

**READY
STEADY
GO!**

Diary

**YOUR
DIARIES**

What You
Recorded For Us
On the Longest Day
of the Year -
June 21 2017

highs, lows,
fears, tears
and friendships

2017

Funding available NOW!!

Distance Learning courses & College Fees

Additional materials i.e Books / Dictionaries / Equipment

Tell me and I forget
teach me and I may remember
involve me and I learn!!



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Make an appointment to see a WIP Advisor or
write to us now - NO stamp required
nothing else is needed on the envelope

ensure WOMEN IN PRISON is in capitals



Freepost - WOMEN IN PRISON

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Winter 2017 • Issue 11

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About Women in Prison

Women in Prison (WIP) is a national charity founded by a former prisoner, Chris Tchaikovsky in 1983. Today, we provide support and advice in prisons and run three community women's centres - the Beth Centre in Lambeth, London, the Women's Support Centre in Woking, Surrey and WomenMATTA in Manchester.

WIP campaigns to reduce the number of women in prison and for the greater use of sentencing in the community alongside significant investment in support services for women so they can address issues such as trauma, addiction, mental health, substance misuse, domestic

violence, debt and homelessness. These are factors that are often the reasons why women come into contact with the criminal justice system in the first place.

WIP's services are by and for women. The support available varies from prison to prison and depends on where a woman lives in the community. If WIP can't help because of a constraint on its resources, it endeavours to direct women to other charities and organisations that can. WIP believes that a national network of women's centres, properly funded, that provide holistic support, is the most effective and just way to reduce the numbers of women coming before the courts and re-offending.

WIP's services include...

- Visits in women's prisons
- Targeted "through the gate" support for women about to be released from prison
- Support for women in the community via our women's centres in London, Woking and Manchester
- Advice and support for education in prison; help to find appropriate courses and colleges for individual women; funding towards course fees for distance learning or at college; help to fund course materials, including books and stationery
- A Freephone line and Freepost address for women who wish to contact Women in Prison
- RSG! A quarterly magazine written by and for women affected by the criminal justice system
- Magazine groups in several women's prisons, with plans to expand further in order to provide women with a channel for their opinions, a way to exercise their rights as active citizens, and an outlet for their creativity.

Got something to say?

Please contact Women in Prison at the FREEPOST address below. We may be able to visit you in prison or write to you.

Write or call free:
WOMEN IN PRISON

Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON

National freephone line
0800 953 0125

info@womeninprison.org.uk

Women in Prison's services are open to all women affected by the criminal justice system in England. Women can choose to attend, leave, or return to our services. None are compulsory.

CONFIDENTIAL

Our service is confidential. Any information given by a service user to Women in Prison will not be shared with anyone else without the woman's permission, unless required by law.

COMPLAINTS

If you are not happy with the service we have provided and wish to make a complaint, you are welcome to do so. Just ask for a copy of our complaints procedure.

Hello and a big thank you for sending the diaries you kept on the longest day of the year, June 21st, the summer solstice. We have dropped many of our regular features in this, a special issue of your magazine, to give space to the many poems and pieces of writing that you sent us on what proved to be one of the hottest days of the year.

The diaries give a brief insight into life inside women's prisons – the challenges, the highs and lows and the sheer hard graft in education, employment and other ways in which women are turning their lives around. Your contributions also reveal yet again the importance of friendship and families.

One of our key roles is as a platform for the voices of women in prison. Your experiences directly informed the Lammy Report on how the criminal justice system responds to Black, Minority and Ethnic (BAME) women and men. So thank you again for all your valuable contributions.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate".

Kate

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF WOMEN IN PRISON

The magazine you are reading is free for all women affected by the criminal justice system in England. We send copies each quarter to all women's prisons and you should be able to find the magazine easily. If you can't, write to tell us. If you are a woman affected by the criminal justice system and would like to be added to our mailing list for free, please contact us at [Freeport WOMEN IN PRISON info@womeninprison.org.uk](mailto:info@womeninprison.org.uk).

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Innovation & Skills



Ministry of
JUSTICE



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Writing Competition 2017

Write a poem or short story with the theme

“walk in my shoes”

**CLOSING DATE
DECEMBER TO JANUARY 10TH 2018**

Entry forms are available by
writing to WIP or from your
Library or Education Dept

It can be fact or fiction
there is no right or wrong
way of interpreting the
theme it's completely open
and up to you what you
write about....
we just want you to have a
go and get your words down.

Your voices will be heard !!!

Prizes

1st x 1 @ £30
2nd x 2 @ £20
3rd x 3 @ £15
4th x 4 @ £10



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HM Prison &
Probation Service

no stamp and nothing else is needed on the envelope - make sure its in CAPITALS

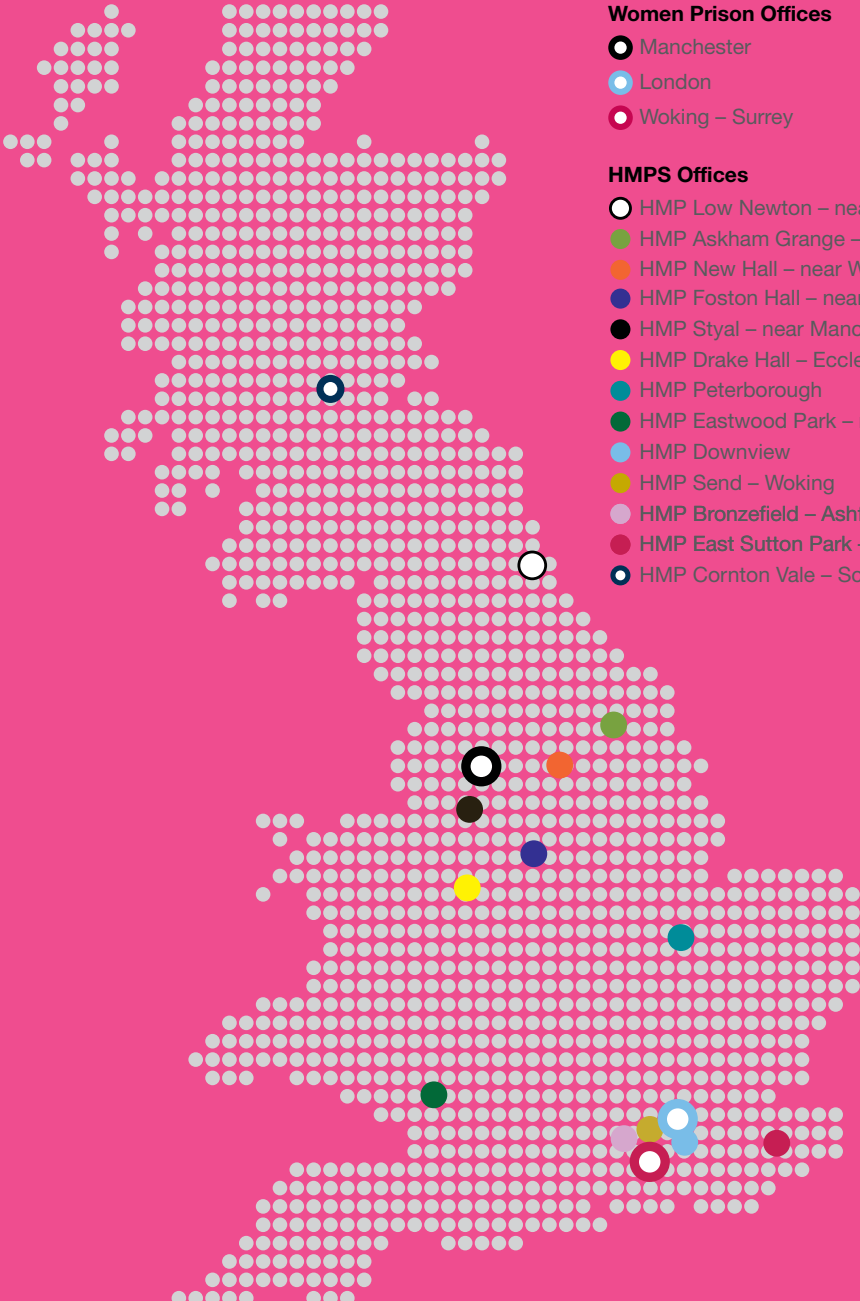
WHERE TO FIND OUR OFFICES

Women Prison Offices

- Manchester
- London
- Woking – Surrey

HMPs Offices

- HMP Low Newton – near Durham
- HMP Askham Grange – near York
- HMP New Hall – near Wakefield
- HMP Foston Hall – near Derby
- HMP Styal – near Manchester
- HMP Drake Hall – Eccleshall, Staffordshire
- HMP Peterborough
- HMP Eastwood Park – near Bristol
- HMP Downview
- HMP Send – Woking
- HMP Bronzefield – Ashford
- HMP East Sutton Park – Maidstone
- HMP Cornton Vale – Scotland



HAVE YOU RECEIVED AN UNFAIR SENTENCE?

The Centre for Criminal Appeals is a charity law firm. One of our missions is to challenge disproportionate sentences arising out of the courts of England and Wales. We do not charge our clients for legal representation.

Our projects provide legal representation for women who wish to appeal against their sentence, i.e. to ask the court to look again at their sentence. This can be done on a number of grounds e.g. failure to raise or take into proper account childcare responsibilities, a mental health condition or a learning disability, to name but a few.

If you are a woman who feels that your sentence was unjust and you are:

- in prison for a non-violent offence;
- you feel you were given inadequate advice about your right to appeal against the sentence or no explanation as to why an appeal against your sentence would be unsuccessful,

we invite you to write to us at the address below to see whether your case could be included in our Women's Sentencing Project.

We are not going to be able to help everyone who writes to us - but we will look carefully at each letter we receive to see whether we can make a difference to the case, for you and for the sentencing scheme at large.

