

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the following individuals who have made this research possible:

- **Women into Work ‘Trainees’**

For their help in conducting the research: - Aku, Marcia , Cyrlene, Pauline Clarke, Kim, Jenny, Kathy, Debbie, Jean, Leilda, Diane.

And for representing the views of female (ex) offenders at Women into Work Development Partnership, Equal Opportunity and Diversity and Commissioning Group meetings: - Aku, Marcia, Cyrlene, Kim, Debbie, Diane, Mimi, Maryann.

And others who have participated in the project: - Linda, Tania, Remi, Muriel, Jennifer, Sharon, Dolly, Gladys, Aimee, Carole, and Natalie.

- **Staff at the following prisons** – For welcoming the project into their establishments and in some cases supporting individual ‘Trainees’: - Askham Grange, Cookham Wood, East Sutton Park, Holloway, Low Newton, Morton Hall, Send, Winchester-Westhill.

- **Also the following community based organisations** – for welcoming the project into their organisations and in some cases supporting individual ‘Trainees’: Adamscourt Reception Centre (Cardiff), Adelaide House (Liverpool), Camden’s Women’s Probation Centre (London), Chelmsford Probation Office (Essex), Clean Break Theatre Company (London), Cranstoun Drug Services (Surrey), Creative and Supportive Trust (London), English Churches Housing Group (Oxford), Elizabeth Fry Hostel (Reading), Kelley House Hostel (London), Norfolk Park Bail Hostel (Sheffield), SOVA Plethu – Refugees in Wales Mentoring Project (Cardiff), Reading Single Homeless Project (Reading), Streetreach (Doncaster), Southend Probation Office (Essex).

- The Women into Work Development Partnership for their support in initiating the project, cultivating contacts and providing advice and guidance through all parts of the process, particularly Nichola Cadet (SOVA Programme Director), Professor Paul Senior (Research Centre for Community Justice, Sheffield Hallam University, Ian Simmonds (HM Prison Service Consultant to SOVA) and Chris Dolphin (Resettlement Co-ordinator for Women’s Estate Policy Unit)

- Most of all we would like to thank the women who spoke to us so honestly and openly during the interview process.

- The core research team, who have been responsible for designing, conducting and co-ordinating this research is as follows: -

Caroline O’Keeffe – Research Manager, Sheffield Hallam University

Julie Otter - Special Programmes Manager, SOVA

Angie Roberts - Peer Researcher, SOVA

Sandra Thompson- Peer Researcher, SOVA

Leanne Wicks - Peer Researcher, SOVA

- A very special thank you to Amy Christian, Women into Work Support Officer for her excellent assistance throughout the research process and the production of this report.

- The Women into Work Development Partnership is part funded by the European Social Fund under the **Equal Community Initiative Programme**. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the European Commission and/or the Department for Work and Pensions.

# CONTENTS

## Introduction

### 1. PROCESS OF CONDUCTING PEER RESEARCH

- 1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Peer Research
- 1.2 Setting the scene
- 1.3 Methodology – What is peer research?
- 1.4 Peer Involvement
- 1.5 Training
- 1.6 Support for Researchers
- 1.7 Research Design
- 1.8 Proposed Sample
- 1.9 Research Procedure
- 1.10 Procedural Issues for Research in Prisons
- 1.11 Research in Prisons
- 1.12 Accessing Participants – Women in Custody
- 1.13 Accessing Participants – Women in the Community
- 1.14 Ethical Issues and Concerns
- 1.15 Data Analysis
- 1.16 Issues Arising from the Use of Peer Research Methodology
- 1.17 ‘Giving Voice’ and Empowerment
- 1.18 Acknowledgment of our own Values & Beliefs within the research process
- 1.19 Reducing the Traditional Division between ‘subject’ & ‘object’ in research
- 1.20 Benefits of Peer Involvement in the Research Process
- 1.21 Disbenefits of Peer Involvement In Research

### 2. FINDINGS OF THE PEER RESEARCH

#### 2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

#### 2.2 IMPORTANCE AND CENTRALITY OF ETE

- 2.2.1 Escape from Previous Lifestyle/Achieving normality
- 2.2.2 Improving Self concept
- 2.2.3 Prison as Opportunity

#### 2.3 BARRIERS TO ETE

##### 2.3.1 Limitations of ETE in Prison Environment

- 2.3.2 Limited Opportunities to Progress
- 2.3.3 Lack of Tailoring to Individual Need
- 2.3.4 Lack of Information

##### 2.3.5 Disclosure of Convictions

##### 2.3.6 Employers Perception of (ex) Offenders

##### 2.3.7 Lack of Recognition of Achievements

##### 2.3.8 Managing the Transition from In to Out

- 2.3.9 Being Institutionalised
- 2.3.10 Housing
- 2.3.11 Rebuilding Relationships
- 2.3.12 Lack of Support
- 2.3.13 Fighting a Losing Battle

## 2.4 SUPPORT NEEDED

- 2.4.1 General Points
- 2.4.2 ETE Skills Development
  - (a) Confidence Building
  - (b) Preparation for Work
  - (c) Work Trials
- 2.4.3 Organisational Issues
  - (a) Education/Awareness Raising of Employers
  - (b) Pro-active Information Giving
  - (i) Disclosure, (ii) Opportunities, (iii) Housing
  - (c) Mentor/Key Worker
  - (d) Mentor/Key Worker – Peer Support

## 3. DISCUSSION

### 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1.1 Involving Women (ex) Offenders In Research
- 3.1.2 Addressing the ETE Needs Women (ex) Offenders

### 3.2 NEXT STEPS

#### FIGURES

- 1 Staff Structure
- 2 Importance/ Centrality of ETE
- 3 Fighting a Losing Battle
- 4 Barriers to ETE
- 5 Support with ETE

#### APPENDICES

- A Interview Schedule 1 (Custody – One to One)
- B Interview Schedule 2 (Community – One to One)
- C Interview Schedule 3 (Custody – Focus Group)
- D Interview Schedule 4 (Community – Focus Group)
- E Checklist
- F Coding System document
- G Consent Form
- H Information Sheet
- I Fieldwork Pro forma
- J Ethical Guidelines
- K Monitoring Form
- L Changes to Monitoring Form
- M Protocol
- N Thematic Framework (1)
- O Thematic Framework (2)
- P Who said what grid
- Q Bibliography

# INTRODUCTION

In 2001 SOVA in partnership with Addaction, CAST (Creative and Supportive Trust), Department for Education and Skills (Prisoner Learning and Skills Unit), Home Office (Women's Policy Team), Job Centre Plus, London Probation Area, NACRO, National Probation Directorate, Prince's Trust, Prison Service, Sheffield Hallam University, Stonham Housing Association, along with 40 Associate Partner Agencies, were successful in securing funding from the **Equal** Fund for a 3 year Development Partnership named 'Women into Work'.

The Women into Work programme was commissioned to work towards combating discrimination and inequality experienced by women who have been disadvantaged, particularly by their experiences of the criminal justice system. By identifying barriers to employment from a female perspective (through peer research) and piloting innovative methods of addressing these barriers by means of training, personal development and empowerment, the ultimate goal of the Women into Work programme is to ensure that women can work towards accessing and sustaining appropriate employment, training and education (hereafter referred to as ETE).

The programme has three distinct phases:-

## **Phase 1: September 2002 – September 2003: Peer Research Programme**

- To identify the importance/centrality of ETE for (ex) offenders, barriers to ETE and ways in which the barriers may be overcome - proposed sample size 300

## **Phase 2: September 2003 – March 2005: Pilot Projects**

Based on the findings of the peer research, the Development Partnership will commission pilot projects which will adopt multi agency "holistic" approaches to ETE, including innovative approaches to resettlement of displaced women

## **Phase 3: December 2004 – November 2005: Dissemination and Mainstreaming**

- The Development Partnership will contribute to the development of policies and practice for unemployed offenders by identifying practices or services that can be "mainstreamed" if shown to be effective.

**NB:** Although a distinct phase of the project is allocated to dissemination and mainstreaming, dissemination activity is also ongoing throughout the three phases of the project by means of consultation/collaboration events, newsletters, presentations at appropriate Forums and training events and this report is part of this process.

Under this particular **Equal** funding stream, there are five principles of fundamental importance. These leading principles are:

- Innovation
- Equal opportunities
- Transnational co-operation
- Mainstreaming
- Empowerment

The above principles are incorporated into all phases of the Women into Work programme.

It was proposed in the original Development Partnership Agreement that disadvantaged women, in particular female (ex) offenders should be involved in all stages of the programme and this has happened throughout the peer research process. It was also proposed that the programme would target women from the following groups:

- Women with mental health problems
- Impaired/disabled women
- Women suffering domestic violence
- Homeless women
- Women with drug or alcohol problems

- Sex worker and prostitutes
- Lesbians
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers

It proved particularly difficult to gain access to women refugee/asylum seekers within the (ex) offender population thus a small scale piece of work around barriers to ETE was undertaken with that particular cohort of women, in conjunction with the SOVA project – Plethu. The results of this report are available separately.

This document reports on Phase One of the programme. As this phase employs new and innovative methods of conducting research with female (ex) offenders this report focuses on not only the findings of the research but also provides insight into the process of conducting peer research with this particular group of women, from the perspective of the research team. The report is divided into three distinct sections: -

- The Process of Conducting the Peer Research
- Findings of the Peer Research
- Discussion and Recommendation

In addition, an in-depth independent evaluation of the peer research process has been conducted by Sheffield Hallam University which will be published separately.



# SECTION 1:

## PROCESS OF CONDUCTING PEER RESEARCH

### 1.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- The aim of the peer research study described in this report was to promote understanding of the experiences of female (ex) offenders when accessing ETE by identifying: -
  - The importance/centrality of ETE for female (ex) offenders in overcoming disadvantage
  - The barriers which prevent women from accessing ETE
  - The support elements which need to be in place to help women to access ETE and integrate successfully into their communities
- The objective of the peer research study was to: -
  - Provide a sound evidence base from which to commission pilot projects during Phase Two of the Women into Work project
- This research project adopted a 'peer' approach. This meant that wherever possible female (ex) offenders were employed to conduct the research, working alongside the Research Manager and Special Programmes Manager. Thus additional aims and objectives arose from the process of conducting the research as follows: -
  - To encourage empowerment of peer researchers by creating opportunities for them to influence decision making and policy
  - To increase self esteem, skills and confidence of peer researchers thus contributing to their personal development and enhancing their employability

In line with the stated objectives, the research team had a strong commitment to *research as praxis*, that is to conduct research that not only identifies knowledge about an issue, but which identifies the knowledge for a specified purpose (Stanley, 1990).

### 1.2 SETTING THE SCIENCE

The Women into Work peer research project is timely in that it was conducted during a time of considerable growth and change in the Women's Prison Estate generally. The alarming rise in the female prison population over the past decade has been well documented. Between 1993 and 2001 the average population of women in prison rose by 140% as against 46% from men (Home Office, 2002). This rise is reflective of a combination of factors including more women appearing in the courts, a greater proportion receiving custodial sentences and a trend towards sentencing women for longer periods (Home Office, 1998). Rapid growth in the prison population has resulted in the need for considerable expansion of accommodation in the Women's Estate and has also resulted in the welcome formation of the Women's Estate Policy Unit, which has responsibility for developing a strategic approach towards women's resettlement needs.

The most common offences for which female offenders may receive a custodial sentence are drug offences (39% at end of June 2001), theft and handling (16%) and violence against the person (15%) (Home Office, 2002). In terms of sentences received, there has been considerable debate and much disagreement around whether the criminal justice system treats men and women differently. Despite commonly held beliefs by academics, pressure groups and journalists the Home Office have argued that there is no research or statistical evidence which supports the claim that women are systematically dealt with more severely than men. Studies have demonstrated that differences do exist in the way in which men and women are treated by the Criminal Justice System but these largely favour women. For example, women are less likely than men to receive a custodial sentence (except for drugs offences where the proportions are almost the same) and when they do, the sentences tend to be shorter than for men. Suggested reasons for this are that women are less likely to be dealt with in Crown Court and they are less likely to have previous convictions (Hedderman & Hough, 1994). In 2001 19% of *all* known offenders were women and women accounted for 13% of those starting orders under the provision of the Probation Service (Home Office, 2002).

Alongside the increased number of women receiving custodial sentences a lively debate has developed around the differential impact of sentencing on men and women. The NACRO report 'Women Behind Bars' (2001) eloquently outlines the implications of women being 'slotted in' to policies and procedures, which have been designed for men. Despite the increased numbers of women receiving a custodial sentence they still comprise just over 5% of the prison population (Home Office 2002). Some of the problems which women face when attempting to resettle into the community following a prison sentence are undoubtedly gender specific; issues around childcare and other family responsibilities, 'double discrimination' in the labour market in addition to the burden of a criminal record (NACRO, 2001). The issue of separation from children and the subsequent need to establish relationships is particularly pertinent. A Home Office study of mothers in prison found that 61% of the 1,766 women in its sample had children under 18 and nearly one-third of their 2,168 children were under five. Three quarters of the children had been living with their mother at the time of imprisonment (Caddle & Crisp, 1997). Additionally, due to the small number of female establishments, relative to male establishments women are frequently sent to prisons many miles away from their homes and families which make it particularly difficult to maintain family ties and also to link into local support services (NACRO, 2001).

In addition to resettlement issues, prison appears to have a different and apparently more damaging impact on women than men. The Chief Inspector of Prison's Thematic Review (1997) reported that over 40% of women had harmed themselves intentionally and/or attempted suicide before imprisonment and they remain at risk of doing so during their time in prison. Also 70% reported prison as having a negative effect on them making them 'more criminally sophisticated as well as more angry and depressed'. The way in which women experience prison may well compound problems with their resettlement.

There is a plethora of literature, which outlines the significance of having a job in relation to effective resettlement and prevention of re-offending (e.g. Crow et. al. 1989, Fletcher, D.L. et. al 1998, May, 1999). The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) identifies education and employment as two of the nine key factors, which influence re-offending, according to a body of criminological and social research. Indeed, the report identifies being in employment as reducing the risk of re-offending by between a third and a half.

Despite the importance of employment in the reduction of social exclusion among the offending population, it is clear that women (ex) offenders are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market. The educational attainment of women in prison is significantly lower than for women in the general population and lower even than that of male prisoners. In one study which examined the current status of work and training in women's prisons as well as women's previous work experience and hope for the future, out of the 567 women prisoners in the sample 74% of women said they had left school when they were 15 or 16 compared to 32% of the general population. Only 39% had any qualifications at all, compared with 82% of the general population and significantly less than the figure for male prisoners of 51 % (Hamlyn & Lewis, 2000). In addition to a lack of education, women in prison are less likely to be in a stable relationship than the general population and are more likely to have child-care responsibilities (Home Office (2002). Many women (ex) offenders enter the Criminal Justice System with a host of medical and psychological problems. A survey by the Office for National Statistics (1999) found that 50% of women prisoners had suffered violence at home and over a third had been sexually abused. Also 50% of women were taking medication for a mental health problem. All of the above factors are likely to impede women's access to the labour market as well as education and training opportunities.

Although prison provides ETE opportunities for a large number of women (48% in the Hamlyn and Lewis sample acknowledged that they developed new skills in prison), few of these skills were felt to be transferable to the outside workplace. 62% of women attended some type of educational or vocational course during their sentence, however there was a distinct lack of integration between training and work regimes in prisons. (Hamlyn & Lewis, 2001). In a small scale study conducted by 'Women in Prison', women reported that education and training courses were too basic with a lack of general provision, frequent waiting lists and a lack of support for distance learning. Additionally women were frequently unable to continue with courses they had started, should they be transferred between prisons (Dowling, 2001).

Clearly ETE plays a vital role in the prevention of re-offending and represents an important step towards social inclusion for women (ex) offenders. However, there is a great deal of unmet need regarding ETE opportunities in prison and those opportunities which do exist do not necessarily equip women for life 'on the out'. Also, women anticipate facing a number of barriers when attempting to access ETE post-custody. As outlined by a recent study conducted with 95 women at HM Prison Brockhill, these barriers include (in rank order): -having a criminal record, drug use, lack of stable housing, lack of education or basic skills, lack of confidence, low self esteem, health

problems, childcare issues, the negative influence of friends/peers and partners. The anticipated barrier of having a criminal record certainly appears to be borne out through experience. The NACRO study 'Offenders and Employment' (1997) found that over 60% of adult ex-offenders using their employment and housing services had been explicitly refused employment on the basis of their criminal record (we can assume that the actual figure is higher as some employers will not have acknowledged a criminal record as the reason for refusal).

The Brockhill study also usefully identified that although gaining employment was perceived as desirable by women, it was by no means considered a priority when looking ahead to their release. Their main concerns were finding suitable accommodation and staying off drugs. Again, these anticipated concerns are borne out by experience; the follow up sample in the Hamlyn study found that post-release women had encountered housing and drug problems as well as problems with finances, depression and families. Significantly, the same study found that during the 5-9 month period after their release only around a third of women in their sample had found a job and few attributed this to any experience they had gained whilst inside.

Despite the largely negative picture painted so far, it is encouraging that alongside the dramatic increase in the female offending population there is an emerging body of literature around women offender's experiences of ETE. This is particularly welcome given the strong link between ETE and the prevention of re-offending. The body of knowledge that currently exists has a largely quantitative slant and is derived largely from women who are currently in custody. The Women into Work research study makes a valuable and unique contribution to our existing knowledge by adding a qualitative, peer led perspective from the voices of women both in custody and in the community. This perspective goes beyond the mere identification of barriers to ETE and offers insight into how women offenders *make sense* of the obstacles, which they face and of their position as 'offenders' within society. This study also offers the opportunity to take direction from women in terms of the support which they need in order to address barriers to ETE, thus providing a sound evidence base to inform future projects which can build on the excellent work of existing initiatives.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGY - WHAT IS PEER RESEARCH?

The concept of 'peer research' is a new and innovative type of research, which has developed from the traditions of 'participatory', 'action' and 'empowerment' research (these terms are often used interchangeably). Despite subtle differences between these approaches a common characteristic of them all is that they represent a shift away from 'top down' research where those with the most power in organisations decide how the research should be conducted. Instead, these approaches offer a move towards 'bottom up' approaches where those individuals who are going to be directly affected by the outcomes play an active role in the research process. In this study, members of the target group (primarily (ex) offenders) adopted the role of active researchers, interviewing their peer group about their experiences of ETE. In this sense, the research can be seen as a tool of empowerment.

The main principles of conducting research in an 'empowering manner' which were adhered to in this study are summarised below: -

- The process involves participants in learning research methods (goal setting, establishing priorities, identifying appropriate questions, interpreting data)
- Participants own the research. They make decisions about design and focus. Participation is real, not token
- Participants work together as a group and the researcher facilitates group cohesion and collective inquiry
- All aspects, including the data, are understandable and meaningful to participants
- Self accountability is highly valued
- The facilitator recognises and values participants perspectives and expertise and works to help them recognise and value their own and each others expertise

*(adapted from Quinn-Patton, 1997)*

Empowerment as a term has become increasingly popular within various arenas during the last few years (psychology, mental health, management and political science). Interestingly, despite the huge amount of rhetoric on empowerment there remains no agreed definition. However, the term is largely concerned with the application of democracy and the acquisition or withdrawal of power (Walters et. al). Empowerment is also concerned with recognising our own abilities to act and become involved in productive processes for the benefit of both ourselves

and others. **Equal** offer the following definition of empowerment and this was borne in mind throughout the peer research process:

*‘Whereby those who have little or no influence, such as excluded people are able to acquire the capacity to have informal opinions, to take initiatives, make independent choices and influence change. It is a two way process, so that those with influence actively change their attitudes and rules and change the way decisions are made through engaging with excluded people’ (Equal, 2001)*

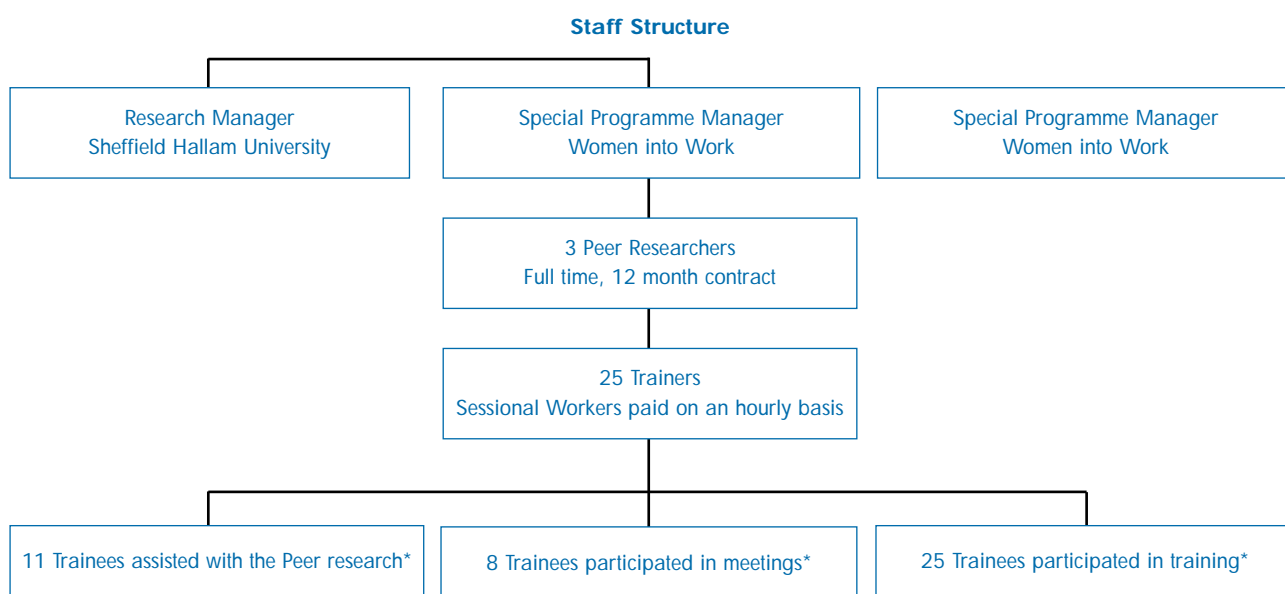
However, we also recognise that empowerment may mean different things to different people in different contexts. We also recognised that empowerment of women was a *desired* rather than *guaranteed* outcome of the Women into Work project.

## 1.4 PEER INVOLVEMENT

Three full time ‘Peer Researchers’ were employed on twelve-month contracts. Their main roles were to design and deliver the peer research in addition to assisting in the recruitment, training and co-ordination of ‘Trainees’.

In addition to the three full time workers twenty-five sessional workers (‘Trainees’) were employed to assist in conducting the research and to represent their peer group at meetings of the Development Partnership, **Equal** Opportunities and Diversity Advisory Group and Commissioning Group. These were sessional workers, paid on an hourly basis. Eleven trainees in total actually assisted in the peer research process. Of these, eight were in custody and three were in the community. The staffing structure of the Women into Work peer research study is outlined below.

