison' event, I found that I absolutely loved being on the stage.

My mentor encouraged me to perform at the Poetry Café in Covent Garden. Twice. And the second time, I felt really honoured when he also stood up and recited a poem of his own. I was also lucky enough to be asked to perform again at the 2019 'Voices from Prison' event.

I've been invited to attend several different discussion forums with Koestler and have always felt that my opinion is valued and I am a worthwhile participant. But the icing on the cake for me was being given the opportunity to be one of the ex-offender hosts at the 2019 exhibition, 'Another Me' held at London's Southbank Centre. I learned so much about art and how people's perceptions differ. I learned

just how much blood, sweat and tears the Koestler team put in behind the scenes and I discovered the huge amount of support Koestler get from their benefactors and associates.

I can honestly say that I have loved every single second of my time working there and I didn't want it to end. I know that without the continued support and encouragement from the Koestler family, my life would never have changed so dramatically. They restored my faith in people. But more importantly, they restored my faith in myself.

"I couldn't believe things
could get any better.
Well, I was so wrong..."

Donna Walton



navigating services.

a panel discussion.

A: The prison sentence was not the hardest part. It was the coming out of prison that has been the hardest part. The prison sentence can be like debilitating in the sense that – where they take your independence away and make you be so reliant on others for certain things, and then you do get into that mindset of like, going to someone for this or going to someone for that. When you’re then brought back out – I went through the Open facilities and was able to do ROTLs and things like that, but still, that did put me in a good place. Even though I was in prison. And the thing is, not every woman is able to able to access the Open facilities – there’s only two in the whole of England. I think there’s only less than 300 hundred Open facility places in the whole of England for women. So, if you ain’t lucky enough to go through that, most people spend all their prison sentence in a closed facility, so the whole reintegration back into the community, back into housing – they don’t even get that chance.

So, how have you lot found out about services or been able to access services? Any that I have heard about, it has been from people using them and it just coming around in conversation. Or literally going online and literally Googling, ‘support and services for women out of prison...’

B: Well for me, I saw probation as a service. That didn't help. My trust in the services was like, whatever. Like I used that as motivation to just look for myself. So, where I am today is because from what I did for myself.

C: Yeah, as you said, [services] I've accessed is because I found it out myself. So even if I wanted probation to help me with something, I researched it myself to find out what charities would help me do it. To tell her [probation] to go forward and do it. Number one - a lot of these services that are provided for people in prison, out of prison and the families of people. I think the services don't really have much education on what they can provide these people and it's like... it's just people they've hired to do a job, tick a box. It's not really a service that... not one that I have had anyway that I could say is a service that is gonna do anything that I couldn't do myself if I use my own initiative and wits about me to do it.

A: I didn't want, and I still don't want, financial hand-outs from them but advice and guidance to access such things, I was under the impression that it would be probation as they're in place to assist my licence.

What I will say is my probation has been very good on emotional support. The probation officer had a very understanding... like the meetings that I would have of when I would see her, they were always positive meet ups, I would always be glad that we had that chat. I could be very

transparent with her about how I've been feeling. Just, she'd appreciate that I'd been so open and that with her. But for me the other issue that's come, is when they then have just changed my probation and she's been reassigned to somewhere else and they've put someone else in place with me.

And I get that change happens. If prison teaches you one thing, it's to grasp change that's happening at big speed. Because as we know, one day you're there and there's one group of people and boom - someone could get shipped out or whatever, and that dynamic has changed again and whatever else. And you kind of have to adapt to that so, adapting is not the issue.

The problem is when this person has now took over your caseload and they haven't updated themselves with you. So then you're having to come and basically explain something that you've explained twice or however many times before, that is supposed to be well documented. That can be very frustrating and I'm getting called by this person - I don't know who this is. And they're like basically, kind of demanding me to be somewhere at a certain time. I work full time. And I'm a single parent.

C: I'm not gonna lie, I had probably about four probation people. And it's not by their choice, it's the system.

A: You haven't even like, introduced yourself so... she's like

'oh, well I'm sorry, I've just been handed this case.' OK that's fine, but as an individual, I am not a case. So the questions that are being asked - I'm not even comfortable having this conversation over the phone. We're not speaking about just, you know, what did you have for dinner or for lunch.

The service is not the kind of service that actually is inclusive of women. Because most women have children. And in England as we know, and in Wales, a lot of women are single Mums so when I have got to go and do something, I have got to think about where my child is gonna be and how that is gonna impact her time and whatever else.

C: I think for women and the families there's not enough in the system, not enough services in the system that supports them.

B: I definitely feel like there are good services out there but there's 100% needs to be services that are filtered out mate. Like you see how, supermarkets have mystery shoppers? Maybe they should have mystery shoppers or something like that to see which ones are actually real. Because I'm not gonna lie, I was introduced to one. And they just had me wasting money on the outside, wasting money that I didn't have. And then I'm going to those places and they're saying hey've never heard of the company I'm talking about, they don't know about this interview that I'm meant to have, like... what?