When writing to us, you can mark the front of the envelope with "Rule 39" to ensure that prison staff do not open the letter.

Please note that, if a solicitor is already representing you in relation to an appeal, we will not be able to assist.

WOMEN'S SENTENCING PROJECT

**Centre For Criminal Appeals
2 - 10 Princeton Street
Holborn,
London
WC1R 4BH**

1 in 3

WOMEN ACROSS THE WORLD EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIFETIME

(London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)

ONLY **6%**

OF THE ENGINEERING WORKFORCE IN THE UK IS FEMALE

(Women's Engineering Society)

WOMEN MAKE UP **51%**

OF THE POPULATION BUT ONLY **30%**

OF THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AT WESTMINSTER

(Fawcett Society)

85,000

WOMEN AGED 16-59 ARE RAPED EACH YEAR IN ENGLAND AND WALES

(Home Office)

WOMEN HOLD

0%

of the highest three ranks in the army, RAF and navy

(Fawcett Society)

WOMEN

THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF WOMEN ARE EMPLOYED IN THE LOWEST PAID SECTORS, INCLUDING CARE AND RETAIL

(Fawcett Society)

GLOBALLY, WOMEN INVEST

90%

OF THEIR EARNINGS IN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES COMPARED WITH **30-40%** INVESTED BY MEN

(World Bank)

THE GAP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN'S EARNINGS WAS 17.4% IN 1997 - IN 2014 IT WAS

»

9.4%

(BBC)

IN A TYPICAL MONTH,

78%

OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ARE WRITTEN BY MEN

(Fawcett Society)

THERE ARE

130 million

CHILDREN IN THE WORLD WITH NO ACCESS TO EDUCATION - 70% OF THEM ARE GIRLS

(International Rescue Committee)

STRO UP!

CJ BURGE 2017 REGIONAL WINNER
OF THE FESTIVAL OF LEARNING'S
SOCIAL IMPACT AWARD



- WIP REPORT
- HOLLOWAY PRISON
- BE BOLD 2020
- NEW BEGINNINGS

Why CJ is a winner!

During a long prison sentence in Japan, CJ Burge set herself the difficult task of learning the language and so began a love affair with education. On release from prison back in the UK, she completed an Information Advice and Guidance Level 3 NVQ and became a volunteer at the charity St Giles Trust, offering support to people in custody.

Now, CJ is studying for her final exams in law and she is the 2017 regional winner of the Festival of Learning's Social Impact Award. So, double congratulations!

The Festival of Learning (previously called Adult Learners' Week) is the biggest celebration of lifelong learning in England. Its mission is to highlight the benefits of learning, and applaud the achievements of adults who have used learning to transform their lives, and to encourage everyone to embrace lifelong learning

Since 2016, CJ has been working for the St Giles Trust's SOS+ Project, which helps vulnerable young people involved in gangs and serious violence. She organises and delivers interactive sessions to young people at risk, offering advice so they can make better choices in life.

CJ's aim, as a lawyer, is to shape criminal justice policy, drawing on her own experiences, to create a fairer, just and safer society.

CJ said, "My learning has allowed me to be financially responsible and contribute to my family in a meaningful way. It has opened doors I could previously only have dreamed would open."



Justice for all?

CLAIR CAIN REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS OF THE INDEPENDENT LAMMY REVIEW INTO THE TREATMENT OF BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Overt discrimination' and a 'racial bias' sit at the heart of the criminal justice system (CJS).

These are the findings of a two-year review into the treatment and outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) men and women in the CJS.

The report, commissioned by the government and headed by Labour MP David Lammy, was published in September. It noted the lack of trust in the system from BAME people and stated that, in prisons, adjudications and disciplinary measures are disproportionately brought against BAME prisoners.

The review made 35 recommendations. These included a forum in each prison, established by the Governor, which would review both the fairness and effectiveness of the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) system. The forum should have both White and BAME representatives.

Other recommendations included performance targets to be set for prisons to monitor equality of treatment and outcome for BAME and white prisoners and a demand that the government set a national target to achieve a representative judiciary and magistracy by 2025.

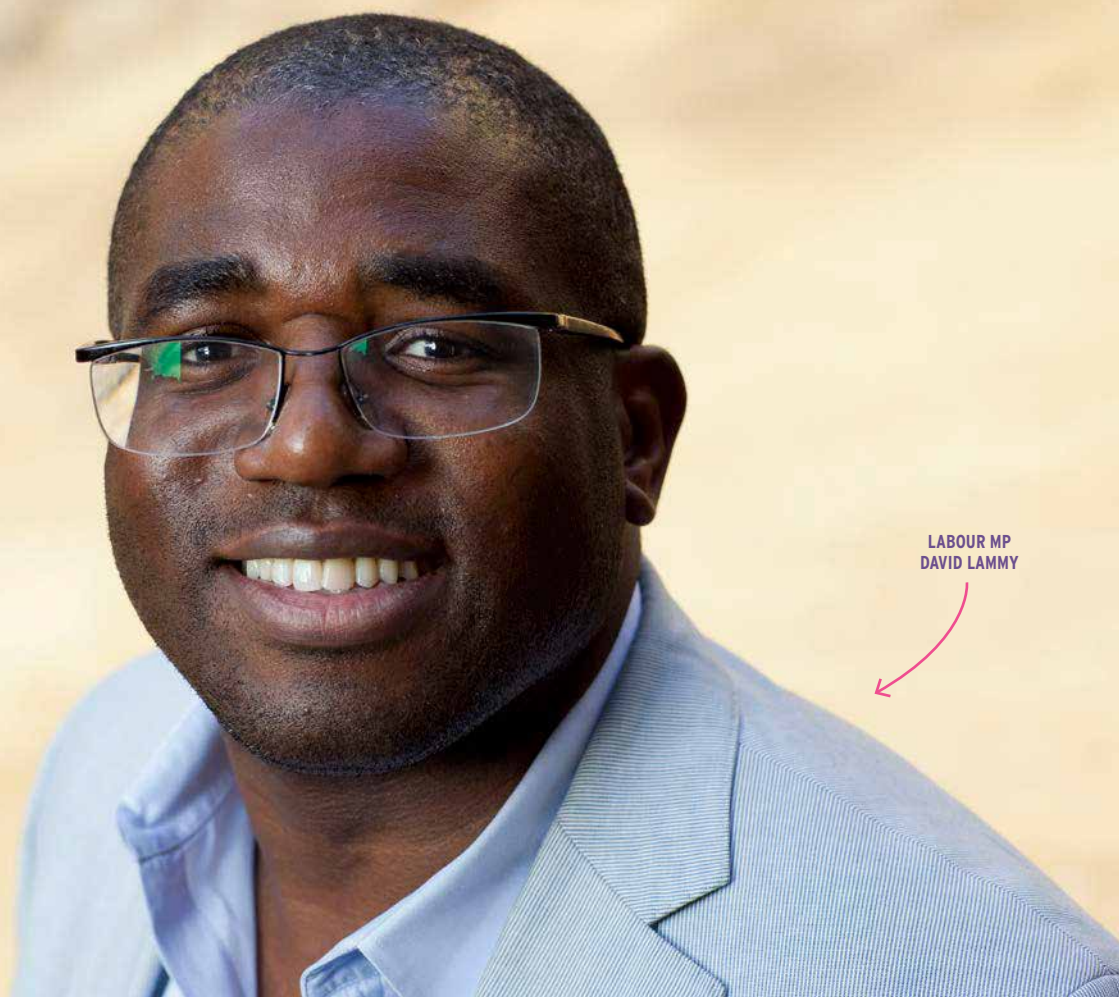


What do you think of the review? Let us know your views.

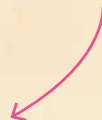
Send your letters to Freepost
WOMEN IN PRISON

Black people represent twelve per cent of the prison population, whilst accounting for three per cent of the UK population. The UK CJS shows far greater disproportionality than the United States'. The report investigated why this should be the case. Among other causes, it mentions that BAME individuals are consistently more likely to plead not guilty than white defendants, meaning that, if then found guilty, they are likely to face a far harsher sentence.

Women in Prison (WIP) and the women's organisation Agenda fed into the review. WIP ran focus groups in two women's prisons and



LABOUR MP
DAVID LAMMY



at its London women centre, the Beth Centre. The women's views were compiled in a report titled 'Double Disadvantage'.

One shocking finding of the two-year inquiry is that, for every 100 white women handed custodial sentences at Crown Courts for drug offences, 227 black women were sentenced to custody.

In 'Double Disadvantage', among the many points the women made, were indications that they were not treated fairly in court and were unjustly penalised by judges and juries, the latter often comprised of white men.

In addition, they were not listened to or informed about court proceedings, e.g. only one woman out of 20 knew whether or not

she had had a pre-sentence report.

Women also said that they were discriminated against and experienced racism in prison from both staff and other prisoners.

One woman said, "I'd never heard so much racism until I came to jail." Another said, "For a white person, it's mental health and for a black person, it's classed as anger management issues."

Women in Prison will continue to campaign to ensure that the Lammy recommendations are enacted.

Do you agree or disagree with the Lammy findings and recommendations?

*Send your comments please to: Freepost
WOMEN IN PRISON (no stamp required)*

A brighter future at last for HMP Holloway?

Campaigners who are fighting for the provision of women's services and social housing on the site of HMP Holloway in North London which has been closed for over a year, have had a major breakthrough.

Islington Council has now said that a legal clause will be inserted in any planning application for the redevelopment of the land to ensure the provision of facilities offering support for women.

Reclaim Holloway, the group that has campaigned to stop the use of the land for private development, is publishing a report, and offering proposals for what could be provided on the site. The report has been shaped by the ideas and suggestions of women both inside and outside of prison, consulted by Women in Prison.