**Figure 1**



*\*Nb: Some Trainees participated in more than one activity within the programme*

## 1.5 TRAINING

During the course of the project the Peer Researchers received a total of seven days training in practicalities of conducting research, research design and qualitative data analysis. They also attended the following SOVA training courses: -

- Public Speaking & Presentation Skills
- Marketing & Media Awareness
- Training for Trainers
- Powerpoint
- Report Writing

- Working with Challenging Behaviour
- Working with Addictive Behaviour
- Working with Volunteers
- Effective Volunteer and Staff Supervision

In addition, the Peer Researchers attended and helped to deliver some of the 'Trainee' training courses, as described below.

The 'Trainees' received an initial two-day training programme. The first day covered the theory and practicalities of conducting peer research and the second day focused on communication skills, including assertiveness, listening skills, non-verbal communication and raising awareness of assumptions and prejudices. In addition, as part of the Women into Work programme, the Trainees also attended training days in 'Feminist Perspectives on Women and Crime', 'Introduction to Counselling Skills', 'Conflict Resolution', Mental Health Issues (Trainees in the North only) and Presentation skills.

## 1.6 SUPPORT FOR RESEARCHERS

The Peer Researchers received formal supervision from the Special Programmes Manager for Women into Work and additional guidance from the Research Manager. The frequency of supervision was at one or two monthly intervals depending on individual need. In addition, the Peer Researchers were offered the opportunity to be allocated a Personal Mentor from an outside organisation for the provision of additional support.

The 'Trainees' received support, advice and guidance from the Special Programmes Manager when appropriate. In addition, the Peer Researchers adopted the role of Mentor for the Trainees and some Trainees also received ongoing support from Prison Staff or community organisations with which they were involved.

In line with the objective of empowering the research workers during the research process, all employees were encouraged throughout Phase One to engage in activities, which would contribute to both career and personal development. In this sense, their role in the project went beyond that of 'getting the job done' and careful consideration was given to the ways in which engagement in the project could enhance their career and personal progression.

## 1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

Semi structured in depth interviews (both one to one and group interviews) were chosen as the method of data collection for this study. Four separate interview schedules were designed as follows:

- Interview Schedule no. 1 – Women in custody (one to one) - Appendix A
- Interview Schedule no. 2 – Women on community sentences and 'ex offenders' (one to one) - Appendix B
- Interview Schedule no. 3 – Women in custody (focus groups) - Appendix C
- Interview Schedule no. 4 – Women on community sentences and 'ex offenders' (focus groups) - Appendix D

These were designed by adopting a participatory approach between the Research Manager, Special Programmes Manager and the three Peer Researchers. The starting point for discussion during this phase was the three key issues outlined on Page 11 - Importance/Centrality of ETE, Barriers to ETE and Support Required. For each key issue lengthy discussions were held around appropriate and easily understandable ways of asking women about it. The discussion continued until a consensus regarding content of the schedules was reached between all members of the team.

Questions were designed to be as open ended as possible and worded to enable women to discuss their experiences and feelings in an in-depth manner. The interview schedules also allowed sufficient flexibility for women to explore issues outside of the specific questions if desired. Within the schedules, consideration was given to introducing and closing the interview and appropriate opening and closing questions.

During the three days allocated for research design, in addition to the interview schedules the following documents were also designed:

- Checklist for researchers re: items needed to take to interview - Appendix E
- Document outlining coding system for tapes - Appendix F

- Consent form (re: both interview and tape recording of interview) - Appendix G
- Information sheet - Appendix H
- Fieldwork pro forma for recording additional information on data collection process (i.e. venue, observations of group dynamics, personal reflections) - Appendix I
- Ethical guidelines document - Appendix J

During the research design phase, the Peer Researchers were able to provide invaluable information to the Special Programmes Manager and Research Manager on a number of key issues including: -

- Appropriate use of language for their peer group
- Prison Service terminology
- Prison 'culture'
- Operational issues within prisons
- Relationships between female inmates and staff and ways in which this may influence the research process

## 1.8 PROPOSED SAMPLE

During the peer research process, we aimed to target 300 women in total, 150 women serving custodial sentences and 150 in the community. The later cohort included women who were currently serving a community sentence or women who had completed either a community or custodial sentence in the past.

## 1.9 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The interview schedules were piloted by conducting interviews with fifty women in custody. As the schedules for women in custody and in the community were so similar, it was felt that an additional pilot was not necessary before beginning the community interviews. Only one change was made to the interview schedules following the pilot study and thus the pilot data is included in the analysis presented in this report.

In the initial stages of the research process, the Peer Researchers were accompanied by the Research Manager when interviewing. Also, for the majority of interviews, the 'Trainees' were accompanied by one of the Peer Researchers. For all focus groups there were two facilitators, one to lead the discussion and another to take notes, observe group interaction and deal with any unexpected interruptions.

At the beginning of each interview participants were asked if they had read the information sheet about the project and were also asked to complete a consent form and a monitoring form, which asked questions about their personal details and background. The monitoring form was changed 5 times over the duration of the research. (The final version may be seen in Appendix K). This was because we realised that: -

- The form was not user friendly, resulting in forms being filled in incorrectly
- The particular wording which we had used would not totally capture the information we required
- Some issues on which we required information were omitted from earlier versions of the form.

The most significant changes are detailed in Appendix L. A graphical summary of the information gathered from the monitoring forms can be found in the later section 'Characteristics of the Sample'

In group interviews the researcher agreed ground rules for the discussion with participants (speak one at a time, respect opinions of others, assure each other of confidentiality). This was considered to be important to put the women at ease, bearing in mind that they may disclose potentially sensitive information to the researchers and to each other.

## 1.10 PROCEDURAL ISSUES FOR RESEARCH IN PRISONS

Due to the new and innovative 'peer approach' used in this research it was necessary for a protocol to be drawn up outlining issues around researchers entering and carrying out interviews in prisons, particularly those currently serving a sentence or those regarded as 'ex offenders'. A general protocol was drawn up in the first instance by the HM Prison Service Consultant to SOVA (Appendix M). It was proposed that amendments could be added to the

protocol in order to reflect the unique needs of each establishment. The standard protocol was agreed by all prisons involved before the research actually began.

All researchers were required to carry a SOVA identity card and those women on parole were required to carry a copy of their Parole Licence. Serving prisoners were required to carry a copy of a Facility Licence to confirm that they were released on temporary licence to conduct the research. The very fact that serving prisoners were granted permission to go into prisons where they were not serving and ex-offenders were also granted permission to enter/return to prisons is reflective of the innovative nature of this project.

Researchers were regarded as Official Visitors and were subject to the rules and regulations governing such visits. As is standard practice, researchers were not allowed to carry mobile telephones whilst in prisons, however they were allowed to take tape recorders into the prisons to record interviews with women.

It was made clear that any breaches of the agreed protocol would be immediately reported to the Programme Director. In practice, there was no breach of protocol throughout the research. The peer research process also gained approval from Martin Narey, then Director General of the Prison Service. It is important to note that members of the Development Partnership Steering Committee played a vital role in securing and maintaining Prison Service support for the peer research.

## **1.11 RESEARCH IN PRISONS**

Overall, we found conducting research in prisons to be an extremely positive experience. Prison staff proved to be very supportive in both facilitating the research and also in encouraging women who were involved in the project as 'Trainees'. When we were conducting the research, staff made every attempt to obtain comfortable rooms for us to work in (e.g. training/education rooms, prison chapels, drawing rooms), provided refreshments and allowed us to engage with the women in an unhurried manner. On the whole women were given permission by the prison to be released from their activity (work or education) in order to take part in interviews. This was significant in terms of demonstrating support for the Women into Work programme as prisons are under increasing pressure to meet Key Performance Indicators around Purposeful Activity in work and education. Indeed some prisons classed participation in interviews as Purposeful Activity.

As expected, certain logistical issues arose whilst conducting research in the regimented prison environment. The research had to be incorporated into the daily routine of prison life (i.e. roll call, lock up, mealtimes). At times this resulted in the researchers having to wait for extended periods of time. Also we were sometimes required to conduct interviews in settings, which were less than conducive environments (rooms without doors, very small unventilated rooms for large groups of women). In addition, occasionally we found that information about the research had not been distributed within the prison and women did not turn up for the anticipated groups. At times, this resulted in women being brought in 'ad hoc', from prison wings to participate in interviews. We felt this raised a number of ethical issues, which are discussed in the 'Ethical Issues and Concerns' section. On the whole, however, we feel that these restrictions did not impact significantly on the research process.

## **1.12 ACCESSING PARTICIPANTS – WOMEN IN CUSTODY**

Governors at all female prisons in England had been informed of the Women into Work programme during the very early stages, prior to the start of the peer research phase and two prisons had already offered to be pilot sites for the peer research. Once the research team were all in post and prisons had been selected in which to conduct the research, Prison Governors in these establishments were sent a letter updating them on the progress of Women into Work and informing them of what the research would involve. We asked for their help in facilitating access to women in their prisons. All prisons responded positively to this request with the Governor usually handing responsibility over to specific Officers, particularly those with a resettlement remit.

Following this, information sheets about the research were sent out to be distributed among potential participants and women were asked to indicate to an Officer if they felt that they would like to become involved. A follow up phone call was made a few weeks later and when informed that women wanted to take part, we were invited to the prison to conduct interviews. We rarely knew before visiting the prisons exactly how many women would be available to be interviewed. Also researchers conducted brief presentations in two of the prisons about the research, and asked women to sign up for an interview directly afterwards.

The Peer Research was undertaken in a total of 8 prisons out of the 19 women's prisons in England. These prisons were Askham Grange, Cookham Wood, East Sutton Park, Holloway, Low Newton, Morton Hall, Send and

Winchester-Westhill. Due to the practical restraints of the research these prisons were chosen largely due to their geographical accessibility for the research team. However, attempts were also made to include prisons with a representative ethnic mix of women. In order to ensure this, up to date data was collected from the Women's Estate Policy Unit. Two open prisons and a prison with a mother and baby unit were also included in our target group in order to gain the broadest possible range of experience amongst women interviewed. As the research progressed we found that most work was undertaken in prisons where staff had shown a particular interest in the research and where Trainees were engaged with the programme.

Indeed, recruitment of women in prisons proved to be most effective in prisons where we had Trainee(s) who were in custody and could recruit women on our behalf. This happened in four out of the eight prisons, which we targeted. This was particularly satisfactory as not only did it mean that the recruitment process was more organised and efficient, it also meant that Trainees were able to be involved in the research from an early stage thus hopefully increasing their sense of 'ownership' of the work. Where there was no Trainee presence in the prison, the recruitment process was often far more chaotic and we had no control over the distribution of information sheets. Nonetheless, we encountered no problems in recruiting our target of women in prison; indeed we exceeded our original goal of 150.

### **1.13 ACCESSING PARTICIPANTS - WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY**

Recruiting women in the community to participate in interviews proved to be far more problematic than recruiting women in custody. Over a period of several months, we pro-actively explored the following avenues in an attempt to recruit women to participate in the research: -

- Head Offices of all probation areas
- Development Partnership members and their contacts
- Associate Members of Women into Work
- All community based projects listed in the NAPO directory (including specialist drug services, arts projects, mental health projects, prostitution forums, hostels etc)
- Contacts made at conferences, consultation events and liaison forums
- Writing directly to women who had recently been released from prison
- Newspaper advertisements
- Personal contacts of research team

As the recruitment process for women in the community appeared to be particularly slow, we decided we had to make it as easy as possible for agencies to help us. Thus we produced 'recruitment packs' containing information sheets about the research and reply slips with stamped addressed envelopes which women could send back directly to the research team, thus minimising agency involvement/workload. Where it was impractical to conduct face-to-face interviews, due to low numbers of women in different geographical locations, telephone interviews were conducted.

Although we did eventually interview 103 women in the community (not meeting our target of 150) the process of recruitment was very time consuming and labour intensive. However *the total number* of women interviewed (346) in prison *and* in the community over-exceeded our target.

### **1.14 ETHICAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

Socially sensitive research is defined by Sieber and Stanley (1988: 49), as '*studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research*'. Brannen (1988) has claimed that respondents who reveal highly personal details about their lives are vulnerable from three major sources: from themselves, from other people, especially partners who may be implicated in respondents' confidences; and from the researchers themselves. The vulnerability of the researcher in such studies has also been highlighted (Lee, 1993, Cotterill, 1992). Investigating sensitive topics usually introduces into the research process contingencies less commonly found in other kinds of study (Lee, 1993) and provides a number of methodological and ethical concerns for the researcher.

The *topic* of this research was seemingly innocuous. However it has been well documented that our *participants* (female (ex)-offenders) are a particularly vulnerable group who may have experienced multiple disadvantage in their lives. Thus we were aware that within the interview situation, disclosures of a delicate nature may be made. This necessitated acknowledgement of the potentially sensitive nature of the research and therefore we felt it particularly necessary to develop 'Ethical Guidelines' (see Appendix J). This document was intended to be a guide for Peer Researchers and Trainees whilst conducting the fieldwork to ensure that they were working in ways, which minimised the likelihood of harm to both participants and themselves during the research process.

In addition to the ethical issues, which were anticipated, before the research began, a couple of potential ethical issues were highlighted once the research was underway. Where researchers were women in custody interviewing their peers, the interview provided an opportunity for researchers to obtain detailed knowledge of the participants, which may not have been obtained during the 'normal' interaction of prison life. Although researchers were bound by a strict confidentiality agreement contained within the Ethical Guidelines, the potential existed for abuse of this knowledge. Although it is possible that this could happen during the course of any research project, there are particular implications for research in prisons where women exist in a confined and potentially hostile environment.

In addition, prisons are hierarchical environments. There were times during the research process when we felt that women had attended groups because they had been 'told to' by someone in authority thus it became difficult to ascertain whether women were consenting to the interview of their own free will or whether they felt it was 'in their best interests' to do so. When we suspected this was the case we asked women to confirm to us verbally that they wanted to be there before signing the consent form. Also when information sheets had not been distributed by prison staff prior to our visits to the prisons it became difficult to ascertain whether or not women were giving *informed* consent to be interviewed. In all instances we gave a verbal explanation prior to the interview about the aims and objectives of the research and the ways in which it would be used. However under these circumstances we were aware that women may not have had adequate time to digest the information and give adequate consideration to whether or not they wanted to be involved.

It was clear in some instances that women had either been given inaccurate information about the interviews or had not understood the information, which they had been given. Many women thought that the purpose of the interview was for them to receive information from us about employment, training and education rather than for them to give us information! This again raises concerns about the acquisition of informed consent.

## 1.15 DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data was transcribed verbatim from the tape recordings. Analysis of the transcripts was undertaken by the Peer Researchers and the Research Manager and due to strict time constraints, began before all the interviewing was complete. A thematic framework approach was used which involved working through a number of distinct although interconnected phrases in order to make sense of the data.

The first stage of data analysis involved *familiarisation* with the data, reading through a selection of transcripts and listening to tape recordings in order to revisit the research context and immerse ourselves in the data. Notes were made during this process, listing key ideas and recurrent themes within the data and generally any issues, which struck the researchers as interesting/striking/significant.

The next stage of data analysis was to agree our *thematic framework*. This was achieved through systematic examination of the notes made during the familiarisation phase. Following an extensive debate a consensus was reached and our thematic framework was agreed upon [see Appendix N]. Our decisions about the thematic framework were informed by the original aims of the research study and topics on the interview guide. Following this the data was systematically coded (i.e. data was lifted from original context and rearranged according to thematic reference) by the Peer Researchers. This process was undertaken using the software package MAXQDA. The next step was to further summarise the coded data before writing up the results. (NB: Themes were reviewed and refined throughout the data analysis stage as can be seen in Appendix O).

As with the analysis, the writing up of results was an interactive process between the Research Manager and the Peer Researchers. The Research Manager took responsibility for the initial writing up of results. However once each section was complete the Peer Researchers were asked to examine the end product alongside the coded data from which the results were derived. They were then asked to give feedback about whether they felt that the Research Manager's interpretation of the data was accurate and whether it was representative of the dataset. Any changes or additions the Peer Researchers wished to make were discussed and included in the final draft. This procedure

was useful in that it provided a 'checking mechanism' for the interpretation of data, thus adding to the validity of the results. As with all qualitative research it is still important to acknowledge that the final analysis is the interpretation of the research team and not the one and only interpretation.

## **1.16 ISSUES ARISING FROM THE USE OF PEER RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The values imbued within 'peer' and 'participatory' approaches to research have much in common with feminist qualitative research practices and such practices were drawn upon during the design and conduct of the peer research project. This is particularly evident in the following areas:

- Using research as a mechanism to 'give voice' to and 'empower' participants
- Acknowledgement of our own values & beliefs within the research process
- Reducing the traditional division between 'subject' and 'object' in research and breaking down hierarchies in the research situation

## **1.17 'GIVING VOICE' AND EMPOWERMENT**

It has long been asserted that women have been largely absent from criminological research and their needs have been marginalised or ignored (Smart 1974). Smith (1989) has claimed that the absence of women's voices in mainstream research serves only to leave unchanged and unchallenged hierarchical conditions and power imbalances found in wider society. Conducting a research project which is focused solely around the resettlement needs of women offenders offers a unique opportunity to redress the balance and to promote and validate women's voices.

As already discussed, the chosen mode of data collection for this study was that of semi structured interviews. Interviews have become a popular tool for data collection within the tradition of qualitative research, particularly when researching potentially sensitive issues. Using interviews as a tool for data collection represents the opportunity to 'give voice' to a group of women who have frequently been 'socially and politically silenced' (McRobbie, 1982: 52) often due to their life experiences prior to entering the Criminal Justice System and also due to their experiences of the Criminal Justice System itself. We also wanted to give women an opportunity to be listened to whilst living in an environment where they may seldom be given the opportunity to be heard. Feedback from the interviews indicate that women found talking to us to be a positive and empowering experience. They frequently expressed disappointment when they found out that the interviews were a 'one-off' experience. Women we spoke to had much to contribute and thus the interviews were lively and lengthy in many instances. Women in custody have expressed that 'it is good to be listened to' and to have their 'opinions respected and taken seriously' as this 'rarely happens' to them in the prison environment. These views were also echoed by women in the community who had previously served a custodial sentence.

On the few occasions when participants became agitated, distressed or upset during focus groups, the group has often provided immediate support, giving positive reinforcement to the person experiencing difficulties (e.g. with comments such as 'you are strong' 'look how far you've come' 'you can get through this'). Participants in custody also reported that their involvement in interviews prompted them to think about preparing for their own release and the problems they may face. This was generally reported as being a positive thing, providing a boost or 'a kick start'. These factors have undoubtedly added an empowering dimension to the research, which may not have been apparent within more traditional research contexts.

## **1.18 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF OUR OWN VALUES & BELIEFS WITHIN THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

Feminist research has been influential in highlighting the need for the researcher to make explicit ways in which her views, thinking and conduct may impact upon the process of the research at all stages. Understanding the 'intellectual autobiography' and the 'personal history' of the researcher (Maynard 1994) *and the way in which this impacts upon the research process* has been emphasised as a crucial part of the research process and an integral feature of good quality feminist, qualitative research (Acker et al, 1991). When undertaking peer research, where the researcher may have a great deal of similarities/shared experiences with the participant, an awareness of these issues may be considered to be particularly important. Throughout the process of conducting

the research, the research team acknowledged that it is impossible to collect data that is untainted by our own values, beliefs and involvements (Stanley and Wise, 1993). Both Peer Researchers and Trainees often expressed a great personal passion and enthusiasm for the work they undertook and talked about it being 'close to their hearts'. Indeed one Peer Researcher referred to the work as her 'personal mission'.

Shared experiences have resulted in the interview situation often being used as a way for both participants and researchers to discuss their own experiences and views about the Criminal Justice System. The way in which values and beliefs were often made explicit in the interview process inevitably had an impact on the 'tone' of the interview. Indeed, interviews often proved to be an interactive process where frustrations and concerns about the Criminal Justice System were vented, not only by participants but also by interviewers! Additionally, the role of the interviewer often shifted from *gatherer* of information to *provider* of information as the researchers imparted knowledge about their own experiences and use of different services.

It is apparent when listening to some of the tapes that these shifts away from a more traditional research environment has sometimes influenced the ways in which questioning has occurred and questions have been asked in a somewhat leading manner (See example below).

**Interviewer:** *Don't forget that things are going to be very different out there when we go out, I mean we're all doing quite large sentences and things do change out there...so do you think it would be helpful if somebody would come in who was like a careers officer who would come and update you on what is going on out there?*

**Interviewer:** *Do you think it would be a nice idea if the jobs that we do, they could combine them even say in the gardens... if they started doing an NVQ that combined with the job?*

In these instances it has been clear that researchers have had their own agendas (particularly in terms of what the pilot projects should be), which may have impacted upon the results, which we have obtained. It is clear that the chosen methodology of peer research is far removed from the desirability of 'objectivity' in research imbued in more traditional methods. However, one of the key criteria for good quality qualitative research is to acknowledge and make explicit one's own subjectivity within the research process and this is something which has been borne in mind and discussed throughout the research process.

## 1.19 REDUCING THE TRADITIONAL DIVISION BETWEEN 'SUBJECT' AND 'OBJECT' IN RESEARCH

Feminist researchers have argued that to understand the world of those being researched the traditional division between 'subject' and 'object' in research must be broken down. The researcher must 'be able to work very differently than she is able to with established sociological strategies of thinking and inquiry' and recognise how researchers 'participate as subjects in the orders of ruling' (Smith, 1992: 96).

Feminist writers have stressed the importance of 'breaking down barriers' in the research process and have advocated a non-hierarchical relationship within the interview process. In a key text, Oakley (1981) advocates that the most effective interviews are conducted when 'the relationship of the interviewer and the interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship' (1981: 41). The issue of investment of personal identity is one, which has been discussed and negotiated throughout the course of the project.

At the beginning of this study it was felt that a researcher openly disclosing their own status as an (ex) offender may serve two functions. Firstly, it may break down barriers and increase rapport between interviewer and interviewee; participants may feel more relaxed speaking to someone who they know has a similar background. Also, the participant may feel inspired by seeing a peer engaging in such work thus offering a useful form of pro-social modelling. However, it could also result in resentment on the part of those being interviewed ('how come you get to do that, you're no better than me?'). Also within the prison environment, women may be reluctant to open up to fellow inmates and to provide them with information, which could be used against them at a later date. On reflection the research team feel that on the whole the former has occurred and disclosing one's own background has had a positive impact on interviews, helping participants to feel relaxed and comfortable. In this sense the interview situation sometimes appeared more like a chat between friends and the division between 'subject' and 'object' was rendered almost invisible.

