

READY STEADY GO!

MEET THE
WOMEN
SPEAKING
OUT TO
MEMBERS OF
PARLIAMENT
ABOUT
PRISON

Know your rights!

Extracts from
Carl Cattermole's
book *Prison
A Survival Guide*

Postcards from Prison

by Erika Flowers

Top tips

from Mim Skinner
on writing your
own book

Yoga

for bad backs

THE NATIONAL
MAGAZINE OF
WOMEN IN PRISON
WRITTEN AND
LED BY WOMEN
AFFECTED BY
THE CRIMINAL
JUSTICE SYSTEM

Competition

Tell us about your experience of work

Work means different things to different people. We often define work as employment – what we do to earn money.

But that's a very narrow definition. We may work as a volunteer, giving our time without pay. We may work on ourselves to try to improve what we do well. We may work hard at a hobby – art, writing or poetry. We may also consider the labour we do around the home – such as childcare, cleaning and cooking – as work. Sometimes illness, disability or poor mental health means we are unable to work and this is also an important part of our experience of work.

Rules for entering the competition

- Feel free to give your own interpretation of what work means.
- If it's a story, essay, interview or article (fiction or non-fiction) please write 500 words or less. When handwritten, this is between 1½ and 2 pages of A4.
- An entry can also be a poem, drawing, painting or a collage.
- Please include a completed consent form (see p65) with your entry and send it to Freepost – WOMEN IN PRISON (in capitals). Failure to include the consent form will mean we are unable to include your submission in the magazine.

One entry will be selected as a "Star Letter" with the writer receiving £10 (only entries that include the consent form on P65 can be considered for "Star Letter")

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Winter 2019 • Issue 14

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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, mental health, harmful 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

WIP's services include...

- Visits in some 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, Surrey and Manchester

- A Freephone line and Freepost address for women who wish to contact Women in Prison

- 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, and an outlet for their creativity.

- RSG! A magazine written by and for women affected by the criminal justice system

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

Got something to say?

Please contact Women in Prison at the FREEPOST address below. Please also send a consent form, turn to P65 for details

Write or call free:

Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON
National freephone line
0800 953 0125
info@wipuk.org

WOMEN IN PRISON
2ND FLOOR,
ELMFIELD HOUSE
5 STOCKWELL MEWS
LONDON
SW9 9GX
TEL: 0207 359 6674.

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.



W

elcome to the second of two special issues of *Ready Steady Go!* focused on the topic of ‘Speaking Out’. We are so proud of the success of our #OPENUP Mass Lobby of Parliament in June, when women from across the country came to Westminster to meet their MPs and seek their support on reducing the number of women in prison and for better investment in women’s centres. In this issue you can read all about the day and the way in which the voices of women in prison were at its heart.

In this issue Mim Skinner also talks about her book *Faillbirds* and we publish an extract from Carl Cattermole’s *Prison: A Survival Guide*. We hope that everything you read here will give inspiration and provide hope in the possibility for change. What this issue shouts out is that we can make a difference, whether it be in our street, prison wing or the wider world. The incredible Toni Morrison (author of *Beloved*) said “If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” Thanks to all of you who are already making change happen - in your writing, in speaking to those in power and in the everyday ways you work with each other to make the world (and life in prison) a little bit better. We need you!



Kate

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF WOMEN IN PRISON

The magazine you are reading is free for all women affected by the criminal justice system in the UK. We send copies 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 Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON info@wipuk.org

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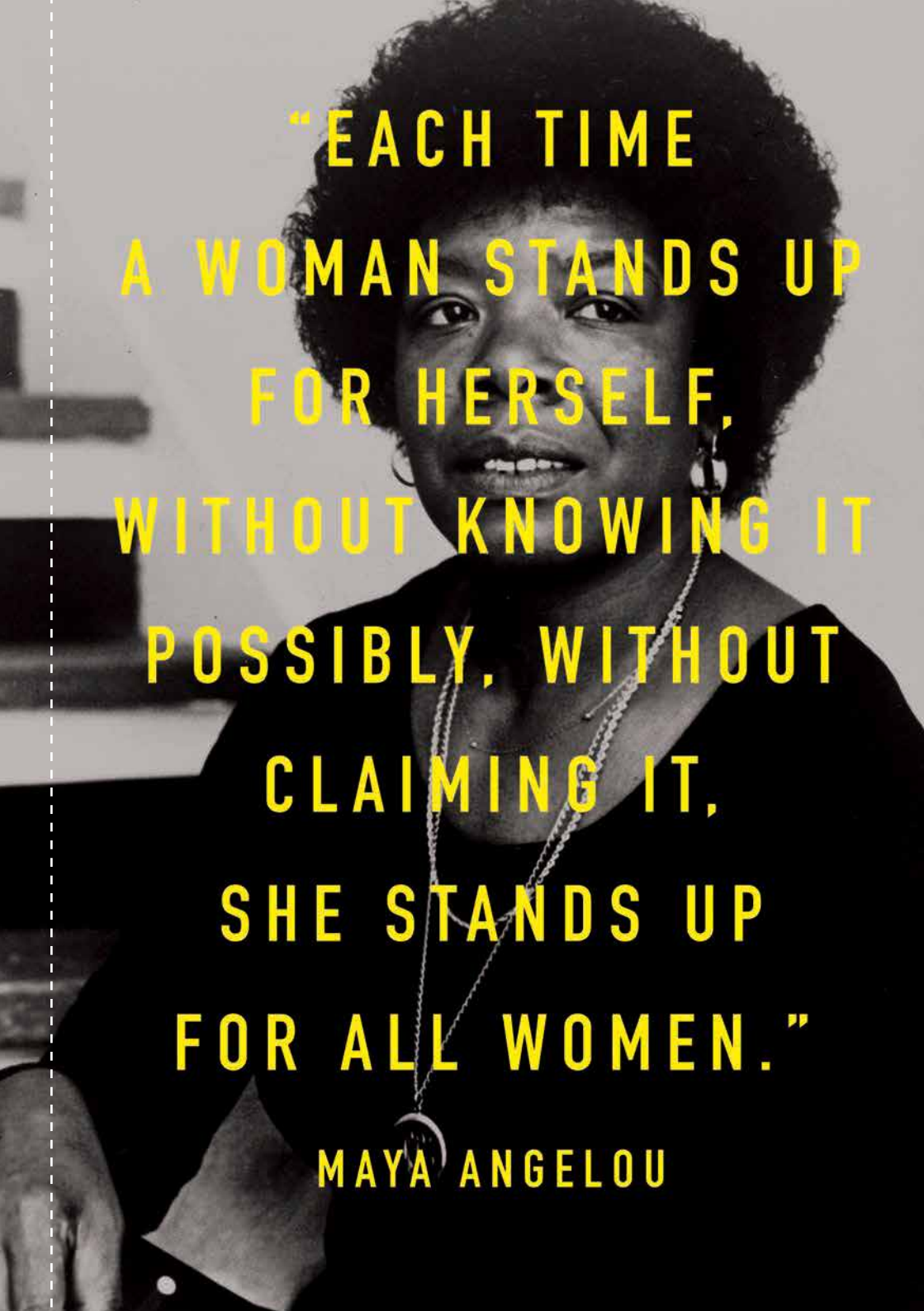


Women's Centres run by WIP

- WomenMATTA – Manchester
- The Beth Centre – Lambeth, London
- Women's Support Centre – Woking, Surrey

Women's Prisons

- 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 - Sutton Surrey
- HMP Send – Ripley, Surrey
- HMP Bronzefield – Ashford, Surrey
- HMP East Sutton Park – Maidstone, Kent
- HMP Cornton Vale – Scotland

A black and white portrait of Maya Angelou, a Black woman with short, curly hair, wearing a dark top and a long necklace. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. A vertical dashed line is on the left side of the image.

**"EACH TIME
A WOMAN STANDS UP
FOR HERSELF,
WITHOUT KNOWING IT
POSSIBLY, WITHOUT
CLAIMING IT,
SHE STANDS UP
FOR ALL WOMEN."**

MAYA ANGELOU

The Prime Minister's decision to suspend Parliament in August led to protests in major cities across the whole of the UK. People blocked traffic near Downing Street and chanted "Save our democracy, stop the coup".

A campaign group in the United States called the **National Bail Out Collective** raised over \$1m through donations to bail out 106 black mothers and caregivers in time to spend Mother's Day with their children.

Local residents, community groups and councillors **stopped the eviction of 141 tenants** from a Council estate in, Belgravia, London in September.



This autumn has been labelled **“the autumn of strikes”**. The trade union United Voices of the World represents out-sourced workers and those in the gig economy (zero hour, insecure and low paid jobs). They are organising multiple strikes with workers to take on seven major employers across London. This follows their previous strikes where they won better pay and conditions for workers at the Daily Mail, Harrods and the London School of Economics.