The report also highlights the impact that the closure of HMP Holloway has had on women. The process of closure caused distress, anxiety and, for some women, significant harm to mental health and wellbeing. A further major impact has been for families in London who now face extra travelling time and cost to visit women elsewhere in the female prison estate.

The proposals for the Holloway site include supported housing for women leaving prison that, alongside independent living, would offer access to support workers, advice sessions, group workshops and communal areas



HMP HOLLOWAY PRISON TODAY

to facilitate peer support.

Another popular suggestion is for a women's centre, a place that provides a one-stop-shop offering a range of services for women, which could be used as an alternative to custody. Both Islington Council and Jeremy Corbyn (who is both the leader of the Labour Party and the local MP) strongly support this idea.

Women who contributed to the report also say that it is important to recognise the sometimes dark history of the prison and ensure that the experiences of former Holloway residents are not forgotten.



Women in Prison asked women if they would find it problematic to live in their own homes on the site of the prison in which they were once incarcerated. The overwhelming response has been, "No! Having your own key to your own front door would be a liberating and empowering experience!"

*Claire Cain,
WIP's Policy and Campaigns Manager*

**Share your stories and memories of
HMP Holloway with us.**

**Address is;
Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON
(no stamp required)**

STR8 UP!

#2,020 by 2020



BE BOLD! LAUNCH OF CAMPAIGN TO HALVE THE FEMALE PRISON POPULATION

Women in Prison has launched the 2020 Ambition - to reduce the women's prison population to 2,020 (or fewer!) by 2020.

Members of Parliament, Police and Crime Commissioners, employers, activists, magistrates and others have come together to pledge their support to the 2020 Ambition.

The campaign is calling for:

- A significant and sustained investment in women's community support services, particularly women's centres and housing for women
- A rejection of the Government's proposal to build five new community prisons for women

- A Sentencing and Court Reform that requires an increased awareness among magistrates and judges of alternatives to custody, urges a reduced use of remand and the end of imprisonment for non-payment of the council tax

- A considerably increased use of the appeals system and an accelerated procedure of the Parole Board to expedite the release of women on the now abolished IPP sentence
- Under Transforming Rehabilitation (TR), the end of custodial recall for breach during the year long supervision period after release.

Woman of Talent Wow Woking!

A poem, called 27, stitched on to a dress worn by artist, Susan Merrick, was among the many imaginative pieces of art and poetry produced by women in HMP Bronzefield and Downview, both Surrey prisons and the Women's Support Centre in Woking run by Women in Prison (WIP). All the work was on display for several weeks at The Lightbox in Woking as part of the annual New Beginnings Art Awards open to women affected by the criminal justice system. In October, it went on tour around the country.

The theme for this year's awards was 'Which Way/' with the artwork telling stories of difficult paths already taken and the possibility of positive future routes. Robert Napier CBE, High Sheriff of Surrey, attended the opening. He also watched a short one woman play, "What Women Face" which he described as "brilliant". The Women's Support Centre (Surrey) organises the awards with assistance from WIP, The Lightbox and Woking Borough Council.

Claire Cain



ARTIST SUSAN MERRICK WEARS A POEM, 27, BY CHARLOTTE, STITCHED ON HER DRESS WORN AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW BEGINNINGS EXHIBITION.



STRO UP!

ARE YOU IN PRISON ON AN IPP SENTENCE?

■ A Women in Prison staff member would like to hear from you please. She is researching the experiences of women who are in prison on this now abolished prison sentence. Please note that this is a research project. We are not able to support your individual case but by feeding into this research we hope we will help to change and improve the system so that women who are over-tariff will be released. If you would like to work with us please contact WIP with your prison details and a little of your story. We will be in touch.

Write to
FAO Claire Cain
Freepost
WOMEN IN PRISON
(no stamp
required)

Let a Million Flowers Bloom!

As part of Women in Prison's "Be Bold" 2020 campaign to substantially reduce the female prison population and ensure proper support in the community, WIP is "growing" a meadow of handmade flowers. Each flower will be created - in wool, fabric, cloth whatever takes a woman's fancy - in women's centres and prisons.

The meadow will be displayed at festivals, conferences and possibly in Parliament too as a symbol of women's creativity and talents and to raise awareness of the campaign.

Craftivism - the combination of speaking out and creative arts and crafts - has the power to draw the eye and capture the imagination. Crattivism tells stories, showcases abilities and is an important campaigning tool.

If you are in prison or in a women's centre and are part of an art or craft group or any group in which you could host a crafting session then please tell the group leader about this project and she can contact Women in Prison for a workshop pack.

Alternatively you can make one or several flowers in your own time. If you struggle to find crafting materials then a drawing or painting of a flower perhaps including words or a poem can also be part of the meadow.

This is a long-term ongoing project with no end date. WIP is unable to return flowers but you will see whatever you contribute in full bloom!. Thank you!

Claire Cain

*Contact WIP or send your flowers to
Freepost*

WOMEN IN PRISON (in capitals - no stamp required).





TUMBLEWEED JOKE WALL



DID YOU KNOW THAT DOLPHINS ARE SO SMART THAT WITHIN A FEW WEEKS OF CAPTIVITY, THEY CAN TRAIN PEOPLE TO STAND ON THE VERY EDGE OF THE POOL AND THROW THEM FISH?

Q: WHERE DID THE SHEEP GO ON VACATION?
A: THE BAAAAHAMAS

KNOCK KNOCK!
WHO'S THERE?

HAWAII

HAWAII WHO?

I'M FINE. HAWAII YOU?

I married Miss Right.
I just didn't
know her first
name was Always.

What's the difference between
in-laws and outlaws?
Outlaws are wanted.

KNOCK KNOCK!
WHO'S THERE?

ACH!

ACH WHO?

SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE COMING
DOWN WITH A COLD.



Skinny says,
"If you think
these jokes

are seriously lame and you can
do better, then let's hear them!"
Send your jokes in to:

WOMEN IN PRISON (magazine)
Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON
5 Stockwell Mews,
London
SW9 9GX



FISH 'N GARRI SOUP

By Sindi Illustrated by Lucy

Please send us your favourite recipe

Ingredients

- Spinach leaves
- Kippers
- Mackerel
- All purpose seasoning
- Hot chillies
- Black pepper
- Fresh Lemon
- Vegetable Oxo cube dissolved into a cupful of hot water
- Plastic lunch box
- Garri made from cassava tubers and similar to tapioca

Spinach



Kippers



Seasoning



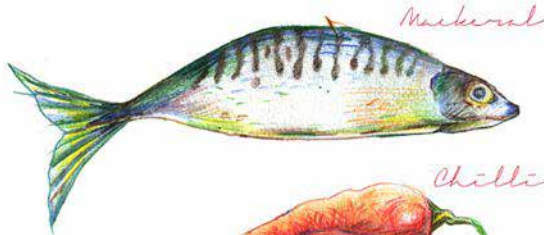
Lemon



Pepper



Oxo



Mackerel



Chilli

Method

All ingredients can be bought on the canteen sheet

1 Drain oil from the kippers and break the kippers and mackerel into small pieces.

2 Mix all the ingredients together, but not the garri, in a plastic bowl or a plastic lunch box.

3 Seal the lunch box and either run hot water over it or fills a bowl with boiling water and places

the lunch box in it covered with a towel.

4 Keep changing the water to keep the temperature hot until your soup is heated.

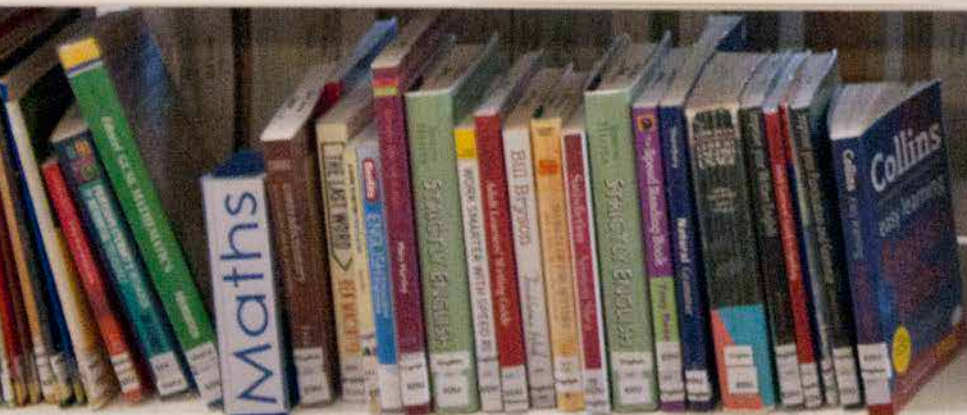
5 Then separately prepare the garri by mixing it with

boiling water, adding a little at a time to arrive at the right thick-ish consistency and ensure there are no lumps.

6 This becomes fufu paste, common in Africa, to eat with your hot soup.

THE POWER OF BOOKING INTO A DIFFERENT WORLD

The National Literacy Trust's **Adam Holmes** describes **Books Unlocked**, the project he manages in prisons



**National
Prison Radio**



NOTICE THE SHAPE OF A BOOK; IT LOOKS like a door. ... This similarity is entirely appropriate since to read is to cross a threshold into a new world, to read is to travel”. Yann Martel - Author of ‘Life of Pi’ “[reading] makes me feel free and unlocks my mind. You are never alone with a good book.” Participant: HMP Styal

The power and value of reading cannot be overstated. The positive benefits of reading for enjoyment can make an enormous difference to the lives of people in prison. Studies show that those who have access to books are more likely to read for enjoyment, and those who read for enjoyment are more likely to succeed academically and to have better life chances.

Better literacy skills are also associated with higher levels of employment and higher earnings. In the context of prisons and young offender institutions, employment and education are key factors in reducing the risk of re-offending. Reading is also one of the joys of life, and higher literacy is associated with increased empathy, improved self-esteem, a greater sense of social inclusion, higher levels of trust, and health benefits.

