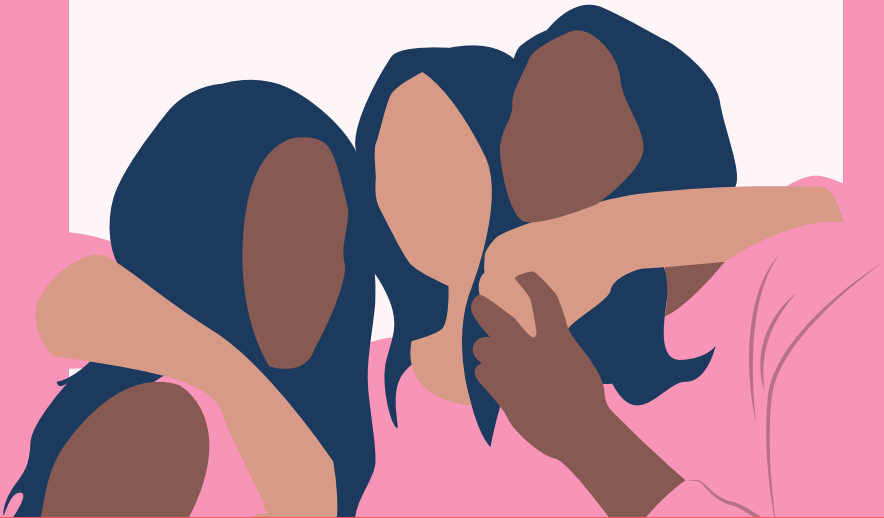


TRANSCRIPTS

WOMEN FLIP THE SCRIPT



Chapter 1: Relationships



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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.

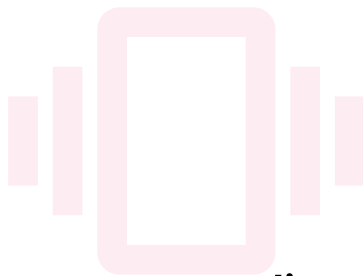


the journey.

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.



0207 359 6674



info@wipuk.org



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





"People are people...
you can't change them
but you can change how
you deal with them."

panellist

relating later.

three women discuss their experiences

A: The first thing I'd like to focus on for this podcast would basically be how your relationship or relationships with family, with your partner, your children, whichever - how do you feel your relationship has been impacted by your time in prison? Being separated from my child was like, the hardest thing I've ever had to experience - like ever. And you don't know that's going to be the hardest thing you'll ever experienced until you're in it. I know how much that child loves me - I'm not going to waste this time. I wanna be able to come out and say you know... When she's older she might be like 'you did this, and it's impacted me this way, this is why I do this.' By the grace of God I pray she doesn't but that could happen so for me, I wanna still be able to say; yes, I done wrong but with that wrong I done good. I made sure I used my time wisely, I made sure that I put myself in a position where I could come out and still provide for you.

Use your time wisely...my relationship with my Mum is a lot better. I think I'm a lot more patient. I'm not saying I'm perfect with it but I feel like I'm a lot more patient. My respect for my Mum and my family members that supported me fully through it... you know when you feel like, I'm forever in debt to you for that. It's not like I feel like I owe you anything but it's just like I want to show my appreciation.

B: I feel like it's had an impact - a positive impact on the relationship I have with my children. I don't think anything has changed with family really. However, with my friends, I've seen that they have like, a different type of respect for me. But with my family, I just feel like it's the same kinda thing.

A: Can I just ask; with that different kind of respect - because you went to jail or because of what you did with your time and how you handled jail?

B: I think it's because of what I did with my time and how I handled jail. It's because of how I handled it. I think with me, I think of it from a different angle than you lot. Because I have a bit of resentment maybe. Because one - where you lot said yeah, you know, my mum took... like she did a lot for me when I was inside and X, Y and Z... For me, my answer would be to that, well... I didn't ask. However, listening to you lot, it's made me sit here and think...even though I've got that attitude of 'I didn't ask' I still need to be grateful. Because she didn't have to do that - she didn't have to say 'I'm gonna take my grandchildren and I'm gonna do that.'

A: Especially as a woman, and especially if you have children. I feel kind of like, you need to use that time wisely. You need to go in there, for me, growth was a big thing. Friendships, well... prison made me have a complete different perspective on friendships. It's quite sad but

people that were a major part of my life and had all the chat, when it came down to it, they didn't stand the test of time. It's an eye opener - that relationship clearly wasn't as strong as I thought it was.

