

TRANSCRIPTS

# WOMEN FLIP THE SCRIPT



## Chapter 5: Journeys (Bonus Edition)





“ My advice is  
do not give up,  
do not stop fighting  
and it will pass.



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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.

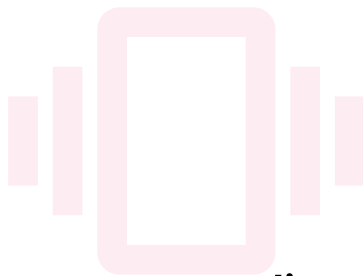


# the journey.

## 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](mailto:admin@advancecharity.org.uk)



[advancecharity.org.uk](http://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](mailto:info@prisonadvice.org.uk)



[prisonadvice.org.uk](http://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*



A stylized illustration of a woman wearing a hijab and a long-sleeved top. The image is rendered in shades of pink and purple, with the woman's face obscured by a dark shape. The background is a solid light pink color.

“

Don't doubt yourself as a mother...  
we are a lot stronger  
than people make us out to be.

”

# through the system.

a personal account.

I think for myself personally, the positives that I gained was a lot of insight, a lot of awareness that there are other people out there. People like myself, and people from all different walks of life. You don't have to be a criminal to actually be put in prison. You could just be a normal parent, a grandma, a Mum, sister, wife, you know. Just a normal person.

I think it's unfortunate that you end up meeting good people in these kinds of places. For me it was just definitely an eyeopener because I definitely came from a more, I would say, privileged circle of people where I've definitely led a different type of lifestyle. And I was definitely prejudiced of people who had any kind of criminal involvement and I think it was a huge reality check for myself as well, which is something I've maintained to uphold as an experience for myself.

It has one hundred percent shaped me differently as a person, for the better, I think. So I definitely am, in a weird way, thankful for my experience of going there 'cause I think if I didn't go there, I wouldn't be the person that I am today. And I wouldn't have met a lot of people and I wouldn't have actually learned to be truly grateful for what I had and

have and God willing, will have in the future.

And I think the harshest thing and the hardest thing for me to accept is - I was free. When I was in there. Due to a lot of things I had experienced in my own personal life and situations I had ended up in, I was for the first time, in a long time, actually free. I found myself again. Which was really weird as well.

I think the lowest point for myself was that I had my son and I moved to an open establishment and for about eight months, even though I was eligible, I still wasn't able to go and see him and he wasn't coming up to see me. And I would be promised that he would be coming, but no-one would bring him. This would happen every week for about two months. In the space of about eight months I think I only saw him three to four times. I would get ready and then they would call on the day that 'we're not coming.' They wouldn't let me know so I'd be getting prepared for a whole week for what to like, do with him, get for him and what I'm going to say to him and I hope he remembers me.

So, I think what helped me overcome was definitely religion. I didn't have much - I didn't have friends, I had no friends visiting me at all, nobody knew where I was. I didn't have the emotional support from people outside. My Mum was very hit and miss and my son's Dad's family weren't very supportive emotionally like that, so for me I would say the first thing was religion. I never gave up. And I believe that I

would be seeing him.

And I think the women who were around me, who I lived with, had been the biggest support that I could ever ask for and I was shocked that people who didn't know me, people who had no loyalties to me and had no reason to help me had gone above and beyond to support me emotionally and had... honestly, if they weren't there I think... I don't know what I would've done.

I definitely am an over-thinker, a panicker [sic], I'm bit 'intense' as some people would describe me as well but I think when you're in there and you don't have that normal support system that you have when you're on the out, you just don't know how to ask, you just don't know what to do, you don't know who to turn to because you're so limited.

I think the women who I lived with, they have been a huge support. Even just knowing that they knew what was going on and knowing that they were mothers as well and stuff. Just be understood.

My son was only very small when I went in and it was just knowing that there are people there, and either just talking to me or helping me with paperwork or telling me like 'no sis, you keep fighting.' I'm definitely I think, one hundred percent a fighter. I never gave up.

I was constantly [hounding] down professionals like 'this

needs to get done, this needs to be fixed.’ So, I think you shouldn’t undermine the support of people and what I would advise women, who are there, first time, is that first of all – it will pass. Whatever you’re feeling, do not give up. And just make sure that your driving force is your child or children. And just know that they will love you unconditionally, no matter what you think of yourself.

Don’t doubt yourself as a mother because we are a lot stronger than people make us out to be. Don’t listen to everything that professionals tell you in there – trust me, if they say no, there is always another way. You are entitled to... it’s your God-given right, you are a Mum so no matter what, don’t give up – you are not alone. We’ve all been through this. I was inside for two years and even if it’s your first time offence or you didn’t do an offence and you still went to prison or like a reoccurring thing – no matter what it is, as a mother, these children will look up to you and will love you unconditionally.