Since 2012, the National Literacy Trust has supported people affected by the criminal justice system to read for enjoyment, to read more often, and to engage with literature. The programme, Books Unlocked, provides free copies of novels that are short-listed each year for a major literary prize called the Man Booker, to prison reading groups across the country. This year, the National Literacy

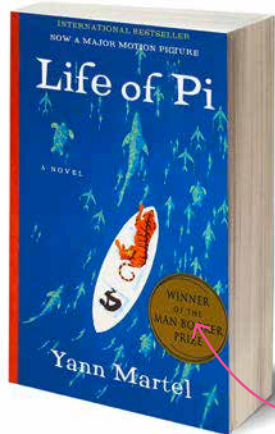
Trust supported reading groups in 27 prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs), distributing nearly 800 books in the process. The ten novels on offer this year were chosen from a variety of genres and authors. They included: Pigeon English by Stephen Kelman, Life of Pi by Yann Martel and How to be Both by Ali Smith.

Pigeon English is a heart-warming book that tells the story of an 11-year-old boy, who emigrates from Ghana to London where he is confronted by a harsh world far removed from the one he grew up in.

How to be Both tells its story from the two different perspectives of its main characters, George and Francesco. The plot focuses on the theme of identity and leaves questions for each reader to answer for themselves.

“A reading community such as the reading group in our library introduces new genres that many of us would not generally read. It is almost always a pleasant surprise and a discovery of a new world of words’.

The National Literacy Trust has a longstanding partnership with National Prison Radio (NPR), which broadcasts audio serialisations of the novels included in Books Unlocked each year. This year, authors such as Patrick deWitt



A GROUP FROM HMP&YOI STYAL READ LIFE OF PI

and Jim Crace have also recorded interviews that have been broadcast alongside their audio books.

NPR distributes individual copies of the chosen titles to those listeners who write in, requesting a book. In 2017, the 1000th book was distributed through NPR to a listener of the Books Unlocked show. The partnership with NPR broadens the scope of Books Unlocked, giving more people access to books, encouraging those who do not read to engage with literature and supporting those who already read to give new titles a go.

“I think it’s a great service provided on NPR, for example, if you don’t get the opportunity to visit the library or if you struggle to read,” says a participant in HMP Styal.

This year, a group from HMP&YOI Styal took part in the project and read *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. An incredible story of survival about a teenage boy trapped on the open sea in a lifeboat with a tiger. The book was enjoyed by the group, who are keen to take part again next year.

One participant commented, “Reading takes me away from the situation I’m in. It provides relaxation, food for thought and escape.”

Katrina Gleave, the Learning, Skills and Employment Manager at HMP&YOI Styal said, “Improving literacy and communication skills is a key for us to assist the women in successfully resettling back into communities

and with their families. We have been running peer-led book clubs for around six months now and have found these to be important interventions; improving women’s self-confidence and social skills. ‘Books Unlocked’ has supported this initiative by enabling women with different agendas, reading abilities and life experience to unite around one title.”

Several participants have described how taking part in Books Unlocked has helped to relieve stress and increased their confidence, tolerance and empathy. Respondents also cited the opportunity to chat with other participants as one of the most important aspects of the programme.

The National Literacy Trust is keen to sign up prison reading groups to take part in the next year of the project that runs from September 2017 to August 2018. If you believe that this project would be something that you and a book group at your prison would like to take part in, then ask your prison librarian to contact the National Literacy Trust by emailing info@literacytrust.org.uk.

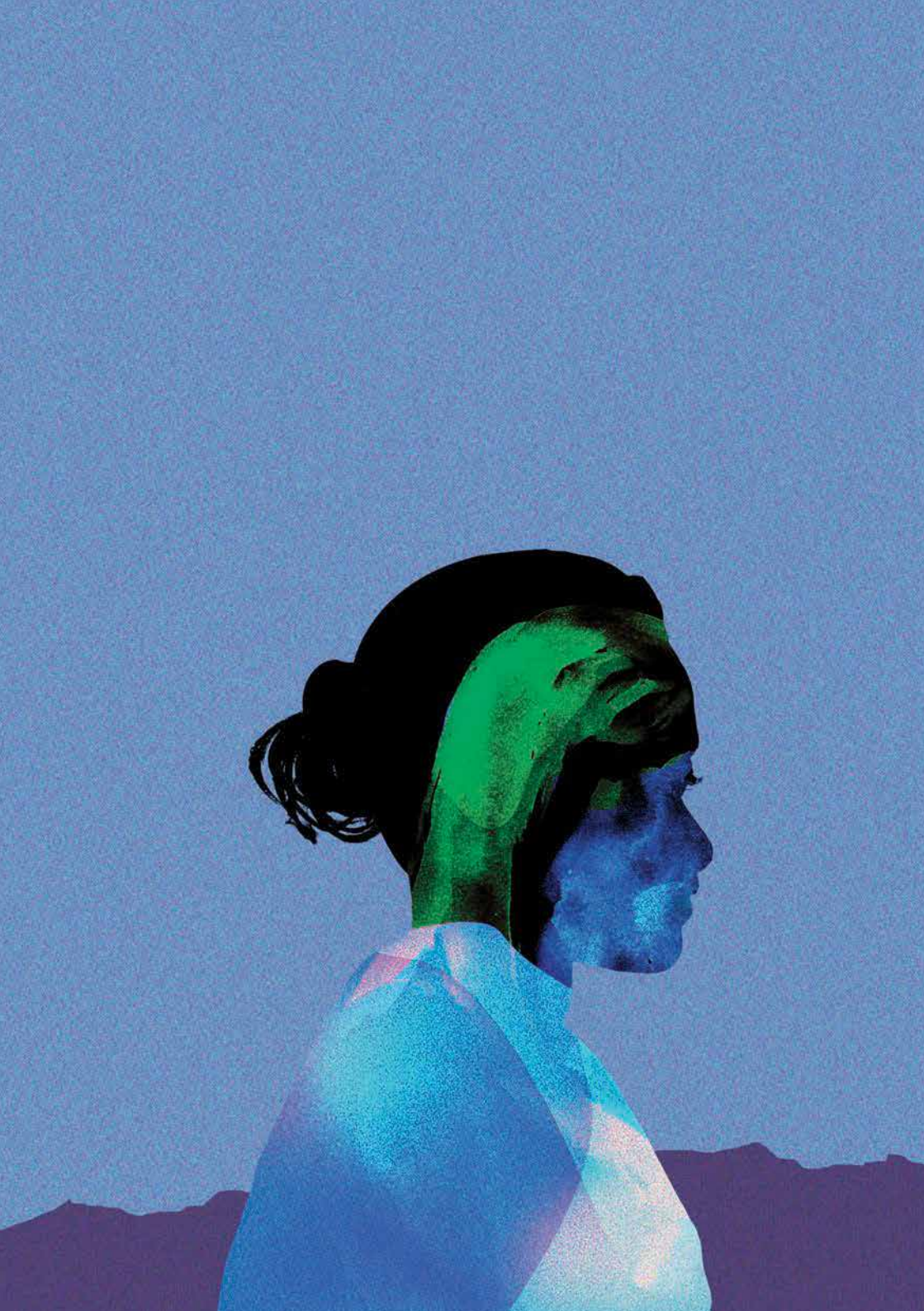
“Books Unlocked has helped to relieve stress and increase confidence”.



SAFE IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

Practical help, advice, life skills and a chat over a cuppa - a combination that builds trust, explains [Anta Brachou](#) of Hibiscus Initiatives

AURORA IS A SRI LANKAN ASYLUM SEEKER and mother of two grown-up children. She came to the UK alone in 2011. She suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder following an attack in Sri Lanka. She has been diagnosed with Severe Depression Psychosis and is undergoing treatment. She does not willingly talk about her personal life and history. She has one friend in London who speaks her language. For over three years, Aurora has relied on the charity Hibiscus to support her with her asylum application and to act as intermediary in communicating with support services. »





Aurora has been living in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation. Hibiscus first met her in late 2013 prior to an appointment at the Helen Bamber Foundation, a human rights organisation that offers support to survivors of cruelty including torture and trafficking.

Emotional support is a hugely important factor in the relationships that Hibiscus establishes with its clients, including Aurora. The practical support is, of course, important, however Aurora always seems happier and more comforted after she has had the opportunity to see us to talk over a cup of tea at the Hibiscus Women's Centre.

The Centre, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, is situated on the Holloway Road in North London. It's an important addition to the services that are developing across London to support vulnerable women. Hibiscus, for its part, focuses on women who are foreign nationals, migrants or from minority ethnic

groups, who are affected by the criminal justice system or immigration restrictions.

The launch of the Hibiscus Women's Centre in December 2016 is recognition of the organisation's specialist work with foreign national women and has coincided with its thirtieth anniversary celebration.

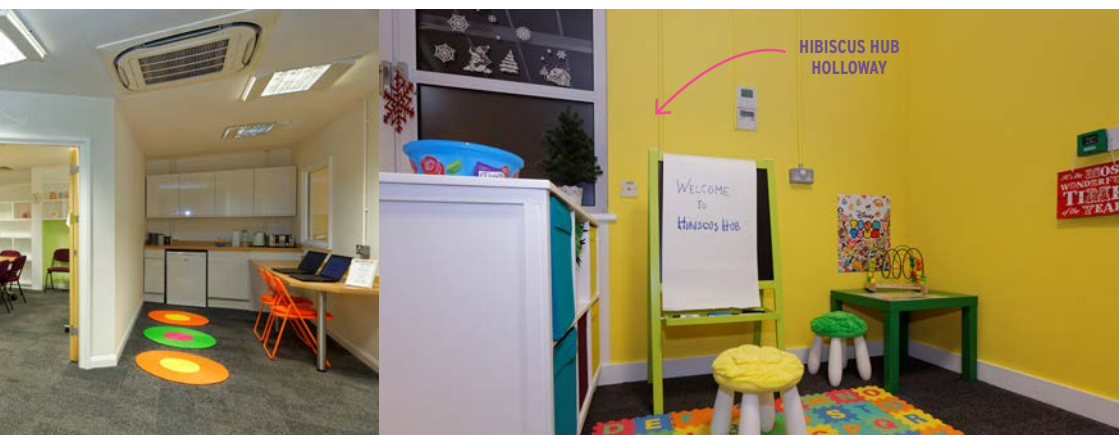
The Centre is a bright, cheerful, women-only space developed in close consultation with the women Hibiscus assists. Women can relax, learn new skills or access specialist advice.