C: When I was in prison, being on your own's OK because guess what - you are on your own really, in this world. And even though you have things and people and relationships around you, really and truly when it comes down to how your life turns out, it's actually down to you. And you're on your own when making these decisions. My mind was focused mainly on my children and that's all I cared about. And that's why, what you were saying earlier about using your time wisely - I definitely agree to that. I went in there and done every qualification that was offered to me. Every single qualification you could think of! Ones that I thought I might not even ever try and get a job in doing, but I took the qualification just so that I could have it and say that I didn't sit there and do nothing -

A: Yeah level up!

C: I wasn't wasting my time away from my children.

B: Do you know what, going to prison definitely categorised the people in my life -

C: Yeah everything about going to prison, it turned my relationships positive. Friends that I have/had... had them

all set in categories. And my family are also in their categories.

A: Yeah because not in a bad way, but everyone does have a purpose. My main thing is, if they're no good for my wellbeing – especially my emotional wellbeing, I'm able to look at it like... whether it's good for me and whether it's even worth my time.

B: And that's the categories I place people in now – are you worth that time? Are you not worth that time?

C: I'm more quicker now to be like – oh! Wait a sec, I don't need this relationship with this person. Whether it be a friend, relative or whatever and I back off of the situation. Now it's like no, it's not good, it's not healthy for me, I don't need it. That's fine.

B: What prison has done, it has made me see my wrongdoings in my little problem with my family and it also has opened my eyes to say, you know, there are certain things I need to work on with myself. However, I just gotta see that people are people and you can't change them but you can change how you deal with them.

A: On the outside, I am a lot more patient with different people from different walks of life. I am a lot more open to experiencing other ways of life.

C: Even though you don't have relationships with people outside the prison community all the time, you kind of do in a way, like you get on the train and stuff like that. And relationships in that aspect, I've learned a lot. Because I've had to live with so much different types of people that I wouldn't even dream of living with and sharing stuff with. In reality, before I went to prison, I would not even want to look at them. I think with the community, it has taught me a lot as well, I think...my relationship with the community.

B: I think prison has had a good impact on the relationships that I have because I've learnt how to be more patient with people... be more accepting of their characteristics.

A: I would definitely advise people inside and out, whilst in prison and when you get out - if there are certain therapies that are being offered with regards to relationships, you should take them. Because it gives you a different perspective. That's another thing that has come from my time -

B: Work on self first. Before you can work on any relationship with others, I had to work on self and that's what prison done for me. It gave me the time to work on self. So I would advise, work on self because without working on self, you can't work on anything else. And working on self will allow you to have more acceptance of how your other relationships will come along. Cos they might not all go good, do you know what I mean?

A: Maya Angelou's – you know, Still I Rise, most people know that one. There are certain paragraphs out of that where I felt like they very much related to me during that time. If I felt down or whatever, to this day, I will still go back to that and do you know what – as bad as things could be, it's actually not that bad.





stillrise.

Maya Angelou, 1978

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust,
I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air,
I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

mum & me.

A mother (M) interviews her daughter (D)

M: Who did you stay with whilst your Mum was in prison?

D: Whilst my Mum was in prison, I stayed with my Nana.

M: How did you find out your Mum was going to prison?

D: My Mum told me the day before she was gonna go to court that she might go to prison. Then a few days after she said that she was going to prison. And some of my other family members told me as well.

M: How did you feel when you found out your Mum was going to prison?

D: I actually felt really scared because I didn't know what, I didn't who I was going to be with and I wasn't really sure how I felt. I felt confused and upset at the same time cos some of it wasn't really her fault it was what just what triggers her, so I was really sorry for her and upset at the same time.

M: Do you feel you were prepared for the separation?

D: No, I wasn't really prepared 'cause I'm so used to being

with my Mum that sometimes I don't focus on when my Mum isn't doing that well so I just need to get used to it and then when I went back to my Mum it was all different.

M: How often did you see your Mum?

D: I saw her like, once every Sunday for the whole time she was in jail.

M: Do you feel that was enough?

D: No. I didn't feel that was enough because I wanted to see her more than just once every week.

M: Do you feel you were supported whilst your Mum was away? If so, by who?

D: I was supported like, a few of my Auntie's supported me.

M: What kind of support would you have liked?

D: I would have liked someone to talk to but because... I'm not really used to talking to any of my other family members the way I talk to my Mum. So I didn't really talk to anyone.

M: If you could wish for one thing during that experience, what would it be and why?

D: For my mum to not be in jail for such a long time.



selfreflections.

A personal story.

For me, the thing that really got me through my prison sentence and post release was my mind set. And I just decided when I knew I was going to prison, that I was going to face this with the most positive mindset possible. I've seen too many people go through the system and come out half the person that went in, or come out with serious mental health issues, or come out to no family and you know, these things obviously have a knock on effect to your mental health and how you feel about yourself. So that's your self-esteem, your confidence.