C: I think most of the services that I've ever tried to use are probably from what I've found myself.

A: On that flip side, with all those things that happened that were bad, what were the positive actions you took or that you was given or assisted with to turn it around?

B: They found me a course - even though it was a course full of men... I was the only female but I was just like, you know what -

A: Girl power!

B: I don't mind, I just came from a house full of women! I do not mind sitting with all these men for a moment. I got the qualification, and I now am a gas engineer. I'm working for a good company.

C: I literally have taken advantage of every single thing I could possibly do and take from that system that I thought was gonna eat away from me, I actually come out of it with, what, 21 qualifications, I went to Uni. I think that was a major positive thing for me.

A: Yeah, that's a piece of advice I would give - take everything. Whilst you're in there, most definitely take everything because I think it's maybe a lot harder to access these services on the outside. When you're inside everyone's in like, a contained environment.

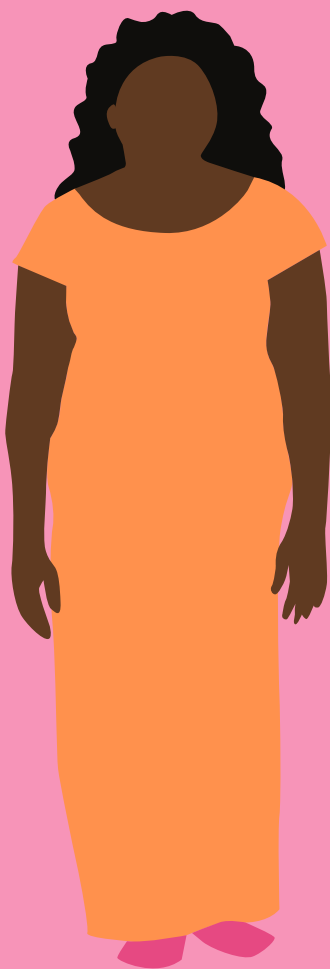
“

I am not
a case.



"When I fall down,
don't look back.
I look front."

Contributor



sharing my story.

a woman shares her journey.

I'm happy to share my story because I know somebody will learn from my story.

I went through a lot again when I came out, not being able to reunite immediately with my boys. They wanted to be with Mum. When my son had suicidal thoughts, that's when I got the house, only a few weeks ago. So it's gonna take my son to die, to reunite us together?

'I don't want to be with Daddy anymore, I want to be with my Mum and you people are not giving my Mum accommodation, she's in the hostel, we can't stay with her in the hostel.' So, so much for this poor boy who's just 15 and is already having suicidal thoughts.

But luckily for me, he spoke to somebody he confided in Church. And that person quickly called services and said, 'we've got this, it's not good.' So, the people in jail spoke to her and that's how I got the place to have the boys.

What I've tried to do is just try to go back to school. Say I should go to work immediately, they're gonna stigmatise me, that's natural; 'oh, she's back from prison.' And I don't want that stigma, the stereotyping. So I thought, let me go

back to school and do a course there. I wanted to do it a long time before I went to prison anyway.

I've tried to do a lot for myself and it wasn't easy for me because I was having this accommodation problem. My kids are still with my ex who's mistreating them, and my children are not happy. The hostel I was put in - children are not allowed to stay there. It's been a lot. A few friends have offered me weekends to bring my boys but they can't do it all the time - they have their life too.

I feel rejected. I feel judged. When I came out, it wasn't what I was expecting. The support wasn't there that much, you know? Apart from Beth Centre and that was it. I'm the kind of person that when I fall down, I don't look back. I look front.

But I couldn't follow up, due to when I came out, all the problems I was going through - accommodation, my children, the boys having problems in their house with their Dad, crying every day, they're hungry, there's no food, they can't stay where I am in the hostel, not all the time my friends gonna allow me to come to their house for the weekend - I don't want to actually be a pest to them as well, it's their lives, it's their home, they've got children as well, so there's a lot going on so I couldn't really follow up.

But you know, I've never been away from my kids. I was away for one year - I want to bond with them immediately

and because they lacked a lot when I went away for one year. It really changed their lives a lot – in school, even in manners. I train my kids! For that one year, they've lacked a lot. They were doing anything they liked, my children started eating junk food, cos nobody was there to cook for them. I love cooking, they eat fresh food every time, that's me, I cook a lot but when I went to prison there was nobody to cook for them. Even when I came out, now we are together now, I'm trying to wind that away from them because they're used to it.

So, it affected them academically. The little one is picking up now Mummy's back. But the teenager one, and he's going to do his GCSEs. His mocks wasn't great. And I told him, 'I'm not going to judge you for that, don't worry, 'cause I know what you're going through.' But we just have to work hard towards the sixth form things so that he can have the better grades to go to Uni.