They can discuss their anxieties with professional staff who can help them work through solutions to the challenges they face, or just enjoy the opportunity to

socialise informally with their own children and other women, and speak their own language.

A typical week begins with the 'Rise and Shine' session on Monday morning. Children noisily enjoy the play facilities while their mothers drink coffee and chat. In the

“When she first began to attend, she was nervous, quiet and wouldn't travel alone.”



afternoon, women attend a weekly IT class run by an experienced volunteer. She teaches basic skills so women can fill in forms, surf the net for useful information and keep in touch with their families overseas.

Literacy classes are offered on a Tuesday. The classes are small; up to seven women attend at any one time. Mel, the English as a Second Language teacher, takes a very flexible approach to cater for different levels of skills and learning abilities. For instance, some of the women cannot read or write in their own language and progress can be slow but rewarding for all involved.

Children are welcome at all classes, so the women do not have to worry about childcare. The classes are followed by a communal lunch. On the last Tuesday of the month, the literacy class takes the form of an outing to a place of interest such as a museum or art gallery.

One-to-one casework takes place every day of the week, especially if there is an emergency, but we are trying to establish a more structured routine and Wednesdays are dedicated to this one-to-one session with Hibiscus staff. Hibiscus has links with several law firms and chambers that provide pro bono advice for Hibiscus clients. The charity offers fact-finding sessions and legal clinics with

immigration solicitors. Hibiscus also facilitates meetings with probation at the Centre, so that the women feel more at ease and the Centre's support and assistance are available during the women's supervision sessions.

On Thursdays, a Mother and Baby group is run by the charity Birth Companions. These sessions provide vital support for pregnant women and new mothers in the community who are isolated and in need of support.

Friday afternoons are dedicated to wellbeing and relaxation activities including yoga.

The Hibiscus Women's Centre is in constant use throughout the week and, often on Saturdays too, for one-off activities or therapeutic workshops.

In Aurora's case- when she first began to attend, she was nervous, quiet and would not travel alone. Now, she attends classes, takes part in consultations and travels independently to the Hibiscus office. As a non-British citizen, dealing with a multitude of services, managing her mental health diagnosis, dealing with her asylum application, and getting by day-to-day has been no easy task. As well as providing practical, trustworthy, support and a handholding service, Hibiscus has helped to make Aurora feel safe in a foreign country.

THANK YOU!

*In the spring we asked you to keep a diary on
THE LONGEST DAY OF THE YEAR,
JUNE 21ST, SUMMER SOLSTICE.*

*Dozens of you did exactly that – so thank you!
In this special issue we publish a sample of the
diaries you sent us. JUNE 21ST WAS ONE
OF THE HOTTEST DAYS OF 2017. ✨*

*The extracts reveal a vivid PORTRAIT OF
LIFE inside women's prisons, the ups & downs,
the value of friends and family, the challenges
faced and difficulties navigated – and the
moments of TRIUMPH, ACHIEVEMENT,
FUN and LAUGHTER. Read on! (AND KEEP WRITING!)*

Diary

2017

Counting the days

2017

Dear diary,

So today is the hottest day of the year, as I have just found out. I woke up just in time for roll check, with four minutes to spare, as per usual. Later I made pork and pickle sandwiches at work and nearly melted from the heat. I found out that my ex, who happens to be my best friend, is dating someone and I'm very, very happy about that.

I spoke to my mummy on the phone and we discussed going on a girls' holiday, just us two, once I'm off licence. So that's pretty exciting!

Vicky, Claire and myself had a little water fight outside on the green in the blazing hot sun. The weather is perfect. I have just been told that I will be allowed to do my maths work outside on the grass, so that is amazeballs!! YAY!!

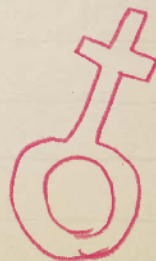
Tonight us girls are going to watch 'Love Island' at 9PM and maybe play some music in the pool room before it starts.

My nails look lovely and glittery! So I'm feeling good today!

My ROTL's start on August 9th so my heart is set on that date and all my head is focused on being able to go out and see my family more!

So, although some days I may have a grumpy face, I really am doing OK, I'm making the most of prison And I'm making the most of the longest day of the year.

Chloe



2017

June 21

Canteen day! Yipee! So finally we have baccy and biscuits. Breakfast is the usual rice crispies and toast and jam. It was rush, rush, rush this morning, canteen, meds and getting ready for work.

Lunch was chicken and chips yummy! Then we had a few vultures who come in our room as word got around about our bounty of biscuits but why are some just friendly on canteen day? LoL Do you think we (the gruesome duosome) are soft? We think not!

Bible study was great and Pastor Ian asked if anyone knew what was special about today. So I raised my hand and informed everyone that it's the longest day of the year/ summer solstice. Needless to say there were a few jokes about us not needing any of our days in here to be longer. LoL

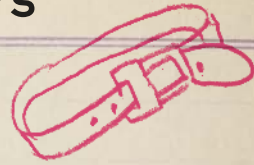
After lunch, I went to my Alcohol Awareness group and Chrissy went to the gym. I also had the Well Woman Clinic, best to get everything checked out, I guess.

We may both have to ask our mums for some financial assistance as I've had to go part time in the call centre and Chrissy is only receiving £1.20 a day at the mo Prison wages! Only four and a half weeks left so not too long now. I am so glad that Chrissy and me are here together and making most of sorting ourselves out ready for a better future. The world is certainly an interesting place and God is firmly in our world and it feels good.
Good night!

Zoe P and Chrissy

Counting the days

2017



HAPPY SUMMER SOLSTICE!!

And achievement day, and best of all get to see Terry and Eddy!! And 289 days to go!

So, yes, I am rather happy this summer solstice. Very different to last year, but in a way just as valuable an experience!

Maybe I'll send Paul a postcard... or maybe not...

I really do need to focus on me, so today is all about ME! Well done me for getting this far and kicking ass at being in prison, you got this Leila!

Started with a shower this morning. Then going to work, then off to see Terry and Eddy, and tonight I will call Mum and Dad! Well that was a day and a half! So achievement day was great. Sooooo wonderful to see Terry and Eddy. I do love Terry so much. Maybe I will marry him one day if he keeps asking. The meal [from the prison kitchen] was lovely. Tomato soup for starters with proper bread rolls. Crunchy on the outside soft inside and the soup had chunks of tomatoes and onion and garlic. Then, roast beef for mains. Big slice of roast beef with cauliflower cheese and broccoli and proper roast potatoes. Lemon cheesecake and brownie with cream and a strawberry for dessert. It was delicious.

Terry and Eddy were so impressed with it all; they were expecting crisps and a sandwich. We took a couple of pictures together. I met the Director (finally), and I told him what I thought of HMP, which was that I really impressed with my prison experience and that there's a lot more on offer here than I was expecting.

We had to share our table with another lady. I know her from

2017

June 21

14:30

education. But of course Terry and I talked shop, which raised a few eyebrows. Terry told me to write erotica and I told Terry to tell his partygoers about me writing saucy letters to keep myself entertained. The only downer was that it was so hot we were all melting.

After lunch, at 14:30, I came back to the wing intending to have a nap, but a friend popped in to drop off a belt I'd lent her. I had made her a bracelet only to discover that, today, she had been fired from her job in the kitchen.

She was distraught. She had helped to make such a lovely meal today and she was only three units away from completing the course when she was fired for having a nose bleed whilst cooking. Something that was totally not her fault, so that was a bit of a downer. Then another friend told me she and her partner are likely to split up which she is also distraught about.

Later, I called my mother and talked for 30 minutes; mostly a good chat. Her love for us her children still overwhelms me and she is determined to come and visit me when she has a bit more money.

Leila



Having faith

2017

Summer in Prison
A time to sit and ponder,
Life outside these walls
Sunbathe I could do
But toil at work I have to
Sun and sand I miss
Outside life spring
Inside I am too heated
Yet joy the sun brings
Long days behind doors
Does not dull my sense of fun
Solstice is here, hurray
A celebration
My day spent with pagan friends
Laughing and sharing
The sun, moon and stars
Align to help make changes
A new life comes forth
The long day awaits
I hold my head high today
For winter has left
Happy thoughts roam free
It is a day to feel love
Peaceful it will be.



Anonymous

2017



June 21

I woke at 6 am
I went to the kitchen to work.
I was fasting for my Ramadan, making sandwiches.
I finished work 11:30am I went back to the unit.
I was very sleepy, hot and I fell asleep.

I woke at 1:30pm - I went to English
In my English class, I wrote a formal letter to
Mr G Thornhill MBE.
I would like him to come and visit the women to
tell us about the history and experiences he has had.
It is very hot.
I finish at 4:45pm, and go back to the unit.
Then I go back to the kitchen to make Ramadan packs.
I take them to the wing where women are fasting,
After I have a shower and read Namaz and pray.

It has been the hottest day since 1976.
I pray it will rain.

At education, other women make jokes,
They laugh and that makes my day go fast.
I am looking forward to ending my fast.
It is hard working in the kitchens when I am fasting
But I still love my job.
It makes my day go by.