TOGETHER WE CAN #OPENUP WOMEN'S FUTURES IN EVERY COMMUNITY

Become global leaders and set an international example in how to reduce the human and financial cost of imprisonment and create healthier, safer communities

#OPENUP PATHWAYS AWAY FROM CRIMINAL JUSTICE INTERVENTIONS

Prevent women affected by abuse, childhood trauma, mental ill-health, addiction, poverty, homelessness and inequality from entering the criminal justice system

#OPENUP THE SUPPORT SERVICES WOMEN NEED

Invest and grow the UK's unique network of specialist women's centres that are proven to be more effective than prison at addressing the root causes of offending

#OPENUP OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

Build a system enabling those who have experienced the harm of prison to have access to housing and support to rebuild and move forward with their lives

10 solutions to #OPENUP

WOMEN'S FUTURES

- 1 Use the **£80m** received by HM Treasury from the sale of **Holloway prison** to deliver the Ministry of Justice's women's strategy.
- 2 For every local authority area to have a **women's centre**.
- 3 A **trauma-informed diversion programme** in every police force so women can be referred into community support.
- 4 Significantly **reduce the use of remand** in prison.
- 5 An end to prison sentences relating to the punishment of debt including **non-payment of council tax and TV licence**.
- 6 A legal presumption against **short prison sentences**.
- 7 When sentencing primary carers ensure alternatives to custody are used to **minimise the harm to children**.
- 8 All those serving **indeterminate sentences of imprisonment for public protection (IPP)** (abolished in 2012) are given a release date and intensive support to rebuild their lives.
- 9 For every women's prison to have '**Women's Centre Link Workers**' so that women can build trusting relationships to prepare for life after release.
- 10 An end to '**Post Sentence Supervision**' to reduce recall to prison and shift the focus on to support.

STR8 UP!

NEWS AND VIEWS

THIS ISSUE

- #OPENUP CAMPAIGN
- THRIVING COMMUNITIES, NOT MORE PRISONS

CAMPAIGN SUCCESS!

Hundreds of supporters gather to meet with their MP at Women in Prison's first ever Mass Lobby of Parliament

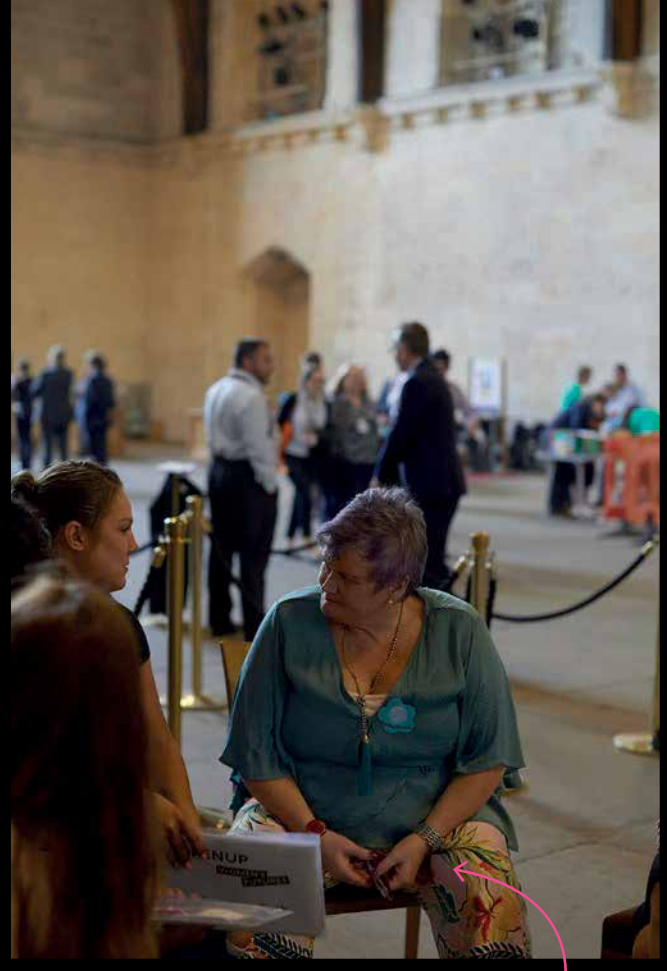
CLAIRE CAIN, WIP'S CAMPAIGN AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGER, DESCRIBES HOW WOMEN FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY MARCHED ON PARLIAMENT TO CALL ON MPS TO SUPPORT THE #OPENUP WOMEN'S FUTURES CAMPAIGN

Women who have been in prison, Women's Centre staff, supporters and other campaigners travelled to Parliament earlier this summer to speak out about their personal experiences and demand that MPs take urgent action to transform the failing criminal justice system (CJS).

Women travelled from Manchester, Birmingham, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cambridge and Brighton. They had face-to-face meetings with their MPs and secured the support of 60 MPs on what needs to change in the CJS. MPs were given information to increase their knowledge of women's centres and issues facing women who are affected by the CJS.

They were also asked to commit to:

- Speaking up in Parliament and championing the vital work of Women's Centres, holding the Government to account for the delivery of the Ministry of Justice's women's strategy (entitled the "Female Offender Strategy") that is committed to providing alternatives to prison in the community.
- Writing to Treasury Ministers to ask that the £80m received from the sale of Holloway Prison is spent on community support services for women.
- Visiting their local or neighbouring Women's Centre.



Everyone we spoke to told us that the day was empowering and fun. Lady Unchained gave a powerful spoken word performance, speaking out in solidarity with those who remain behind the prison walls. In addition, there were crafting sessions, campaigning activities and lots of food from a bakery called 'the Good Loaf' which provides training for women affected by the CJS. The whole day was a fantastic launch pad for the #OPENUP campaign [see p10-11 for more on this campaign] and shows yet again the huge support for finding ways to reduce the number of women in prison, by investing in housing and support in the community. One immediate result of the mass lobby was securing a debate in Parliament on the issue.

LOBBY IN WESTMINSTER HALL, INSIDE THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, WOMEN TELL CAROLYN HARRIS MP WHY WE NEED TO URGENTLY REDUCE THE WOMEN'S PRISON POPULATION

STRO UP!

WHAT IS A MASS LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT?

A mass lobby is a gathering of a large group of people who are all campaigning for the same thing and have arranged to meet with their MPs in Parliament on the same day. Mass lobbies raise the profile of your campaign in Parliament and, by focusing on one particular day, greatly increase the chance of actually getting meetings with MPs.

WHAT IS A PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE?

A debate in Parliament is the coming together of a group of MPs to discuss key issues of the day, government policies and proposed new laws. The debate can help increase MPs' knowledge of the subject and you will often hear opposing arguments put forward. They can also provide MPs with an opportunity to voice the concerns and interests of the people they represent from their local area.



FUEL FOR ACTION -
FOOD FOR THE MASS
OF CAMPAIGNERS
PROVIDED BY THE
GOOD LOAF



JUSTICE MINISTER
SPEAKING ABOUT
THE NEED TO INVEST
IN COMMUNITY
ALTERNATIVES
TO PRISON



WOMEN LISTEN TO THE
SPEECHES AND SPOKEN
WORD BY LADY UNCHAINED
AT THE END OF THE DAY



WOMEN MET WITH IMRAN HUSSAIN - THE SHADOW JUSTICE MINISTER - TO CALL FOR URGENT ACTION TO REDUCE THE WOMEN'S PRISON POPULATION.



THE SETTING FOR #OPENUP NEAR WESTMINSTER - PREPARING TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER!



FLOWERS IN BLOOM! CRAFTED BY WOMEN FOR THE #OPENUP FLOWER MEADOW

Thriving communities, not more prisons

CLAIRE CAIN, WIP'S CAMPAIGNS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGER, EXPLAINS WOMEN IN PRISON'S RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PLEDGE TO SPEND £2.5 BILLION ON BUILDING NEW PRISONS – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR THE CAMPAIGN TO REDUCE THE WOMEN'S PRISON POPULATION?

Since the Brexit Referendum over three years ago, we have had a number of Justice Ministers and Parliament's time has been dominated by the business of Brexit. Westminster has been entirely absorbed by the debate on how, when - or even if - the UK should leave the European Union.

The challenge, during this unpredictable period, has been to encourage MPs to take an active interest in other issues. We managed to achieve a breakthrough with our lobby of Parliament and the #OPENUP Women's Futures campaign (see page 12). #OPENUP lays out a route to reducing the women's prison population, primarily by investing in a network of women's centres and other community support services (see our Manifesto on page 10).

Recently, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government announced a policy of building new prisons at a cost of £2.5bn. It looks like these new prisons will be built for men. Still, Women in Prison stands firmly opposed to this huge outlay of money. We believe that

resources should be invested instead in schools, healthcare, support services and in ensuring everyone has a home.

We need thriving communities, not more prisons. Thriving communities mean that men, women and children can access the support and opportunities we all need to live fulfilled, happy and healthy lives.

At the Labour Party Conference in September, Richard Burgon, the Shadow Justice Secretary pledged £20m to fund the network of women's centres if Labour win the next election. He also gave a commitment to end short prison sentences of weeks and months. Lucy Frazer MP, the current Conservative Justice Minister, also recently gave a speech in which she pledged her support to reducing the women's prison population.