## 1.20 BENEFITS OF PEER INVOLVEMENT IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

- As service users, peers have in depth knowledge of the roles of prison staff so have been able to advise on the personnel who may be best able/willing to assist us with conducting the research in prison. To a lesser extent this has also happened within community organisations. This has vastly reduced the amount of 'gate keeping' encountered by the research team.
- Prison establishment and community organisation staff have generally responded very positively to peer involvement in the project and have been supportive of the women involved. This has also resulted in a reduction in 'gate keeping'
- Peers have been able to recruit participants easily and efficiently on our behalf. It is possible that there has been greater willingness for women to participate having been asked by a member of their 'peer group' as opposed to an 'outsider'.
- Peers have extensive knowledge about the subject being researched. This has positively influenced the research design and has also provided valuable learning experiences for members of the research team with a non-offending background.
- Peers have extensive experience of the subject being researched. Their willingness to share personal experiences and difficulties have enabled the research to be conducted in a sensitive and informed manner. It has also ensured that the research has remained focused on issues which were relevant to our target group thus enhancing the reliability/validity of the findings
- Employing peers has facilitated interview situations, which are relaxed and informal. Women appear to have been comfortable and open when discussing their experiences
- The use of peers has enabled interviews to have multiple functions, which have been empowering for women (i.e. information/experience exchange between researcher and researched, as well as gathering the required information)
- Training opportunities and work experience have been made available for Peer Researchers and Trainees within a field which is relevant and important to them
- Women have been enabled to develop new skills and knowledge which has improved self concept and increased confidence and assertiveness
- The above has had a knock on effect in some cases: - increasing women's assertiveness when dealing with agencies and also having a positive impact on the way women offenders are perceived by prison staff
- Women have had the opportunity to directly influence decision making within the Women into Work programme which has had benefits both for the women and for the programme
- Women have had the opportunity to be involved in a project where their experiences of the Criminal Justice System have been validated and valued
- For some women, involvement in the project has involved communication and collaboration with those working in the Criminal Justice System at all levels. This may have enabled women to 'normalise' these people and also to understand different perspectives on issues which are pertinent to them
- Undertaking work and training has enabled women in custody to remove themselves from the prison environment and to meet new people in a welcoming and non-judgemental environment
- Peer Researchers have provided positive role models for Trainees and Trainees have provided positive role models for interview participants
- Trainees in custody have been able to earn a wage which can be saved for release

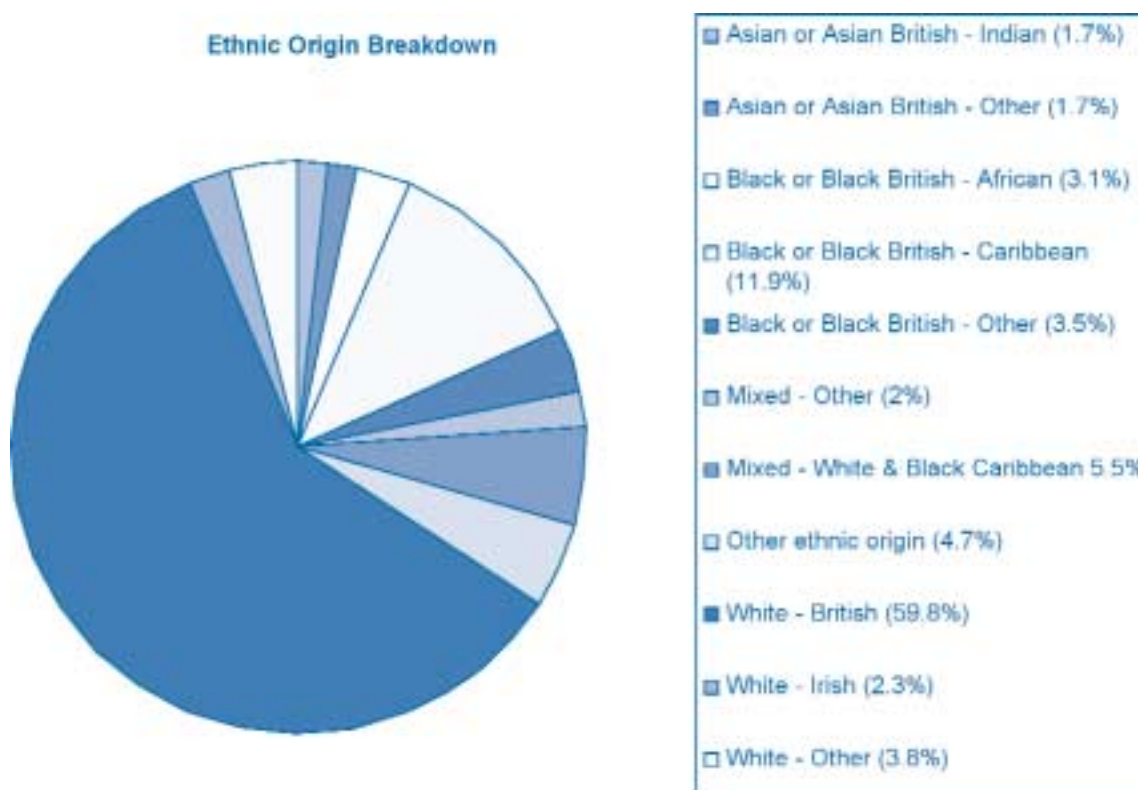
## 1.21 DISBENEFITS OF PEER INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

- Peers are more likely to have own agenda and therefore ask more leading questions than non-peers and impose their own views on the research
- Involving women who have no previous experience of research has meant that it has not been possible to involve many of them in all stages of the research (i.e. analysis and writing up). Developing the skills to have this level of involvement would have necessitated far more intensive training and this was not possible within the tight timescales for the project (NB: the Peer Researchers were involved in all stages but this was not possible for the Trainees)
- For women in prison who have been involved in the programme, it has sometimes proved both problematic and time consuming to make the necessary arrangements to enable them to attend training courses and meetings particularly when attempting to negotiate licences. In some cases it has been difficult to make contact with prison staff and Trainees
- Additionally, there have been occasions where Trainees in custody have been unable to attend certain meeting/events because it has not been possible to negotiate licences within short timescales
- Getting all Trainees and Peer Researchers together at a central point was very difficult especially in terms of times for facilities licences
- If time/dates of meetings had to be changed at short notice, Trainees were often unable to attend as licences could not be organised within the timescale
- In order to give Trainee opportunities to the maximum number of women, the posts were advertised and recruitment took place nationally. This has proved costly both in terms of money and time for Trainees and Research Team staff
- Many Trainees actually wanted to work more hours than were available on the programme but due to the high number of Trainees involved (25) this was not possible
- Trainees in the community who were on benefits have been able to earn very little money through their involvement in the project without their benefits being affected
- Due to the wide geographical spread of Trainees it proved difficult to keep updated on their work activities. This also created difficulties in updating Trainees on what was happening on the programme. The vast majority of communication occurred via letter or telephone, rather than face to face
- Some women have found it to be a rather daunting experience to go back into prisons where they may once have resided
- Peer involvement may raise concerns with those people working with this particular client group (i.e. workers involved in drugs work may feel concerned about someone who has been convicted of a drugs offence in the past coming in to interview one of their clients)

# SECTION 2: FINDINGS OF THE PEER RESEARCH

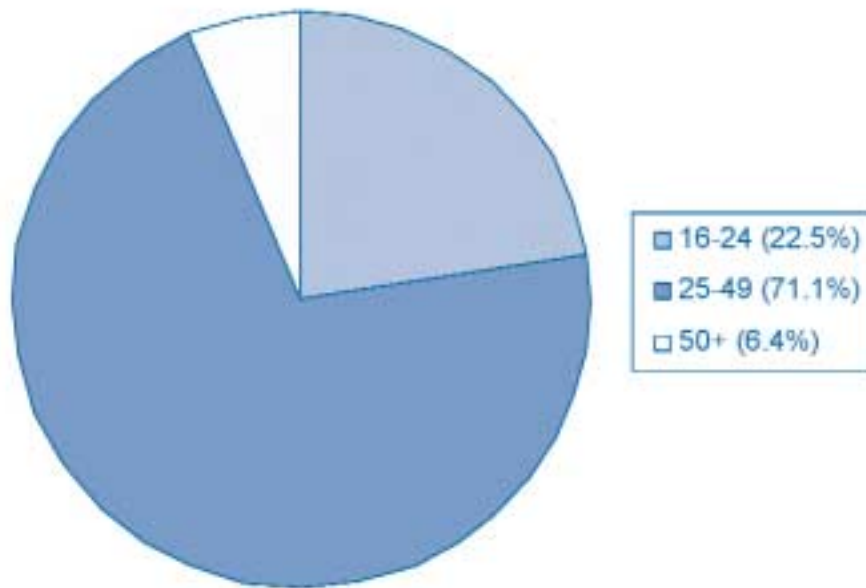
The results are organised according to the three key issues which the peer research was designed to address (importance/centrality of ETE, barriers to ETE, support for ETE) and also the thematic framework, which was established by the research team. Wherever appropriate, verbatim quotes from participants are offered to encapsulate and exemplify the main issues, which are being discussed. In addition to the text presented here you will find attached as Appendix P a 'who said what' grid (Green, 2003) which gives an indication of the number of interview transcripts which contain data pertaining to each individual theme. This table, in conjunction with the 'Characteristics of the Sample' section below which provides biographical/demographic information on the individual participants should assist the reader in interpreting the study's findings and considering the transferability of its results to other comparable populations. Results of the custody and community data are presented together. This is because there were no significant differences between the two data sets, which would justify separate analysis. There is a particular focus on the experiences of being in custody/making the transition back into the community. This is because the majority of our sample (70%) were in custody but also, many women in the community sample had also been in prison at some time in their lives and they frequently discussed these issues during interviews. This is perhaps indicative of the impact which serving a custodial sentence had on their lives.

## 2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE



- **Ethnic Origin Breakdown (n=346)**

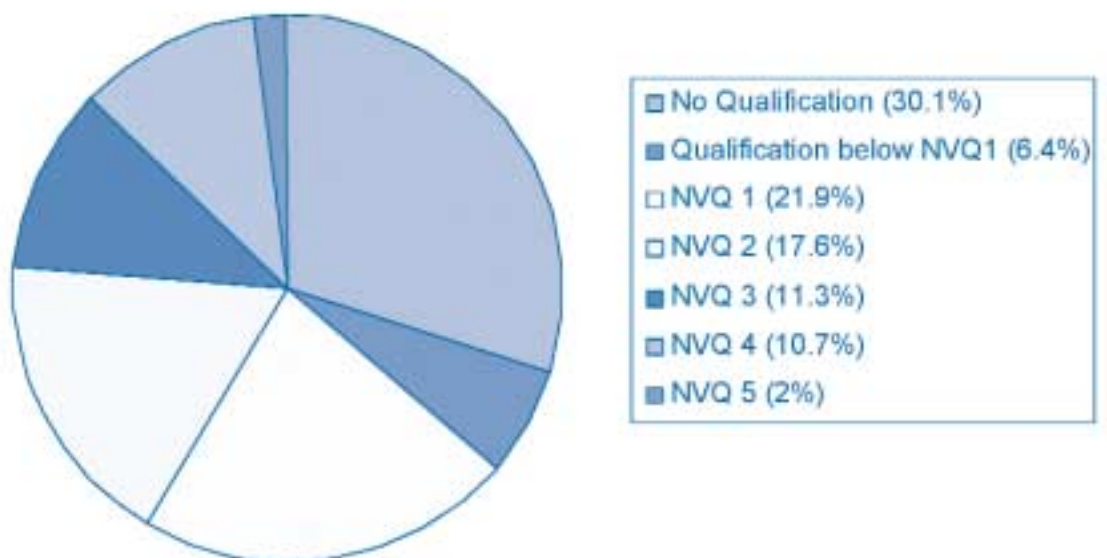
Age



- Age of Beneficiaries (n=346)

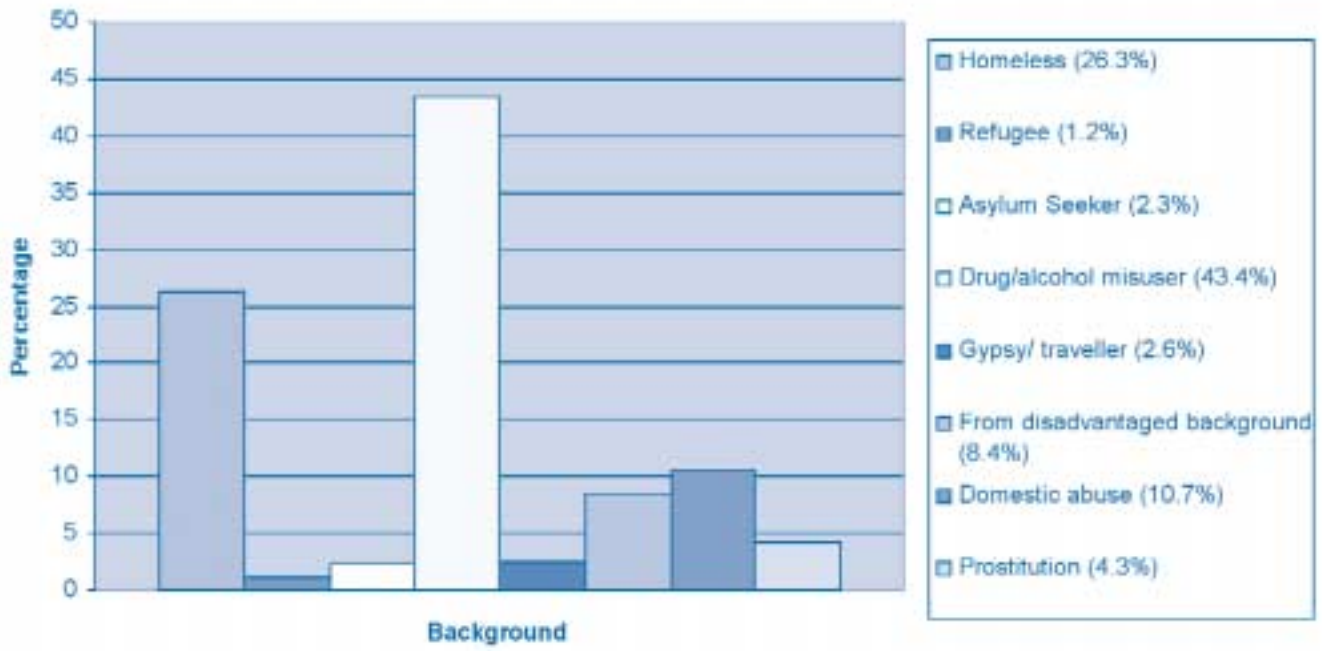
The ages range from 18 – 66, with the average age being 32.7 years

Highest Qualification obtained by women before entering the Women into Work Programme



- Qualifications (n=346)

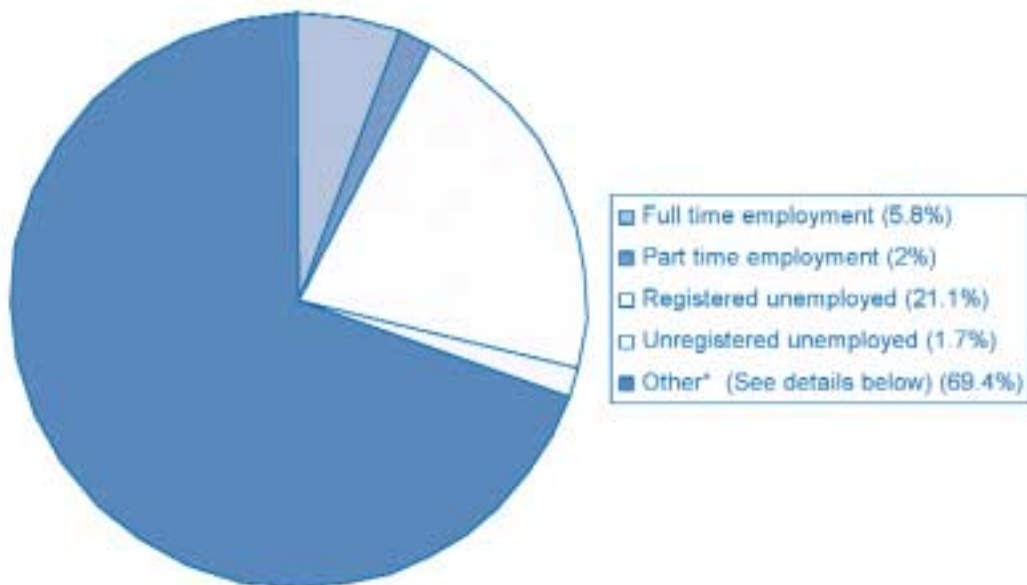
### Background



- **Background (n=346)**

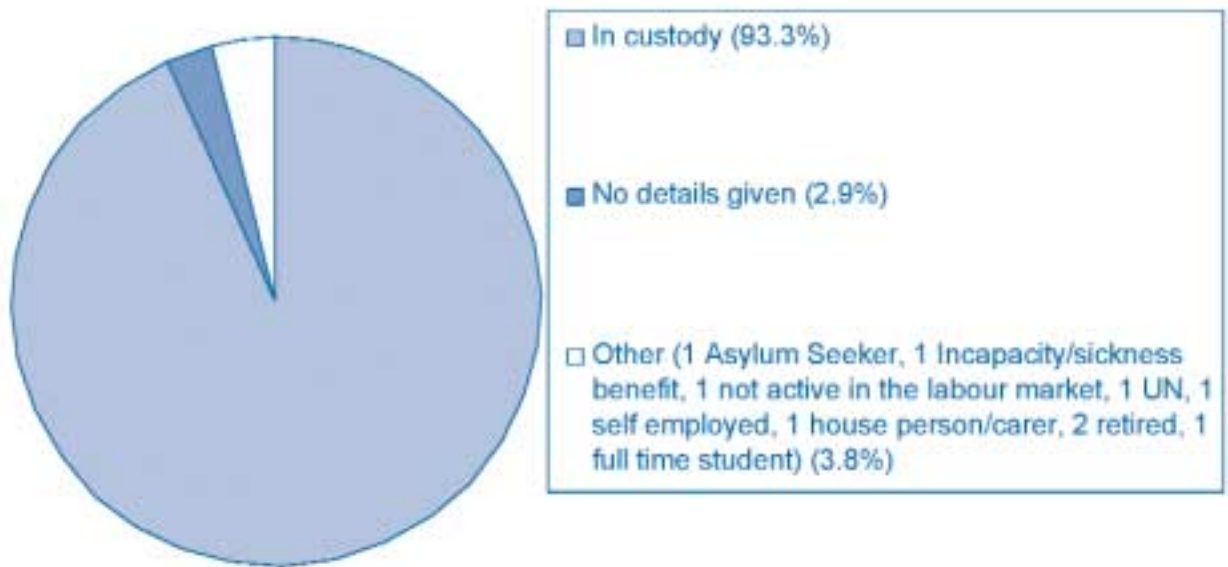
Please note that women were asked to tick all that applied

### Employment Status



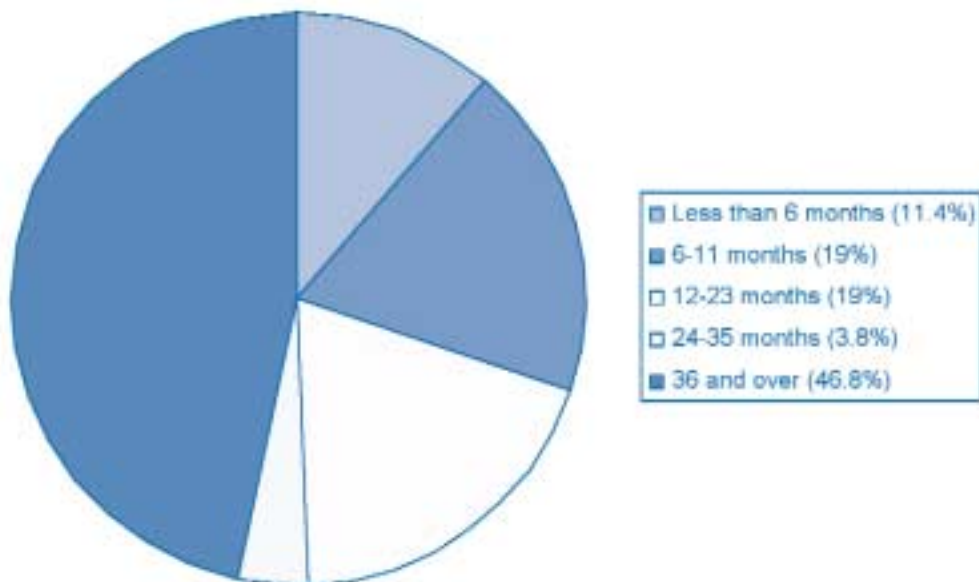
- **Employment (n=346)**

### Employment - Other



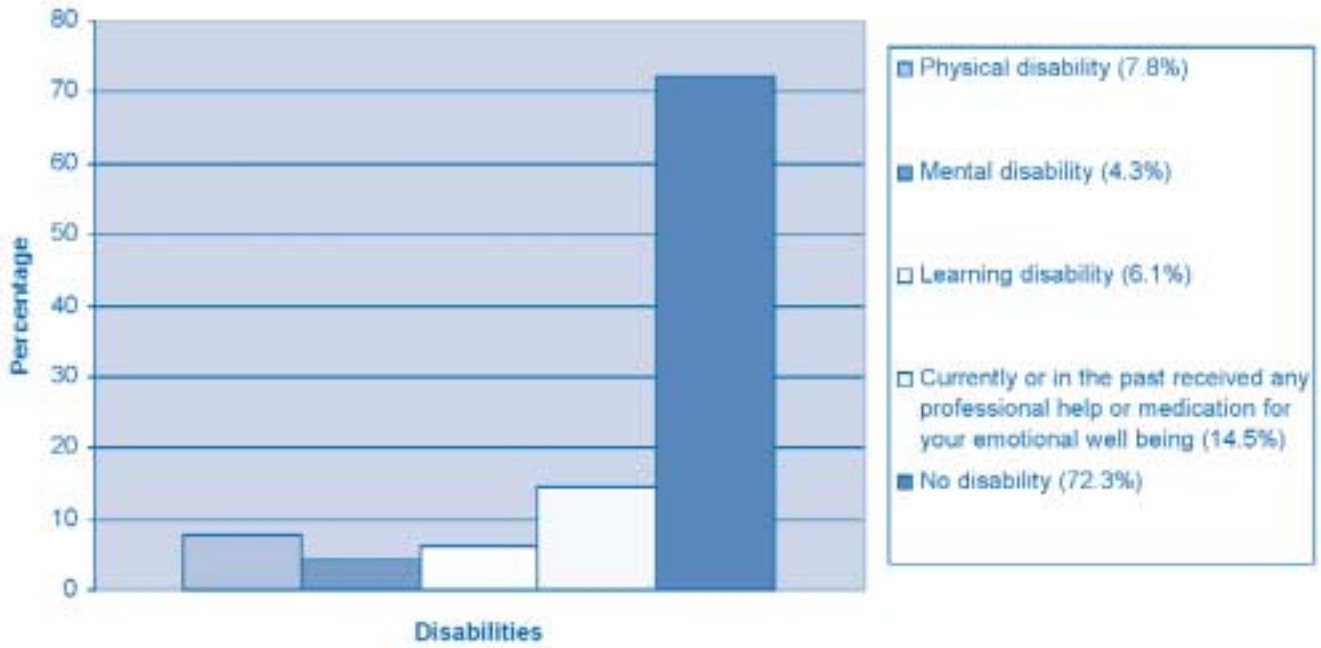
- Other employment details (n=240)

### Length of unemployment



- Length of registered/unregistered unemployed (n=79)

