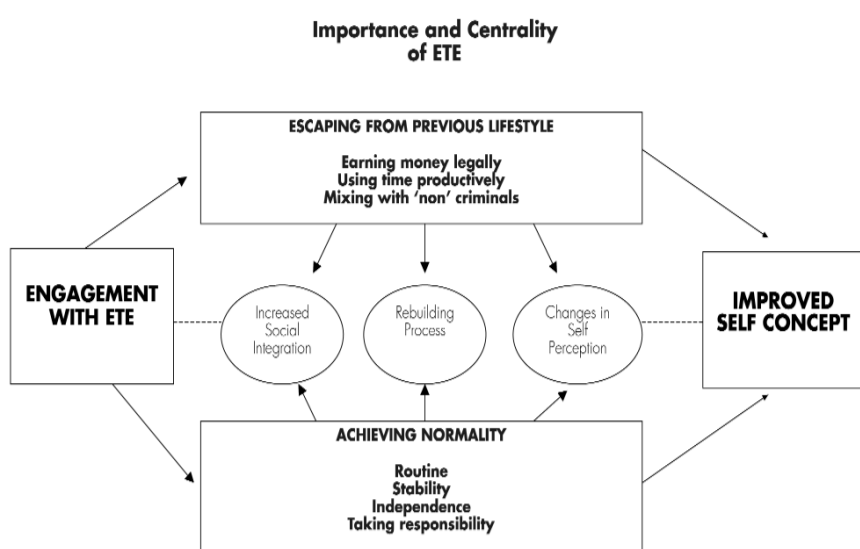


Resettlement of Women (ex)Offenders

This leaflet offers suggestions to enhance current resettlement work being conducted with female (ex)offenders. The guidance offered is based on extensive research and hands on working with women (ex)offenders under the remit of the SOVA led project 'Women into Work'. A key aspect of the Women into Work programme was to conduct peer research in order to identify barriers to employment, training and education for women (ex)offenders. Based on this research pilot projects were commissioned to address the barriers identified. This leaflet draws together key learning points from this process. It is aimed at those working towards the resettlement of women (ex)offenders, particularly those in the prison estate and those involved in employment, training and education provision.

General Starting Points

- Engagement with ETE is often not seen as a high priority for women (ex)offenders therefore they may benefit from awareness raising around it's potential positive impact
- Recognise that a 'stepping stone' approach may be necessary to encourage women to engage with ETE
- A holistic approach to sentence and resettlement planning should be adopted
- Given appropriate encouragement, information and support women (ex)offenders are interested in and motivated to engage with ETE thus ETE advice and information should form a key part of any resettlement package. Women need to be actively involved in this process to ensure that provision is tailored towards individual need
- Women's aspirations need to be validated. Women enjoy and benefit from being listened to, the process of talking through can be hugely beneficial
- The issue of resettlement needs to be addressed as early as possible in women's sentence to enable a smoother transition
- appropriate measures need to be taken to address the transient nature of many female prisons



Creating a Productive Prison Experience

Barriers to ETE

- Limitations of ETE in a Prison Environment**
- Overemphasis on basic skills
 - Long waiting lists
 - Lack of available staff and equipment
 - Lack of continuity between prisons
 - Lack of integration between work and education
 - Lack of tailoring to job market
 - Lack of information re: opportunities

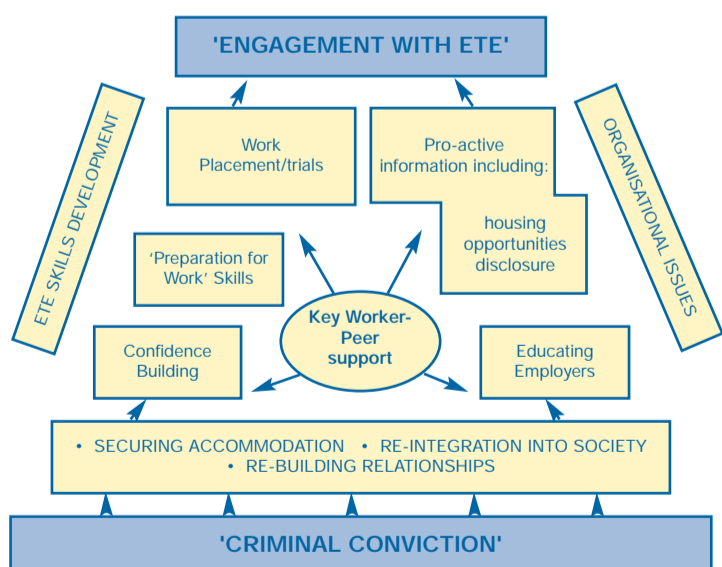
- Psychological/ Emotional Factors**
- Feeling like 'fighting a losing battle'
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Feeling disempowered
 - 'Getting knocked back'
 - Feeling 'out of control'
 - Feeling isolated

