

TRANSCRIPTS

WOMEN FLIP THE SCRIPT



Chapter 2: Housing & Finance





People are bigger
than their actions.

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.

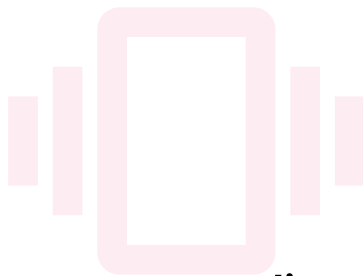


the journey.

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.



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womeninprison.org.uk

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



housing hurdles.

Panel discussion.

A: For most women, I'm telling you, not everyone but for most women, housing has been a major issue for them. Whether they're in prison dealing with it, or when they get out of prison, dealing with it. There was a a lot of low times.

B: There was even times, to be honest, 'cause of all the things I had to deal with, EG: not working, having no money but having all these bills and debts that I had to pay. And then having my family there, my children there and not being able to provide the way I needed to provide at times, I felt guilty. So, and I also felt disappointed because like you said earlier, you've worked so hard and you feel like oh, I've come out and I'm a new person and I've made all these changes, but then there's...no change. I've come out and there's no change to my outside life, to the circumstances.

So it's just like, it would be easier for me to just commit a crime, go back to jail, and not be able to provide for my family because I can't. Rather than being out here, and not being able to provide for my family when I basically can. But there's no... there's no doors opening for me right now.

A: If I kind of portray myself in a certain way, then I'm gonna put myself in a better position when I get out. So obviously I've worked very hard then to... I was already very qualified

before I went away and you know, I was able to hold down jobs and have good jobs. And just like with you though, all of the things that I had trained to do, because of my crime I could no longer do it.

So then when you come out, you've made these changes, you've done these courses. They've made you do courses 'cause you have to do the Offender Behaviour courses and prove yourself to the probation and all of that. It's like, you come out thinking... even with me - because I'm in a job and that, obviously for me and my circumstances - I've just come out of prison, I do have a child who is literally, from the moment I stepped back out of prison, she was solely my responsibility again... I'm thinking 'right, well I'm there, my finances are actually in a good place, that should put me in a better footing to get housing. No! So then, that does have a knock on effect because you do feel disappointed in yourself and then...

The day I stepped out, I've sorted out myself and I've put myself in a position that I did have a roof to put over my head and a bed to lay my head down and I know plenty of women that was getting out and being handed a tent! Like if they ain't vulnerable already, they're then saying 'here, be a little bit more vulnerable.'

Once you've got out of prison, do you feel there was the support to like, maybe access benefits or the information needed for your housing?

B: I would say like, there were issues around relationships and housing because I had to rely on family to keep my house in order for me to have a house to come out to. So that caused an issue within itself. Kind of like that burden of paying my rent and making sure my house was there when I came out, that did kind of have a little impact. I felt like I owed them.

A: So then, that must have kind of been, obviously, a strain or caused some kind of issue?

B: Yeah, until they saw how, how hard I went when I came out. They saw 'nah she's proper going in' -

A: And that you weren't making no excuses, either.

B: Exactly, there you go.