So, my advice is do not give up, do not stop fighting and it will pass, your children will still love you. ‘Cause that was one of my fears, that my son wouldn’t love me anymore and we are now stronger than ever and he thinks the absolute world of me.

Don’t worry if people can’t understand that because at the end of the day, whether you’re religious or not – even the universe will give you back the energy that you give out. I’m



“

I was shocked that people who didn't know me... and had no reason to help me had gone above and beyond to support me emotionally.



a firm believer in what you're gonna give out you're gonna get so believe that you're gonna get your kids, believe you're gonna be able to see your kids and believe that it will all work out and believe it whole-heartedly and the universe will bring it to you.

My situation itself was terrible because I was on a mother and baby unit with my son, for about ten months – my separation was the most horrific ever. I had problems on the outside with my son's father and inside I got isolated by staff members and I was being questioned in regards to terrorism because of my religious beliefs. I got questioned about why my dressing attire had changed and how I felt about Muslims being killed – this was when the Manchester bombings happened and this was all in front of my child – he was with me in the room while these questions were being asked. I was treated differently. I was racially profiled, so was my son's Dad.

Then I was told I can't leave the first establishment to move to an open because 'that's the way it is' so they kept me on a normal wing for about two months. And on the day of the separation they kept me over in the mother and baby unit over the weekend. I wasn't actually allowed to move straight away so I was still in the same room, which was where my son and I were and they wouldn't let me leave for two months. I would get ready and they'd say 'yeah you're on the transfer list' and then my name would magically disappear. I would have to pack up and go back to my

room.

And then they put me on a suicide watch or put on report or something so someone would come and check on me hourly and say this is standard procedure because you're at risk of suicide and I was like... I've never been at risk of anything like that. So anyway, I was like, I'll accept that too. Then they said when you're on this book you can't leave, you can't be transferred, and they were saying that the prison does not want you - the open prison doesn't want you when in actual fact they were just toying with me.

In the end I got there, got to the open prison and they said 'we were expecting you, you just haven't turned up.' My eligibility for open was in February and I didn't get there until July. When I got to the establishment I was at - the open prison, and then I had social services absolutely ruining me, trying to take my son off me. I had the previous establishment trying to get me to sign foster carer papers to give my son into foster care. I had a really bad experience and social services were not in any way helpful, at all and honestly, I can't even lie, the most support I did have was from women that I met there. Because they helped calm me and helped me see things in a more logical way.

But I think, I'm probably one of many cases that they would have had to have dealt with, but what was done with me was wrong. Because I was literally every day, every minute begging and writing letters, and 'who can I talk to' to get

support, 'who I can talk to' to move up the process.

So much has else has gone on, I mean, you're really tested there, you really are. It wasn't what I expected and just... I didn't get support that I thought I should get as a young Mum, as a parent, as any type of Mum. Where I was, I thought that was really heart-breaking.

I ended up having to go to court to fight for my son because the social services, the local borough was trying to get an interim order which meant that they basically tried to give him away to his Dad's parents. And I fought in court, I was there every day, I was panicking, it was a three to four day trial where my name was tarnished because I've got a criminal record and 'she's this person, she's that person' and it was the most difficult experience for me because when I was there I had to stand up in the witness box so I had to fight for my freedom and I was fighting for my son - again, so that in itself was really difficult and challenging for me because I had never even had a parking ticket in my life. I had to relive my sentence for myself and my child all over again.

Thankfully the judge was very, very, very understanding and non-bias so she was able to see through everything and she said she had 'no issues with the Mum,' and actually the case went into my favour.

Take what you can from prison, turn it into a positive rather

than a negative. If you sit there in self-pity and self-wallow you're gonna shrivel up and become a prune. But if you use it and grow out of the sh\*\*, and out of the mud and then you come out, you know, ready for the world.

I never got the chance to process what had happened to me and for the first time since I've been out, this month for me has been the first time I've been able to process that I actually went to prison. So for me it has been a bit challenging. But definitely take the time out and use prison for what you can - to better your life for when you're out.

See it as a little resting spot to kind of build your future. This is the little pit stop that you're at, to secure the future for when you are out and with your kids. Whether that be support, a job, education, take that time. Use the negative into a positive.



# 'imat64

by Donna Walton

Where I'm from is pretty rough, and so's the folk in truth.  
Then there's them wot' acts stuck up, all 'aughty 'n aloof.  
But one who neva' seems t' get no trouble at 'is door,  
Is 'im wot' lives jus' down the road at number sixty four.

I moved from out the area, 'bout sixteen years ago,  
Swapped me 'ouse 'n upped me sticks wiv' all me kids in tow.  
'An all I 'eard was "If you 'ear an 'ammering on yer door."  
"Make sure it 'ain't 'im wot lives down there at sixty four."