Do you know what killed me most? Every night I had to pray, because then every day I put on the TV, it just had a black boy. My boys are black boys. And one of them is just that age range. So, when I now left to prison, I was scared, what's going to happen. Especially the 15 year old one, I was scared. I prayed every day and every time I put on TV in prison, they stabbed a boy, what is all this?

The safeguarding officer in their school was so supportive – she's an angel.

People that helped me to sort things out from prison were from Pact – they did a lot for me. My probation officer that I got when I came out of prison she was lovely, supportive.

I never accepted medication. So all the medication I was offered both in prison and when I came out, I told her, ‘do you know what? I don’t want to be on medication.’ I know it’s just what I’m going through at the moment. If I can see just a bit of support, I’ll be fine.

My probation officer, she really tried. Giving me like, a scale of preference, like ok ‘let’s start with this, we’re gonna get there don’t worry, we’re going to get to that bit but we have to start from here’ – yeah, she tried. She told me, I mean my probation officer told me, ‘I can see you’re gonna get there.’ There are stages and everything. But she understands I’m human.

Somebody told me to come to Beth Centre, so they can get a lawyer. Because I had a trial for one year before I got sentenced. But because everything was new to me, I didn’t know what to do, so one of my friends said, ‘go to Beth Centre.’ When I got there... invited some people to have therapy with me, come to chill out sometimes with massage, gave me travel expenses, you know?

That’s what’s carrying me, giving me that strength. To keep going. Patience as well is very important. I just don’t wanna be like my old self, I want a fresh beginning.

And my lovely (she's gone now) probation officer, she left last month, wow I don't know what would've happened to me. They have been so supportive.

When somebody hears my story and the way I handled it, what I went through and how I handled it, I'm still on my feet now. Even my probation officer was like, 'you know what? You don't even look like someone that went to prison.' I paid for it, I did handle it well, but it could happen to anybody.



building community.

advice from two support workers from Solace Women's Aid.

Ellen: For women who are about to be released or recently released, thinking about support they want to build up and what support they want to rely on during their early weeks outside of prison, I think something I would strongly advocate is considering a women's service rather than an ex-offending service which is somewhat more generic. And as much as these services can do really fantastic work, I think what we've really found at the Hub and with the Specialist Outreach project is that having that women centred, gendered approach, that makes all the difference in understanding where these people are coming from and where the women that we work with are coming from.

Now of course, we're in an inner London borough and I understand that services outside of London or outside of larger cities are perhaps not as diverse, but I think certainly considering local women's services is always gonna be a better route, I think, for women coming out of prison. Because the women's prison population is so much smaller than the men's, it just tends to be much more male dominated and I don't think women get a lot out of that. So certainly looking at those resources and for women who perhaps aren't able to access a local service, looking at national helplines and national services that they might be

able to make use of.

So for example, services like Women in Prison or the Advance Minerva project or the Southwark Women's Hub. Some of these are borough specific of course but I think that's always the starting point that's going to better meet the needs of women coming out of prison.

Katy: I think as well, any woman that's in prison who's about to be released or has been released, your first port of call is your probation officer. And I know that might be quite weird to hear because you see them as this person that might recall you or whatever, but actually they can refer you to services that are in your borough, somebody who can support you and come to appointments with you and be there for you in a way that your probation officer wishes they could be but maybe doesn't have time for.

The other thing is, don't get fed up with knocking on doors and asking for support, don't stop reaching out, because you need to believe that you deserve that support. To change your life, you deserve it - you can do it, you deserve a fresh start and you're entitled to it.

“

Have that second chance at life...
if you go into your sentence with a
positive mind and a plan,
you can use this bad thing to your
advantage.

Panellist



beth centre

Lambeth Women's Centre run by WiP. Staffed by Case Management Workers and a Peer Mentoring Coordinator. Services include practical and emotional support.

 0203 869 2170  beth.referrals@wip.cjism.net  womeninprison.org.uk

help with prison visits

Financial assistance to visit people in prison who may not have other visitors. Applicants must be receiving particular benefits and can apply on gov.uk website.

 0300 063 2100  helpwithprisonvisits@justice.gov.uk

koestlerarts

Supporting and championing arts by people affected by the criminal justice system. Includes arts mentoring, exhibitions and the annual Koestler Awards.

 020 8740 0333  info@koestlerarts.org.uk  koestlerarts.org.uk

minerva project

Specialist support for women aged 18+ involved with the criminal justice system. You must be referred by a professional.



admin_minerva@advance.org.uk



advancecharity.org.uk

woman's trust

Includes individual counselling, workshops, support groups and crisis counselling for women in recovery from domestic violence. All staff and volunteers are women.



020 7034 0303



office@womanstrust.org.uk



womanstrust.org.uk

women and girls network

Free, women-only service that supports women in London who have experienced violence, or are at risk of violence. Providing counselling, advocacy and advice.



0808 801 0660



advice@wgn.org.uk



wgn.org.uk

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.



	<p>Prisoners · Families · Communities A Fresh Start Together</p>	
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