Brexit continues to dominate the headlines. Nevertheless, campaigners keep fighting to reduce the women's prison population by calling for greater investment in community support services and women's centres - and we do have reasons to be hopeful.

“Your

silence

will

not

protect

you.”



MEET THE WOMEN OUT ABOUT THE OF PRISON

Laura Hill, WIP's Press and Communications Officer, interviews three women who met their MPs (the people who represent them in parliament) at the #OPENUP Women's Futures Mass Lobby.

LOUISE'S STORY

How did you feel on the way to the lobby?

I was a bit nervous, as this was my first time in London. Also I was worried about meeting MPs.

Who did you meet with?

I was told before I met Philip Davies MP that he was a hard nut to crack, but he was really interested in what I had to say. He asked lots of questions and wanted to know about my experience of prison. He also wanted to visit a Women's Centre to see what can be done with more funding.

The other MP I met was smiling but I felt like she was not really listening; she seemed like she had no interest in the issue and there were more important things to be fighting for.

What did you speak about?

I spoke about how the money from the sale of Holloway Prison should be used to fund Women's Centres and women's support services.

I also spoke to Philip about how prison devastates children and families. I used myself as an example. I said "don't look at every mum who commits a crime as being a terrible mum and that it is her fault that she is in prison. There's a lot that builds up to that. I didn't

just wake up on the morning of my crime and think I'm going to commit my crime without considering my children. I was poorly, I had mental health issues and I had a massive family breakdown. When I got to breaking point, the support services weren't there and I ended up in custody."

I told him some of the nicest people I've met have killed someone and Philip said "What?". I spoke about how I knew a lady who killed her husband after years of abuse; she had nowhere to turn and just snapped. I said it doesn't make it right to kill someone, but you need to look at the circumstances which led to it.

What advice would you give to others wanting to lobby their MPs?

I felt a bit nervous about meeting with the MPs, but I thought MPs are no better than we are; they are just human beings and they are certainly nothing to be scared about. Once I started talking, I was alright, and my nerves disappeared.

My advice is MPs are just people, so be honest, just be yourself and if they don't want to listen, it is their loss. All you can do is be true to yourself.

What did you enjoy most about the day?

The food was fantastic; it was nice to meet everyone from Women in Prison and it was nice to spend the day with Narinder [from Women in Prison] because she has been such a good support whilst in and outside of prison.

What did you enjoy least?

The London Underground, it's horrific - the heat is the worst feeling in the world.

What was the most important message you took away from the day?

Women together are empowered; women do matter and we can speak up. We have a voice!

Illustrations by PPaint

EN SPEAKING IR EXPERIENCE ON TO MPs



IMANI'S STORY

How did you feel on the way to the lobby?

I was a bit nervous when I got to Parliament. I was worried I might be intimidated by the MPs and that my point of view wouldn't be heard.

What was the key point you wanted MPs to hear?

I wanted them to know how harsh prison is and how much it affects women and their families. I told them that resources should be used to help women rather than incarcerate them. I used my own personal experience to explain this and I also spoke about other people I had encountered with similar experiences to myself.

How did you find sharing your experience and what advice would you give to other people wanting to lobby their MPs?

I met with Diane Abbott MP. She didn't try to cut me off and she listened intently to what I had to say. This made things a little easier, as I didn't want to be dismissed. Also, I felt very passionate about what I was speaking about, so, once I delved into the detail, the nerves went.

The day was very hectic with a lot going on. I wasn't supposed to meet Diane so I had to adapt quickly to the situation. Based on this experience, my advice would be: before you meet with an MP, think about what you want to get out of the meeting and think of five key points you want to make sure you tell them. I would write these points down, so you have something to take into the meeting to use as a guide to the conversation. This will mean that no matter who you meet or what happens, you will be prepared, and in the short time that you have, MPs will hear what you have to say.

What did you enjoy most about the day?

I felt very privileged when we were being shown around Parliament. I had been past it before, but I had never been inside. I loved getting an insight into how Parliament works and having the opportunity to meet and speak with MPs. It was eye opening. Also, the food was great!

What was the most important message you took away from the day?

I found out Women in Prison was started by a woman called Chris Tchaikovsky who was imprisoned in HMP Holloway in the 1970s. Her experience of prison, her empathy and humanity led her to start up an organisation. I took away that your experience can change the system or the world, you just need to believe that you are as important as the next person and that your experience can help somebody.

“DIANE DIDN'T TRY TO CUT ME OFF AND SHE LISTENED INTENTLY TO WHAT I HAD TO SAY. ONCE I DELVED INTO THE DETAIL, THE NERVES WENT.”



CLAIRE'S STORY

Did you do any preparation for the Lobby and if so, what did you do?

Most of my preparation focused on getting over my nerves and anxiety about the day. These feelings are based on my worries about how people will look at me and if they will judge me. I had to get into my head that I am a person like everyone else in the room and what I have to say is just as important. We are all individuals, wherever we have come from in life.

I also read some of the background information on what we were planning to ask MPs on the way down to the London.

How did you feel on the way to the lobby?

I felt excited! This was my first time in the Houses of Parliament, and it was also my first time sat face-to-face with an MP. I thought, "Wow! I am really getting on a train to London to speak to MPs to try to change things for the better for women."

Did you feel the MPs listened to what you had to say?

I think they did listen because we secured a debate in Parliament afterwards. I also think we were well received. But really, we live in two different worlds and when I am in the presence of somebody like that, I don't know how to connect with them. We need to break down these barriers

Also, one MP said he would tick two of the pledge boxes. But then, after the meeting, he got up to leave without ticking the boxes. I said, "You agreed to two of

the pledges, are you going to tick the boxes?" He did it. I felt good that I said this to him because I think he would have walked off otherwise.

How did you find sharing your experience and what advice would you give to others wanting to lobby their MPs?

I felt vulnerable and exposed but at the same time, I didn't mind sharing my story if it was going to help other women. I prepared myself and decided that I would tell MPs that I have been in the criminal justice system and that I have experienced domestic violence, but I wanted to keep it brief and I didn't go into the specific details of my experience. The journey I have been on and what I have learnt along the way means that I have decided the details of my experience are something I want to keep for myself. Although I have been through these things, they do not define who I am.

My advice - go for it! Be realistic, be brave and take the plunge. But, don't let your fears or doubts stop you if you have an idea.

What did you enjoy the most about the day?

The whole experience. I liked going down on the train with the ladies from WomenMATTER, we had a good day and a good laugh. The food and the atmosphere were nice. Also, I didn't feel out of place.

What did you enjoy the least?

The walk from the Houses of Parliament to the place where we had all of our lovely food was quite long. I said if we do this again, we need golf buggies to ferry us back and forth.

What was the most important message you took away from the day?

Keep going!

Is there anything else you want to share?

I want to say a big thank you to WomenMATTER staff for asking me to go along.

"I SAID, 'YOU AGREED TO TWO OF THE PLEDGES, ARE YOU GOING TO TICK THE BOXES?' HE DID IT."

DATE 2019

PAY TO #OPENUP

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FROM PROBATION TO PROTEST ONE WOMAN'S STAND

Women in Prison's [Hareem Ghani](#) meets American anti-prisons campaigner and author, [Victoria Law](#).

Illustration by Javin Chong



I WENT TO A SCHOOL THAT would now be considered a school-to-prison pipeline school” Victoria, known as Vikki Law, says, “This is where schools treat children as if they’re in prison. You walk in and the first thing you encounter is a queue for the metal detector and the x-ray. It was a really good recruiting ground for gangs. They would come in and recruit, mostly young men, who were disenchanted with this whole high school farce. Keep in mind that when you are 15, 16, 17 and somebody says, “How would you like to make a couple hundred dollars a night?”, it sounds very good - especially if you are from a low income, low resourced family and you’re not seeing any other way out of poverty and hopelessness.”

Law, mother of one, is of Chinese decent, brought up in Queens, one of New York City’s five boroughs. As a student in high school, aged 16, she committed an armed robbery to initiate herself into a Chinatown gang. She received five years’ probation as it was her first offence and she was considered a good student. Her friends did not have the same experience. Instead, many were sent to Rikers Island. A prison covering a 400-acre site, on an island in the East River between Queens and the Bronx. At any one time, it holds 10,000 prisoners and it is notoriously brutal. Eighty-five percent of those imprisoned have not been convicted of a crime. Pre-trial detention

is for people who cannot afford to make bail, or, as Law says, “for people who can’t afford the price-tag of freedom.”

Visiting friends at Rikers led to Law’s commitment to the abolition of prison. At the age of 19, she co-founded Books Through Bars which sends free books to prisoners and educates the public about the need to replace prison with a system that works.

Law, now in her forties, recalls sitting in the Rikers waiting room. “You don’t get to bring anything with you in the waiting room, you’re just sitting there with nothing to do, so you start talking to and making friends with the other people who are waiting. It’s mostly black, brown and immigrant women and we would talk to each other and ask, “Who are you here to see?”, “What did they do?” and again and again what I was hearing was that people were not serial killers

like Jeffrey Dahmer or individuals of the Bernie Madoff-type, cheating people out of millions of dollars. People were there because they had substance abuse problems, because they were poor, because they had been in prison before and when they got out, couldn’t get a job, so turned back to illegal activity.”

At college, Law decided to study prison resistance starting during the presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-89). At the end of her first semester in college, she says, she realised that all the writing about resistance concerned men. “I thought this isn’t right; how are there

“This isn’t right; 90,000 women in prison, and none of them are resisting?”

90 thousand women in prison and none of them are resisting?” Encouraged by her professor, Jeanne Theoharis, a civil rights professor specialising in Black Liberation and Civil Rights, Law decided to pursue this research further. After a decade of researching and writing about women in US prisons, she wrote her award-winning book, *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*.

“The first thing I realised” Law comments “was that, even though women share many of the same oppressive conditions and concerns as men in prison, they also have their own concerns that don’t affect men in the same way, like parenting.” She continues, “When a father goes to prison, often he has a relative that can step up and take care of his children. Whereas, when a mother goes to prison, half the time she’s a single parent.”

Law’s research also highlighted how much of the media coverage focused on men taking more disruptive forms of protest such as prison strikes. “Women tend to focus on quieter, less flashy, actions. Women educate themselves about the law, they help other women with their court paperwork, they reach out to lawyers and say, “How do we ensure social workers and foster parents bring our children to visit us and follow the policies and laws they are supposed to be following?”

“People are less likely to notice that women are participating in more quiet acts of resistance. This often looks different to what we traditionally think of as organising or what we traditionally think of as resistance.”

The Mass Clemency Campaigns of the 1980s and the 1990s in the US illustrate her point, “Clemency is the power the Governor has to shorten somebody’s sentence” Law

explains. “In Ohio in the late 1980s early 1990s, domestic violence survivors who were incarcerated for killing their abusers, organised the first successful mass clemency campaign for women who had been imprisoned for killing abusive husbands or boyfriends in the United States. It’s only been in the past few years, in large part because of the tremendous amount of organising by women behind bars and people on the outside, that people are starting to see domestic violence as one of the pathways that lead women into prison.”

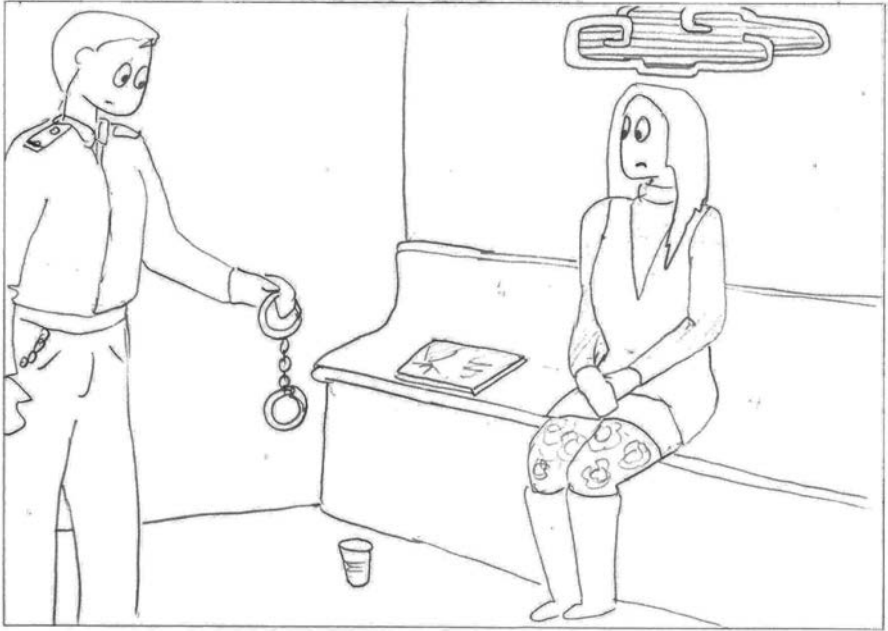
In 2003, spearheaded by the women in an Oregon prison, Law began publishing the zine, *Tenacious: Art and Writings* by women in prison. “[The women] said, “We’ve been reading these zines and we are always seeing things about men; we are not seeing any reflection of what we go through when we go to prison.” *Tenacious* emerged as a collaborative effort between women on the inside and women on the outside. “It’s not just people inside operating in a semi-vacuum with incomplete information and it’s not people on the outside operating in a semi-vacuum with incomplete information. It’s that critical exchange of ideas and then saying, “How do we move forward on this?”

Law, a freelance journalist writing for outlets such as Truthout and Bitch Media, as well as continuing to campaign for the abolition of prisons, told an interviewer four years ago, that, when she was first a mother, it was the support she received from others that allowed her to stick with the fight for social justice. “It’s important that we think about not just how to welcome new people,, “ Law said, “But also how to enable each other to keep participating, keep showing up..”

POST CARDS FROM PRISON

By the artist and campaigner Erika Flowers

POSTCARDS FROM PRISON BEGAN AS A WAY of documenting a traumatic period of my life that very few people would ever experience! I drew a postcard every day for over four years, documenting the second part of a six-month period on bail, the three-year custodial sentence at HMP Holloway until it closed, my time in HMP Send, and then the challenges I faced reintegrating back into the community for the year after my release. >>



Time to put the handcuffs on!

I started drawing the postcards to deal with the rollercoaster of emotions that I was going through. They gave me a space to reflect by depicting what each day had held and how I was feeling about my impending day of doom in court. I had pled guilty and a custodial sentence loomed; the postcards document how I had to pack up my life for an unknown period.



Choosing canteen for the week

Once I entered the prison system, the postcards took on a slightly different purpose. I was in an environment that few ever get to see; photography is strictly forbidden, so I felt that I would take this opportunity to not only depict all the ins and outs of prison life as a prisoner, but the surroundings that I found myself in and how I interacted with it.



My art studio is my bed!

As I have always drawn, the postcards became my only creative outlet. I took in my own pencils and a stack of blank postcards and when these ran out, I had to ask my family and friends to send in more. My previous art experience made it difficult to get into art class, so I drew the postcards and collaged using a 69p glue stick from the canteen and images from the Sunday newspapers.

On release and reunited with my laptop, I turned the postcards into a film. With over 1400 individual cards, it runs for almost 3 hours. By selecting different sequences of postcards, I can tell different stories that highlight some of the issues faced by women in prison. The fact that I was incarcerated at HMP Holloway when the closure was announced suddenly made the whole postcard diary take on a new meaning, as now it was not only documenting my personal story, but history!

Postcards from Prison was exhibited in Koestler Arts Annual Award Show at London's Royal Festival Hall South Bank Centre in 2017. Erika has won many Koestler Awards for her artwork and will be exhibiting in their 2019 show.

Erika's postcards can be ordered as prints on her website recordedinart.com. Follow Erika's on Instagram @postcardsfromprisondiary

“WE NEED
TO CHANGE
THE FACT THAT
PEOPLE DON'T
KNOW WHAT
GOES ON IN
THIS COUNTRY'S
PRISONS.”

Mim Skinner worked as an art teacher in a women's prison in the UK. Women in Prison's [Hareem Ghani](#) sat down with her to chat about her new book *Falibirds*.

'JAILBIRDS:
LESSONS FROM A
WOMEN'S PRISON
BY MIM SKINNER
IS PUBLISHED BY
SEVEN DIALS'

JAILBIRDS

LESSONS FROM A WOMEN'S PRISON
MIM SKINNER

Miriam “Mim” Skinner made her debut as an author in July this year with *Failbirds: Lessons from a Women’s Prison* - a 300-page memoir telling the story of the rich and varied lives of the women she encountered during her two years as an art teacher and assistant to the chaplain in a women’s prison. More recently, she co-founded the Refuse Café in Durham which intercepts food that would otherwise go to landfill and where she works alongside local mental health services, probation and prison resettlement services to support women leaving prison.

“When I started working in prisons, part of me expected to find this pantomime cast of characters”, Mim writes in the introductory chapter of *Failbirds*, “Instead, I met wonderful, funny, brave and resilient people with complicated stories – on both sides of the bars.”

When I sit down with Mim, I ask her to share how she first got involved in prison work. “It’s a fairly unorthodox route”, she replies, “I was involved in a community church attended by lots of women who were struggling with either addiction, homelessness or domestic violence”. She continues, “I met a lot of women who came through the care system or who were homeless, and it actually shocked me that they were going in and out of prison. “We worked out that, if my friend and I shared a room, someone who was homeless

MIM’S TOP TIPS FOR WRITING

■ Just start writing!

Write every day to develop the habit of writing. It could be a letter or a diary entry. Alternatively, some people prefer to write down a page of thoughts as soon as they wake up. I was never very good at keeping this up!

■ Keep a notepad with you at all times: if you think of a good phrase or idea, you can jot it down immediately and expand on it later.

■ Record events as they happen: on a side note, this can also be quite therapeutic and good for your mental health.

■ Submit your writing to competitions as often as you can. Your librarian will be able to give you a list of competitions you can enter, but there are also good opportunities in *Ready, Steady, Go!*; in *Inside Times* and offered by the Prison Reform Trust. This will help you improve your work and will give editors examples of your writing if you decide to send them a proposal.

■ Submit to the Comment Is Free section in *The Guardian*. If you want to practise writing blogs or newspaper articles, this is a good place to begin. *The Guardian* likes to hear from people writing about their personal experiences.

■ Finally, I may be able to help you with editing: I can also provide introductions to publishers. If you are a woman in prison, write to me at REFUSE CAFÉ, 143b Front Street, Chester-Le- Street, DH3 3AU or send for free to Freepost WOMEN IN PRISON and WIP will pass on to Mim

could use the other room.”

Mim worked as an art teacher in prison for several years and it was this experience which inspired her to write *Failbirds*. The book, containing personal reflections about the criminal justice system as well as personal contributions from women who have been in prison, provides a glimpse of life inside. From sharing light-hearted content like the “Three Uses for Prison Coffee Whitener” or “Six Uses for Sanitary Pads [in Prison]”, to discussing homelessness, pregnancy and mental health, *Failbirds* does not shy away from controversial or hard-hitting topics.

It is one of only a handful of books written about the experiences of women in prison. I ask Mim whether she would encourage women with experience of the criminal justice system to write about their personal journeys. “I’m passionate about people sharing experiences”, she replies.

Failbirds concludes with a chapter entitled “Lessons (I Learnt) From a Women’s Prison”, so I ask Mim to share with me what she learnt from her time working in a women’s prison. “In practical terms,” she replies, “I learnt I’ve never met such patient and good embroiderers as those in prison. But the thing I learnt was about forgiveness, and, I met women who have forgiven things and people that I don’t think I ever could.”

Illustration by Emily Hayes

“ IF THERE IS
A BOOK
THAT YOU WANT
TO READ
BUT IT HASN'T BEEN
WRITTEN YET
YOU MUST BE
THE ONE
TO WRITE IT ”

TONI MORRISON

FOUR
THINGS
I'VE LEARNT
ABOUT
CHANGING
THE WORLD

India Thorogood, campaigner and lead community organiser for a political party, gives her top tips.

Illustration by @henryobasistudio



CAMPAIGN

I was told by my parents that I could do anything, but I was also proudly told I was working class. The two statements seemed to contradict each other. Telling posh people at Sussex University that I was from Essex was like watching them smell milk gone off from their students' fridge. When I told one person my Dad was a scaffolder, the response was "Do people still do that?"

I realised from a young age, things were not always fair for families like mine. Slowly I started to believe I had to change that. My Dad was unemployed for long periods and when he wasn't, he would tuck me into bed and go off to work nights scaffolding the skyscrapers of big banks in London. The same banks that were responsible for the financial crash that sent families like mine to the job centre or food bank.

My uncle was in prison for most of my childhood and the police came knocking for my brother, but, apart from one teenage incident of filling my bags with as much make up as I could, I managed to stay out of trouble.

Pushed by my parents, who do jobs they've never really cared for, I had the opportunity to do something I really cared about. So, I took that feeling that so many of us feel, that things aren't always fair - and I have tried to find out if it really is possible to change the world. Here's what I've learnt by working as a campaigner:

1 Start Personal and Local

We spend a lot of our lives feeling powerless, but once you have your first campaign win, it'll make you feel taller than the Eiffel tower and stronger than Mohammed Ali.

Start by picking something in your everyday life. You are more likely to be listened to if the campaign is real, honest and comes from experience. We all care about issues that are close to home – so, if you are starting a campaign against your letting agent, for instance, start by uniting a group of their renters. If you are campaigning to change prisons, organise with the people you are living with in prison or people who have been in prison.

2 Know Your Target

I worked for Greenpeace, taking on big corporate "baddies" like car and oil companies who Greenpeace argues are responsible for polluting our lives and funding

climate change. The first thing we did was research what makes that company tick - what does the company pride itself on? How does it make its money? What are its values? Same goes for if you're influencing an individual - like an MP, a local head teacher or business owner. Figure out what a victory looks like - what you want them to do - and how to make it happen. When we took on HSBC to stop funding forest destruction, they were spending millions on fancy advertising, so we got thousands of people to comment on their ads on Facebook and made our own adverts that went viral. When we won the campaign, they announced their policy change with a video on Facebook - which showed we used the right tactics. If we hadn't done our research, we wouldn't have known what mattered to them - and we wouldn't have won.

3 Don't Give Up, Escalate

I started my first campaign as a teenager with a simple letter to my head teacher about the school vending machines. I was invited for a meeting, but he didn't change a thing. When I marched with a million people against the Iraq War, aged 12, we were ignored. The first campaign I was employed to work on, we lost. I've had my fair share of painful political losses - but that means you start to get an idea of what works and what doesn't.

The trick is to show you are not giving up

"Women have campaigned to turn their old prison into a Women's Building a place of hope instead of fear."

and you are not going away. What would have happened if I had taken my school campaign up a notch? If I had brought other students together to back my campaign, organised a peaceful protest outside his office and, if still ignored, sent my letter to the local press? Would he have ignored a teenager's letter read by thousands, including hordes of parents?

4 Anyone Can Do It

Whether you want to organise your own group or join an existing one like Sisters Uncut, or your local political party, all kinds of skills are needed to create change. Groups need people who can design flyers, speak to the media or organise the logistics for meetings and events.

Over the last year, we have watched thousands of children go on strike from school to demand our politicians take action on climate change. In New York, women have campaigned to turn their old prison into a Women's Building, a hub for community support services and women's rights - they are creating a place of hope instead of fear. All of us are capable of winning - and deserving of justice.

I've had a good go at trying to change the world in my own way but I've not changed the world - or certainly not fixed it - just yet. But if people like you put up a fight, woman by woman, I've no doubt that one day we'll get there.

CARL'S

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CARL CATTERMOLLE spent a year in HMP Wormwood Scrubs and HMP Pentonville. Out of the experience came his practical guide to surviving prison.

Prison A Survival Guide offers advice such as how to make a salad dressing in prison, what to take in your 'bang up bag' when you go to court and your rights accessing support and health care if you have a chronic illness or are disabled. WIP is publishing two extracts from Carl's book. The first is called 'Complaints and Applications' and is a handy guide to using the complaints process to change the prison system from within. He doesn't pretend that it will be easy or that you will win, but, if successful, you can hold members of staff to account and even set legal precedent. The second extract offers concrete advice on what to do and your rights when 'getting a nicking' while you are in prison.

URSZULA SOLTYS



CARL CATTERMOLE



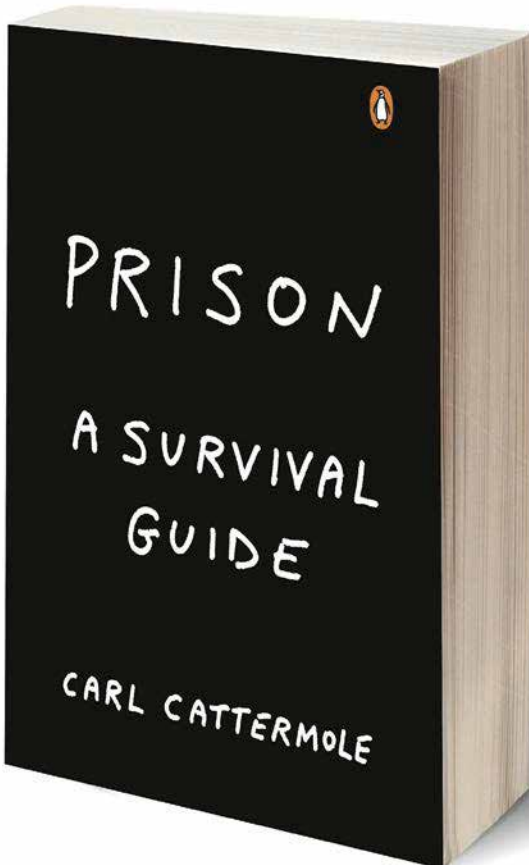
Complaints and Applications

EVEN IF YOUR FORM AVOIDS THE bin, the complaints system is purpose designed to be impenetrable. I won't repeat what I said about the 'bitter cocktail', but it applies to this section too. And even if there was a complaint to make then a lot of prisoners have no faith at all in the system.

I saw with my own eyes that this led to

staff members taking the p*** in full knowledge that nothing would ever be formalised against them. So if you are a literate person banged up with all the time in the world then it's imperative that you stand up and fight The Battle of a Thousand Forms to prove they can't walk all over you, him, her and anyone else in the future, even if it sometimes does feel futile. I could definitely draw comparisons between trying to escape prison's steel-clad concrete walls with a teaspoon and trying to get some results from the prison system by using the comps and apps on offer but I'd still encourage you to use it. Here's the technical process...

First, you write a Comp1 complaint form (receiving a useless response to this is just a formality). Then you write a Comp1a appeal form to take it up the management ladder. Write a Comp2 (light pink form) to 'confidentially' (I've included inverted commas because some prison officers will open them regardless) take it yet further. If you get another unsatisfactory response and you've got a valid point then write to the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board). Once you've gone through all the internal complaints process, write to the PPO (Prisons and Probations Ombudsman). You can also write to your MP, the Home Office, a solicitor who deals with jail issues or phone the ever-helpful PAS or Howard League advice line. It can take months to get a result but it's 100 per cent necessary. If the system gets told what's what and you've set a legal precedent, it will all seem worthwhile.



Getting a Nicking

IF YOU DO SOMETHING REALLY silly, you will be arrested within the prison, taken to a criminal court and potentially given another sentence. But if you do something only a little bit silly, you'll get a 'nicking'. This is where you're put through the adjudication process, the prison's internal justice system. [...]

An officer has to give you two forms within 48 hours of the occurrence: the first (DIS1, or a 'nicking sheet') will explain what you've done wrong and the second (DIS2) explains what will happen next. Overleaf you can write a written statement or request the presence of witnesses.

As with the police I'd recommend giving no comment until you've got proper advice and the situation has cooled down. For more serious charges, such as possession of a mobile phone or a proper assault, you will face an 'Independent Adjudication' by a visiting judge. In this instance you can get legal aid and, as ever, when it's available, I'd strongly recommend you take it.

For more minor charges you will face a 'Governors Adjudication'. You can call witnesses (prisoners or members of staff) but you should ask them before getting them involved. You can't get legal aid despite the fact that, if you're found guilty, it can impact

your recategorisation, ROTL (release on temporary licence) and eventual freedom. I'd strongly recommend calling the Prisoner's Advice Service (PAS) on their freephone advice line in this situation. You can also call the Howard League's advice line if you are under 21. You should also read the Prison Discipline Manual (aka PSI 47/2011) and really take your time to study this ... two hours spent reading mind-numbing legal drear might mean you find that the screws failed one tiny guideline and therefore your

nicking will be dismissed on technicalities.

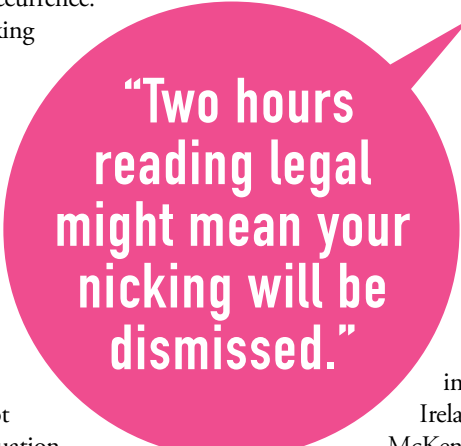
For proper legal representation you have to pay, and for most this isn't an option however you can still use a 'McKenzie Friend'.

They are an odd facet of English and Welsh law (it's slightly different in Scotland and Northern Ireland) which allows a

McKenzie Friend to sit with you, read documents and provide advice even though they can't represent you. It can be a friend, a fellow prisoner or an unpaid solicitor. For more information see www.mckenzie-friend.org.uk.

As PAS, the Howard League and the manual will explain, you have a right to see all paperwork relating to the charge before the adjudication starts so be sure to ask for it. [...]

Once you're in the hearing, you will get asked a bunch of questions [...]. Question number five is always 'Do you want legal advice or representation during the hearing >>>



“Two hours reading legal might mean your nicking will be dismissed.”

before proceeding further?’ – this is your best chance of adjourning the case and maybe even derailing it. The prison has a legal duty to help you locate other prisoners who may have witnessed an incident, even if you have no idea of their name or appearance. You can also ask to see CCTV from the wing. At all points make sure the adjudicator writes all requests, agreements, refusals and reasoning down in case you later need to rely on them.

To appeal: for a Governor’s Adjudication, you submit a form DIS8 within six weeks of the conclusive hearing. If this is unsuccessful you can elevate it to the Prison and Probation Ombudsman within three months. For an Independent Adjudication, you fill in an IA4 form and submit it within the 14-day time limit.

Sounds complex? It is. I haven’t even included the whole fiddle. For the full lowdown, see the Prison Reform Trust

document about prison rules, the government’s Prison Service Orders and Prison Service Instructions or the Prison Handbook, which should be available from the prison library.

Can I interrupt myself to say I knew none of this when I was going through adjudications and was simply never told a shred of this. Before someone says it, yes, I’m sure the details were buried in small print but I had no knowledge of resources available and no idea of the significance of being found guilty. If you combine prison levels of illiteracy, mental health issues, drug addiction and lack of legal aid, it’s a pretty bitter old cocktail. It should come as no surprise to you that two-thirds of people are found guilty at adjudication.

This all leads me on to the obvious – if you are behind bars and are a small print warlord, then offer your help to others – it can have a massive impact on their future freedom.

“I had no idea of the significance of being found guilty..”

These two extracts are from *Prison: A Survival Guide* by Carl Cattermole, published by Ebury Press, £8.99. For the next edition of the magazine, we will be interviewing Carl Cattermole, so look out for Part Two of Carl's Corner.

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PRISONERS'
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ADVICE
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SERVICE

Parole, Transfers,
Temporary Release,
Indeterminate Sentences,
Human Rights, HDC,
Categorisation,
Adjudications, Healthcare,
Licence And Recall,
Discrimination,
Contact With Children,
Resettlement, Foreign
National Prisoners

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Monday, Wednesday & Friday

10am to 12:30pm and 2pm to 4.30pm;

Tuesday evening 4.30pm to 7pm

**Are you confused
about your human and
legal rights in prison?
Free of charge, PAS
can explain what the
Prison Rules mean,
how they affect you
and whether they are
being applied fairly.**

**Please note that PAS
is unable to take on
Criminal Appeals**

**Call PAS, or write to us at:
PAS, PO Box 46199, London EC1M 4XA**

Prisoners' Advice Service is
a registered charity
(No: 1054495) and is a
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ALL YOURS!

PAINTINGS,
POEMS,
STORIES
& MORE....
ALL BY YOU

“PARTICIPATING IN ART
AND PERFORMANCE...
IS AN ACT OF RADICAL
SELF-LOVE. IT IS SELF-
CARE IN A
MOMENT
THAT IS BOTH
PERSONAL
AND ABOUT
ALL OF US. IT
IS ACTIVISM.”
STELLA KANU

“Journey Within” was the theme of the New Beginnings Annual Art Awards, now in its ninth year. The award, run by Women’s Support Centre in Woking, is a celebration of the artistic talent and determination of incredible women from across Surrey. This year, the exhibition included work from artists in HMP Bronzefield and HMP Send, as well as women in the community.

Stella Kanu, Executive Director at the London International Festival of Theatre, opened the exhibition with these words “We should never miss the opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge women in their power.”

We also heard a moving monologue by women from the Women’s Support Centre in Woking about their personal journeys. Lydia’s painting called Light won the main award and has provided the cover for this issue of the magazine.



LIGHT BY LYDIA



ENGLAND

180

D.W. WAT

D.W. WAT

ENGLAND

London

187
PLK
X
K





PREVIOUS PAGE:
IMRA, IN THE
WAITING ROOM

ABOVE: KAREN,
PARADISE OF
THE MIND

ABOVE RIGHT:
NATASHA, FIELD
OF THOUGHTS!

RIGHT: DENA,
AT THE FAIR
GROUND



THE TRANSFO HOLLOWAY PR A BUILDING TH SUPPORTS ALL WOMEN?

Claire Cain, WIP's Campaigns and Public Affairs Manager, updates us on the fight to turn the site of HMP Holloway into a benefit for the whole community »»»»

FORMATION: CAN VISION BECOME A POSITIVELY



WOMEN'S BUILDING
CONCEPT DRAWING

“A hub for community groups, campaigners and services to all share a safe and secure space.”

What’s happening?

Three years after it closed, Holloway prison has been sold to the Peabody Trust Housing Association. After several years of campaigning, we are delighted that the new developers have committed to building social housing on the eight-acre site where the former prison stood. They have also committed to space for support services and facilities for women. Women in Prison is a member of the Reclaim Holloway campaign group and we are working to ensure that the support services and facilities built for women take the shape of a Women’s Building.

What is a Women’s Building?

A Women’s Building is a large hub for many different community groups, campaigners and support services to all share a safe and secure space. The vision is for the building to be open to the public as a place for art, theatre, storytelling, campaigning, advice and support for all women. The Women’s Building presents us with a chance to bring together those who are fighting for justice and equality for women and to build a national beacon for women’s rights.

Why do this at Holloway?

Women in Prison believes that too many women are sent to prison and that there needs to be a greater focus and investment on support services and opportunities for women in our communities. Transforming part of a former women’s prison into a community project for women’s rights is highly symbolic of the way forward for justice for women in the UK. It is a way of reclaiming a site that has caused so much pain and harm to women

and their families and turning it into a space for hope. Furthermore, we hope the Women’s Building can provide a practical solution to support women’s organisations and groups who often struggle to afford rents in London and find spaces to meet.