I 'ave to say that livin' 'ere is int'restin' at least,  
There's always someone 'avin' beef or s'piciously deceased.  
Tho' lookin' back, I must admit, fer all the blood 'n gore,  
None of it 'as ever 'appened outside sixty four.

Well I ain't one to court no grief, so kept me nose well clean.  
An' 'oned me answer of "No officer, I neva' seen."  
That shoulda' bin' the end of it, me 'forts would turn no more.  
To why the 'ole estate was scared of 'im at sixty four?

It served me pretty well n' all, until that fateful day.  
The postie knocked 'n said "Here take this parcel, he's away."  
Then backin' down me steps, he kept 'is eyes fixed on the floor,  
An' nodded down the road 'n said " It's his at sixty four."

Me blood turned icy in me veins,  
me goosebumps, goosebumped too.  
An' if i'm 'onest I was scared so much I 'fort I'd poo!  
Me knees gave way as I went crashing t' me kitchen floor.  
Tremblin' at the fort I 'ad to knock at sixty four!

I dunno' 'ow I dun' it but I made it down the road.  
Nerves all jangled, muscles tensed in full on 'F#e#k that mode'.  
Me mouth fell open, laughin', understandin' now I saw,  
A uniformed policeman lives at number sixty four...



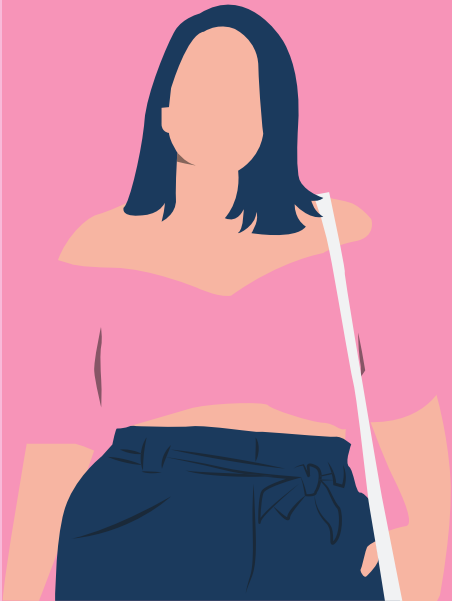
“

I found myself again.

”

“

I thought I was a disappointment but, [I]  
obviously wasn't a disappointment to  
her.



# open and out.

a personal account.

I got sentenced to two years for intent to supply. March 2017. It was very devastating for me. I had a young baby, nine months old and a teenage child that I left behind, and it was fairly traumatising.

I ended up moving to an open prison, 'Cause they categorised me as low risk. So i ended up going to open. Being there, I took every single course you could think of. For jobs that I would probably never even apply for but I just thought that whilst I was there, I was gonna make the best out of that situation. I was gonna be away from my children, I was gonna come out of this with something, so I did.

I got a job in the education department which enabled me to do any course that I did want to do anyway. While I was being allowed out on ROTL - we were allowed to go out and get jobs and stuff like that, so I started to help organise these job fairs for all the other ladies and invite employers in to get the other girls jobs 'cause some of the girls had never had a job, and for a bit of a boost for their confidence and whatever else.

And I did that but I didn't really wanna go into a job that was something that I wasn't interested in. Not only that, I

didn't wanna get paid and then the prison take a percentage of what I'm working for, which was quite a high percentage - I'm sure it was like 40% or something like that.

So, I started to research things that I could do when I was speaking to the career's advisor. I started researching different courses and stuff like that and found a course at Goldsmiths University doing History and Anthropology. Which is a module I found really interesting.

Although I never thought I had the qualifications to get into University, I knew that while I was in prison I completed a lot of qualifications, NVQs and stuff and I thought it must add up. Anyway, applied for this course, got invited for an interview. Got accepted into a University, a very good University - Goldsmiths University of London.

Through that, I'm department rep, programme rep, take part in various activities within that University and enjoy it thoroughly. I've changed to a different degree which is Education, Culture and Society which I find extremely interesting. It relates to everyday life and you know, some of the situations that I've been through.

I was coming out on day release to go in to my lectures and seminars. I'm no longer an inmate, I was released on good behaviour they say, on tag and stuff like that. When I got released I tried to find suitable housing for me and my children to be together but found it really hard. It was a

really big task and I ended up coming out and being in my Mum's property and sleeping on her sofa. It was getting a bit stressful because obviously I want to parent my children and want us to have our alone time and contacted various people, especially someone that I met in the prison. She worked for basically helping people in housing – but she couldn't help me because I had children.

But I contacted her and told her I was still having a really hard time finding housing. She put me in connection with another lady who helped me rent privately by being my guarantor and helping me pay the rent in advance and a deposit. 'Cause that was proving a real big task for me. And although the government were offering to pay Discretionary Housing Payment, it would never have come in time for the landlord to accept – once the landlord has accepted me, I am supposed to pay them straight away. The local authority don't give you payment like that for homes, so I had to find other means. Which we did.