### Health



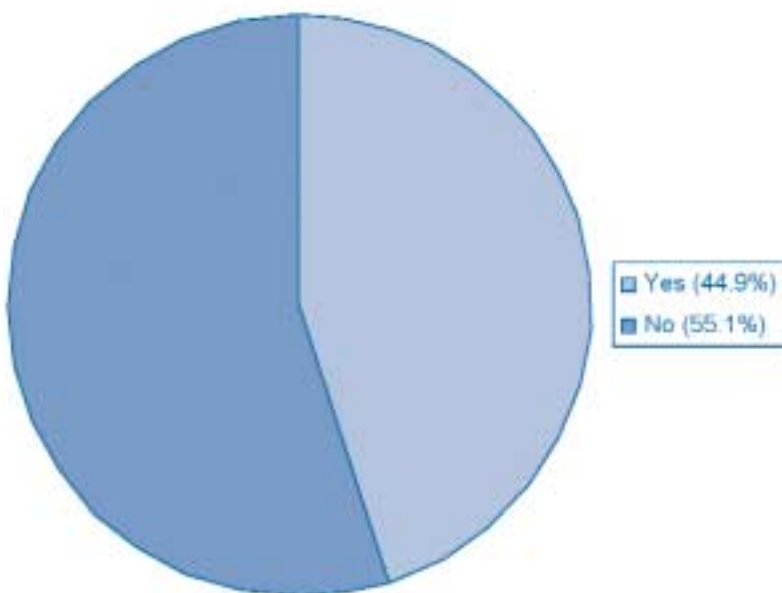
- **Health (n=346)**

Please note that women were asked to tick all that applied

*Nb: The 'professional help and medication' option was only added approximately half way through the research (see Appendix L)*

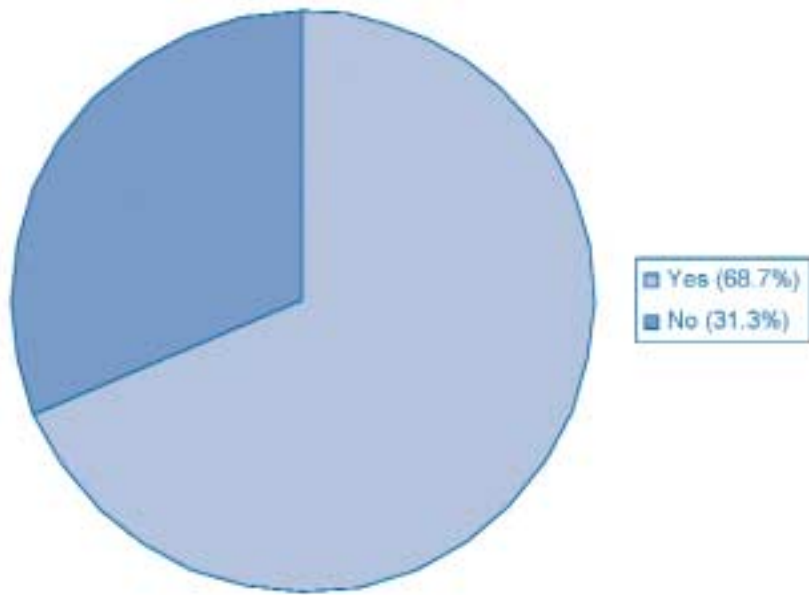
## WOMEN IN CUSTODY ONLY

### Work prior to Custody?



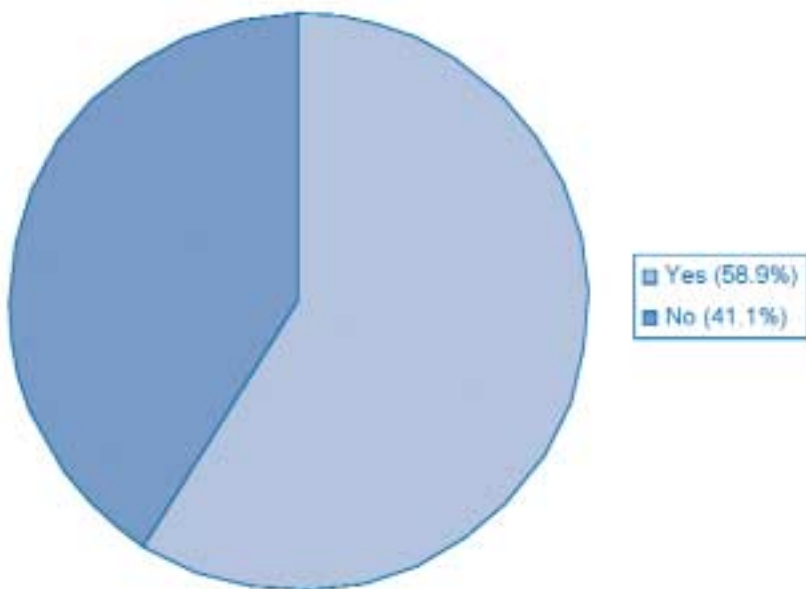
Work Prior to custody? (n=243)

First time in Prison?



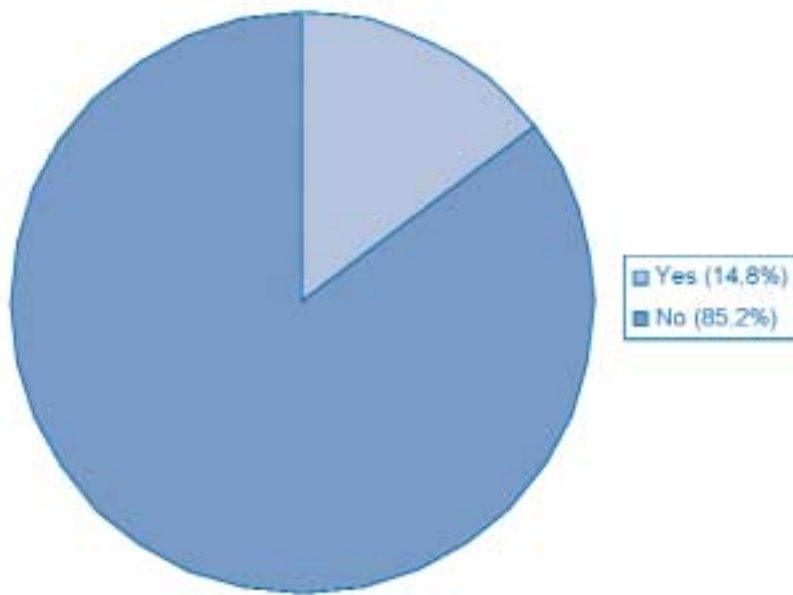
- First time in prison? (n=243)

Accommodation arranged on release?



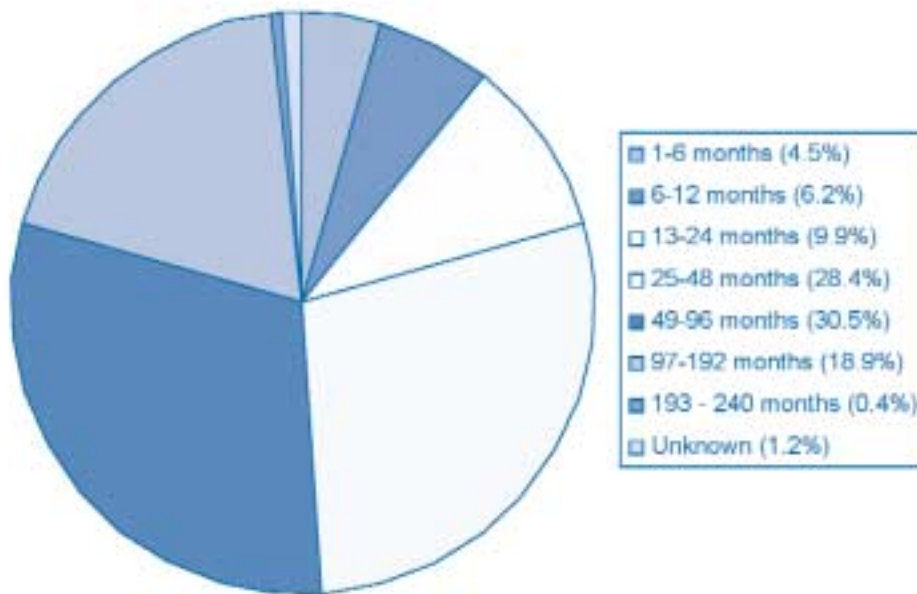
- Accommodation arranged on release (n=243)

### Work arranged on release?



v Work arranged on release (n=243)

### Length of sentence

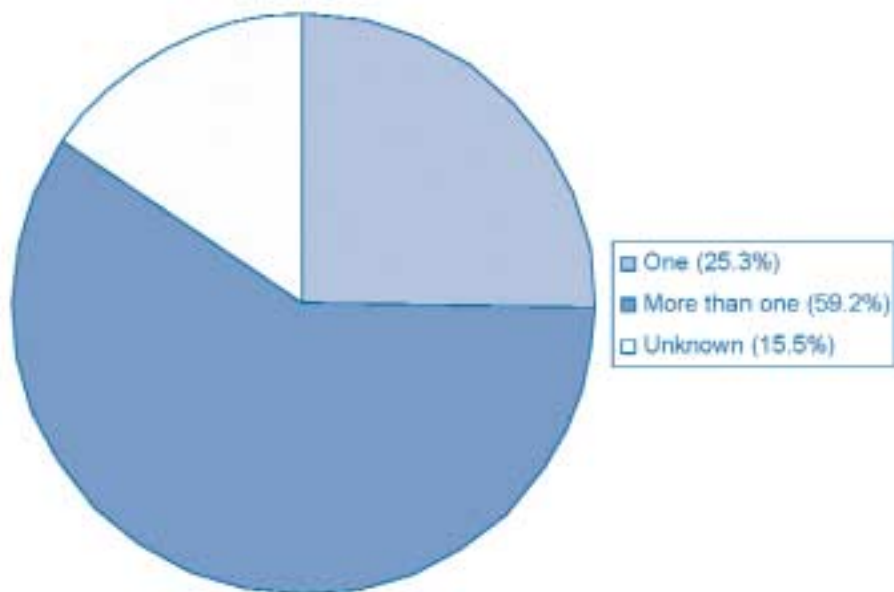


- **Length of sentence (n=243)**

The length of sentence range from 3 months to 240 months (20 years). The average sentence length is 62.6 months (5.2 years)

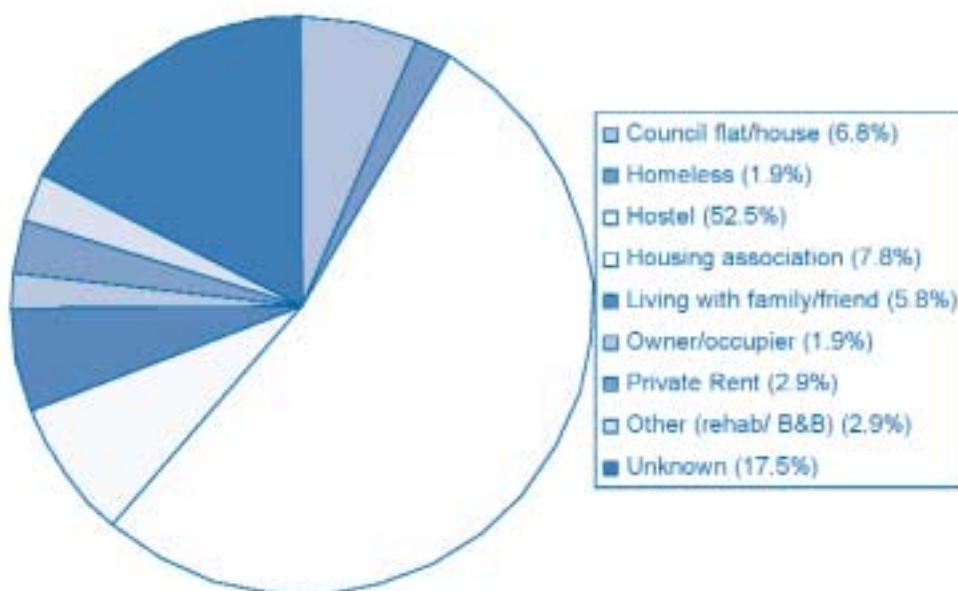
# WOMEN IN COMMUNITY ONLY

Number of Convictions



- Number of convictions (n=103)

Current Accommodation

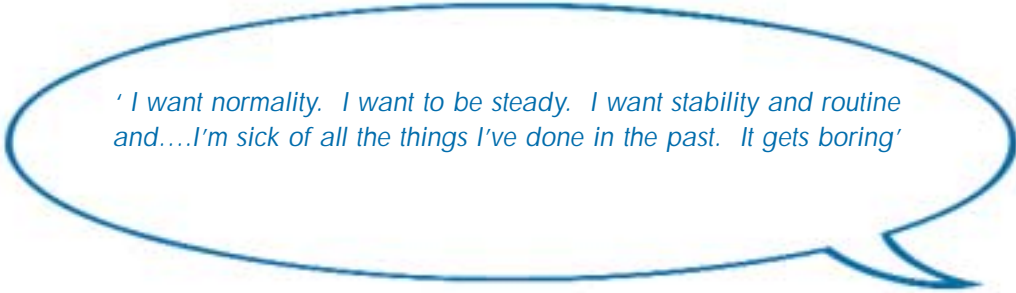


- Current Accommodation

## 2.2 IMPORTANCE/CENTRALITY OF ETE

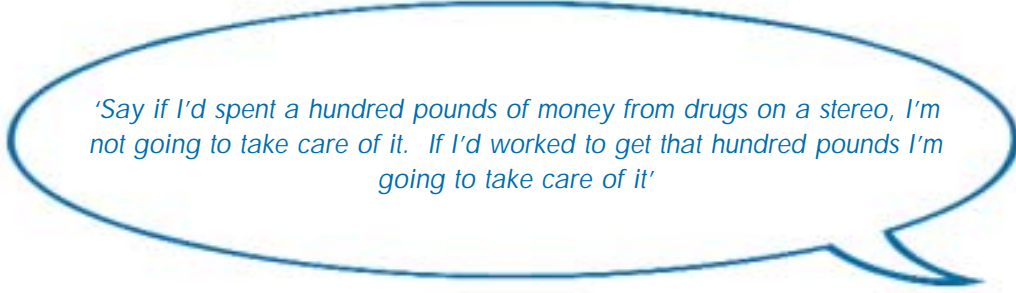
### 2.2.1 Escape from previous lifestyle/Achieving normality

Women perceive getting into ETE as important for a variety of reasons. To many women breaking out of old lifestyle patterns and earning their own money represented a sense of freedom and overall well being, offering the opportunity to escape from an offending lifestyle and to have a so-called 'normal lifestyle' incorporating routine, stability, independence and taking responsibility for themselves and their family. It is felt by women that this will lead to a degree of acceptance within society. This is particularly important for those women who have always felt 'different' and 'excluded' due to their criminal background.



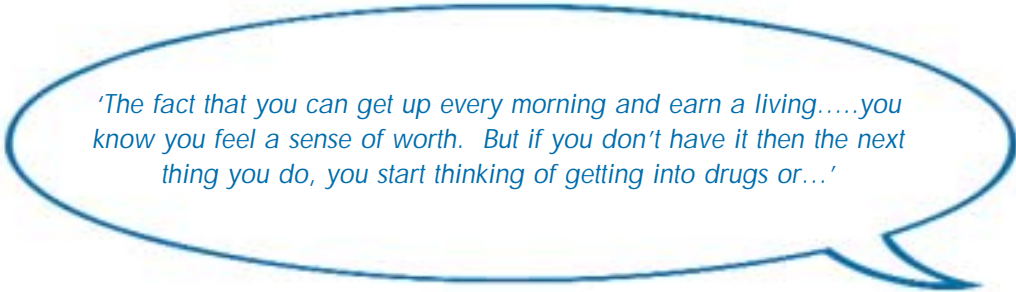
*'I want normality. I want to be steady. I want stability and routine and...I'm sick of all the things I've done in the past. It gets boring'*

The opportunity to engage in paid employment and the potential financial rewards which it brings firstly offers women an incentive to move away from a criminal lifestyle and the associated dangers. This was particularly important for women whose drug problems had led them into criminality. Earning one's own money was deemed to have important psychological rewards, providing a feeling of achievement rather than the feelings of guilt, which are associated with earning money illegally. Women speak of earning an income as important in terms of learning to value and respect money and possessions.



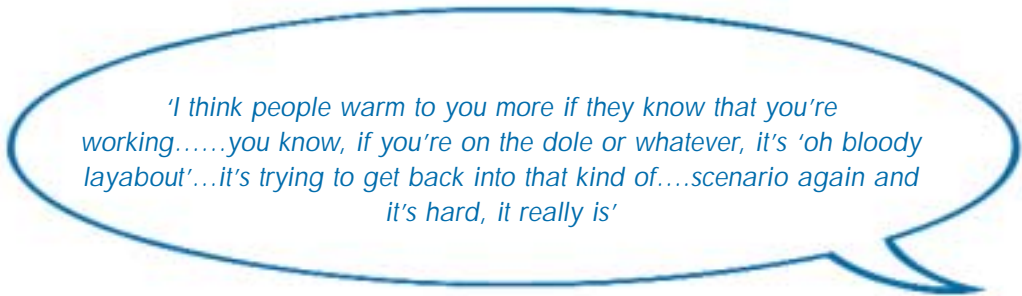
*'Say if I'd spent a hundred pounds of money from drugs on a stereo, I'm not going to take care of it. If I'd worked to get that hundred pounds I'm going to take care of it'*

Women also spoke of the importance of ETE in their battle to stay away from crime, offering 'something to do' and the incentive to 'get up in a morning' and to do something productive with their time.



*'The fact that you can get up every morning and earn a living....you know you feel a sense of worth. But if you don't have it then the next thing you do, you start thinking of getting into drugs or...'*

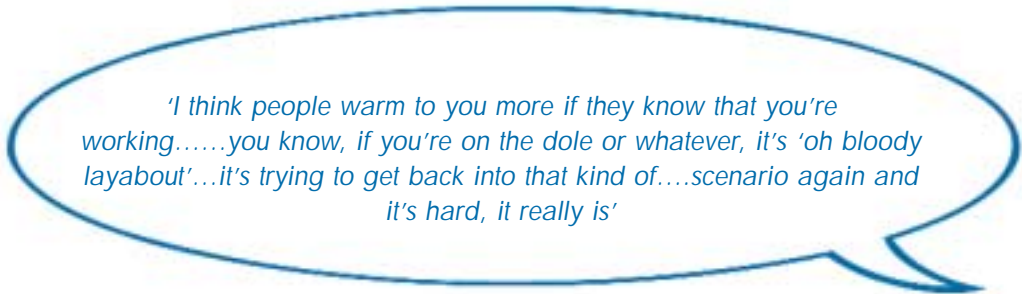
ETE offers women the opportunity to escape from the 'criminal clique' in which they may have been immersed and to meet a variety of people who may impact positively on their lives. Also, ETE provides a valuable asset in the struggle for social integration following a conviction.



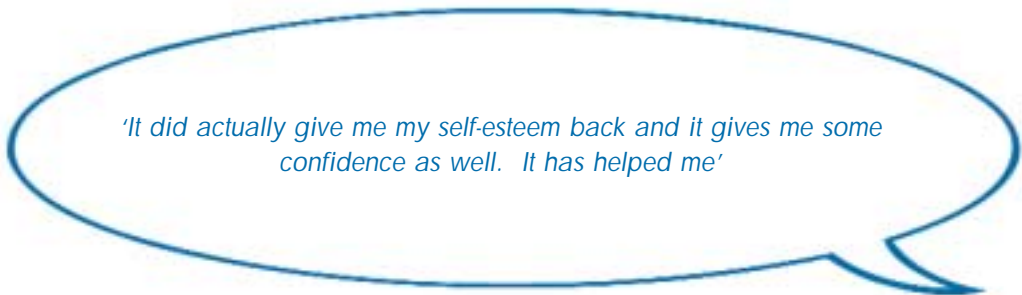
*'I think people warm to you more if they know that you're working.....you know, if you're on the dole or whatever, it's 'oh bloody layabout'...it's trying to get back into that kind of....scenario again and it's hard, it really is'*

### 2.2.2 Improving Self Concept

Women speak of their involvement in ETE as part of their 'rebuilding process' following a conviction, on both a practical and emotional level. In particular, the increased confidence that women get from ETE whilst in custody enables them to cope with reality in the outside world more effectively



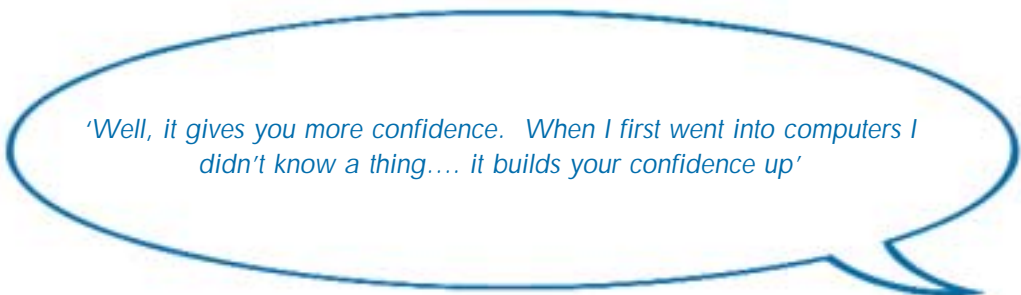
*'I think people warm to you more if they know that you're working.....you know, if you're on the dole or whatever, it's 'oh bloody layabout'...it's trying to get back into that kind of....scenario again and it's hard, it really is'*



*'It did actually give me my self-esteem back and it gives me some confidence as well. It has helped me'*

ETE is also an important factor in re-establishing (or in some cases gaining for the first time) a sense of self worth. An important part of this process derives from receiving a positive reaction from people in ETE environments and being treated the same as people from non-offending backgrounds.

Women speak of being pleasantly surprised by their achievements when placed in ETE settings, which offer opportunities conducive to their needs. This is particularly apparent in relation to IT skills and for those women who have never previously been involved in ETE. Proving their own capabilities in initially foreign and potentially hostile environments provides a huge boost to women and impacts positively on their self-perception. This encourages women to consider other possibilities for progression, which would previously have appeared to be out of reach.



*'Well, it gives you more confidence. When I first went into computers I didn't know a thing.... it builds your confidence up'*

The ability to earn one's own money also results in an increasing 'sense of worth' and an increased amount of self-respect for women.

*'When you're working hard for your money you know, it means more to you than when you're selling a bag [heroin]...I think it's a sense of.....worth, that you value yourself'*

This in turn feeds into an increased sense of 'fitting in' and being able to 'hold their head up high'.

The positive effects and outcomes arising from involvement in ETE are very apparent within the transcripts. However it is important to remember that many women in our sample come from a place of very low self esteem and many have experienced numerous 'knock backs'. An improved self-concept which results from involvement in ETE may for some women be fragile and easily eroded, particularly for those women with drug problems.

*'It gave me that bit of self worth. I thought 'Oh yeah, I'm doing this, I'm getting good grades...I felt really good about myself for a short while but you know, when you get back into the drugs scene again, everything just goes out the window'*

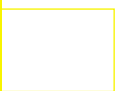
For this reason the importance of maintaining women's momentum and motivation to stay involved in ETE cannot be overstated.

### 2.2.3 Prison as Opportunity

There existed a high level of motivation to engage in ETE among the women in our custody sample and there were a number of motivational factors. For women in custody, ETE was viewed as a mechanism to help women 'get through' their prison sentence and as offering a sense of purpose in a seemingly purposeless existence. Also prison offers women the opportunity to engage in ETE in a focused manner, without external distractions. The majority of women in the custody sample have reported that they have been given ETE opportunities in prison which they wouldn't have had on 'the outside' (often due to drug taking and the resulting chaotic lifestyle and/or due to childcare responsibilities) and they have taken full advantage of these.