Mrs Bibi

1976

Having faith

2017



Today, I wake at 7.30am to serve the girls breakfast. It consists of toast, cereal and milk. I didn't have breakfast I sweep, mop, wipe sides, wash up, take off my chef's whites with hairnet and gloves; I could start a new fashion trend lol! Then, I have a coffee and fag in a room that is small and cramped.

I have a wee at 8.45am. I take my anti-depressant medication, an antibiotic (for a spot) then at 9am the officers gather us to tell us that a lady passed away last night. She didn't do it herself. She was 55. I changed my bed around at 9.30am. I went to work in reception, packing, stacking, tidying up. Not much to do today so got back at 10am.

I cleaned my room, write this journal to you, got told off by the nurse as I didn't take my medication last night then again got told off for not knocking at the door of the nurse's office. I just barged in to say, "Miss, weigh me." She had a client. Shame! How embarrassing!

I put my washing in as its wash day today then at 10.30am I attended my recovery group to engage, learn and talk about addiction. We get sweets Yum! I cleaned my nails. I have a routine now.

Prison rescued me. Then, at 11.45am I serve lunch to the girls, fish and chips and peas, rice pudding and tea. A girl shouted at me saying my man owes her money. What's it to do with me? I'm working on myself, he can stay in addiction.

Then, I mop, sweep, wash up, wipe sides, and put tools away. At 12.45pm, I lock up while screws have lunch so got my bedding. Going to make bed, change sheets, watching Bargain

CHIPS

2017



June 21

Hunters on television, have a fag, put my washing in and post a letter.

Then, I read the Bible. "The king finds pleasure in a servant who acts with insight." Proverbs Chapter 14 verse 35. I went to church from 2.30pm to 3.30pm. Then, I made food for a new arrival and coffee and gave her a pack of tea, coffee, whiteners, toothbrush, toothpaste, brush, shampoo, conditioner, and soap.

I talk to her. Hi, bye, how are you? At 5pm, I went to outside association, a square box, and sunbathed. At 5.30pm, I lock up. I ate my dinner: peanut butter bagel, crisps, biscuits, water, then I had a bath at 6pm. At 7pm. I exercise squats and sit ups and dance then at 8pm I do some colouring. I take in the train noises and the birds singing.

Signing off now xxx

Danni



Having faith

2017

My start to the day was typical of the small stresses of prison life. As a Pagan of many years standing, I'd have loved to observe the sunrise in the early morning, but my cell faces west so I lit some incense and welcomed the longest day. I work in a sewing workshop, so was busy in the morning. I had real JOY on getting back for lunch, I had a "slip" after an absence of six weeks, the Pagan chaplain was visiting, so our little group of women had the deeply soothing rare treat to celebrate one of our sacred days on the day itself. This marks the high point in the year, the sun at its furthest north, it starts to retreat south again from this day forth. We spiritually send unwanted things, feelings and stresses with the sun to be recycled. It is a time of letting go of outworn attitudes and habits, and is an important time for us. As I observed the sunset, I felt the day had turned from bleak to warm with the chance to meet and celebrate with some special people. Our chaplain is a very wonderful lady, a spiritual lifesaver, and we need that in here. I'm grateful for these glimmers of warmth and light in a bleak, dark place.

KJ



2017

June 21



Friendship

2017

Today was a good day.

I decided that as today is the longest day of the year and afterwards winter would start to draw in, I would make every minute worthwhile.

So...

Work was as good as it gets here. Collective working in a happy environment made our situation easier.

The meat went well, the sausages looked good - what more can a person working in meats/butchery ask for? Sad life maybe but the options are limited.

It was very hot - meltingly so. But, working in my section - despite the smell - means working in a chilled, literally, area. Usually, it's not a very popular job except in the heat. Lucky me!

At the end of the day, socially we enjoyed our time together. Talking, laughing, reminiscing, thought provoking. In prison, it rarely gets better than this.

Anonymous



2017

June 21

I want to write a poem
To express to you today,
How much your friendship means to me
In many a special way.

When the sky is grey and bleak
And a storm is on its way,
You hold my hand and walk with me,
Throughout my darkness day.

When the season comes to change,
And the sun shines brightly above,
It's you I share the good times with,
Your company that I love.

Your friendship is a gift,
Unique, precious and true.
I am so grateful for the friendship
That I share with you.

Nazneen



Life - a glass half full!

2017

Today is another really hot day but I always look forward to coming to work. The environment allows me to go for a small walk at lunchtime to see the pigs and gather my thoughts. This morning as I was walking to Education I bumped into a learner who is taking my course. She was excited to tell me her news. She had recently scored 96% in her customer service unit and said she had completed it very quickly as she knew the answers because of the course I run - I was so happy and pleased for her and it made me feel I had done a good job in helping her develop and progress.

This morning she informed me she received a high mark in another test, which was much more challenging. She was so enthusiastic and said she wanted to pursue a career in this field, using not only her customer service skills. Her enthusiasm rubbed off on me and I entered Education knowing it was going to be a great day.

Nikki - instructor

96%

2017

June 21

Some days here I love it. Other days, I wonder why people cannot see it the way I can. I see the staff sitting and listening to the residents; I see the personal officers sitting late into well after their shift finishes, I see the Governor still here after six at night and I see the education staff desperately encouraging the learners to pass their exams.

I see the glass half full, I see the flowers open here in the beautiful gardens, I see the squirrels searching and burrowing for nuts, I see the lawns beautifully kept by the farm girls who take such pride in their work.

I also see the tears after the phone-calls home. I see the sadness after the visits at the weekend.

I hear the heartache of mums who long to be with their children.

I see their chaotic lives and wish I could make it better. It's just a day in the life of this prison but it's a day I'd rather spend here than anywhere else.

Anonymous



Life - a glass half full!

2017

I woke to see the sunrise - the temperature was high,
I made the lunchtime dinners - then dressed and shouted bye.
I drove the 40 miles - the traffic flowing well,
I waited at the big brown gate and pushed the calling bell.
Once in the prison walls I went, my keys attached by chain,
To education's grandest house, a walk just down the lane.
The ducks were tending wee ones, the donkeys eating grass,
Fostas cooking breakfast, and Chapels finished Mass.
O.J.'s shouting "movement" - the teachers all in place,
The ladies spill from down the wings - they come at quite a pace.
My students smile and wave at me - their faces shining bright,
I love my job at HMP; it's a pleasure - a real delight.
They come to class all eager - a willingness to learn,
I try to teach them vital skills so they can go and earn.
The rollers out, the paint is blue, the cutting in just fine,
Before we know it, time has passed and off they go to dine.
The tears can be a flowing, but I see they always try.
They pull together often and help each other through,
It's hard to be locked up at times - it leaves you feeling blue.
The afternoon was paper - a patterned one in green,
Cutting, pasting, smoothing - to learn they are so keen.
We learnt about a budget and how to manage money,
Some of their priorities were really rather funny!
They talked about the visits planned and letters that were
written,
Of girlfriends, husbands, and siblings - a few of whom were
smitten!

2017



June 21

We talked of re-offending and the desire to start anew,
We talked of being a decorator - I'm sure there'll be a few!
And so to close the lesson, we summarised the day,
It had been fun - it had been hard, but they all found the way.
So off the learners wandered to shower and have some tea,
I hope they've had a good day and feel as happy as can be.
The longest day it may be - but for me it's gone real fast,
I love my job in prison - for me it's been a blast.

Vanessa



I love my prison. Today, I passed my maths exam, my tutor told me this morning. It put me in such a good mood. I never went to school and I have learnt to read and write, as an adult, and now, I have maths level 2.

I go home soon, I shall never forget this place, not because I passed my maths exam but because the staff was kind and believed in me even when I didn't have self-belief. I knew I would pass my exam because I have learnt to love myself again and believe I deserve better in life.

Ann

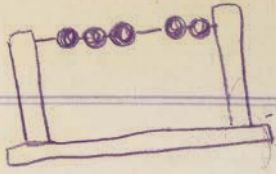
And so the day unfolds

2017

- 05:30 Ugghh.... too early...Zzzzz
- 06:30 Where's the bloody toothpaste tube top? Where the hell did it go!
- 06:45 How the hell did it get there? Ewww! (hand goes down toilet to fish out top)
- 07:00 Due to a medical conditions, I do exercises sitting on a chair. I write a list of what to do, who to see, while exercising legs - imaginary cycling!
- 07:15 Catch up on what's going on in the world - BBC News
- 07:30 Shower/dress and ready for unlock
- 08:00 Unlock - empty bin, collect breakfast, post letters, check POD for timetable changesnearly forgot. eat breakfast.
- 08:45 In cell education (due to medical condition). Now, let's get the hang of this maths I've been working on.
- 10:00 At long last, manage to get a concept through this skull of mine. Next subject, French...not so keen but it's got to be done!
- 11:45 Pick up lunch; do rounds of peoples asking for bits of information they need that I've managed to

EDUCATION

2017



June 21

acquire. Follow up checks on people I've previously helped, See if they have progressed on the issues they've raised, start writing another letter to a publishing company to request education and law books for our main library.

12:30 Agghh...another cold dinner - forget to eat AGAIN.

12:45 Finish letter to publisher, now my own paperwork - Open University registration, personal letters and read the newspapers that have been kindly donated on a regular basis. The Guardian donated by another lady. I read them then ensure they are passed to other prisoners. Need to also jot down TV viewing for tonight as well as general tidying up of my cell, and address any outstanding issues via internal mail.

Which reminds me - must put on 'things to do list' complaint about issuing only one bar of soap every six weeks to prisoners - ridiculous in this weather!