So now I'm doing my official first year in Education, Culture and Society and I live in a two bedroom with my two children. My eldest has his own room, which I'm so happy and grateful for because he had been needing that space. I mean, we were homeless before I went to prison.

And there's a few people as well, I would say, I wouldn't have been able to do it without. And that would be; my Mum, who brought my children to see me more or less every

week. I mean, anytime she could, she did. There'd be odd weeks when she didn't come but it was understandable. The Education Department within that open prison I was in, they were very supportive of everything that I wanted to do.

There was also Women in Prison who were very supportive in that too because anything that I needed to search – you're not allowed to use the internet but she would search things for me, print stuff off for me and it was really, really handy to have that kind of help.

While I was there, I also made friends. I met some of the most genuine people I've ever met in my life. Which was surprising because I had in my head that 'oh my god, I'm going to meet some really awful, horrible people' and wouldn't want to socialise with them in the prison. But I was wrong. People that have had a start off or you know, were trying to do things to support their family and stuff like that and ended up doing something probably similar to what I had done.

But yeah, I think it's changed me for the best. I'm a lot better as a Mum – my patience, tolerance is so high now. I'm really calm, I don't get upset. I don't think – you know, think that every weekend is time to go out and be away from my kids, so before I think I kind of took advantage of that. And being away from them kind of taught me how much, you know, when they're not there, how much I miss them and how to value my time with them.

It's also taught me about valuing relationships as well, especially with my Mum. As a teenager I felt like you probably like, you go through stages where you think 'oh you know, my parents this, that and the other' and even as an adult you get into disputes with your parents, you start to question 'things' - I don't know how to express what I mean, but going into prison made me know that my mother is my rock and she supported me so greatly in this.

She, even now, when I came out and I came out with over 21 qualifications from prison. Not including the ones I had before I went to prison. And she said to me how proud she was. I thought I was a disappointment but, obviously wasn't a disappointment to her.

# what's the one thing you wish you knew at your lowest point?

1

I wish I knew the red flags of men before I learned the hard way.

2

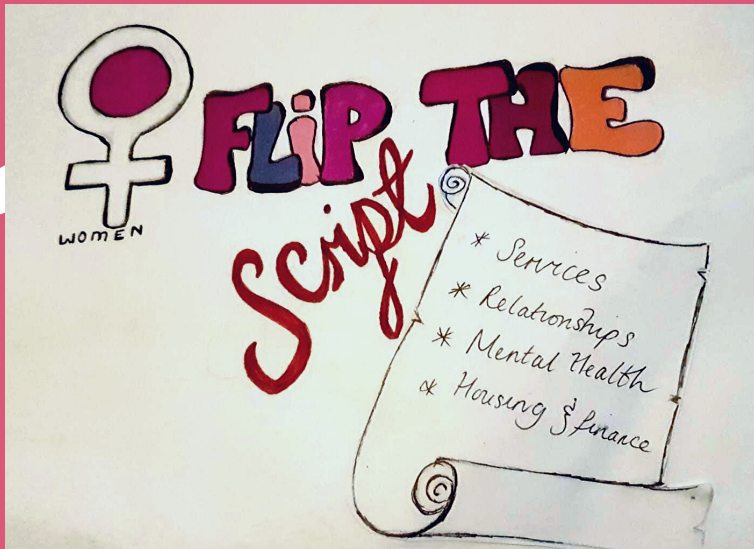
I wish I knew how loved I am by my friends and family.

3

I wish I knew I'd get this far.







Thank you to "J"  
for this design.

# birth companions

Practical and emotional support to women before, during and after their baby's birth in prisons. Includes peer support and trauma-informed working.



07786 133 636



info@birthcompanions.org.uk



birthcompanions.org.uk

# hestia

A variety of services including community support for those released from prison. Floating support and Visiting Support services may also be available alongside refuges.



020 7378 3100



info@hestia.org



hestia.org

# homestart

Focused on supporting families during difficult periods including prison. Home Start Volunteers help you to access local services.



0116 464 5490



info@home-start.org.uk



home-start.org.uk

# naccc

National Association of Child Contact Centres. Providing information for parents, children and grandparents following separation.



0115 948 4557



[contact@naccc.org.uk](mailto:contact@naccc.org.uk)



[naccc.org.uk](http://naccc.org.uk)

# open book, goldsmiths

A range of classes, Extended Project Qualification and Foundation Pathways to University for ex-offenders including academic, media and arts-based subjects.



020 7919 7759



[openbook@gold.ac.uk](mailto:openbook@gold.ac.uk)



[gold.ac.uk/open-book/](http://gold.ac.uk/open-book/)

# prison reform trust

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



0808 802 0060



[prisonreformtrust.org.uk](http://prisonreformtrust.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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