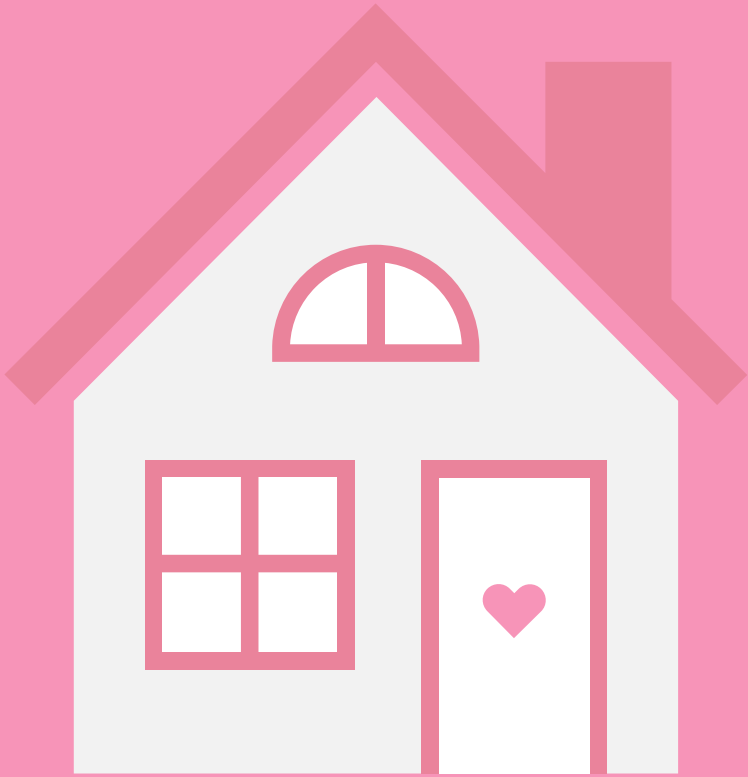
A: That was actually a major part of me going to prison, because my housing was not in a good situation, I'd just been served notice in a property I'd been in for like, years and years... yeah, it wasn't really good. Since coming out, I mean, for me, there was no support from probation. I was in Open so I was using ROTL time prior to coming out, to go and visit the Housing, to get some support in getting housing for when I come out. And they was just like 'oh come and see me when you get out.' So literally that's what I had to do. The day I got out I went straight to the Housing and I had to sit in there with like, everything, and just wait

for them to give me temporary accommodation.

Luckily, I was able to get that. But, it wasn't, for me, personally, for where I'd just come from as well and the fact that I had my daughter back instantly, it wasn't a good place where they put me. And it's like, when you come out, with this positive headset 'cause you've used your time wisely, and you've come out and you're like 'right, I'm gonna do this and do that, and I'm gonna stay positive and whatever else,' and then they put you somewhere that literally does have an impact on how you're feeling... It's kind of like, OK um... (and I was working two jobs!) So I just felt a little bit let down.

The housing for me is still a major issue. I'm working somewhere that I'm a really happy, that I do things that I enjoy, that I feel like I'm having an impact, and then you go back to some like, basic standard of living and you're just kind of like... and you're paying premium for it as well! I feel like I'm being robbed!

And it has had a really big strain on just how I feel about myself because it's like, OK I've gone through all of that, gone through that bad experience, because you know, prison can be quite traumatic. Gone through all of that with keeping a positive head, with doing the right things and then you come out and - for the housing situation, I feel like it's kicking me in my teeth!



“

I'm gonna ride out this struggle

Panellist

The housing situation is now having an effect on my daughter because we don't have the space that we need. She is a growing young lady, she needs her own space, I need my own space, we're literally living on top of each other.

Spend my time bidding, I can bid all the time and there's some days when there are properties for me to bid on, that doesn't mean I've ever been offered a viewing. And then there's some weeks when there's nothing. And when I say weeks, I'm talking like, three weeks consecutively, there is no properties for me to bid for.

Again, I'm in a loop. I can't do right for doing wrong. They then say, 'look for private.' You look for private, and then your borough then turns round and says 'no, don't think you'll be able to maintain the payments for it, so we're not going to basically support you to go forward for this housing.' And you're kind of like, 'alright, so what do you lot want me to do?' Because right now, the housing situation that you currently have me in, it is detrimental to my mental health, how I feel, like my wellbeing and definitely to my daughter's. Where she's at right now, my child shouldn't have to experience this. Then again, you feel like 'oh my gosh this is Karma.'

B: it's like the higher powers say, 'here, I'm going to put you in the same position again.'

A: I'm not gonna do what I might have done before, I'm gonna ride out this struggle. I have to look at everything in like a mathematical kind of way. So for me, housing is the thing I am most striving towards right about now in my life and that means a lot of saving, a lot of going without because I'm not doing it for me - this is what my daughter deserves. My daughter should not have to pay for my decisions. That's not fair.