*'I've got more opportunities now since I came into prison than before I come into prison...I'd never had the opportunity to study cause I was like with me children'*

*'I would never have done it when I was outside. I left school at 14. I didn't have no qualifications when I come to prison. I thought I couldn't do it'*

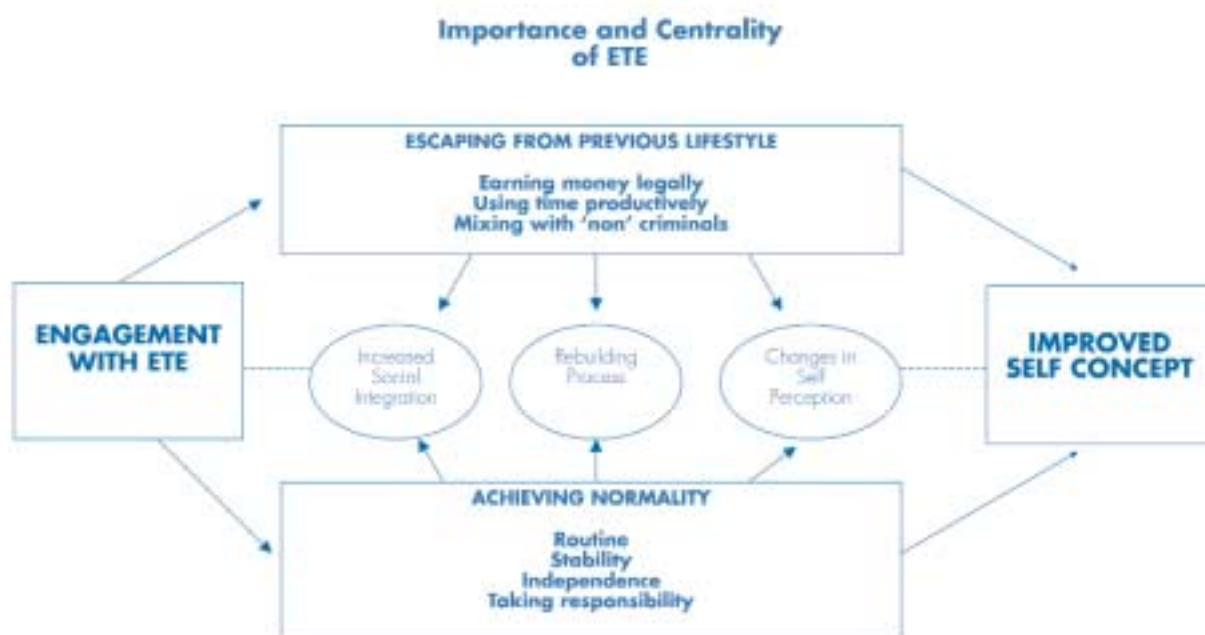


Learning new skills and enhancing existing skills whilst in prison offered women a useful 'stepping stone' to assist in 'bettering themselves' on release. Where women have engaged usefully with ETE in the prison environment, this was perceived as providing an important part of the re-integration process on leaving prison and offers women the opportunity to participate more fully in life outside.

It is particularly important that skills and learning are formally recognised. Gaining qualifications and certificates when in prison offers women something to look forward to and a sense of purpose on release. Through involvement in ETE women perceive that they have increased choices in terms of what they are able to achieve in the future.

Women speak of a determination to make positive progression whilst in prison, thus ensuring that the time they spend in custody is not wasted. In this sense women speak of having gained rather than lost out from coming to prison. In addition, in some cases prison provides women with drug problems with the opportunity to detox and access treatment facilities. However it is important to note that the level of support for drug problems varies between establishments and is often very limited.

The importance/centrality of ETE in the lives of women (ex) offenders is illustrated in Figure 2.



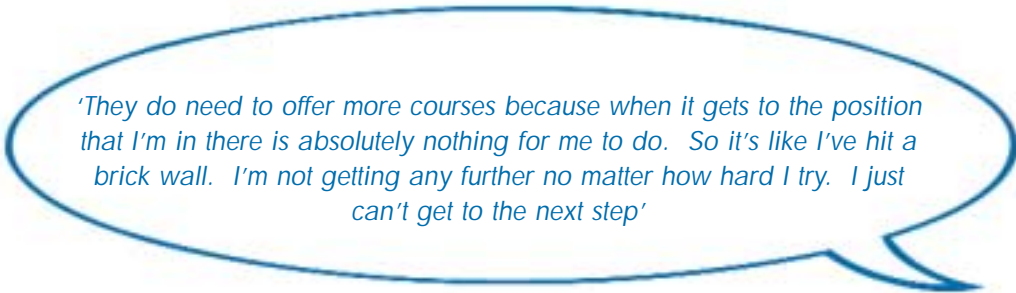
## 2.3 BARRIERS TO ETE

### 2.3.1 Limitations of ETE in Prison Environment

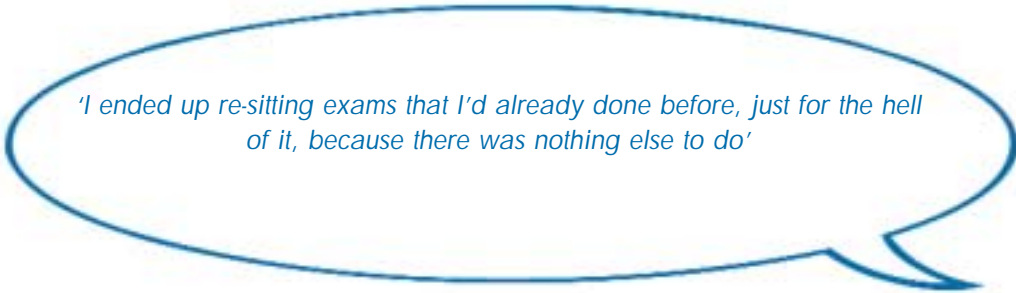
Although many women have a positive experience of ETE whilst in custody, the level of satisfaction varied somewhat between establishments and our data shows that experiences are not uniformly positive. Women also referred to the limitations of ETE in prison. These include: -

### 2.3.2 Limited Opportunities to Progress

Many women in our sample were frustrated by the over-emphasis on basic skills level education within prisons. Women stated that much of the available ETE and also staff time is focused upon those women who have the most acute needs. Although women could understand why this was the case it limited their ability to challenge themselves. Many women were unable to make the progress they would like because higher-level courses simply were not available to them.

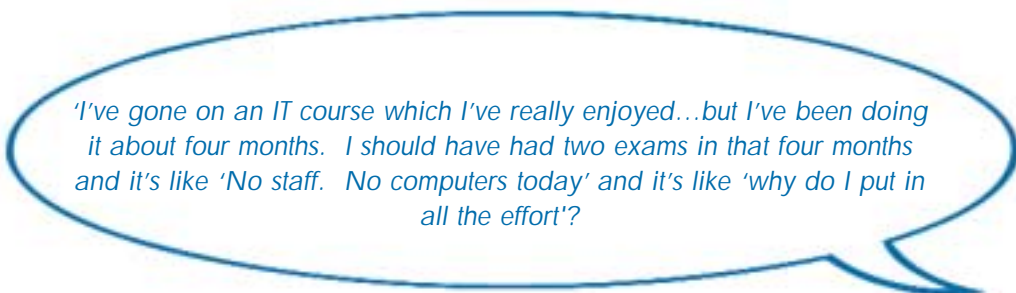


*'They do need to offer more courses because when it gets to the position that I'm in there is absolutely nothing for me to do. So it's like I've hit a brick wall. I'm not getting any further no matter how hard I try. I just can't get to the next step'*



*'I ended up re-sitting exams that I'd already done before, just for the hell of it, because there was nothing else to do'*

As well as the limited amount of courses, those which are available are often over-subscribed thus women are placed on long waiting lists. This is particularly problematic for those women who are serving short sentences as by the time a place becomes available they may well have left the establishment. Women also speak of a lack of available staff and equipment, which again, limits their ability to progress.




*'I've gone on an IT course which I've really enjoyed...but I've been doing it about four months. I should have had two exams in that four months and it's like 'No staff. No computers today' and it's like 'why do I put in all the effort?'*

In addition, when women are transferred between prisons they are often unable to continue with the ETE they had been involved in previously. Also some women had to repeat courses, which they had already completed because relevant information was not passed between establishments. This results in women feeling that their time is being wasted and they are not making any progress.

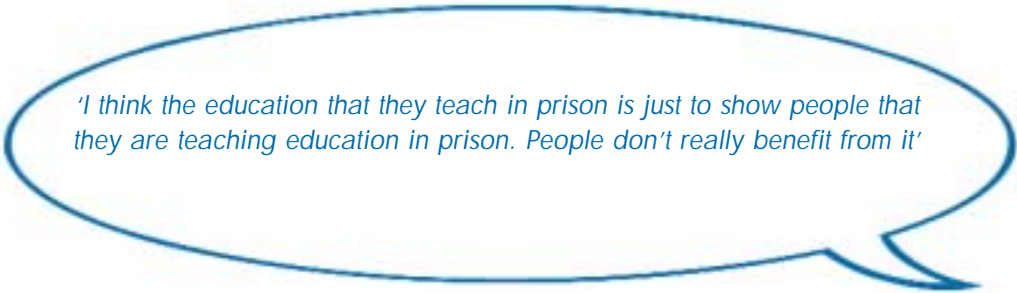
### **2.3.3 Lack of Tailoring to Individual Need**

Women report that very little of the ETE which they undertake whilst in custody is actually tailored towards their own individual needs. Women speak of 'being told' what they are going to do rather than being asked what they would like to do and this leads to dissatisfaction. Women would like more opportunities to gain experience, which is relevant to a chosen career, rather than (or in addition to) the prison work, which they are obliged to undertake. Women find it particularly difficult to obtain work placements, which may complement and enhance their education and lead to increased employability on release.



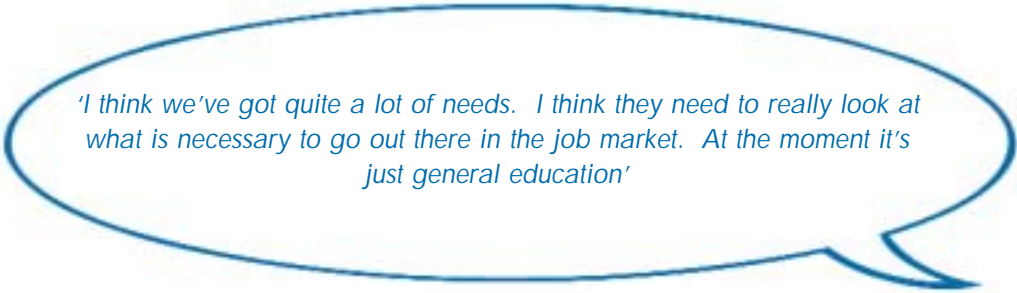
*'I've done my NVQ in hairdressing.... I wanted to get a job in hairdressing but every place that I phoned up, they were all looking for experience, you know, working in a salon experience, so it seemed like doing my NVQ...to me it had been wasting time'*

Women state that, to a certain extent, the ETE offered in prisons is 'tokenistic' and about 'being able to tick the right boxes'. The diverse needs and aspirations of women tend not to be addressed thus women feel that it is the prison itself rather than them as individuals who are benefiting from it.

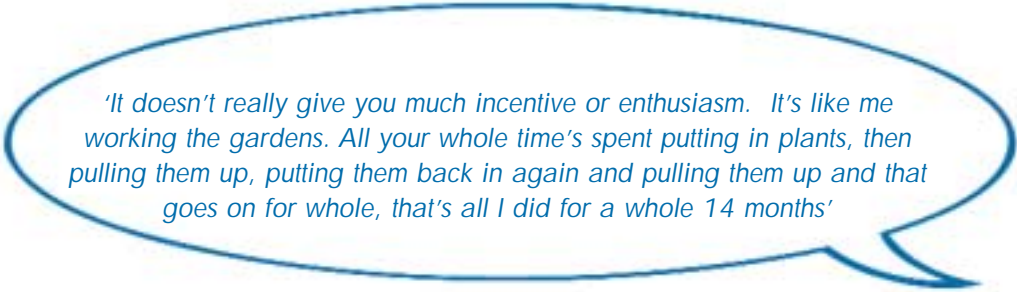


*'I think the education that they teach in prison is just to show people that they are teaching education in prison. People don't really benefit from it'*

Women also claim that ETE is not tailored towards the job market outside of custody and does not necessarily equip them with skills and experience, which would be attractive to potential employers. Women feel frustrated when the work, which they undertake, appears mindless and boring. Whilst acknowledging this work does need to be done, more satisfaction could be gained by striking a balance between work done as a matter of duty and work done to develop or enhance skills relevant to life outside.



*'I think we've got quite a lot of needs. I think they need to really look at what is necessary to go out there in the job market. At the moment it's just general education'*

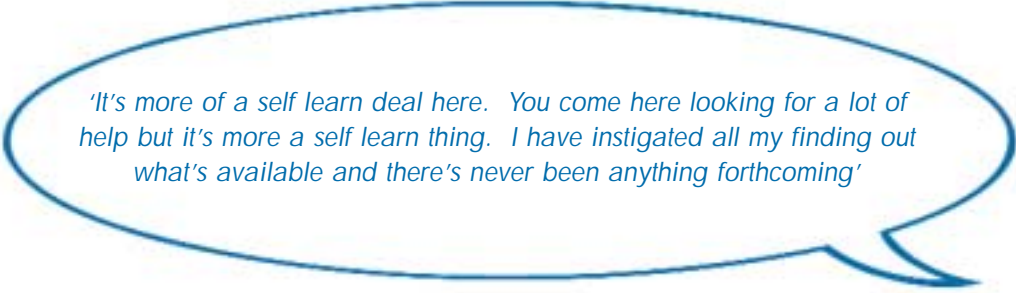


*'It doesn't really give you much incentive or enthusiasm. It's like me working the gardens. All your whole time's spent putting in plants, then pulling them up, putting them back in again and pulling them up and that goes on for whole, that's all I did for a whole 14 months'*

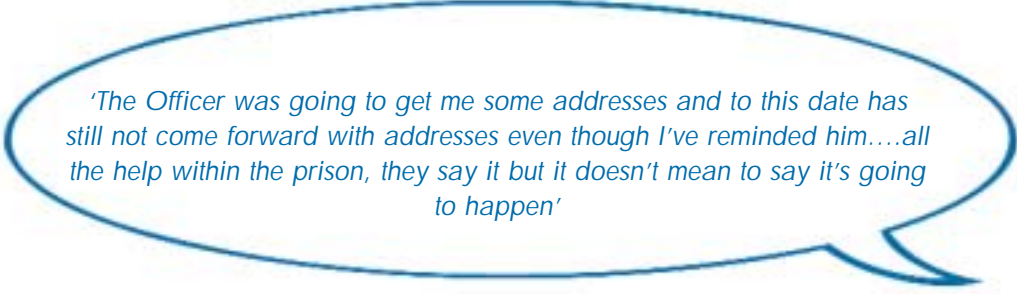
Additionally, for those women in employment before coming into prison, there is little opportunity to maintain skills pertinent to their chosen career. Also women serving short sentences may be particularly disadvantaged in terms of ETE opportunities. Not only do they find it difficult to receive useful sentence planning and access to courses but the short time which they are in custody often means that there is little change in their mindset thus such women may be at a higher risk of simply returning to their previous lifestyle.

### **2.3.4 Lack of Information**

Women report a lack of information about opportunities, which are available to them whilst in custody. In order to find out about different courses, women have to be very pro-active and the necessary information is not readily on display. Women speak about asking for information from various prison staff and it not being forthcoming. This leads to feelings of frustration at not being able to use their time constructively and also a lack of faith in prison staff.



*'It's more of a self learn deal here. You come here looking for a lot of help but it's more a self learn thing. I have instigated all my finding out what's available and there's never been anything forthcoming'*



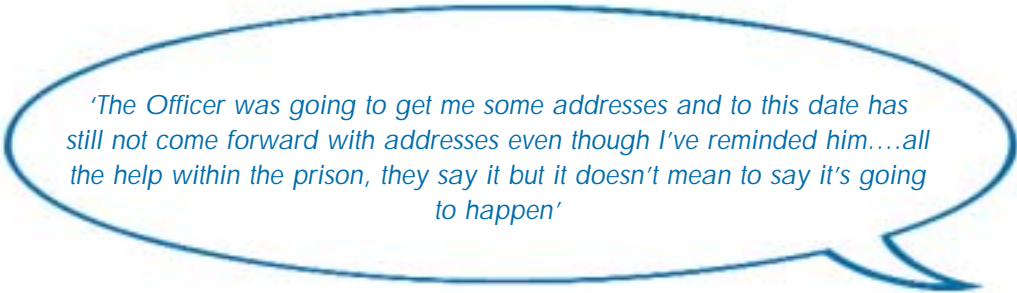
*'The Officer was going to get me some addresses and to this date has still not come forward with addresses even though I've reminded him....all the help within the prison, they say it but it doesn't mean to say it's going to happen'*

### **2.3.5 Disclosure of Convictions/Employers Attitudes**

Additional barriers to ETE for female (ex) offenders are disclosure of convictions and perceived or actual attitudes of employers (these two issues are very closely linked). There was considerable confusion around disclosing convictions when applying for a job. Women frequently asked us for clarification of the current situation during the research interviews. A minority of women who had done 'Preparation for Work' courses had received information regarding the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and found this to be very useful. Many women thought that they were obliged to disclose all convictions and feared the repercussions of not disclosing and then being found out at a later date.

The decision of whether or not to disclose is a difficult one for women to make. Disclosing is considered to be a very high-risk strategy but similarly not disclosing is a risk as failure to do so may 'backfire on them'. Most women took the view that it is better to 'be honest from the start' with employers although suggested that it would be easier to make the disclosure in an interview situation rather than at the application stage. This would at least give women the chance to present themselves and to perhaps break down any misconceptions the employer may have which may prevent them from employing (ex) offenders. It was felt by some women that dishonesty would just reinforce negative views of offenders that employers may have and also would also prove stressful for women to have 'skeletons in the cupboard' in their work environment. However some women did feel that they would be justified in not disclosing their conviction(s) due to the prevalence of stereotyping and discrimination among employers.

Within the transcripts there emerges a strong sense of it being a 'no win situation' with employers as, no matter what, women perceive that their conviction(s) would always override the range of skills and experience which they may be able to offer the employer. Such discrimination was viewed by most women as 'a fact of life' therefore creating a huge barrier to them becoming 'law abiding citizens'



*'The Officer was going to get me some addresses and to this date has still not come forward with addresses even though I've reminded him....all the help within the prison, they say it but it doesn't mean to say it's going to happen'*

For many women, the thought of having to disclose their conviction(s) provides a huge disincentive to getting back into work. Along with disclosure of a conviction comes a sense of shame and an unwelcome reminder of past wrong doing which women would prefer to put behind them. The need for disclosure creates a huge stumbling block in

terms of moving forward and shedding an old, undesirable identity. This dampens women's enthusiasm for applying for both jobs and courses. Again, discrimination following disclosure is perceived by women as something that is inevitable and something, which can't be overcome. Within this context applying for ETE is perceived as a 'futile exercise'. Disclosure induces fear and anxiety in women and greatly hinders their prospects of returning to ETE.

*'It's just putting down about my criminal record that puts me off...I get to the bottom and it's always at the bottom and I think oh I might as well chuck it in the bin because I mean you never get a reply'*

*'I have to say that I would hate to have to go into a job centre and apply for a job simply because I would just dread what you do. Do you lie or do you not lie?'*

### 2.3.6 Employers Perceptions of (Ex) Offenders

When considering this section it is important to note that some of women's views of employers' perceptions of them are based on experience, however some are based merely on conjecture. Women's ideas around how they are viewed by potential employers are tied up with issues of distrust, un-desirability and an inability to change. Women feel that their entire identity is bound up with their criminality (*'just a criminal'*) and employers fail to see *'the person behind the crime'*.

*'Obviously, they are going to be biased because the first thing they see is a criminal, they don't see the person behind it. They don't see a person that has made a mistake and regrets what they've done and just wants to do whatever they can to prove that they are not a bad person'*

Women with a criminal background are viewed as a homogenous group, sharing the same negative characteristics (*'smack heads', 'scum', 'losers', 'thieves'*). Employers do not appreciate the diversity of women in the prison population and the variety of backgrounds and experiences, which they have. Society has a certain image of offenders as somehow different from 'normal' people.

*'You will often find that people in society would never think that prisoners would look like normal people. Most of them think that they will be distinctive'*

Once labelled, it proves difficult or impossible to shake off the image which employers have. Women perceive that employers assume that 'if you've done it once you will do it again' which would be an insurmountable hurdle in terms of building up a trusting working relationship. Some women acknowledge that they too had such perceptions before they entered the prison environment and feel that negative attitudes of employers are symptomatic of prejudice in society more widely.

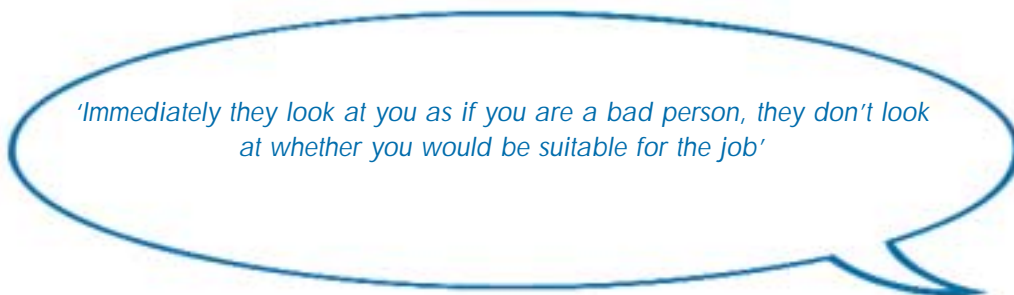
Women speak of a shift in attitudes once a disclosure of a conviction is made. Employers' negative reactions to disclosure have serious implications for women, making them feel small and humiliated. This proves damaging for women who may already be feeling particularly sensitive and vulnerable. Reactions which women report having received from employers range from fear through to disdain and pity. Women feel that crimes involving theft and drugs are viewed particularly negatively as they raise issues around honesty in the workplace. As a result of past involvement with such crimes, women will be more closely monitored at work and viewed as a risk, which may impact negatively on staff relations. Worryingly, one woman claimed that she had been abused by an ex-boss, as he knew that she came from the prison and he felt that this gave him a licence to treat her any way he wanted. Women stated that employers sometimes expected women to be grateful if they employed them rather than the women receiving gratitude for the work they do.

Women feel that in addition to negative stereotyping employers may be reluctant to employ them for reasons of self-preservation. Employing (ex) offenders may have negative implications for the company image and reputation. Also other members of the workforce may be unhappy working with (ex) offenders and this may cause additional problems for the employer.