And I just realised that in this world, people are going to let you down but there's no worse feeling than when you've let yourself down. And so, I just think it's really important to focus on your mental health, focus on reading and positive affirmations, working towards maintaining a healthy mental health. Surrounding yourself with people that want the same for you that you want for yourself. Because you know, we don't realise it but sometimes when our mental health is affected, when our self-esteem is affected, when our confidence affected, it's usually a knock on effect of the environment that we're in, or the people that we're surrounding ourselves with.

One of the biggest lessons I got through going through the prison system... was that... when it's all said and done, you're only left looking at yourself in the mirror. And I've always wanted to look at my reflection and not be scared of what looks back or not look at it and think 'who is that person?'

So whilst I was there, I just chose to use that time to get to know myself, work on maintaining a healthy mental health, work on maintaining a positive relationship with my family, which in turn will help with my mental health. And just look at things with a positive mindset.

And I know that's hard to do, but it's so much easier to say 'woe me.' And the easy route is never the one that makes you feel good. And so I'd rather take that harder route and know that I done it off my own back, I didn't allow circumstances to knock me down and keep me down.

If i could give any advice to mother's who find themselves in this situation, of being in prison, having to deal with the probation service, it's that... do not allow it to break you. Work on yourself, work on being a better person than the person you were yesterday. And knowing that we're mums, always remember that there are people - our children, looking at us for inspiration and guidance. And if you can show your children how you positively deal with a negative situation, of course it's going to just set them up for life on how to deal with things that might not always go their way.

That's what was always important to me, not to lose myself in the midst of it all. But furthermore, find myself, and become a stronger person. And become a stronger mother.



"I've always
wanted to look
at my reflection
and not be
scared of
what looks
back."

“

Survivors...
Women are really powerful.

”



solid support?

While we often focus on the relationships we have with intimate partners, friends and family members, the relationships we build with professionals can be equally as important. I decided to ask an outreach worker and a service manager what they think makes a good support worker. Here's what they had to say.

Ellen: I think there's a lot at play and I think that really has to be quite specific to the needs of the group that they're working with.

Obviously, the world is full of fantastic support workers really doing their best in adverse situations and adverse funding climates who probably would like to do a lot more than they can. But I think that when we're looking at what makes a good support worker in terms of women coming out of prison and I think what's really beneficial about our Hub and our Specialist Outreach Service is that we're coming at it from a gendered approach. Solace Women's Aid is a women's service and not just a women's service but a violence against women and girls service.

**More on
the Women's Hub
in Chapter 2**

I think a good support worker in terms of ethos and what they're starting point is when working with women affected by criminal justice is recognising that the criminal justice system is often a trauma and a violent experience for women or part and parcel of violence and trauma. And so tied up in their homelessness, their abusive relationship, their drug and alcohol use, their mental health conditions (often unmet or undiagnosed mental health conditions), physical health conditions, poor family networks, care system, some of the things we've talked about. A good support worker, alongside of course, compassion and empathy, needs to come from a starting point of seeing why offending happens or why offending behaviours take place and for women I think we've got to recognise the gendered perspective and the marginalisation that these women have experienced by society. It's not that they're bad people committing crimes, it's that they're trying to survive in a society that treats them like dirt and marginalises them at every opportunity.

We can't just have a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all for working with people because when you're working with women who are in crisis or who are in distress, you have to factor in all of the additional things that they may have been through as women. And particularly women who are affected by the criminal justice system - we know that means they've probably been affected by the care system, they've probably been abused by a partner, usually a male

partner, they've probably been exposed to drug and alcohol difficulties either in their own lives, or their peers' lives, or their families' lives. They've probably experienced family breakdown - nobody wakes up one morning and just decides to burgle a house or mug someone in the street, it's coming from somewhere and I think that we have to understand the gendered origins of so-called 'offending behaviour' when we're working with women.

Katy: I think what makes a good support worker is a real understanding of the difficulties that the women face and how frustrating it can be. And just really recognising that... the strength and courage of these women to every day still be trying to do things better. And really, really rooting for them and wanting them to succeed and becoming really invested in them as people.

Part of that is really establishing a rapport where they trust me. I'm very, very informal in my approach, I'm very human. You know, we have long chats and [they] know a lot about me and my family and my partner. And that leads to really healthy conversations about relationships and they say things to me like 'what would you do if your partner hit you?' I can say, 'look, I would leave because that's not love - he respects me and I respect him' and that leads to giving them a template for what a healthy relationship looks like that they can relate to, because unfortunately they may not have seen one.

I think that flexibility is so important. I might have a day planned where we're gonna sit and apply for housing benefit and we're gonna make an appointment with the GP and then, my woman turns up and she's distressed and her ex-partner has assaulted her and that [plan] goes out the window.