Ridiculous full stop! Need to write to the manager of the library to ensure that arrangements are in place to transfer any excess books we receive from publishers to other prisoners. I also have to see my personal officer. I need information for a friend outside these walls suffering domestic abuse

And so the day unfolds

2017

14:00hrs Unlock - then studying for my course in engineering which can be tedious at times, This is countered however by the psychology topic I study next at 3:15pm.

16:15



Time to set up the DVD library I've started for my house block. Residents certainly enjoy the DVDs available All you need to start up your own club be it DVD's, chess, art is a room, a few hours and a cupboard and a small financial donation towards materials from the prison It's very frustrating initially. In fact, I nearly give up before things finally take reasonable shape

DVD library all set up - back to study - Oh no!!!

16:40

No can do - library opens up at 17:00

17:45

20 minutes - pick up tea. Get medication - ready for opening up?

17:00-17:10

Stuck in med's queue. I can at least make DVD sleeves from envelopes and stickers while I wait.

17:15

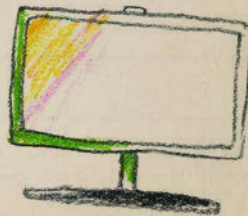
Library open - 20 people rush in it's not my fault there's a queue to get DVDs stamped out. Oh stop complaining - what's the rush? Where are you going tonight ? Clubbing ?

2017

June 21

- 17:50 All done and dusted - everyone happy - now all I have to do is put everything away. Ten more DVDs are donated - they will need processing . . .
- 18:00 DROP EVERYTHING - this is my "ME" time for an hour - doing absolutely NOTHING but watch TV.
- 19:00 Two letters to write. One to organisations that can provide help/support to prisoners such as MIND, CAB,
- 20:30 Enough time to fit in an hour of general reading. Diving into a book is such an escape.
- 21:30 Oh my gawd.... I have to write to my solicitor, and write a 'thank-you' letter to book shops I also have to fit in 45 minutes for exercise.... damn.... I'm so tired.
- 23:00. Just thought of the irony that has arisen when writing out my day I never have enough hours in the day to do all I want to do...

Anonymous



And so the day unfolds

2017

On Wednesday 21st June I was working in the meats department for the morning. I sat my board, which went very well. It helped me stay in good spirits for the rest of the day. In the afternoon I read a newspaper in the library as I had finished my maths course and I was waiting for my result. While I was in the Library I recorded my storybook to be sent to my children as a nice surprise. In the evening I watched TV in my room.

This was my day.

Jo



2017

June 21

Today, I went out to open a bank account. An officer drove me to the bank. We drove by lots of fields and a farm. There were lots of cars on the road and it was nice to see real people and be out in the real world. When we arrived I got out of the car and saw a very fit sexy man, he had no top on and he made me feel very hot.

I went into the bank, they was friendly and very helpful. I was feeling very happy and accepted. It made me feel human again.

I liked the drive back, we listened to the music and I enjoyed the sun.

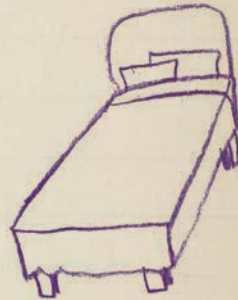
Anonymous



And so the day unfolds

2017

It's the longest day
But here all days seem the same
They're drawn out and dull
Locked behind our doors
Short staffed again
Buzzers ringing
The echo of "Are we being let out?"



There's always something
Now this day is upon us
We can't miss the best part of the day
Can't sleep now
My room is too bright
And it's only seven.

The nights will start drawing in
Before we know it, summers over
We'll start going to bed early
There's not much else to do
That's why I write this for you

Julie

2017

June 21

Longest Day Ever
My mind is whirling,
Streaming so fast,
We are locked up again,
And all I can think of is the past.

Will I stay,
Or will I go,
As my court day looms,
Who cares,
Who knows.

The call of the beach,
Sand between my toes,
This will not last 4ever though,
Although, pift,
It may seem so.

I am fixed now,
Being in here,
Fixed my head,
Fixed my heart,
My soul and much more.

Long may this continue,
You will hear me cry,
I will not be a junkie again,
Never. Ever.

Lucy



And so the day unfolds

2017

I woke up to another day in CSU seg. (Segregation). I'm always awake by 6 am without an alarm as I go to bed by 8 pm at the latest. I can hear the music in the gym as my cell backs onto it. I hear it every morning from 6.30-7.30am. I roll out of bed at 6.40 am, get myself ready (teeth, washed, dressed, hair), sort my clothes and toiletries for when I go in the shower later.

I sit down to read my post that is put under my door during the night. It consists of a pen pal letter and an email from Inside Times to say it received my article that I sent. It will be interesting to see if it is published in next month's issue.

I begin a letter to my friend and do some Wordsearch puzzles until the officers bring me breakfast at 8:20am in a takeaway box with disposable cutlery and a flask of hot water.

I have two slices of toast and cornflakes with a 250 ml carton of fresh milk. As it's Wednesday, we also receive our tea packs and jam packs to last us the week. I am asked what regime I want. I always say everything shower, phone, exercise and POD. Chaplaincy does its rounds at 8.25am followed quickly by the nurse dispensing meds.

At 8:30am. I go to work in the gym. My shift is from 9am to 11.45am. We have a brilliant five-a-side football match, my team just wins 10-9. I do a little workout in the main part of the gym then we are allowed outside on the Astro turf in the blazing sun. We play rounders.

I am dropped off at the seg, jump into the shower then lunch. I have chips, beans and a tuna and cheese wrap. After lunch, is lock up, I write more of my letter to my friend. I always seem to have a pen in my hand! Then, I do more

2017

June 21

Wordsearch. Lunchtime lock up flies by as it's only from 12:35pm till 2pm. At 2:30pm, I go to the exercise yard for 45 minutes, Later, I return to my room and lie down until dinner. I don't doze, as it will mess up my sleeping pattern.

Dinner is at 5:10pm. I had jacket potato, coleslaw, salad, a blueberry muffin and a very tasty ice cream. I'm pretty sure I didn't order a jacket potato. Dunno how they are always forgetting to send food over, maybe it's done on purpose as it's the seg.

The nurse comes round to dispense meds at 5:30pm, I like it when they come early as I can go to bed early. I finish my letter, have two hot chocolates then catch the news on my radio before preparing the envelope to post this diary. I undress, do my teeth, and set my alarm just in case I don't wake up naturally tomorrow morning. I am going to bed at 7:30pm, I will post this through my door when I wake up in the night to use the loo and have another drink. Goodnight x

Laura



WE DON'T WANT NO EDUCATION! OR DO WE?

WIP's Perri Northage captures a chat about the value of distance learning in prison. *Illustrated by Robin*

Jenny: Why would you want to do that – haven't you had enough studying when you were at school? What good will it do in here? You've got a conviction; it's going to make getting a job impossible.

Amina: No.... I got pulled out of school when I was 12, as my father wanted me to work.

Jenny: Yeah, but you must have learned loads along the way? Why bother now?

Amina: I did. I learned how to clean a kitchen, toilet, lounge, how to make tea and bake; how to cook dinner and wash up without a noise, how to scrub floors and steps until they gleamed, how to create pictures in the

clouds of dirt I beat from the carpets hour after hour. I learned how to dance for an audience, how to be quiet, how to cover my body, how to believe that everything my father said was true.... In other words, how to lose all sense of who I was. I didn't know what inspired me and who I wanted to be. I didn't know that my voice mattered. Yes, I learned a lot.

Jenny: Responds with stunned silence...

Amina: So, you see, I went to the school of oppression – not somewhere I would recommend, not for young people and especially not for a young woman. So, yes, I do want to do 'that', to learn, to reverse all of the above and more.

Saitha: Hi, what's happening?

Amina: I am just explaining to Jenny why I want to do a Distance Learning course while I am here, in prison...

Saitha: Oh great! I have just finished one. It was hard but, now, I feel so pleased with myself.

Jenny: Why did you do it – have you got a job to go to?

Saitha: I did it because I don't want to work in my family's shop. I have always dreamed of working with animals or working in a florist shop. I hate the smell of the antiques that my family sells; I hate the way they treat me; I hate the control they have on my

movements. I want more for myself than they do.

Amina: So what was hard?

Saitha: Learning to focus again, being strict on making sure I made time each day to study just a little, so I wouldn't get bored. I found myself looking forward to getting back to my room to continue with the work each night. I never thought you'd hear me say that, did you?

Jenny: No Sai! You're always in association, creating merry chaos or charming the officers!

Amina: So has it given you more than qualifications?

Saitha: So much more! Now, I believe I am worth something; I feel I can achieve. I had a lot of help and support and I did it. People didn't judge me. They encouraged me by reminding me it was worth giving myself the opportunity to learn.

Jenny: Wow! No one has ever done that for me. I have always been told I am stupid, I will always be trouble and no one will want me, I'm certainly never going to get a job – not legally anyway!

Saitha: I am in contact



with an organisation that works with dogs and they said they would look into giving me a volunteer role when I get ROTL. It won't be for another year, so I have time to do another course in the meantime. Jenny, I can't begin to explain how it feels to achieve; it's like all the negatives you have had in your life slowly lose their power. The impact of hurtful words begins to dilute. People talk to me about stuff other than relationships, drugs, gossip.... I have something interesting to put in my letters to my kids, now, and we chat about what I am learning when they visit.

Amina: So, I am guessing you would recommend it then? (She laughs)

Saitha: Yes - but you do have to have commitment, passion and a belief in yourself. You have to choose a course you are interested in; otherwise it's a total waste of money. Distance Learning has given me hope; it's given me a purpose, and it's given me direction. It means I am not scared to fail anymore because I know to fail just means, 'First attempt'. It's a beginning, not the end.

If you are interested to learn more about Distance Learning, turn to page 2 of this magazine

IN PRISON FOR OWING COUNCIL TAX – NO WAY!