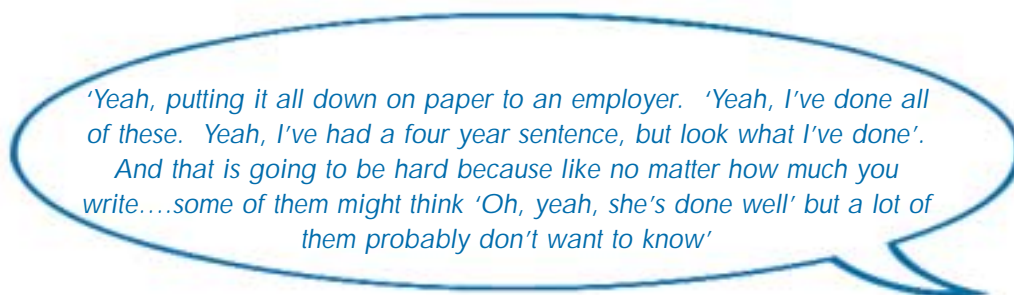
Women do acknowledge that all employers are not the same, and some are indeed willing to give you a chance. However, women's past experiences and expectations for the future are generally negative.

### 2.3.7 Lack of Recognition of Achievements

Although women may come out of prison feeling highly motivated and with a strong desire to prove themselves, such enthusiasm may be quashed by the way in which employers are 'blinded' by their criminal record and the negative characteristics they may attribute to them as a result of this.



*'Immediately they look at you as if you are a bad person, they don't look at whether you would be suitable for the job'*

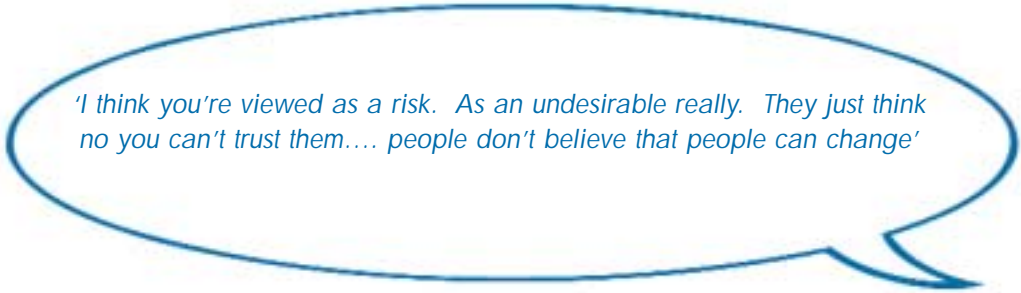


*'Yeah, putting it all down on paper to an employer. 'Yeah, I've done all of these. Yeah, I've had a four year sentence, but look what I've done'. And that is going to be hard because like no matter how much you write....some of them might think 'Oh, yeah, she's done well' but a lot of them probably don't want to know'*

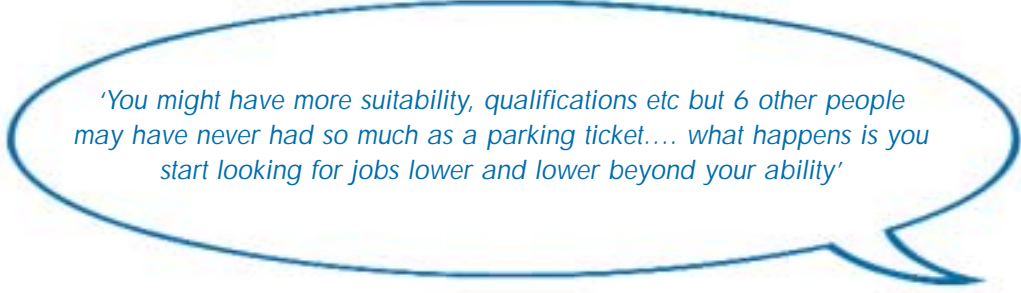
This also results in a failure to recognise their achievements. As already discussed many women choose to use their time in prison constructively and when given the opportunity make considerable progress in terms of gaining skills and qualification. However women are acutely aware that such progress may not be recognised or valued by employers or at least not valued as highly as the same achievements by some with a non-offending background. Women are perceived not only as untrustworthy but also as 'not worthy' of employment despite a range of relevant skills and experience.



Thus women expect that a result of such negative perceptions will be that they will never be given an equal chance when applying for jobs, no matter how well qualified or suitable they are and they will be forced into taking employment which is not necessarily commensurate with their experience.



*'I think you're viewed as a risk. As an undesirable really. They just think no you can't trust them.... people don't believe that people can change'*



*'You might have more suitability, qualifications etc but 6 other people may have never had so much as a parking ticket.... what happens is you start looking for jobs lower and lower beyond your ability'*

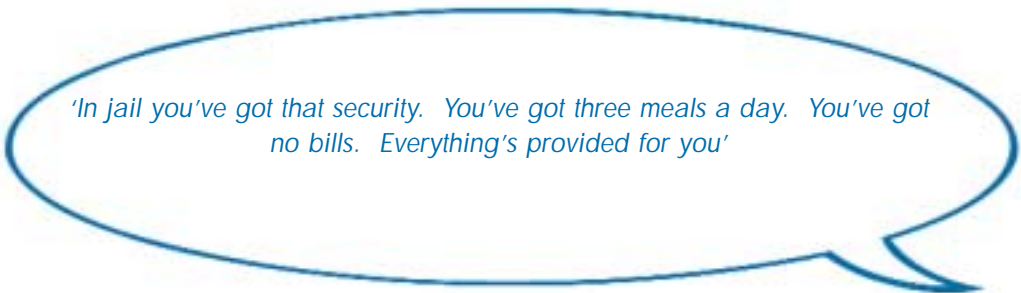
Also it may be difficult for women to get recognition for some of the courses they have undertaken and the skills they have learnt because they are directly related to offending behaviour and are exclusive to the prison environment (e.g. Enhanced Thinking Skills). Thus women are reluctant to tell employers about them even though they may be transferable skills, which are valuable in the workplace.

### **2.3.8 Managing the Transition from In to Out**

Women report numerous difficulties when making the transition from 'in' to 'out'. The difficulties involved in managing this transition are highly significant because they demonstrate that from the moment of their release women are faced with numerous difficulties and struggles, which take priority over accessing ETE. It is clear that women will need support with these issues before they will be in a position to start thinking about ETE.

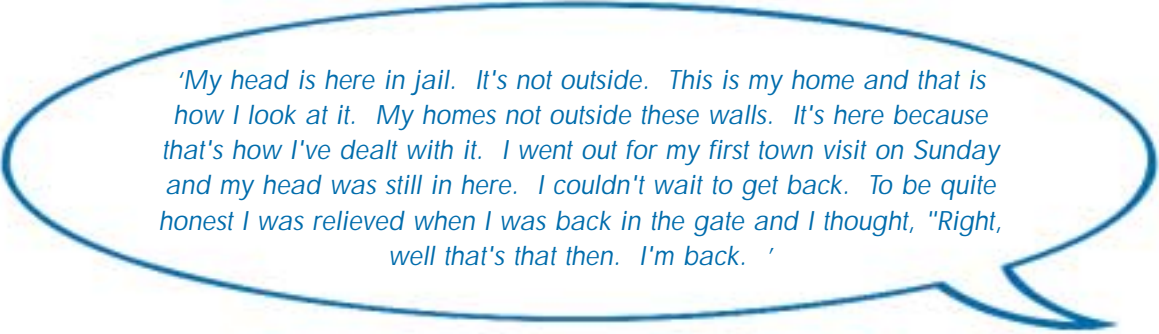
### **2.3.9 Being Institutionalised**

In direct contrast to commonly held societal perceptions about being incarcerated, women speak of prison as a 'safe environment', which provides welcome protection from the outside world. Women quickly adjust to the routine of prison and the security of knowing that their routine is dictated to them, thus negating the necessity to think and provide for themselves.

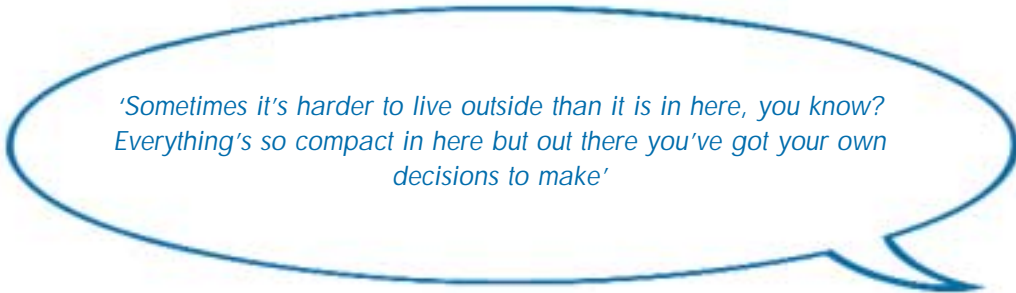


*'In jail you've got that security. You've got three meals a day. You've got no bills. Everything's provided for you'*

Women speak of leaving the outside world behind when they come into prison and of entering a different 'head space' whilst the world carries on around them outside. Of course, it is important to remember that in prison women have very little choice but to adapt to the environment that they are in and this may be a coping mechanism on their part.



*'My head is here in jail. It's not outside. This is my home and that is how I look at it. My homes not outside these walls. It's here because that's how I've dealt with it. I went out for my first town visit on Sunday and my head was still in here. I couldn't wait to get back. To be quite honest I was relieved when I was back in the gate and I thought, "Right, well that's that then. I'm back. '*

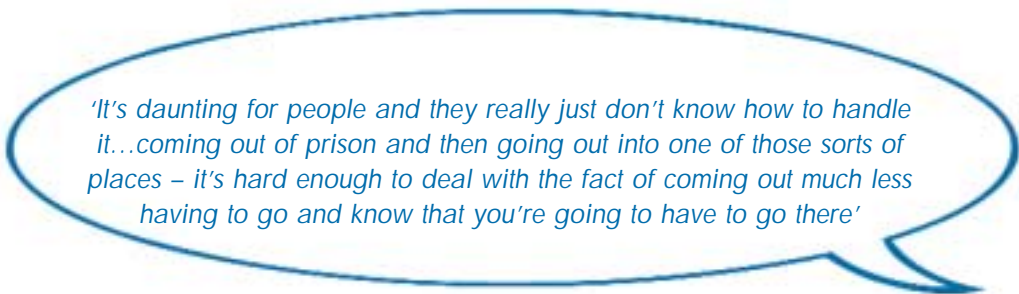


*'Sometimes it's harder to live outside than it is in here, you know? Everything's so compact in here but out there you've got your own decisions to make'*

The extent to which institutionalisation occurs will greatly influence the way in which women experience the transition from in to out and the level of difficulties they may encounter.

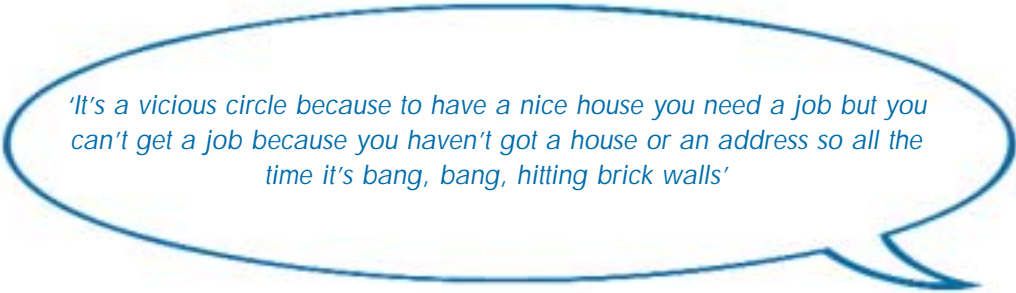
### **2.3.10 Housing**

Obtaining accommodation is an absolute priority for women coming out of custody and can have a huge impact upon stability in other areas of their lives during the transition phase. Many women have lost their home and many of their possessions as a result of coming into custody and speak of this as being particularly traumatic. Women feel daunted by the prospect of having to rebuild a secure environment to live in. Most women are very limited in terms of the accommodation which is available to them and this lack of choice is potentially damaging. Women are anxious about being placed in accommodation, which may increase the likelihood of returning to a criminal lifestyle. This is particular pertinent for those women who have 'cleaned up' when in custody but who may be placed in hostel accommodation with drug users following release where they may be tempted to return to a criminal lifestyle.

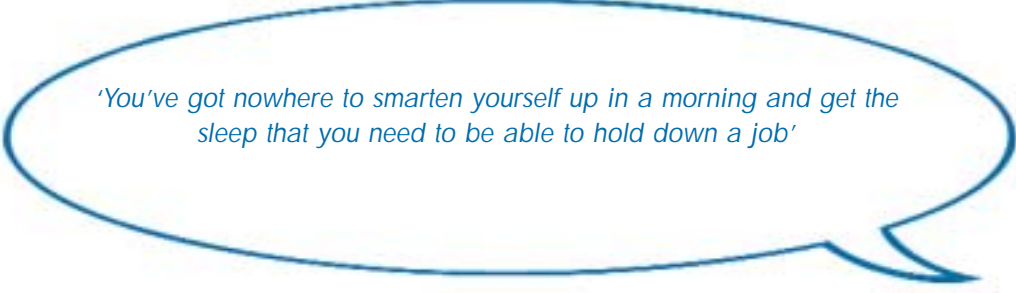


*'It's daunting for people and they really just don't know how to handle it...coming out of prison and then going out into one of those sorts of places – it's hard enough to deal with the fact of coming out much less having to go and know that you're going to have to go there'*

Failure to secure accommodation creates a huge stumbling block, not only in terms of getting back into ETE in the first place but also in terms of being able to hold down a job. Women find themselves in a vicious circle, unable to get a job because they don't have a home and unable to get a home because they don't have a job.

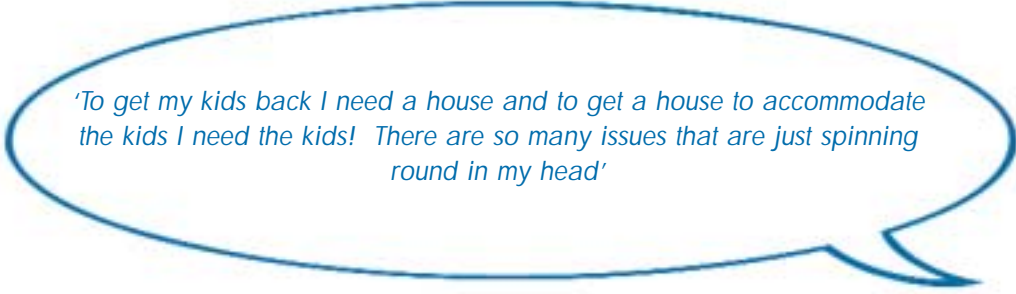


*'It's a vicious circle because to have a nice house you need a job but you can't get a job because you haven't got a house or an address so all the time it's bang, bang, hitting brick walls'*

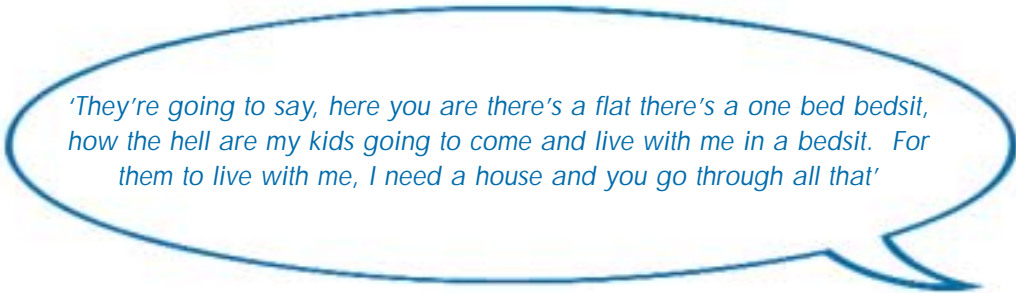


*'You've got nowhere to smarten yourself up in a morning and get the sleep that you need to be able to hold down a job'*

Also, a lack of appropriate accommodation seriously hinders the rebuilding of relationships with children from whom they have been separated. Again, rebuilding family relationships is a priority over ETE for many women. Women find it difficult to get their children back if they don't have suitable accommodation but believe they need to be with their children in order to get priority for council housing etc. Again this proves to be a disempowering and overwhelming situation for women.



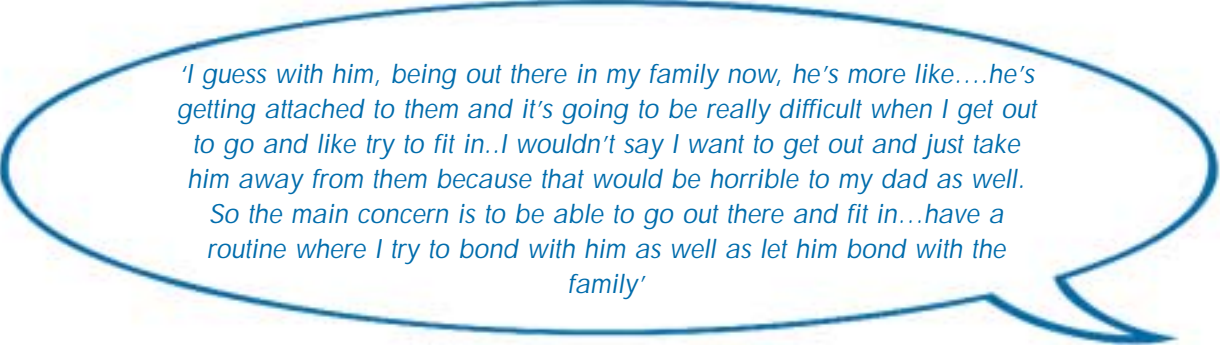
*'To get my kids back I need a house and to get a house to accommodate the kids I need the kids! There are so many issues that are just spinning round in my head'*



*'They're going to say, here you are there's a flat there's a one bed bedsit, how the hell are my kids going to come and live with me in a bedsit. For them to live with me, I need a house and you go through all that'*

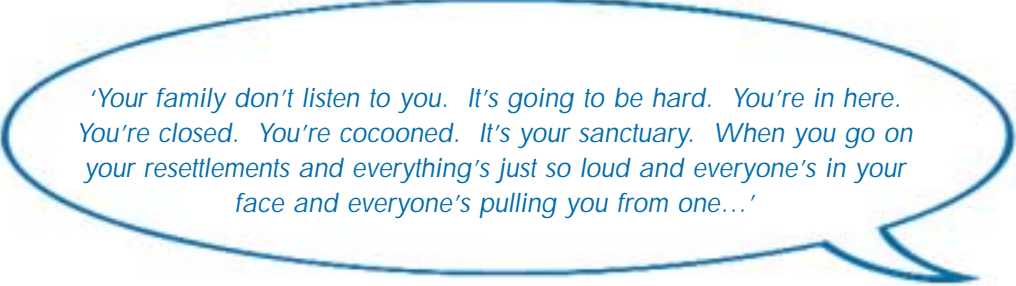
### **2.3.11 Rebuilding Relationships**

Rebuilding relationships with families is another crucial aspect of the transition phase, particularly for those women who have young children from whom they have been separated. Women feel that there is little opportunity to maintain relationships with their children whilst in prison and this is a source of anxiety, guilt and frustration. This impacts negatively on women's self-concept. Where children have been looked after by family members, women speak of a dilemma of not wanting to disrupt the routine which may have been established for their children whilst they have been away but also of desperately wanting to spend as much time as possible with them when they are released.



*'I guess with him, being out there in my family now, he's more like....he's getting attached to them and it's going to be really difficult when I get out to go and like try to fit in..I wouldn't say I want to get out and just take him away from them because that would be horrible to my dad as well. So the main concern is to be able to go out there and fit in...have a routine where I try to bond with him as well as let him bond with the family'*

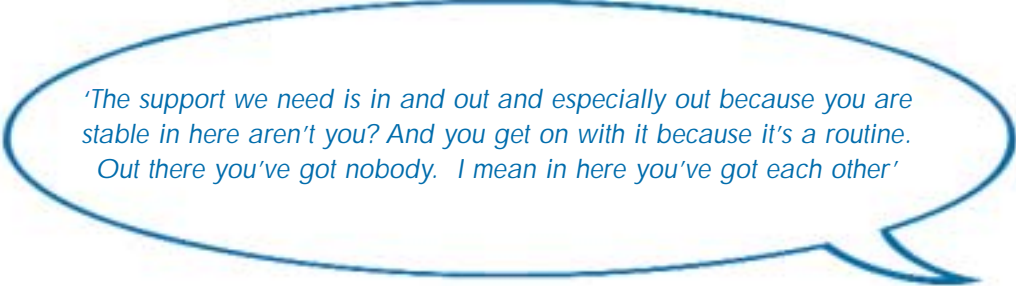
Regaining the trust of one's family may prove a stumbling block in terms of re-establishing bonds, this is particularly the case for women whose drug problems have lead them into criminality. Although women speak of wanting to 'right the wrongs' they may have done to their families through their involvement in crime, women also speak of their families as failing to understand their problems and being unable to imagine what it is like to go to prison and the impact of being released back into the community. They struggle to cope with expectations placed on them during the transition period.



*'Your family don't listen to you. It's going to be hard. You're in here. You're closed. You're cocooned. It's your sanctuary. When you go on your resettlements and everything's just so loud and everyone's in your face and everyone's pulling you from one...'*

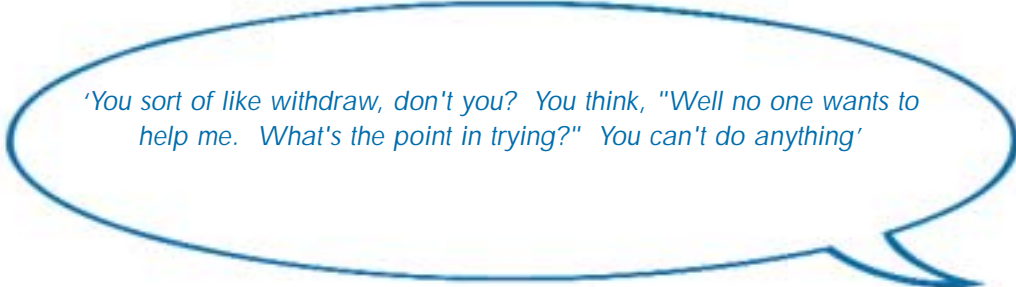
### **2.3.12 Lack of Support**

Life on the outside is a struggle for women and each small step taken can seem like having 'a mountain to climb'. It is clear that women are unable to access appropriate support during the period of 'resettlement' and 'readjustment' following their sentence. Women speak of feeling abandoned when they leave prison and isolated in their struggle to avoid getting back into crime. Whilst in custody women build up their own support networks with fellow inmates and fear losing this 'on the out'



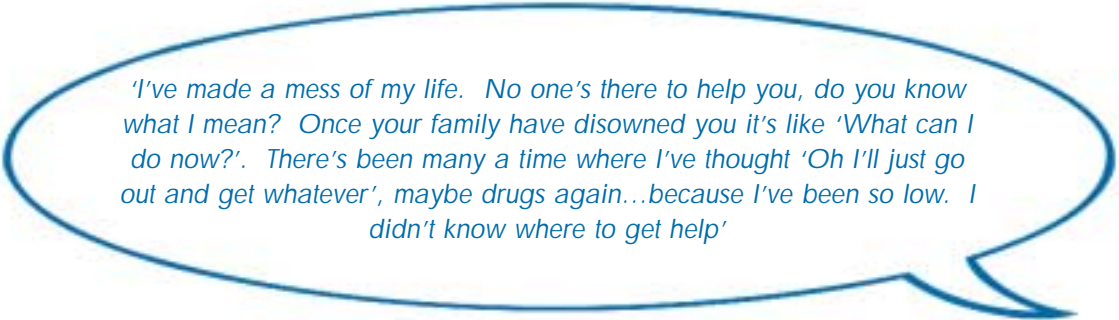
*'The support we need is in and out and especially out because you are stable in here aren't you? And you get on with it because it's a routine. Out there you've got nobody. I mean in here you've got each other'*

This feeling of abandonment can soon lead to despondency and disengagement with potential avenues of help.