- Barriers on Release (perceived and actual)**
- Having to disclose a criminal record
 - Negative perceptions of employers/ETE providers
 - Lack of recognition of achievements
 - Managing the transition from custody to community
 - Being institutionalised
 - Lack of suitable accommodation
 - Need to rebuild relationships with children/family
 - Lack of support

- Thorough and continual assessment of resettlement needs is vital
- A holistic perspective enables prioritisation and rationality to the package of interventions delivered
- Women should be explicitly informed about the roles of different prison staff relating to their resettlement
- Prison can provide an ideal opportunity for women to engage with ETE which they may not have had 'on the out'
- To prepare for ETE women would benefit from confidence building classes to enable them to gain encouragement, motivation and inspiration from each other
- Group work may also be particularly effective in delivering ETE support to women
- Women need to be encouraged to recognise transferable skills which they have but may not recognise
- Non traditional routes need to be explored to encourage employment readiness
- ETE records should always follow women when they move from one establishment to another
- Fear of disclosing a criminal record provides a significant barrier to ETE thus extensive support needs to be offered in this area
- Those women engaged in ETE prior to arriving in custody should be enabled to maintain skills which are pertinent to their chosen career
- All skills and learning need to be formally recognised with certificates and qualifications where possible.
- More prisons should attempt to move away from a somewhat gendered curriculum of catering, cleaning, parent craft etc. in favour of training in skills gap areas
- Prisons should consider adopting more 'peer led' approaches in service delivery
- Pro-active marketing of ETE services within prisons is essential.

Engaging Employers as Integral to the Resettlement Process

- Working with ETE providers is an essential bridge to enabling re-engagement of women ex-offenders to the world of work.
- In terms of liaising with ETE providers, roles and responsibilities within the Prison Service need to be clarified
- Job Centre Plus advisors may have a key role in developing links. Women prisoners themselves may also have an ambassadorial role to play here
- ETE providers need to be made aware of the ways in which women (ex) offenders may be multiply disadvantaged
- 'Outside' ETE agencies should be encouraged to go into prisons to promote opportunities as frequently as possible
- Women (ex)offenders need to be educated and informed about those ETE providers who are willing to engage with them
- ETE providers need to be aware of the benefits of engaging with women who are currently in prison
- ETE providers who engage with ex-offenders should promote their ways of working to other ETE providers
- Wherever possible, women's education and training should be complemented by practical work experience. But need to recognise that arranging work placements may be a time consuming and fraught with complicating issues
- Consideration needs to be given to whether a woman undertaking a work placement will be able to find similar work in her home location
- Links with big business need to be developed.



Making the Transition from 'In to Out'

- Support networks need to be in place before women leave prison and intensive support available (preferably peer mentoring support)
- Informal support networks need to be assessed to identify those prisoners who will be most vulnerable on release. Where possible, prisoners families should be involved in action planning for release
- Throughout sentence, workers who are independent of the prison service and social services could usefully conduct liaison work with prisoners families and children to help prevent the breakdown of relationships
- Initiatives that address the impact of institutionalisation are vital
- Housing agencies need to work closely with the prison service and women themselves and should be educated about the strong links between failing to secure accommodation and re-offending
- Prisons across the female estate and community based organisations should engage with each other wherever possible to learn about 'what works' and to consider ways of mainstreaming best practice
- Addressing the needs of women offenders as they re-enter the community is likely to be more effective if strategies are closely tied into wider social strategies
- External funding tends to impose stringent time scales and limit the life span of community based projects, thus limiting resettlement work undertaken. The human cost of this needs to be acknowledged and carefully managed.