Rona Epstein explains the law on council tax debt

Earlier this year, a High Court judge ruled that the magistrates who had sentenced a woman to 81 days in prison for failure to pay her council tax had made an unlawful decision. Her sentence was quashed. The woman is a single mother who has two part-time jobs, working hard to provide for herself and her son. She has never committed a crime. She should never have been jailed. Why did this happen?

First, her story. Melanie, who lives in Wales, worked part-time and cared for her son and an elderly neighbour, then had a period of unemployment. She failed to pay her council tax; hence, magistrates ordered that she be sent to prison for 81 days. They suspended the imprisonment on condition that Melanie paid £10 every week towards the debt. She suffered some health problems and, again, failed to keep up with the payments. In August 2016, she realised that she had fallen behind in her

payments and made a lump sum payment of £100. The next day, she was arrested by bailiffs and taken to prison. She was told she had to serve the sentence as ordered by the magistrates.

People who are sent to prison for not paying council tax are given very little help. They never imagine that it is an error in law that has put them in a prison cell, as owing money is not a crime. No one tells them they can apply for bail and that the decision to send them to prison can be

challenged. They receive no advice. They do their time.

A few months ago, I wrote an article on council tax debt for this magazine in which I explained the law about owing council tax and what should happen if someone has difficulty in paying the tax they owe.

Melanie, while in prison, read the article and then wrote to Women in Prison asking for advice. Women in Prison put Melanie in touch with the Centre for Criminal Appeals. The Centre arranged for a lawyer to take on Melanie's case; his name is Sam Genen. He acted for Melanie and got her out of prison on bail. At the subsequent court hearing, the judge declared that sending Melanie to prison because she owed council tax was an unlawful decision. The magistrates had made a number of serious mistakes. They had failed to assess Melanie's financial means and had no basis for concluding her failure to pay was because of "culpable neglect".

Each year, around 100 people are imprisoned for non-payment of the council tax. In the vast majority of cases, the magistrates' decision to order them to prison goes unchallenged because those sentenced don't know how to challenge it and don't get the help they need. Yet, the decision to send someone for prison for owing tax can and should be challenged.

We all have to pay council tax. The council requires this money to carry out services we all need: dealing with rubbish, providing schools and care homes for the disabled and the elderly, fixing roads and pavements, running parks, leisure centres and libraries... the list goes on. If you owe some of the tax, the council may order you to appear before the magistrates because of the debt.

The magistrates must make an enquiry into your finances (income, outgoings, dependants). They then make a decision: are you guilty of "wilful refusal to pay" or "culpable neglect to pay"? If they find you are guilty of wilful refusal or culpable neglect to pay your council tax – this means that you have the money to pay but have refused to use that money to pay your council tax – the magistrates have a number of options. One is to impose a prison sentence of up to three months.

However, imprisonment should be a last resort. There should be no jail sentence if there is an alternative way to recover the money you owe. If there is an alternative, for example ordering that an amount be deducted each week from your benefits or from your wages or salary, then you should NOT be sent to prison.

In council tax cases, the magistrates have no power to punish anyone. Judges have said this since the 1980s, when people were being sent to prison for non-payment of poll tax.

If you are, or anyone you know is, in prison because you/they owe council tax, please get in touch with me as soon as possible. My details are at the end of this article. Expert legal advice is available and it could make all the difference.

Please write to:

Rona Epstein
Freepost
WOMEN IN PRISON
(no stamp required)

Rona Epstein is Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry Law School, Coventry University. You can contact her at R.Epstein@coventry.ac.uk

Useful contacts

WOMEN IN PRISON

Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON

Freephone: 0800 953 0125
info@womeninprison.org.uk

HOUSING

Shelter Helpline:

0808 800 4444

NACRO Helpline:

0300 123 1999

LEGAL & GENERAL ADVICE

Prisoners' Advice Service (PAS):

Prisoners' Advice Service,
PO Box 46199,
London,
EC1M 4XA
0845 430 8923

PACT

(Prison Advice & Care Trust)

Helpline:

0808 808 3444

Prison Reform Trust Advice and Information Service

Advice Line:

0808 802 0060

SOMEONE TO TALK TO

Samaritans Freephone:

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK,
PO Box 9090,
STIRLING,
FK8 2SA
Freephone: 116 123

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

MIND:

Mind Infoline, Unit 9,
Cefn Coed Parc, Nantgarw,
Cardiff, CF15 7QQ
0300 123 3393

SUBSTANCE MISUSE SUPPORT

Frank Helpline:

0300 123 6600

Phoenix Futures Advice

Line: 0845 600 7227

Action on Addiction Helpline:

0300 330 0659

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Women's Aid Helpline:

0808 2000 247

Rape & Sexual Abuse

Support Centre

(Rape Crisis)

Helpline: 0808 802 9999

WOMEN'S CENTRES

Women's Breakout:

Upon release please go to the
online directory run by
Women's Breakout to find
the nearest specialist
women's centre to where
you are based.
[www.womensbreakout.org.uk/
projects/](http://www.womensbreakout.org.uk/projects/)

FAMILY SUPPORT

National Offenders' Families

Helpline: 0808 808 2003



Illustration by Chenna



WORDSEARCH

Find the words – time yourself!

C	D	E	L	A	T	N	E	M	G	I	G	B
Y	O	U	D	B	M	B	O	N	O	U	A	O
C	P	U	F	V	E	P	I	N	U	I	S	O
D	O	G	N	A	O	H	S	K	B	I	G	K
Y	S	W	U	S	C	H	M	L	E	H	B	K
G	B	T	W	A	E	A	A	N	C	A	R	E
O	Y	R	O	A	W	L	T	H	B	H	L	E
L	K	C	L	N	A	I	L	A	R	T	M	P
O	S	T	Z	D	F	R	R	I	A	H	E	I
I	H	J	V	V	I	O	L	E	N	C	E	N
C	G	N	I	B	M	U	L	P	S	G	T	G
O	B	D	O	M	E	S	T	I	C	M	S	Z
S	A	S	T	R	A	W	F	L	E	S	E	K

COUNSELLING
BOOKKEEPING
SOCIOLOGY
BEAUTY

NAIL ART
ART
ANIMAL CARE
PLUMBING

MENTAL HEALTH
COACHING
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

HAIR
FITNESS
DOG WALKING
SELF ESTEEM



Have you been moved or transferred?

We know women are often moved or transferred from prison to prison without any warning. You might have been working with Women in Prison in one prison and then been moved to another.

It is important for you to let us know if you have been transferred, so we can continue to give you support. We are not given information about where you are or whether you have been moved, and we don't have access to this information because we are independent from the CJS/Prison.

Please use this sheet to let us know if you have been moved and that you want to keep working with us. Tear it out and post it to:
Women in Prison, Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON

Name:

Prison no:

Where you were:

Where you are now:

Your worker:

What we were supporting you with, if anything:

WHAT DOES WOMEN IN PRISON BELIEVE?

HOW DOES THAT INFLUENCE HOW WE WORK?

Chris Tchaikovsky set up Women in Prison (WIP) over 30 years ago, after she had served a sentence in HMP Holloway. She lobbied tirelessly to improve conditions inside prison, to widen the knowledge and understanding of the judiciary about women affected by the criminal justice system, and to end the use of prison for all but a tiny minority of women.

Chris said: “Taking the most hurt people out of society and punishing them in order to teach them how to live within society is, at best, futile. Whatever else a prisoner knows, she knows everything there is to know about punishment – because that is exactly what she has grown up with. Childhood sexual abuse, indifference, neglect – punishment is most familiar to her.”

■ **Women in Prison** continues to campaign for a radical overhaul of female imprisonment. WIP aims to convince and demonstrate to policymakers that the majority of convicted women should serve sentences not behind bars, but in the community. They should remain close to home where their often complex needs can be properly addressed, recidivism ended and the connection with their children maintained.

■ **Women in Prison** recognises that every woman has her own assets and capabilities. These are valuable tools in making real and lasting changes to their lives, but they are too often undermined by the experience of prison.

■ **Women in Prison** is a women-only

organisation. It believes that the male and female experience of the criminal justice system has some similarities, but many more differences. Too often these differences, such as being a single parent and primary carer, fail to be properly acknowledged and understood, which adds to the punishment already exacted.

■ **Women in Prison** workers, inside and outside prison, endeavour to offer individual women a consistently professional relationship based on trust and mutual respect and kept within appropriate boundaries. Their aim is to work with women affected by the criminal justice system, so they can achieve the change they choose to make.

■ **Women in Prison** believes that most women pose no risk to the public and should not be incarcerated. For the very few who do, the design, location and regimes of our prisons are totally inadequate.

■ **Women in Prison** knows, from both research and experience, that prison is expensive and ineffective in breaking the cycle of crime.

■ **Women in Prison** believes that the most effective way to reduce women’s offending is to deal with its root causes – which generally rest with gender inequalities and social injustice – in community alternatives.

Women who come to WIP do so voluntarily. WIP is not part of the punitive system.

Got something to say?

If you need help, please contact us.
We can visit you in prison, or write to you, or meet up if you are released.

WRITE OR CALL FREE

Women in Prison

Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON

5 Stockwell Mews

London

SW9 9GX

National freephone advice line

0800 953 0125

info@womeninprison.org.uk



Books Unlocked

Hibiscus

Your Diaries

We don't want no education!

In prison for owing council tax

Str8 Up!

Jokes

Stir It Up!

Wordsearch

WHAT YOU TELL US COUNTS!

YOUR SAY IF YOU HAVE
ANYTHING TO TELL US ABOUT
WHAT YOU LIKE OR WHAT
YOU DON'T LIKE; SUBJECTS,
INTERVIEWS AND IDEAS YOU
WANT TO SUGGEST; OR IF YOU'D
LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE
MAGAZINE, PLEASE WRITE TO:

Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON