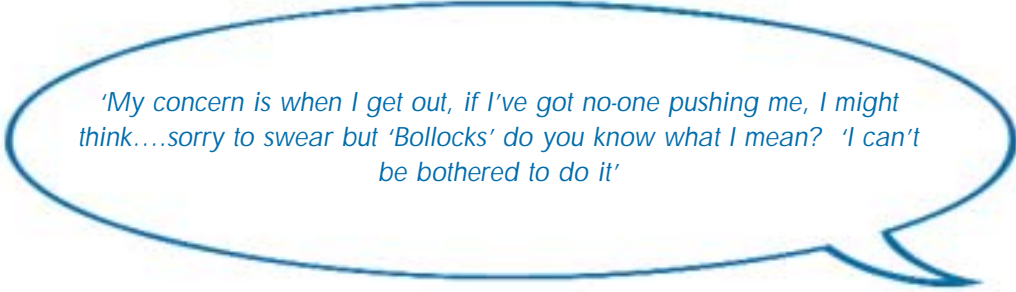
*'You sort of like withdraw, don't you? You think, "Well no one wants to help me. What's the point in trying?" You can't do anything'*

Thus it is important that support and advice are available immediately after release when women may be feeling particularly vulnerable and when the risks of returning to criminality are high.



*'I've made a mess of my life. No one's there to help you, do you know what I mean? Once your family have disowned you it's like 'What can I do now?'. There's been many a time where I've thought 'Oh I'll just go out and get whatever', maybe drugs again...because I've been so low. I didn't know where to get help'*

It is important to note that women are leaving an environment which is heavily regimented and one where women are frequently told what to do thus negating the need to 'think for themselves'. It can prove frightening and overwhelming for women when released into an unstructured environment where they have to think for themselves and use their initiative. It is clear that women need intensive support at this stage in order to motivate them to do the smallest tasks and it is very clear that this support is simply not available.



*'My concern is when I get out, if I've got no-one pushing me, I might think....sorry to swear but 'Bollocks' do you know what I mean? 'I can't be bothered to do it'*

It is particularly difficult for women to motivate themselves when they are being 'bounced backwards and forwards' between different agencies when trying to get benefits and housing in place and this can prove to be a disempowering process.

### **2.3.13 Fighting a losing battle**

As a result of being faced with such barriers and with so few resources to overcome them, women feel like they are 'fighting a losing battle'. It is very apparent when reading through the interview transcripts that this cohort of women feel incredibly powerless. This is reflected in the kinds of metaphors, which they used during the interviews, often speaking of having things 'done to them' rather than being able to take control themselves. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

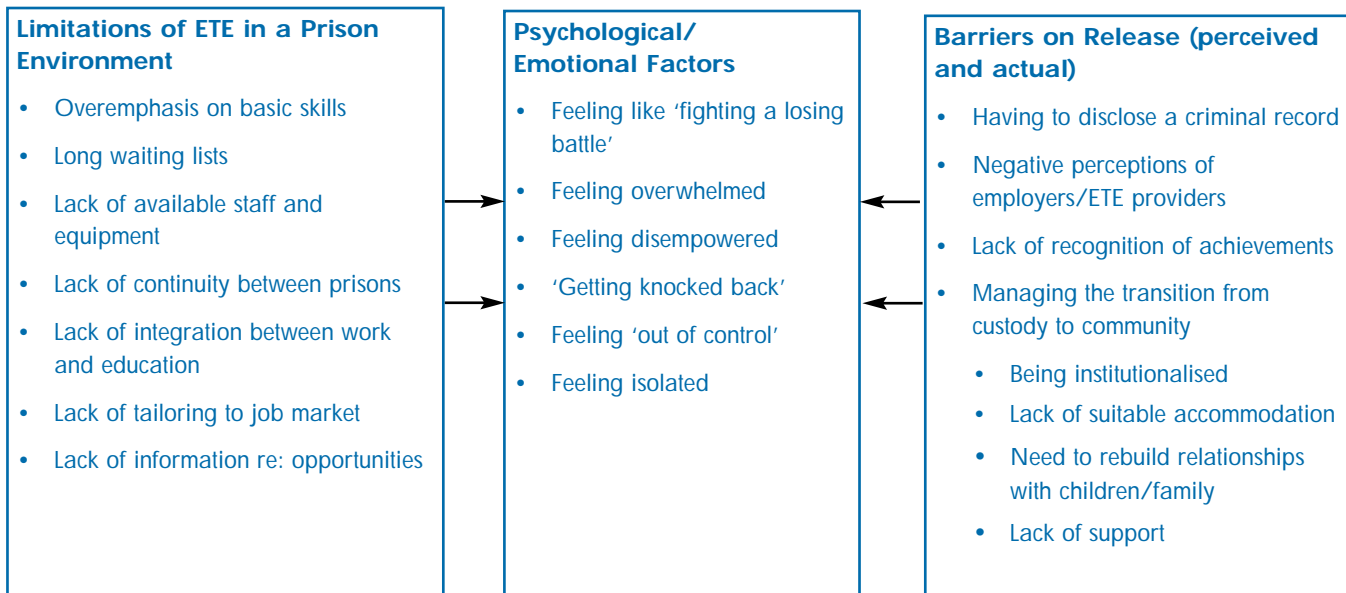
Figure 3.

Can't access, can you save as a separate page please?

The self-perception of (ex) offenders as powerless needs to be overcome if women are to believe that they can succeed and that it is in their power to effect change for the future. It is clear that women need to be supported in regaining some control over their lives and need to be encouraged to believe that they can succeed.

A summary of the main barriers to ETE experienced by women (ex) offenders is illustrated in Figure 4.

### Barriers to ETE

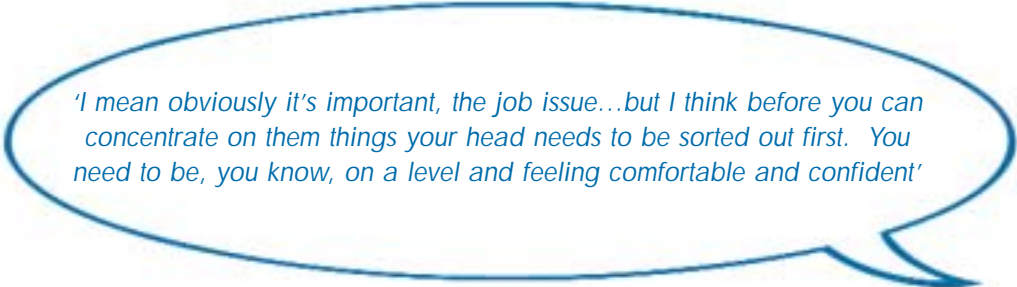


## 2.4 SUPPORT NEEDED – RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WOMEN

### 2.4.1 General Points

Our findings demonstrate that women need to go through a number of different stages of support following a criminal conviction in order for them to feel 'ETE ready'. Throughout these stages, support needs to be on a practical and emotional level. Crucially, women need to develop an improved 'sense of self' and increase levels of social integration which in turn may lead to higher levels of motivation and success in gaining practical skills relevant to accessing ETE.

Firstly, it is necessary for those women who have served a custodial sentence to receive intensive support in managing the transition from prison to the community. This may be viewed as a 'stepping stone' phase where the focus is not necessarily on issues, which relate specifically to ETE. As outlined in the previous section, if women do not get the appropriate help and support at this stage (with issues such as housing and rebuilding relationships etc) it is unlikely that they will feel in a position to access ETE.



*'I mean obviously it's important, the job issue...but I think before you can concentrate on them things your head needs to be sorted out first. You need to be, you know, on a level and feeling comfortable and confident'*

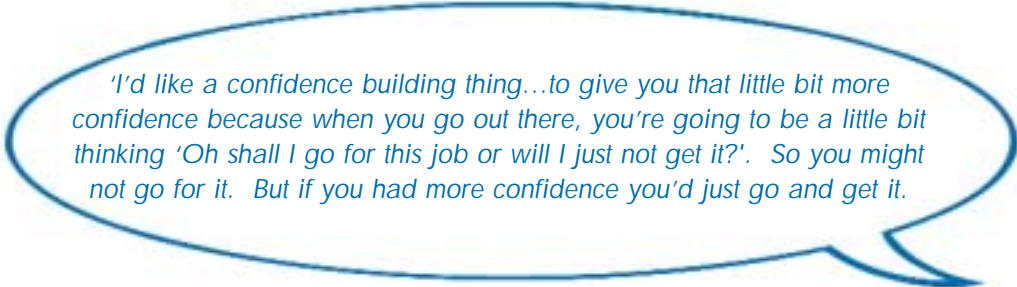
Secondly, women need support in 'preparing for ETE'. This stage is likely to incorporate equipping themselves with relevant skills and experience. However, on an organisational level, it is also vital for work to be done to ensure that ETE environments are conducive to engaging with (ex) offenders and that staff are sufficiently aware and sensitive to the issues involved with this particular cohort of women.

It is also important to note that women serving short sentences may be particularly disadvantaged in terms of the support they receive. In particular they may have no involvement with ETE whilst in custody and thus do not have time to see the potential for changing their lives which other women have talked about and therefore may be more likely to go back to the same lifestyle as before. Of course women with drug problems need specialist services to assist them with staying off drugs and the resulting criminal lifestyle. Additionally all support for women needs to be consistent and long term. This final section discusses specific support measures, which women have identified as necessary in order to become ETE ready.


### 2.4.2 ETE Skills Development

#### (a) Confidence Building

As has already been discussed, many female (ex) offenders describe themselves as feeling powerless and lacking in self-esteem for a variety of reasons. Women speak of feeling 'different' or 'inferior' to 'non-offending people' thus attempting to access ETE appears incredibly daunting and to some women, totally out of reach. Lack of confidence/self esteem is a huge disincentive for women in terms of engaging with ETE and thus they feel like they need formalised help and support to deal with these issues.



*'I'd like a confidence building thing...to give you that little bit more confidence because when you go out there, you're going to be a little bit thinking 'Oh shall I go for this job or will I just not get it?'. So you might not go for it. But if you had more confidence you'd just go and get it.'*



*'That would help us build confidence if we all went as a group and saw each other doing well and say 'well alright, you did it and that's like a little step'*

It is clear from the transcripts that women need to take small steps in order build up their confidence up to a point where they feel 'ETE' ready. Women suggest that building confidence comes from mixing with other women who may be in a similar situation to themselves and gaining motivation and inspiration from each other.

### **(b) Preparation for Work**

In addition to building confidence and self-esteem women need practical skills in order to become 'ETE ready'. Women speak of benefiting from the 'Preparation for Work' courses that are run in some prisons. They feel that these types of courses should be a standard package, which is readily available within all prisons and should be available to all those women who want them. Such courses could usefully include advice and support on:

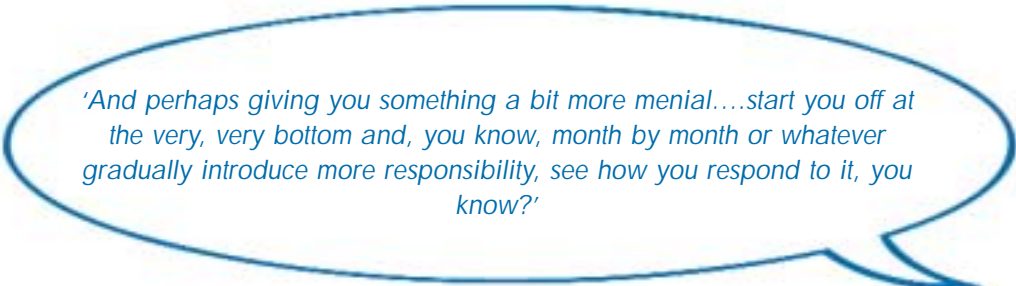
- CV writing
- Application form completion (job/course/state benefits etc)
- Disclosure of convictions (legal position and also negotiating with employers – learning how to present oneself in a positive light despite convictions)
- Self presentation skills (in terms of physical appearance and also verbal presentation)
- Job searching (access to Internet and newspapers)
- Preparing for interviews (perhaps mock interviews with opportunity for constructive feedback)

Women stressed that such courses should be conducted in an unhurried manner and should be spread over a period of several weeks. They could be run informally with plenty of opportunity for discussion with other prisoners and also individual time with tutors.

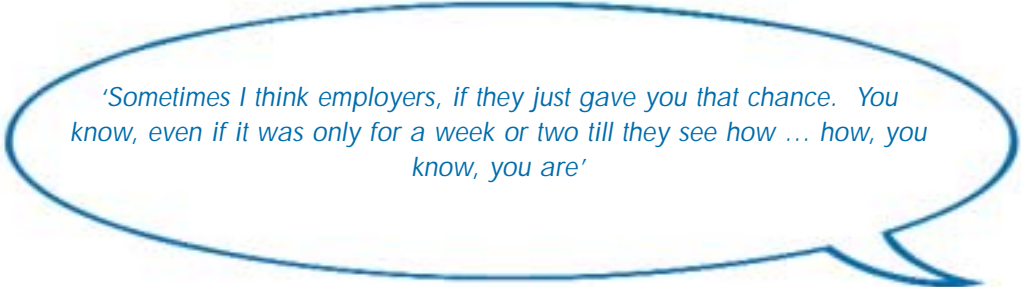
It became apparent during some of our interviews that women frequently did not recognise the transferable skills, which they had. Thus it is clear that women would also benefit from learning how to promote their existing skills to employers.

### **(c) Work Trials**

Women speak of 'not being given the chance to show employers what they can do'. Women feel that negative perceptions and stereotypes of (ex) offenders are so deeply entrenched that they are often unable to get a 'foot in the door' despite an abundance of experience, skills and enthusiasm. Women in our sample suggest that work trials may be a useful way to do this and speak of a willingness to engage with such trials. This would be beneficial for women who are currently in custody (to complement and enhance the education they are undertaking) and also for women who have been released and want to get straight into employment. Women take the view that 'actions speak louder than words' and if they were given the chance they would have the ability to impress employers, potentially leading to longer-term job prospects.



*'And perhaps giving you something a bit more menial....start you off at the very, very bottom and, you know, month by month or whatever gradually introduce more responsibility, see how you respond to it, you know?'*



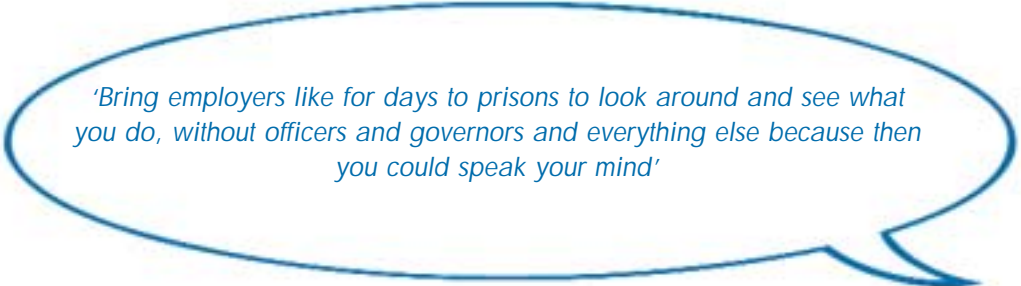
*'Sometimes I think employers, if they just gave you that chance. You know, even if it was only for a week or two till they see how ... how, you know, you are'*

Many women in our sample had never had a job before so engaging in a work trial or placement would provide a useful opportunity to experience 'the world of work' without the pressure of making a long term commitment. A short-term opportunity may provide the necessary incentive for women to feel more positive about their situation and to move away from their previous lifestyle. This type of arrangement could be in the best interest of both women and employers.

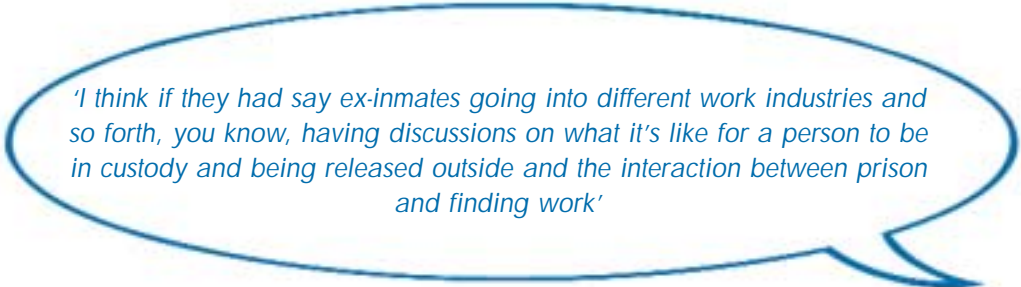
### **2.4.3 Organisational Issues**

#### **(a) Educating/Raising Awareness of Employers**

In terms of challenging employer's negative perceptions, education and awareness involving direct employer liaison with offenders/ex-offenders is viewed as key. This may be conducted in a variety of different ways – employers could be invited into prisons where they could learn from the prisoners about 'life inside' and the purposeful activity, which they engage in. Alternatively ex-offenders could go out into workplaces and inform employers about the reality of being a woman trying to find employment following a criminal conviction. Not only would this be useful and informative for employers but would also enable women themselves to develop skills and confidence. Women feel it is vital that employers have the opportunity to learn about the positive things, which women do with their lives following their conviction thus perhaps reducing the focus on the negative aspects of their lives beforehand.



*'Bring employers like for days to prisons to look around and see what you do, without officers and governors and everything else because then you could speak your mind'*



*'I think if they had say ex-inmates going into different work industries and so forth, you know, having discussions on what it's like for a person to be in custody and being released outside and the interaction between prison and finding work'*

Women suggest that prisons need to take responsibility for marketing themselves and their residents effectively in order for potential employers to perceive them as a viable supplier of good employees. Such work could represent an important shift in the perceptions of employers enabling them to see the potential benefits of employing (ex) offenders rather than viewing them as 'high risk'. Women also feel that it would be useful for employers to have increased awareness of the causal factors of crime, in particular the problems, which women may have encountered in their lives prior to custody. This may enable employers to 'see the person behind the crime' rather than resorting to negative stereotyping.

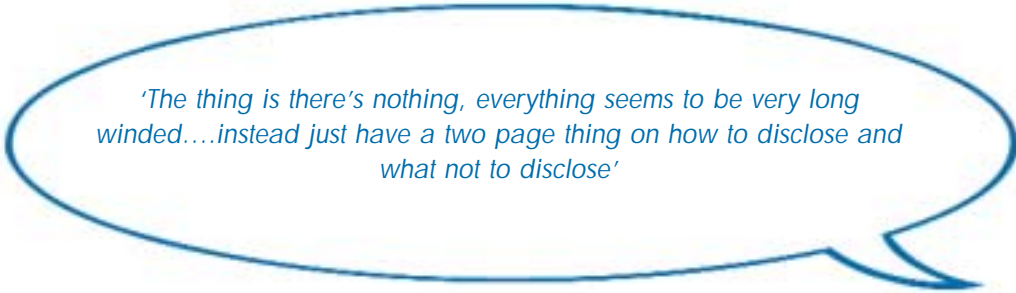
## **(b) Pro active information giving**

Women speak as often feeling 'in the dark' about various issues and of not having the information which they need in order to move forward with their lives. This results in both confusion around some key issues and also frustration. Women in custody tend to rely on each other for information about housing, ETE opportunities etc, as formal help and support is perceived to be 'inaccessible' and left up to the discretion of individual Officers. Attitudes of individual agency workers towards (ex) offenders both inside and outside prison will often dictate the level of information, which women receive. Women speak of 'not being able to get a straight answer' and of not being made aware of appropriate channels of support both inside and outside of the prison environment.

Women have goals and ambitions to better themselves but at times feel unable to act upon them as they are unsure who they can ask for information and advice. The difficulties which women often have in motivating themselves following a criminal conviction have already been discussed. There is clearly a danger that if necessary information is not readily available and accessible; women's motivation to move on with their lives may quickly diminish. It is therefore clear that pro-active information giving is a key support mechanism for women, particularly in the following three areas.

### **(i) Disclosure**

As mentioned previously, within the transcripts there is clearly great confusion around the laws surrounding disclosure of convictions. This provides a disincentive for women to apply for jobs and provokes a great deal of stress and anxiety. Women suggest that this is a problem that could easily be addressed by the production of a simple document.

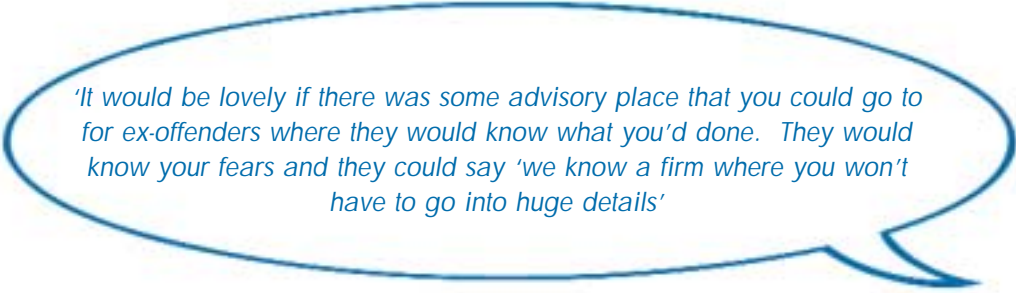


*'The thing is there's nothing, everything seems to be very long winded....instead just have a two page thing on how to disclose and what not to disclose'*

Despite the fact that documents such as this already exist, it appears that the information is not getting through, as the vast majority of women in our sample were unaware of their existence.

### **(ii) Opportunities**

Women need to gain more awareness of the ETE opportunities which may be available to them when coming out of custody or completing any type of sentence, in particular knowledge of those employers and training/education providers who would treat them fairly and equally. This appears to be an issue relating to employment in particular. Women need to gain more awareness of employment opportunities, linked to Labour Market Intelligence for the area to which they are resettling, especially in relation to skills gaps and skills shortages. Being armed with this information would make women a lot more confident to actually approach companies and give them hope that it is possible for them to get back into work.

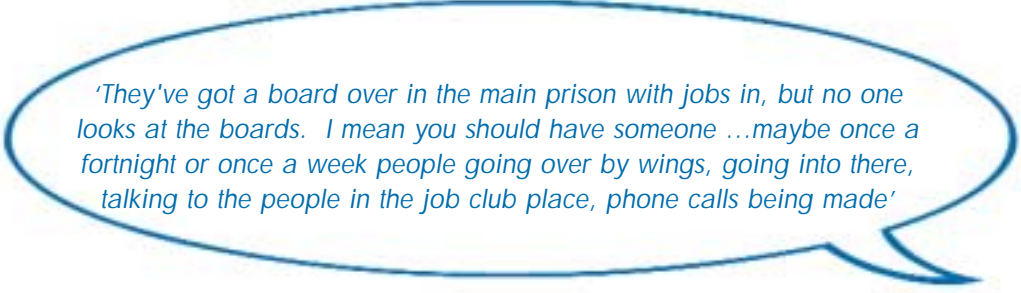


*'It would be lovely if there was some advisory place that you could go to for ex-offenders where they would know what you'd done. They would know your fears and they could say 'we know a firm where you won't have to go into huge details'*

Women suggest that this type of information could also be condensed into some type of directory or booklet, which could be widely distributed.