Being a very calming influence and not getting swept up into the chaos that unfortunately they're experiencing. I can be that calming influence for them to see a way forward.

You know, just recognising the barriers that they face and knowing how I can help them go around those barriers. For example, when women present to Housing on release, it's a really overwhelming day, they've got loads of appointments, I make sure that that process at Housing is as quick as possible, I advocate with them to managers to say 'look she's got a lot to do today, she can't sit here all day, can we do this quickly?' I make sure they've got a phone and phone credit, you know, I put them in a taxi to their accommodation and physically move them in with their stuff like... I'm there. So they're not facing these things alone.

Temporary accommodations, nobody knows what that entails. You walk in and it's just a bed. They've got no cups and plates, so not only are they being released from prison with nothing, when they go to their accommodation, even if I buy them some packet noodles, they haven't got a plate to eat them off of!



“

I'm there.

On what makes a
good support worker.

Universal credit we know is paid 5 weeks in arrears, what are they going to do for those 5 weeks? How are they going to fund their travel to appointments, to probation, to and from that accommodation. And it can be the difference between them getting through those awkward first few weeks or panicking and reoffending to support themselves. Because the barriers that they face look pretty impossible without somebody saying, 'look I've topped up your oyster card, here's some phone credit, this is how we're gonna get to your accommodation and I believe in you, you can do it, you can ring me anytime.' Without that support, how are we expecting women to find the self-belief to do this?

Just encouraging them that they are powerful and they're survivors. You know, as a woman, it's so lovely to work with women because focusing on what unites us rather than what separates us; the experience of being a woman and helping these women - I mean, they are survivors, they've been through things that none of us can imagine and they're still here and they're still trying. Helping them recognise their strength in that and connecting to their power as women - it sounds corny but, women are really powerful and helping them see that is really special to be able to do.

I come from a background in criminal justice where I was never able to help the women I was working with as much as I wanted to. And if they did have keyworkers I always found myself a bit jealous of the keyworkers that got to do.

those lovely rehabilitative, nice things with the women and I was just sitting behind a table, basically... having to make the horrible decisions of, you know, do I have to recall this woman that can't get to me because she's got all these barriers that I know she's got. Working now, and being able to do all the things I've always wanted to do to help these women rebuild their lives and move forward, is really, really special.

But sometimes, personalities just don't gel. And that happens. I've seen great key workers who are otherwise great at their jobs and they just don't gel with one woman for whatever reason and that's fine. And nobody has to be upset by that. Your Key Worker wouldn't even take it to heart if you said 'you know what, I'm not sure this is working between us, I'm not sure we're really on the same page.' Talk about how you feel - you can tell your Key Worker, 'do you think we could try me having a different Key Worker?' Because often Key Workers can just swap round, maybe another Key Worker can work with you and then the Key Worker that you've had can work with another woman. Because relationships are delicate things and sometimes they break down and sometimes it's just no-one's fault. So just recognising that things are not going the best with your Key Worker and having an honest conversation about that and saying 'this feels uncomfortable.'

Those relationships are gonna become the vehicle for change that drive these women forward to be able to have the self-belief to do the things they're capable of. So I think we can see, already, the effects of that.

So I think it's about meeting the women where they're at, and letting it be led by them. I'm not doing things to them, I'm planning with them and being really collaborative and moving forward. The trust is the main, main thing because they don't really trust anyone because they've been let down and let down and let down by services so I think one of the main things is to do, what you've said you're going to do to bring that consistency that they haven't seen in the past.



family action

Help and support for separated families. Including post-adoption support. FamilyLine for information, referrals and support.



0800 802 6666



info@family-action.org.uk



familyaction.org.uk

family rights

For families with children in care. Freephone helpline. If social workers are involved in your child's life and you would like to speak to an adviser,



0800 801 0366



office@frg.org.uk



frg.org.uk

family lives

For parents and wider family members. Helpline previously known as ParentLine for support and info around family life.



0808 800 2222



askus@familylives.org.uk



familylives.org.uk

gingerbread

For single parent families. Info including around contact arrangements and legal/financial entitlements.



0207 428 5400



groups@gingerbread.org.uk



gingerbread.org.uk

match

For Mothers Apart from Their Children. Groups of women with shared experiences. Helpline for support and understanding.



0800 689 4104



enquiries@matchmothers.org



matchmothers.org

women'said

Domestic violence service focused on women and children. Providing an online 'chat' with support workers and forum to speak with other survivors. A number of additional local services and information can be found on their website.



helpline@womensaid.org.uk



womensaid.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.



advance
SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Pact

SOUND
OUT

Prisoners · Families · Communities
A Fresh Start Together

A logo consisting of a stylized white 'W' shape on a black background, with a white silhouette of a tree or plant to its right.