

EMBARGOED until 00:01 TUESDAY 20th October 2020

We can no longer ignore the business case for reducing the number of women in prison

Women's Centres are specialist community-based support services for women facing multiple disadvantages, including women involved in or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.

- A place at a Woman's Centre ranges from **£1,223 to £4,125 per woman depending on needs, whilst a place in prison costs £52,121**
- It is estimated that **£1.7bn is spent on issues linked to female offending, whilst in the long term £2.84 is saved for every £1 spent on women's centres**
- The Women's Centre model shows one centre making a saving of **£18 million over a 5-year period.**
- **An initial review of 15 women's services specialist providers has revealed a £10m gap in core funding for Women's Centres for the year from March 2021.** For many, this funding 'cliff edge' and the inability to plan beyond the short-term, risks the closure of vital support services for women who might otherwise end up in custody.

A report by [Women's Budget Group](#) in collaboration with [Women in Prison](#), [Brighton Women's Centre](#), [Anawim - Birmingham's Centre for Women](#), [The Nelson Trust](#) and [Together Women](#) released today is calling on the Government to deliver the objectives of the Government's Female Offender Strategy by reducing the number of women in prison through investing in Women's Centres.

- Research shows that there are now more than 2,200 more women in prison than there were 25 years ago.
- It is estimated that 17,000 children are affected by maternal imprisonment every year. This is due to women's disproportionate levels of caring responsibilities.

The report, [The Case for Sustainable Funding for Women's Centres](#) highlights the staggering savings that can be made by investing in Women's Centres, the financial cost of the current model and its failure to address the root causes of women's offending, leading to a 'revolving door' of imprisonment. Overall, women's interaction with the Criminal Justice System is a cause and consequence of women's economic inequality:

- In 2018, 82% of women sentenced to prison had committed a non-violent offence, such as shoplifting or even non-payment of council tax, compared to 67% of men.
- Women's offending is often rooted in poverty or financial exclusion.

Dr Kate Paradine, Chief Executive of Women in Prison said:

"There is overwhelming evidence that community support is best placed to address the root causes of why women are sent to prison in the first place, helping with issues ranging from mental health, to debt, domestic abuse, and parenting. But now Women's Centres across the country lack the certainty that they can keep their doors open and support the women most exposed to the consequences of the pandemic. When the socio-economic effects of coronavirus start to bite, it is community services like Women's Centres that help the most disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and families to weather the storm.

"We urge the Government to use the upcoming Spending Review to safeguard the future of these vital community resources across the country by offering a new deal for funding Women's Centres core services. This would deliver their commitment to radically reduce the number of women in prison, help women transform their lives and those of their families to build healthier and safer communities."

Dr Mary- Ann Stephenson, Director of Women's Budget Group said:

"We know that a high proportion of women who are engaged in the Criminal Justice System are often there for non-violent offences and their offending can often be traced back to issues around domestic and sexual violence, substance misuse, debt - all of which are a cause and consequence of women economic inequality.

As the recession caused by this pandemic deepens women's economic inequality is set to get worse. In order to build back better from this pandemic and explore what kind of world we want to create and what kind of economy we want to make we must not overlook the women trapped in a cycle of poverty and the criminal justice system.

To build back better we must invest in services that will support the most vulnerable women through the lockdown, recession and beyond. This report provides significant evidence on the return on investment of funding Women's Centres and the specialist, long term support they provide. We call on the government to engage with the findings of this report and start the process of embedding investment at a national level. This can then help to lead the way in securing local funding for Women's Centres."

Joy Doal, Chief Executive of Anawim said:

"This valuable piece of work drilling down into the funding landscape of women's centres has uncovered a real patchwork of provision. Some are very reliant upon Local Authorities, others much more on charitable foundations. All the funding streams have something in common - fragility.

Foundations are moving into a season of extremely low return on investments, large funders such as Big Lottery are not open as they are concentrating on emergency Covid response. Local Authorities have increased levels of demands on them due to the pandemic. This picture adds to the conclusion of this report that sums up the precarious state of women's centre funding nationally. Women's centres do vital work transforming women's lives so we cannot risk losing them."

Press offices:

Women in Prison

Sorana Vieru: Sorana.vieru@wipuk.org / 07860 695 752 / Head of Campaigns and Public Affairs

Women's Budget Group

Thaira Mhearban: thaira.mhearban@wbg.org.uk / 07736 658951/ Communications Officer

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson: maryann.stephenson@wbg.org.uk / 07957 338582/ Director

About us

Women in Prison is a national charity providing independent, holistic, specialist support to women facing multiple disadvantages, including women involved in (or at risk of being involved in) the criminal justice system. We work in prisons, the community and 'through the gate', supporting women leaving prison. We run three Women's Centres and 'hubs' for services (in Manchester, Surrey and London), including diversion schemes for women at an early stage



of involvement in the criminal justice system. We also campaign to end the harm caused to women, their families and our communities by imprisonment.

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is an independent network of leading academic researchers, policy experts and campaigners that analyses economic policy for its impact on women and men and promotes alternatives for a gender equal economy. Our work on coronavirus can be accessed at: <https://wbg.org.uk/topics/covid-19/>

Anawim, Birmingham Centre for Women is a charity supporting women who have multiple and complex needs which can be addressed through our wide variety of services and specialised caseworkers with extensive experience, including through their Women's Centre.

Nelson Trust is a charity that brings belief, hope and long-term recovery to people whose lives have been torn apart by addiction and the multiple and complex needs that come with it. We provide residential addiction treatment to men and women. We also support women in the community who are in contact with the criminal justice system.

Brighton Women's Centre is a charity that has been supporting self-identifying women in Sussex for over 40 years. We help women from all backgrounds, facing all kinds of issues, to live happier lives. We work with women dealing with bereavement or trauma, women who have been through homelessness or the criminal justice system, survivors of abuse or discrimination.

Together Women is a charity providing holistic services to women and girls with multiple and complex needs across Yorkshire, Humberside and the North of England. We provide gender specific support for women and girls that is flexible, responsive and dynamic. Through trained, expert Key Workers the women who come to us for support have their needs identified and addressed through various interventions; we offer one to one work, group therapy and signposting to external, specialist services who operate from our centres to provide our clients with a holistic, all-encompassing service.