Where did the idea come from?

New York! In 2012 a women’s prison on the west side of Manhattan closed after being damaged in a storm. A group of women activists had been looking for a site to host lots of women’s organisations and decided the abandoned Bayview prison provided a historic opportunity to reclaim a site of women’s confinement and pain and transform it into a home for women’s justice. This journey is the inspiration behind the Reclaim Holloway Women’s Building and we hope that they will become sister sites for the global fight for women’s rights and equality.

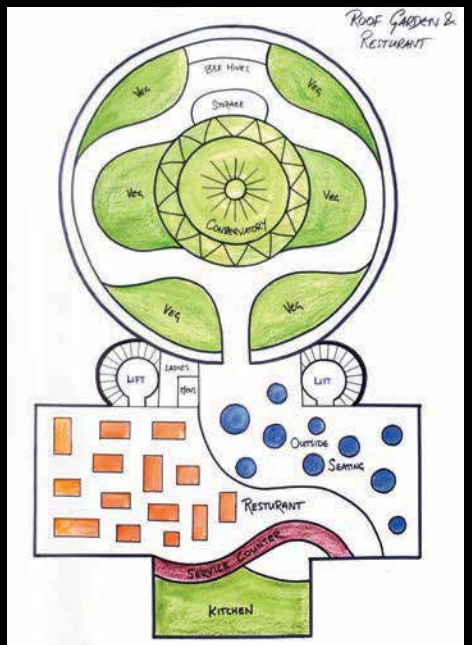
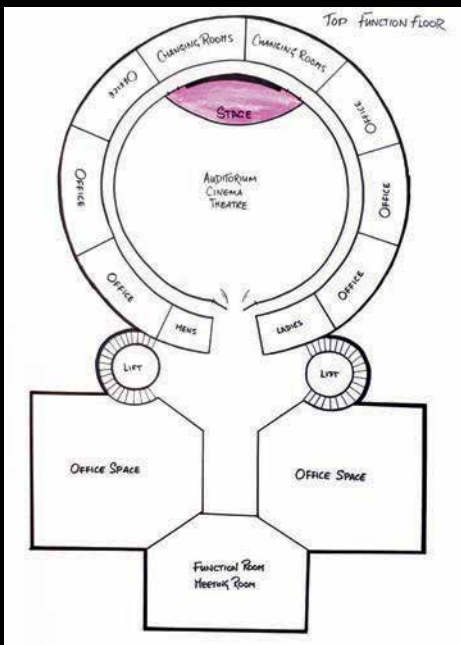
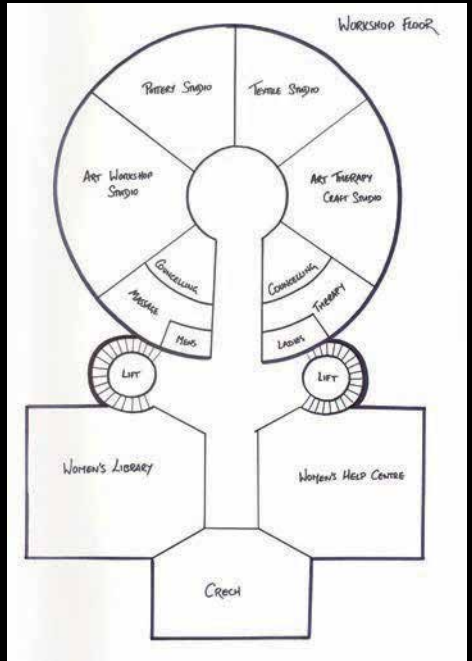
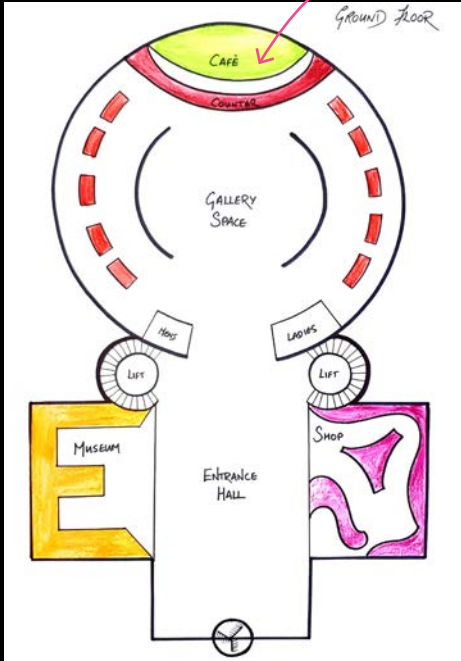
What’s next for the campaign?

We need to continue building support for the Women’s Building and lobbying the developers to ensure this opportunity is fully grasped. Whilst there is a commitment to building facilities for women, this doesn’t tell you what that will look like once the project is finished. We therefore need to keep campaigning to help shape the design of the Women’s Building.

How can I support and get involved?

We would really love for you to back this campaign and would value your support. Please write to WIP – see the inside back page on how to contact us – to share your support and ideas for the Women’s Building!

DRAWINGS BY NIKI, MEMBER OF RECLAIM HOLLOWAY WOMEN'S BUILDING GROUP AND A DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY PLAN FOR HOLLOWAY.





BENT BARS PROJECT



The Bent Bars Project is a prisoner solidarity letter writing project for LGBTQ+ prisoners. The project is open to anyone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer or gender non-conforming.

We match LGBTQ people inside prison with LGBTQ people outside prison so they can write to each other. The aim of the project is to support each other and to help break the added isolation that LGBTQ prisoners often feel.

If you think this project is for you and would like a penpal, write to us and we will send you more information.

Bent Bars Project, P.O. Box 66754, London. WC1A 9BF

(if you cannot write to P.O. box addresses please write to Women in Prison using their freepost address and they can forward it on to us)

We look forward to hearing from you!

SELF CARE

A Space
To Breathe.
By Lucy

First published in Off the Cuff, a magazine written by and for women in HMP Styal.

Yoga for Bad Backs

Almost everyone gets back pain at some point in their life. While it can be a horrible experience, a sore back is rarely serious and there are lots of things that might help. The NHS recommends yoga, and other gentle exercise, as a treatment. You can do this when your back already hurts – go carefully and pay attention to your body, avoiding anything that feels wrong. You can also practice these movements frequently when you are well, to strengthen the back and prevent any future problems.

Cat (breathe out) / Cow (breathe in)

Flow slowly between these poses in sync with the breath. Do each of them at least 10 times.



Frog

10 breaths



Single Knee to Chest

5 breaths each side



Bridge Preparation / Bridge

Carefully move between these two poses 3 times, then hold the second one for 5 breaths. Repeat if you wish.



Forward bend

Bend your knees as much as you need to, to get your hands flat on the floor. Stay for 5 slow breaths.



Figure Four

5 breaths each side



Legs Up Rest

Put your legs up on a chair or bed. If this is difficult, just put the knees up, feet flat on the floor. Stay like this for at least 5 minutes, savouring the calmness and silence of each breath.



Sphinx

5 breaths



Lying Twist

5 breaths each side



PROSECUTING PARENTS

WHO REALLY PAYS THE PRICE?

Rona Epstein, Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry University, explains how and when a “crime” is not a crime.

Sylvia (not her real name) is a single parent who cannot work because of ill-health. Her 13-year-old son is on the autism spectrum (ASD) and has a number of learning difficulties and anxiety. He was too anxious to attend school regularly. Under the law, which makes it a crime for a parent to fail to ensure that their child attends at least 90% of school sessions, she was prosecuted. She had one fine, which she paid. When the authorities issued her with a second fine for non-attendance, she refused to pay and was taken to court.

“I represented myself and gave full details of my son and the reasons for his school refusal and the court fully appreciated my mitigating circumstances and said it agreed that it must be very hard raising a child like my son. It found me guilty (because it had to) but gave me an absolute discharge with no court fees. I deregistered my son the day after the new term started because I was threatened again by the attendance officer saying that the school could not accommodate my son’s part-time timetable and not knowing when he was going to turn up and that I should find a different school.”

In 2018, there were 27,000 prosecutions for truancy. Most parents were fined, but some were sent to prison. It was usually the mother who was prosecuted. Our research, published in February this year, was based on an online questionnaire answered by 125 parents whose children had missed school. We found that many of these parents were ill or disabled. Almost all the parents reported that their child was anxious about school. They described night terrors and extreme reactions of fear when it was time to go to school. About 40% of the children in this sample have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Many of them had other health issues. 90% of the children had SEND (Special Educational Needs/Disability) or a health problem. All the parents reported that it was impossible to force their fearful and panicky children into school; yet many had been threatened with prosecution or been prosecuted.

Lack of resources was a key issue. In some cases, one-to-one support in school had started but not continued, or recommended by the educational psychologist but not supplied. Long waits for diagnoses and for assessment and support were also common.

60% of the children had been bullied. Some parents fearing prosecution took their children off the school roll. Some of these children were home-schooled, causing loss of income when parents left work; others had no structured education. Specialist legal help for parents is available, but this is not widely known. (www.covrj.uk/prosecuting-parents)

We argue that school absence should be treated as a welfare matter, as in Scotland, and not as a crime. The distinction between a social welfare and a criminal justice approach is important: in the social welfare system, the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration; this is not the case in the criminal justice system where the welfare of the child is only one of a number of considerations. If every child is to matter, as Professor Sally Tomlinson says, questions should be asked about schooling rather than criminalising parents.

We also see the criminal justice system being abused in a different context: Three hundred and five people were sent to prison in 2018 because they owed council tax. Usually, people sent to prison for not paying council tax receive no help. No one gives advice about bail. They do their time. They never imagine that it is an error in law that has put them in a prison cell. Owing money is not a crime: magistrates should not send anyone to prison because they owe council tax. What they should do is deduct an amount from benefits or wages, so that the amount owed is gradually paid back. If this would take too long (more than three years), they should consider remitting part or all of the debt.

Some time ago, I wrote an article on council tax debt for this magazine explaining the law and what should happen if someone has difficulty in paying the council tax they

owe. Melanie, a single mother from Porthcawl in Wales, who was in poor health and in financial difficulties, read the article while she was in prison. She was serving a sentence of 81 days imprisonment for owing council tax. She wrote to Women in Prison asking for advice. Expert legal help was found for Melanie, who was then released from prison on bail. The later court decision was to quash her sentence; the magistrates had made a number of serious mistakes when they sent her to prison.

Following much publicity about this case, in June 2018 the Welsh government announced a consultation with the aim of abolishing imprisonment for council tax debt – a huge step forward. After that, the law was changed. Now people in Wales, like those in Scotland and Northern Ireland, cannot be sent to prison for council tax debt. We still have a way to go because in England it is still possible for magistrates, making the same sort of errors, to continue to send people to prison when they owe council tax.

So, one short article in this magazine, one brave and outspoken woman, two caring and competent lawyers – result, an important change in the law. That's progress!

If you are - or someone you know is - in prison for owing council tax, please get in touch. Expert legal advice could make all the difference.

Please write to:

Rona Epstein

Freepost

WOMEN IN PRISON (no stamp required)

Or email:

info@wipuk.org

Rona Epstein is Honorary Research Fellow at Coventry Law School, Coventry University.

WORDSEARCH

Find the words – time yourself!



WOMEN
ACTIVISM

COMMUNITY
ART

LOBBYIST
DEBATE

ABOLITION
EDUCATE

CREATE
ORGANISE

SUDOKU

How to play? Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9, without repeating the number.

			7		5	8		2
	4		3				9	
8							5	
5		1			6		3	4
		4				1		
9	2		1			5		7
	5							3
	9				7		1	
2		6	4		3			

Useful contacts:

HOUSING

Shelter Helpline:
0808 800 4444

**NACRO
information and
advice line:**
0300 123 1999

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**Women's Aid
Helpline:**
0808 2000 247

FAMILY SUPPORT

**National Prisoners
Families' Helpline:**
0808 808 2003

LEGAL & GENERAL ADVICE

**PACT (Prison Advice
& Care Trust)
Helpline:**
0808 808 3444

**Prison Reform
Trust Advice and
Information Service:**
0808 802 0060
Open Monday
3:30pm - 5:30pm
Wednesday
10:30am - 12:30pm

Thursday
3:30pm - 5:30pm

**Prisoners' Advice
Service (PAS):**
PO Box 46199,
London,
EC1M 4XA
0207 253 3323
Open Monday,
Wednesday
and Friday
10am - 12:30pm
and 2-4:30pm

**Rights of Women
Family Law helpline**
020 7251 6577
Open Tuesday-
Thursday 7-9pm,
Friday 12-2pm
Criminal Law helpline
020 7251 8887
Open Tuesdays
7-9pm

Immigration and
asylum law
020 7490 7689
Open Mondays
10am - 1pm &
2pm - 5pm
Thursday
10am-1pm &
2pm-5pm

HARMFUL SUBSTANCE USE SUPPORT

Frank Helpline:
0300 123 6600
Open 24 hours,
7 days a week

**Action on Addiction
Helpline:**
0300 330 0659

LGBTQ+ Bent Bars

A letter writing
project for LGBTQ+
and gender non-
conforming people in
prison
Bent Bars Project,
P.O. Box 66754,
London, WC1A 9BF

Books Beyond Bars
Connecting LGBTQ+
people in prison
with books and
educational
resources
**Books Beyond
Bars,** PO Box 5554,
Manchester,
M60 0SQ

OTHER

**Cruse Bereavement
Care**
0808 808 1677
Monday-Friday
9:30-5pm (excluding
Bank Holidays),
operating until
8pm on Tuesday,
Wednesday and
Thursday.



Illustration by PPaint

WOMEN IN PRISON (WIP) CONSENT FORM

We love to receive artwork, poetry, stories, articles, letters, knitting patterns, recipes, craft ideas, etc etc for publication in the magazine from women affected by the criminal justice system in prison or the community.

Anything you send to us, please also tear out, complete and send us this page along with your piece so that we know for sure that you are happy for us to publish and what name you would like to use.

Please note that we are unable to return to you any of the written pieces or artwork that you send to us for publication.

Thank you for your contribution! All the best, The Women in Prison Team.

Please use CAPITAL letters to complete please

TEAR HERE

First Name		Surname	
Prison or Women Centre (if applicable)		Prison No. (if applicable)	
Any Contact Details (email, address, phone)			
Title of your piece (if relevant)			
Basic description (ie A letter in response to... or a poem or an article on...)			
I give permission for my work to be used by Women in Prison (PLEASE TICK):			
WIP's magazine (Ready Steady Go)	Yes	No	
WIP's Website www.womeninprison.org.uk and Twitter Feed @WIP_live	Yes	No	
WIP's Publication & Promotional Material (ie Reports, leaflets)	Yes	No	
Please note we only publish first names (no surnames) and the name of the prison or Women's Centre only in the magazine (we don't publish prison name in other publications or online). You can of course choose to be Anonymous (no name used) or write a nickname or made up name.			
I am happy for my first name to be published	Yes	No	
Please write exactly what name you would like to be used:			

Freepost - WOMEN IN PRISON (in capitals)
 (no stamp is required and nothing else is needed on the envelope)

WHAT DOES WOMEN IN PRISON BELIEVE?

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.”

OUR VISION

A new system of justice that addresses the root causes of offending (including harmful substance use, poverty, mental ill health, homelessness and experiences of trauma and abuse) in communities, through a network of women’s centres and services available to every woman who requires support.

OUR MISSION

■ To persuade decision-makers to radically reduce the women’s prison population, by demonstrating how investment in specialist community support services, including women’s centres, enables women to move forward with their lives. To promote the development of communities where small therapeutic secure units replace prisons for the minute number of women whose offending and risk to the public may require custody. We do this by:

■ Leading inspiring, passionate campaigns to replace the current system, and to radically reduce the number of women in prison, thereby freeing resources for investment in community support services, including women’s centres.

■ Delivering high quality, trauma-informed independent support services for women, in communities and prisons, that focus on early intervention and holistic provision as part of a ‘whole system’ multi-agency response.

■ Offering a platform for women’s voices which builds women’s confidence and self-belief, strengthening an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and provides opportunities to speak ‘truth to power’ to bring about real change.

OUR VALUES

■ **Social justice and feminism** – We are committed to social justice and the feminist goal of equality. We see daily the price paid by women, children and families as a result of injustices across sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability and class. The current system is broken. It causes harm and delivers neither justice nor rehabilitation. We know from experience that a women-centred ‘whole system’ approach is the best way to reduce crime, strengthen communities and protect the public.

■ **Independence and trust** – Core to our success is our independence and the trust placed in us by the women with whom we work, whose energy and assets are at the heart of our services and campaigns. This partnership based on independence and trust is a vital part of our ethos and drives our ability to speak ‘truth to power’.

■ **Dedication to changing our lives and the world** – We believe that women can change the world in which they live, as well as their own and their families’ lives, when they are given meaningful support and opportunities to speak out, utilise their strengths and be ambitious for change. We know that this requires perseverance and hope. We see setbacks as a chance to learn from failure, renew our efforts and try a different approach, not a reason to give up.

Got something to say?

We want to hear from you and would love to publish your letters, opinions, articles, poems and artwork in this magazine.

Send your work to us for free.

On the envelope write:

freepost **WOMEN IN PRISON**

(In capitals - no need for a stamp)

Don't forget, to publish your work we also need you to complete and include a consent form – see page 65



Interview with campaigner
and writer Victoria Law

#OPENUP Mass Lobby
of Parliament

New Beginnings Art Awards

Holloway Women's Building

Yoga for Bad Backs

Word Search

Sudoku

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