Majority of people are spending how long and doing how much of the sentence in prison and then you're coming out, you have nowhere to go. I came out with a job so I was good, do you know what I mean? But most people don't come out with a job. So then you're coming out with no money and then no housing. If you aren't a strong person mentally and if you don't know who to turn to and ask for help, and if you are not strong enough to ask for help, you're gonna reoffend. You're gonna find yourself going back through the system. You're gonna find yourself sitting there, kicking yourself again!

C: They give you basic information... if you're someone who would want to go to work normally anyway, would probably know most of that information and know how to research and research that stuff yourself.

When I came out, I was homeless, I was sleeping on the couch, I had two children in my Mum's house while I was sleeping on her couch. And every certain time in the

morning we have to get up because you're sleeping on the couch. You can't be laying in, there's no laying in. It affected my relationships with my kids.

They tried to offer me housing in a hostel, with other criminals, where my children couldn't come. So I felt that wasn't really a help to me coming out, having no housing and... Making a Mum come out of prison who's already been away from her children, go and stay in a hostel, away from her children, probably nowhere near where her children are staying. Has to now, go and live separately and that's really gonna help that child to grow up and be a positive person in their community? A citizen of this country?

B: Before prison, I would say I was doing well. I'd just got my degree, I was in a good job but my job entails having a DBS so obviously my offence it caused me not to be able to work in that job anymore. I was working before that so I wasn't eligible for that free legal aid. Plus my victim surcharge. They was running me down when I was *in* prison!

A: A lot of the information I got was not from the prison service, it came from charities that were advocating or working in prison, with prisoners, for prisoners. Or, it came from other prisoners, speaking to other prisoners. Women in Prison were the ones offering therapy groups to people outside of having to go into the therapeutic wing. So it was good that there was women like Women in Prison coming in and offering counselling sessions and what not.

C: They kind of helped me access a little bit of housing. Even though they were limited to what they could do, they helped me access things like applying online and making phone calls. I actually remember working with one of the women - she actually prepared me in a way that made me know that the local boroughs were not going to help me with housing. 'Cause otherwise I would've come out expecting to go speak to my local borough because that's the information they give you, 'go speak to your local borough.'

"There's real excitement about the future... where women don't have to consider putting themselves at risk to survive."

Ellen Tansey



making a hub a home.

An interview with Ellen Tansey, service manager and Katy Lawrence, Specialist Housing Advocate for the Southwark Women's Assessment Hub, delivered by Solace Women's Aid.

Ellen: So the Women's Assessment Hub is a service in Southwark which is a borough in South East London aimed at supporting women who are affected primarily by rough sleeping and by the criminal justice system and women who are affected by violence against women and girls. What I mean by that is domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, harassment, crimes typically committed by a partner or a family member towards women.

The Hub has a two-pronged approach – so we have an accommodation project and we also have a specialist outreach project. Just to give a bit of a history; the Hub is commissioned by Southwark Housing Options who provide the housing and homelessness services in the borough and the Hub is delivered by Solace Women's Aid who provide domestic and sexual violence support services across London.

Increasingly, as a women's organisation, as a domestic violence organisation, we're looking at housing, looking at homelessness because domestic violence is such a prolific

route to homelessness for women in London. Added to that, what we're focusing on is the fact that women are not just affected by domestic violence in a single-issue way. They're affected by a host of other issues that intersect with the abuse that they face. So this could be, women affected by the criminal justice system, by the prison system, drug and alcohol use, mental health conditions, physical health conditions, interacting with the care system as children themselves or having their own children removed and that services really aren't meeting the needs or often aren't meeting the needs of all of these things at once. They're very much geared towards one or the other support needs.

So in that spirit, Solace works with Southwark Housing to deliver a host of specialist housing and homelessness services for women, including women with children and families, in temporary accommodation, support for women in crisis and needing accommodation that day and women who may be facing entrenched rough sleeping , repeated prison admission and a host of other barriers that go alongside that.

The Hub is funded by the Rough Sleeping Initiative which is a government pot of money administered by the Ministry of Housing to work with people at high risk of rough sleeping across the country and they funded a number of different Hubs. And there are two Women's Hubs; one in Southwark and one in Leeds.


Coming on to exactly what that looks like – we have a property with 3 bedrooms and 24 hour support. 3 women live there at the moment and they have an allocated Resettlement Worker who supports them while they're living there. They are then, after an 8-12 weeks stay in the Hub, so quite a short stay, they'll then be made an offer of accommodation and they'll retain their Keyworker for up to a year to support them to settle in the community. Added to that, we also have a Specialist Outreach Worker who works with women who may end up living at the Hub or who may end up exploring alternative housing options, supported accommodation, temporary accommodation...

And again, the support is very intensive and what's really different about the Hub and the support that we offer is that the support is flexible and also intensive – and when I say that; flexible in the sense that it's not a Keyworker pulling up a calendar full of appointments saying 'you need to go to probation today, you need to go to the job centre tomorrow, you've got Housing on Thursday and then [a] drug and alcohol appointment on Friday and if you don't get to those appointments, everything's going to fall apart.' It's much more an approach that looks at OK, you're living in a system and operating in a system where you've got lots of appointments, lots of things that you need to do, but how can we make that work for you? How can we make that appointment something that's manageable? Are we going to go and do something nice afterwards, are we going to do something the night before to prepare for it; pick out

what you're gonna wear, what you're gonna have for breakfast, what bus we're gonna get, be really organised, take out the stress just to have someone on the bus home after the appointment, to let off steam and let off your frustrations...

It's about recognising that the women that we're working with are having to interact with a system where they've had really negative experiences and what can we do to make that less intimidating, less alienating and less frightening. And be that living as a resident in our residential service or engaging with support from our Community Outreach Service. That's not always gonna be support to go to an appointment, that might be support to do a grocery shop, or go for a coffee or go to a yoga class - we want to be flexible around what people want to do, the Hub is staffed 24 hours a day and there's always someone available if someone's looking for a bit of a chat, or wants someone to have a cup of tea with, someone to help them get to the chemist, to get to the supermarket - that's always gonna be an option for them, it's just someone to come home to.

Katy: So the way that we feel kind of, our approach at the Hub and with our Outreach work is that you can't treat the symptoms of repeated offending and repeated admissions to prison without treating the cause. You know, women are treated like a set of walking risk factors. The criminal justice system is quite a shaming ritual for women - you know, they stand in the dock and somebody tells them they're a terrible



"Really try to engage with your probation officer before you're released as much as possible – ring them, ask for support, have a video link, see how much you can get in place before you're released because the support is there."



person and then they get locked up, it's just very, very symbolic. It's a very dehumanising process, so we bring back the humanity of that and we take a really holistic approach, we look at the whole human being and not a set of risk factors because these women haven't experienced a lot of kindness in their lives, they've gone through a lot of violence and a lot of abuse which has led them maybe to the issues and the barriers that they face, so we are getting them used to the idea that they deserve kindness and that builds their self-esteem and in turn leaves them less vulnerable to abuse.

So we encourage people to feel good and to have fun in that approach, so when we do budgeting we factor in phone credit and bus passes and how are you going to do your shopping. But we also say, let's put aside ten pounds to get your nails done, are you going to do your hair this month. We have self-care Sundays at the Hub where we do face masks with the women, we do yoga, we take them to the cinema, we see them as whole people and they respond to that, and they build relationships with their workers where we sit and watch Love Island with them, we'll sit and have a cup of tea and have real conversations and they haven't necessarily experienced that. They've experienced being treated as somebody who's done wrong and people are bigger than their actions.

Ellen: So we recognise that one of the really destabilising for women when they go into prison is the separation from

their children. And we recognise that this obviously dramatically affects women in a way that it doesn't necessarily affect men. And as a women's service and a service for women coming out of prison, we want to be live to that fact and conscious of that fact. The Hub itself, the accommodation is not family accommodation, the Hub is single rooms. However, that's why the Outreach project is so important as well. If a woman needs support from us and she did have children or she had the opportunity of having her children returned, we would certainly explore the housing options with Katy our Outreach Worker, Specialist Outreach Worker [who] would look into what accommodation might be suitable for her and her children – as I say, she wouldn't be able to live at the Hub, that's not the provision we've been given in this occasion but we would support her through the community and exploring her housing options with the local authority.

By no means is this an attempt to minimise the damage and the challenges men face when they go to prison, but just to recognise that it is a very different experience for women and actually much more acute. So when men go to prison, there's often a woman available to sustain the family unit; it might be Mum, Grandma, girlfriend, but when women go into prison, there isn't. And they lose their children to the care system and they exit prison a single woman and often have to go and present at Housing that day. While dealing with the trauma and the pain of not having seen their children for some time who they love and care about and

want to have a relationship with, you know, they're faced with a Housing Officer saying 'well as a single woman, you're not a priority, you haven't got kids.' In the event that she is given accommodation, it will be for a single woman and then when she approaches her social worker about rebuilding her relationship with her children, she'll be met with the response that obviously, 'you don't have the right accommodation to accommodate a family, therefore your children will not be returned to you, they'll be remaining in whatever arrangement there is.' So of course, it's impossible to work with women, particularly women who have been disadvantaged and marginalised by society without really centring children within that because these are often women who have children and often women whose relationship with their children is really traumatic, not to mention they're often or may have been care-leavers themselves or involved in the care system as children themselves which obviously brings its own additional trauma and its own additional barriers. And often very legitimate distrust or discomfort around social care and local authorities based on their own challenges.

Katy: What we've got is we've got a system that is reproducing injustices and inequalities across generations here because these women have been traumatised by their experiences, the systemic failings that have led to them being in this position. They've been through a care system that hasn't, with the best will in the world, necessarily cared for them that well, they've been given a leaving flat at

aged 16 that they don't know how to maintain, they may have lost that, they may have ended up homeless or in volatile relationships, they haven't got a network of family support, they then have children that they then lose to the care system and what chance do those children have? They can't even necessarily be raised by maternal or paternal grandparents because where is that net of family support in the first place? So we're really reproducing this dynamic of women that face these barriers and don't have the adequate support to overcome them. I think it's important to recognise the impact [of] this to a new generation of children that are removed from these women.

Ellen: I've always worked in the women's sector, it's been something that's important to me, women's rights and feminism and have always been a big focus for me and I've wanted to be part of creating a society that gives women a fairer deal and I've always enjoyed being able to do that for a living. But I did start my career working in more general services so refuges for families fleeing abuse or community advocacy for women that were at high risk of harm. And I realised during my time working in that field that housing was the thing that really struck me - it was so hard to get somebody housed who was plainly homeless, at risk, in desperate need of safe accommodation. And I started to really enjoy housing advocacy and the reasons for that are; as much as it's changed a lot in recent years, the legislation for housing in the UK does entitle people who need housing to get some sort of housing. And that's always been a really



great foundation and I've been able to argue with local authorities and argue with different housing providers for women's safety through that. And my career very much went on the path of housing and homelessness - it's so integral to somebody recovering and moving forward from a difficult time in their lives. It's impossible for somebody with insecure housing or unstable housing to move forward and of course they're gonna end up returning to an abusive partner or engaging in behaviours that end up getting them arrested. Or their mental health is gonna take a nosedive, they're not gonna be able to meet their physical health needs, they're gonna fall out with family, they're gonna fall out with friends, of course they are. It just struck me that homelessness extradites and worsens any challenge for women, just so quickly and so easily that things are made 100 times worse. When actually having a place to call home would've set the ball rolling on solving a lot of what's going on for them.

I think there is a reluctance and a barrier to providing women with what they need and to be honest I think [there are] two key reasons. One of them is austerity - we're 10 years in to the project of austerity and it's not working. It's led to lack of housing, lack of social care, lack of healthcare, lack of mental health services, lack of drug and alcohol services and they're stripped back year on year and particularly when you're working with women who are perhaps in their 40s and 50s, they remember a time where there was more provision for them and there would be more

support for these things to be resolved, and it actually comes as a shock that there isn't anymore. That being said, I don't think austerity adequately answers the question of why there's a challenge in women accessing these resources. I think it's a huge part, but I also think we also have to look at the fact that we're operating in a society that institutionally isn't able to accept that women experience life differently to men and particularly women who face some of these additional barriers that we've talked about, and therefore they need a different approach.

There's not necessarily a lot of scope that can understand why a woman with two young children can't sit in a housing office all day waiting to be seen for 6, 7, 8 hours or why a woman who's struggling with a heroin addiction can't sit and wait in a housing office - she's got things she needs to go and do, she needs to go and collect her script and so on and so forth. But [there is] an institutional reluctance to engage with any of the additional barriers as well so I think, it's hard enough if you're a woman going in to get these resources, it's 10 times harder if you've got any of these other barriers where there's a real institutional distaste for them.

Katy: So my job title is Specialist Housing Advocate in Southwark for Solace Women's Aid. My day to day working life is that I support women who are at risk of homelessness or who are already homeless. I help them get off the streets

and I help them into accommodation and I help them through a homelessness process that they would otherwise find it really difficult to access. I help to, kind of, build their self-esteem and their self-belief and get them stable, so that if they are given somewhere to live, they're more likely to sustain it.

So I think we need to recognise what's going on in society at the moment and the impact of austerity 'cause that's left us with a housing crisis. We've got no social housing, we've got scarcity of housing in London which is even worse, we've got unmanageable rents. Combine that with the invisibility of women's homelessness - we know that women aren't necessarily seen on the streets.

The other thing is that when women are street homeless, rough sleeping provision is really dominated by and catered for men. Mixed hostels are not appropriate for women who have been through trauma, they don't wanna be housed with men that are suffering with difficulties too. Women need to feel safe, they're not going to feel safe with men next door, in the room next door, they need to be in a women-only environment and I don't think that's much to ask and I hope that people start to provision those kinds of services. If an Outreach Worker says to them 'come into our Hub, we've got a Pop-Up Hub and we've got 7 beds and you can have a bed for the week while we try and move you forward' - that is not a gendered provision. There's men in that Pop-Up Hub, you're all in one room on camp beds with

men - so that woman's not going to feel safe to access that support and that's often the gateway to more help, so...

The other thing is that when women do present and they are given temporary accommodation when they're in a crisis, they can be given temporary accommodation up to an hour and a half away, the women could be given temporary accommodation in areas they're not familiar with. How is a woman with children going to get her children to school? So often that forces them to stay in violent situations. Also specifically women that are leaving prison, there's only two probation hostels in the whole of the South of England for women, there's loads for men!

You might get asked by a Housing Officer, why you're in the position you're in as if you need to kind of explain and account for yourself when all you need is somewhere safe to sleep that night. So the whole process for anybody presenting as homeless is very difficult and then if you add the needs of women who have been through the criminal justice system...

It's like without that support, they're gonna get sucked into this tornado almost that... how do they stop life happening to them and start dictating how their life's gonna be? We are responsabilising [sic] women for the position that they find themselves in, because of what they've gone through, because of the results of, you know, a chaotic upbringing, without the support to maintain a lifestyle legitimately and

"I've wanted to be part
of creating a society
that gives women a
fairer deal."



we are punishing women for the support needs they are presenting with.

Ellen: So we've had some really great successes both in the accommodation project at the Hub and in the Outreach, it's really early days for the accommodation, we only opened our doors a couple of months ago but we are at full capacity, we've got three women living there. One of our current residents, I remember the day she moved in, she drew the short straw and ended up with the smallest room at the project, and I was making a bit of a joke with her about whether she'd be alright with it and she said, 'you know, most of the girls at the train station today didn't have anywhere to go so I'm just happy to have somewhere.' And I think stuff like that are really the early achievements that we're starting to see and starting to celebrate.

I mean it's a lovely little house, it feels more like a house-share and it's got a little garden and a balcony, I think it's just a nice place to come into and that's seen really positive. And the relationships they've built with their workers, and again these are women who have probably had hundreds of Key Workers throughout their adult life and indeed, their childhood, but we've seen really good relationships. Things like going out for a coffee, going out for lunch, going to the cinema, women just feeling better about themselves. A couple of the women we're working with at the moment are looking at college courses, looking at a future - what we're seeing is that women are

envisioning a life where they're not getting recalled to prison. Most of our residents at the moment have had several short sentences and it was just that kind of cycle of, being released, there's nothing in place to catch them, things taking over, they end up back in prison, you know, 'wash-rinse-repeat' kind of thing.

And they haven't returned to prison. They've been able to actually engage with support and see that there could be something better than that and that there could be the opportunity of a different life. I think the thing that really works is that they know there will be some form of accommodation for them and alongside that, very intensive support to maintain that accommodation. I think that's why we've been able to see these really early successes and I think there's real excitement about the future for the women we're working with, they're really excited to get their property and they're really excited to decorate it and enrol on a college course and do nice things with their Workers and just have a future where they don't have to consider putting themselves at risk to survive.

But we really hope if the pilot's a success, there may be scope for that to be expanded and tried out in different cities. If you are a woman with a connection to Southwark and you are coming out of prison, Southwark probation are familiar with the project so have a chat with your probation worker before release, about accessing the project. We really encourage you to do that before release - we are

able to do prison visits and do an assessment there and see if we're able to offer you support.

Alternatively if you're not involved with probation at the moment or your involvement with the criminal justice system is quite historic, you can also request support at Bournemouth Road in Peckham, the housing office, you can request support from Solace at the front desk there and you will receive either support from our Outreach Worker or another member of the Solace team.

Katy: I think whatever borough you are in, there will be a women's support service that your probation officer can refer you to so I think it's really important to speak to your probation officer before you're released. Because you know, these services can come and visit you in prison and make you feel reassured and supported when you come out.

A lot of these services – I know that in Southwark we work with a service called Pecan a lot, which operates out of the Women's Hub in Southwark and Lewisham and if I get a referral from Pecan to support a woman, Pecan will pick that woman up on release, there's a Through the Gate service. Really try to engage with your probation officer before you're released as much as possible – ring them, ask for support, have a video link, see how much you can get in place before you're released because the support is there.

apex trust

A Merseyside charity supporting ex 'offenders' into employment, training, education and voluntary work.
Providing specialist and one-to-one support.



0174 461 2898



sthelens@apextrust.com



apextrust.com

citizensadvicebureau

Advice on benefits, debt, housing and more.
Find your nearest advice centre via their website. You can also speak to an adviser via their online chat service.



03444 111 444



citizensadvice.org.uk

pecan

A community development programme in South East London providing one-to-one and group career support, affordable food and a women-only hub with activities and info.



0207 732 0007



welcome@pecan.org.uk



pecan.org.uk

nacro

National charity providing support around employment, housing and education to people with criminal records including housing support whilst on remand or in prison.



0300 123 1999



helpline@nacro.org.uk



nacro.org.uk

solace women'said

Services for women and children including advice and information, therapeutic services, accommodation services and rape crisis support.



0808 802 5565



advice@solacewomensaid.org



solacewomensaid.org

unlock

Providing a wide range of advice and information for people with convictions including an online Information Hub and peer-based forum.



0163 424 7350



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