Women speak of needing to know what is realistic and feasible in terms of returning to ETE in order to minimise the risk of potentially damaging rejection. However, women are also keen to ensure they do not set their sights too low and have the option to consider additional training and education as a means to a long-term career. Information regarding funding opportunities are particularly important in this respect.

Women also speak of a need for direct interpersonal contact from agencies when imparting information. It is not enough for information about job opportunities to appear on notice boards in prisons/community organisations. Women report being more likely to be motivated if an effort is made to make direct and regular contact.

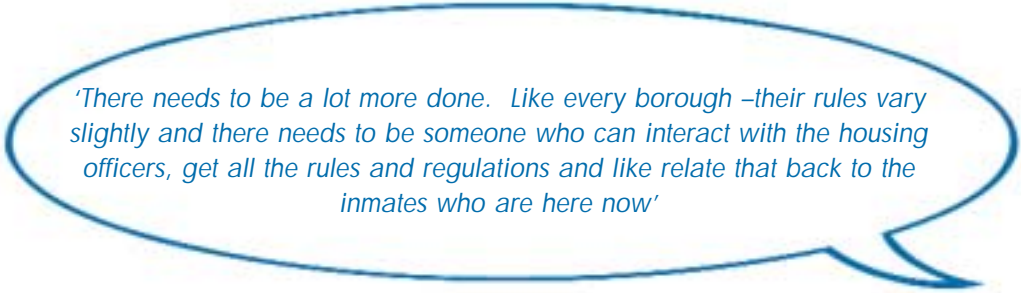


*'They've got a board over in the main prison with jobs in, but no one looks at the boards. I mean you should have someone ...maybe once a fortnight or once a week people going over by wings, going into there, talking to the people in the job club place, phone calls being made'*

Women speak of a willingness to be pro-active in their search for ETE information. A few groups suggested that informal coffee mornings, specifically for female (ex) offenders wanting to get back into ETE would be desirable where they could look through newspapers etc. and share ideas and experiences. However, it is important that this type of informal arrangement is backed up with paid staff members who could offer hands on advice and support and to conduct liaison work with ETE providers where it is not possible/appropriate for women to do it for themselves.

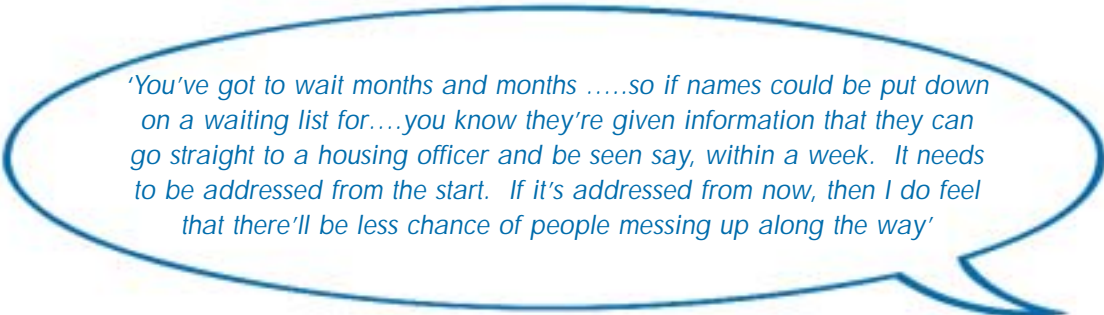
### **(iii) Housing**

Another key area in which pro-active information giving is essential is in the housing arena. Attempting to find out housing rights can be a complex and overwhelming process therefore it would be useful to have a worker who could seek out information on their behalf.



*'There needs to be a lot more done. Like every borough –their rules vary slightly and there needs to be someone who can interact with the housing officers, get all the rules and regulations and like relate that back to the inmates who are here now'*

It is absolutely vital that women receive appropriate information and support around housing as it is an area which impacts significantly on all areas of their lives (engagement with ETE, rebuilding relationships with families etc). It is a source of great anxiety for many women in custody that their housing needs are not addressed early on in their sentence. Women feel it is essential that they receive housing information and advice at the earliest possible time to reduce the chances of them returning to crime on release.



*'You've got to wait months and months .....so if names could be put down on a waiting list for....you know they're given information that they can go straight to a housing officer and be seen say, within a week. It needs to be addressed from the start. If it's addressed from now, then I do feel that there'll be less chance of people messing up along the way'*

### (c) Mentor/Key Worker

As already discussed, women are particularly vulnerable during the period of 'resettlement' and 'readjustment' following their sentence and often feel that they are 'fighting a losing battle'. It is important that women receive intensive support at this difficult time if they are going to be able to initiate and maintain changes in their lifestyle. Women feel that Probation Workers are unlikely to be able to provide this type of intensive support. Thus at this crucial time when they are extremely vulnerable, women have expressed that it would be helpful to have some kind of mentor or key worker who would be largely responsible for providing emotional support, reassurance and advocacy. It is important that this person would be able to provide consistent and sustained support and be readily available for women to call on.

*'I think if you just got allocated a key worker or something, somebody who could spend a reasonable amount of time with you every day....someone just to reassure you and guide you'*

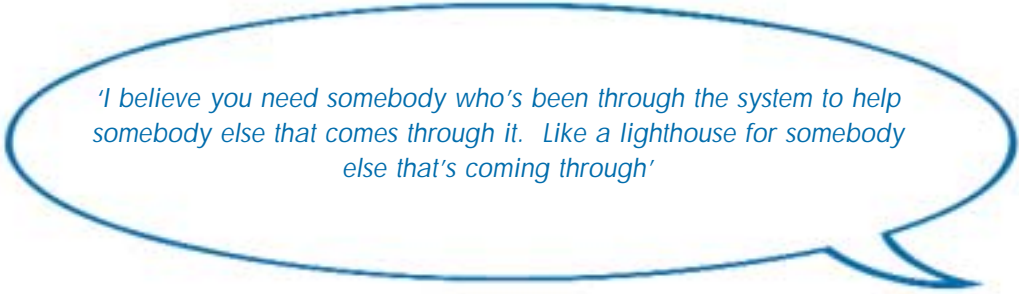
*'There should be help anyway, not just for housing and jobs, there should be help there for...everybody automatically thinks it's just housing, it just jobs but it's more support emotionally as well'*

Women have a fear of 'having to do everything alone' and the key worker could provide valuable moral support to women and also act as a motivating factor in helping women to rebuild their lives. It is vital that women get positive encouragement at this time and ideally, support would be available on a one to one basis and for a substantial period of time. Where appropriate, women feel it may also be helpful for this person to offer support to women's families in helping them to gain understanding of the experiences their family member has been through and to help with re-adjusting to life with them.

### (d) Mentor/Key Worker – Peer Support

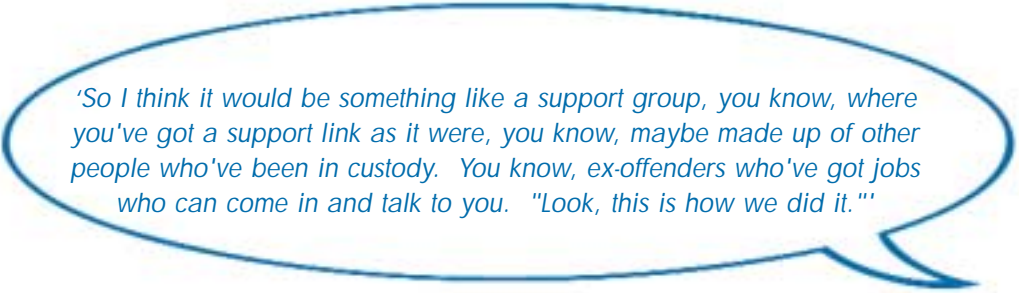
It is important that this person should not be from the statutory sector and would preferably be an ex-offender themselves. This was particularly important for women, firstly so they could relate to that person and not feel patronised and secondly because they could provide a useful role model and inspiration to women coming out of prison. Women are also likely to have more respect for someone who has been through the system and 'survived'.

*'A lot of people patronise you as well, you know, like ...saying that they understand what you're going through...they haven't got a clue'*



*'I believe you need somebody who's been through the system to help somebody else that comes through it. Like a lighthouse for somebody else that's coming through'*

The idea of a peer support group was also favoured by some women, as it is important for them to feel that they are not the only ones going through this difficult period of readjustment.



*'So I think it would be something like a support group, you know, where you've got a support link as it were, you know, maybe made up of other people who've been in custody. You know, ex-offenders who've got jobs who can come in and talk to you. "Look, this is how we did it."'*

A model offering an ideal support structure for women in attempting to engage with ETE is illustrated in Figure 5.

## SECTION 3: DISCUSSION

The peer research element of the Women into Work programme (Phase One) aimed to increase understanding of the experiences of female (ex) offenders when accessing ETE. The research was undertaken in order to inform Phase Two of the programme, that is the development of innovative pilot projects to address the needs identified by women involved in Phase One. By adopting a qualitative, peer led approach the research team have been able to illuminate the lived experiences of women (ex) offenders and provide an understanding of 'what it is like' to attempt to engage with ETE with a 'criminal' identity.

The characteristics of our sample were broadly representative of the female offending population as a whole with high numbers of women with a past history of drug/alcohol misuse (43.4%), low educational attainment (30.1% having no qualifications and a further 28% educated to NVQ level 1 or below) and limited employment histories (55% not having worked before going into custody and 85.2% having no work arranged on release). Interestingly, the average length of sentence for women in our sample (5.2 years) is significantly higher than that in the general female prison population where, in 2001 63% of women received a sentence of 6 months or less and just 9% were sentenced to more than three years (Home Office, 2002). As already discussed, women who serve short sentences are far less likely to engage in ETE in custody. This would perhaps explain why this cohort of women are under-represented in our sample. Women from ethnic minority groups were overrepresented in our sample when compared with the general prison population (40.2% compared with 26% of the general prison population according to Home Office figures from 2001. In line with previous studies (i.e. Dowling 2001, McMahon & Seemungal 2003) this research has found this cohort of women to be motivated to engage with ETE, given adequate support and favourable life circumstances. In particular ETE has the potential to offer women an escape from a criminal lifestyle and positively influence self-concept. However, it is abundantly clear that women still face numerous barriers to ETE in terms of: - accessing useful and relevant ETE opportunities when in custody, having to disclose a criminal record to potential ETE providers, perceived and actual negative attitudes of potential ETE providers.

In addition, women who have served a custodial sentence face numerous difficulties (both practical and emotional) when attempting to manage the transition from being in prison to resettling in the community. These issues (i.e. gaining appropriate housing, rebuilding relationships with families and children, feeling overwhelmed by life 'on the out') often take priority over ETE and need to be addressed before women can move towards becoming 'ETE ready'.

Women in our sample perceive life following a criminal record as an 'uphill struggle' and women are disempowered by the process of 'getting knocked back'. However women offered us a clear vision of the support, which they require in order to overcome barriers to ETE. They identified the need for intensive agency support both during the 'stepping stone' phase when making the transition from custody to community and also in preparing for ETE by developing appropriate skills. Our study found mentoring to be a crucial support mechanism for women. The women in our study also identified mentoring with a 'peer' element to be particularly desirable. Building on our experiences of a peer led model of research we can assume that this type of approach may offer the opportunity to empower both receivers and providers of the service and to overcome the hierarchal nature, which exists between service user and provider in more traditional types of mentoring projects.

In addition to the support needed for individual women, it is clear that work is needed at an organisational level particularly in terms of raising awareness among employers of the reality of employing (ex) offenders and also raising awareness of the need for pro-active information giving by agencies in relation to issues such as housing, disclosure and job opportunities. It is particularly encouraging that women have expressed an interest in being involved in awareness raising work with employers.

The findings of this research clearly corroborate findings of the limited number of studies available on women (ex) offenders experiences of ETE, notably the plethora of problems faced when leaving custody which take priority over ETE, the barrier which a criminal record is perceived to have on ETE opportunities and the limitations of ETE in the prison environment (lack of integration between work and education, overemphasis on basic skills). In addition, this research has been particularly useful in highlighting the positive impact which ETE can have on women's self-concept and also the psychological impact of being released from custody without a coherent support system. It has also highlighted the importance of pro-active information giving as a crucial support mechanism. Previous research

has been largely quantitative in nature, relying upon statistical interpretation of survey data. The major strength of this study has been its use of women (ex) offender's voices as the vehicle to 'get the message across'. Our peer led approach has allowed sufficient flexibility to enable women to talk openly and at length about issues which are particularly important to them thus providing a more holistic assessment of their problems and needs. In this sense, we have been able to ensure that the recommendations arising from the findings are grounded in women's past experiences and wishes for the future.

The Women into Work programme has offered the opportunity to recruit a large sample of women (unusual for a qualitative study) over a wide geographical spread. It has also offered the opportunity to include within that sample women who have served community sentences and women who have been released from prison for some time. This has enabled a particularly useful insight into the process of managing the transition from prison to the community. It should be borne in mind that those women who did choose to participate in interviews may have had a particular interest or involvement in ETE (and high levels of motivation to engage with it) which may have resulted in a degree of response bias (i.e. findings may be positively skewed). However, as already noted in the 'Ethical Issues' section, women in custody were not always given much choice as to whether or not they participated so this will have tempered response bias to a certain extent.

The implementation of the peer research has been greatly assisted by members of the Women into Work Development Partnership and the strong links, which the Programme has with both the Prison Service and community organisations working with women (ex) offenders. Such links have undoubtedly 'paved the way' to enable us to conduct research (particularly in prisons) in a way which has not happened before (serving prisoners entering prisons etc, use of tape recorders etc). The research has had a dual purpose; not only to increase knowledge about women (ex) offenders' experiences of ETE but also to empower women (ex) offenders involved in the research process by enabling them to develop skills, gain practical work experience and to influence decision-making.

This innovative way of working has brought both rewards and challenges. Enlisting (ex) offenders as researchers has proved time consuming and problematic at times, particularly when attempting to make arrangements for women in custody to engage in training, attend meeting etc. However, in terms of actually conducting the research, having women in custody employed as researchers has proved hugely advantageous particularly in terms of reducing gate keeping and in the recruitment of participants.

In terms of the research process itself, it has been apparent on occasions that peer researchers and trainees have had their own agenda regarding what the problems are for women in accessing ETE and what should be done about it. Thus it has been difficult for women to remain 'detached' during the interview process and it needs to be borne in mind that our results will inevitably reflect the views of the interviewers as well as the participants! This imposition of personal views on the research process is somewhat inevitable when adopting a peer approach due to women having personal experiences of the issues being investigated. However, this undoubtedly happens in non-peer research too as no research can be completely 'value free' and should not be viewed a barrier to 'good quality' research findings. In many ways it can be argued that a peer approach increases validity of research findings, enabling an 'on the ground' perspective within the research design and ensuring the research remains focussed on issues of relevance and importance to the target group. In addition, the reduction of the traditional division between subject and object in research and the absence of hierarchy in the research environment has created relaxed interviews thus ensuring a large volume of high quality data.

The benefits of using a peer approach for the women involved are considerable. Feedback, which we have had, indicates skill and knowledge attainment among researchers as well as less tangible outcomes such as increased confidence, self-esteem and increased hope for the future. Indeed, all three Peer Researchers have progressed to employment within the Criminal Justice arena, building on the experience and skills acquired during their time with the Women into Work programme. Undoubtedly, one of the most encouraging outcomes of the Women into Work programme so far has been highlighting the potential for using a peer approach, not only in future research projects but also in service delivery. It is exciting that the pilot projects will test out further the use of this approach (as detailed in the 'Next Steps' section).

## 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3.1.1 Involving Women (ex) offenders in Research

The following recommendations will be of use to people/organisations who may be considering using a 'peer approach' towards research and also anyone conducting research with this particular cohort of women. NB: The term 'Researcher' refers to both Trainees and Peer Researchers.

- When recruiting Researchers, posts should be widely advertised to ensure that a diverse group of peers have the opportunity to be involved in work and training
- It should be made explicit from the start what the role of Researcher involves (hours of work, ways in which benefits may be affected, prospects for career development etc) and careful consideration should be given to the way in which Researchers expectations are managed
- A protocol should be developed and adhered to at all times when conducting peer research. Establishments should be asked to sign up to this prior to commencement of research and the opportunity for negotiation with individual establishments should be given (this applies to both prisons and community organisations)
- Where possible, attempts should be made to have Researcher presence at each location where research is taking place, to promote and organise the research and to act as a 'link person' with staff
- From the start of the work, a designated staff link person in each establishment where research is taking place should be agreed upon (with a second contact to cover periods of absence). This person can then be responsible for imparting information to potential participants, promoting the project and responding to queries
- Face to face contact with the above person should be made to promote good working relationships and effective communication
- Regular contact and ongoing dialogue with staff in organisations where research is being conducted should be maintained
- Researchers should accept that the research is being conducted within organisational constraints and should be sensitive to the roles and needs of individual workers
- Where possible, attempts should be made to negotiate suitable accommodation and numbers of available interview participants with organisations prior to visit
- Women should be able to choose how they define themselves and their role within the project (i.e. whether or not they want to disclose their background)
- Staff team should be aware that conducting interviews with peers may raise potentially sensitive issues for Researchers about their own background and experiences and necessary support must be available if problems arise
- Researchers should be advised about the implications of disclosing their own circumstances to both participants and organisations and support should be offered if difficulties arise
- Researchers should be offered the opportunity to engage in as much training as possible in order to enhance future prospects
- Wherever possible, Researchers should be involved in decision making processes about the direction of the research and the programme as a whole
- Women who participated in interviews should be informed of research and also work which is undertaken as a result of their participation in the research
- Attempt to make it as easy as possible for organisations to assist in recruiting potential interview participants from their client group (i.e. develop recruitment packs with reply slips which simply have to be handed to women)
- When training Researchers, consideration should be given to the values and beliefs which we bring to the research context and ways in which this may influence the way we work
- When training Researchers in interviewing techniques, the importance of using open ended, non leading questions should be heavily emphasised

- Special attention should be paid to the issue of consent. It should be borne in mind that some participants will have been 'told' to participate in an interview rather than asked if they would like to be interviewed. When asking a woman to sign the consent form, Researchers should also ask the woman to confirm verbally that she is happy to be there
- It should not be assumed that all women will have received the relevant information about what the research involves. A brief verbal summary should be offered before interviews begin
- Participant feedback from interviews should be systematically recorded on a pro-forma to provide insight into women's experiences of being interviewed, specifically whether or not they found it to be an empowering process

### **3.1.2 Addressing the ETE Needs of Women (ex) offenders**

The following recommendations will be of use to both practitioners and policy makers whose work involves addressing the resettlement needs of women (ex) offenders, particularly those who are involved in ETE provision. The views expressed in this study and recommendations for support needed come directly from women who participated in interviews thus are valid in their own right. However, in making recommendations it is unlikely that women will consider the organisational constraints within which service providers are working. This is of course, understandable for women whose only concern is accessing the support they may desperately need. The research team recognises that many organisations are already conducting excellent work with limited resources and in difficult conditions. We also recognise there are no 'quick fix' solutions when addressing the barriers to ETE for women (ex) offenders. We hope that the following recommendations will assist agencies in identifying priorities for service provision and also in viewing potential solutions to the numerous problems faced by women (ex) offenders in a more holistic manner.

- The issue of resettlement needs to be addressed as early as possible in women's sentence to enable a smoother transition into the community on release from prison
- Prison staff and community based organisations working with women (ex) offenders should acknowledge that women 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. Even if ETE providers are unable to meet their specific needs, the process of talking through their aspirations can be hugely beneficial. Aspirations should be acted upon wherever possible
- ETE opportunities outside the prison environment should be actively promoted to prisoners (e.g. distance learning, higher education) and information on how to apply for funding for such courses should be made readily available
- Women should be explicitly informed about the roles of different prison staff in terms of advice and information giving
- 'Preparation for Work' courses need to be designed to include ways to promote transferable skills and abilities to employers and should also deal with issues around disclosure
- Existing documents containing information about the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act should be distributed to all new prisoners as a matter of course
- Women who are involved in ETE prior to arriving in custody should be enabled to maintain skills which are pertinent to their chosen career
- 'Bite sized' or 'taster' ETE courses should be available to short term prisoners
- Women need to be educated and informed about those ETE providers who are willing to engage with women (ex) offenders and they would also benefit from hearing about women who have had positive experiences of ETE providers
- ETE providers need to be made aware of the ways in which women (ex) offenders may be multiply disadvantaged, in particular they need to be aware of the particular circumstances which may lead women to commit crime and the often gendered nature of these circumstances

- 'Outside' ETE agencies should be encouraged to go into prisons to promote opportunities as frequently as possible. Prisons should take an active role in building working relations with local communities
- ETE providers need to be aware of the benefits of engaging with women who are currently in prison (i.e. unable to do 'sickies', ongoing feedback and dialogue with prison staff), in addition to the huge range of skills and experience, which they could bring to the workplace.
- ETE providers who engage with ex-offenders should promote their ways of working to other ETE providers, offering examples of positive experiences and good practice
- ETE records should always follow women when they move from one establishment to another and women should not be moved from their establishment when undertaking courses unless the opportunity exists to continue the course in the new establishment
- Wherever possible, women's education and training should be complemented by practical work experience
- ETE providers should develop strategies to keep women motivated and engaged in ETE programmes. Reasons for attrition should be carefully monitored
- Skills and learning need to be formally recognised with certificates and qualifications where possible
- All agencies working with women (ex) offenders should strive to work in an empowering manner, striking a balance between enabling women to make decisions for themselves and offering help and assistance where necessary
- Women would benefit from both prison and community based confidence building classes to enable them to gain encouragement, motivation and inspiration from each other
- Wherever possible, personal mentoring should play a key role in supporting women (ex) offenders. Mentoring should offer structured ongoing and regular support and could usefully employ a peer approach
- Prisons and community organisations should consider adopting 'peer led' approaches in service delivery. This could range from the delivery of basic skills education through to providing housing and ETE guidance. Useful lessons can be learnt from models of practice which have proved to be successful
- Wherever possible, women should be encouraged to maintain links with their children by whichever means are available to them. Women should be encouraged to have ongoing dialogue with temporary carers re: arrangements for children on release
- Women need help and support in dealing with the considerable distress which they encounter as a result of being separated from their children
- Workers who are independent from the Prison Service and Social Services could usefully conduct liaison work with prisoner's families and children to help prevent the breakdown of relationships.
- Strategies to reduce institutionalisation should be implemented in prisons. Women should be encouraged to think about their life outside the establishment and wherever possible should have 'town visits'
- Support networks need to be in place before women leave prison and intensive support available during women's particularly vulnerable period, post release
- Housing agencies should be educated about the strong links between accommodation and re-offending
- Housing agencies need to work closely with the prison service and women themselves in aiming to secure suitable accommodation for their release
- Prisons across the female estate and also community based organisations working with women (ex) offenders should engage with each other wherever possible to learn about 'what works' and to consider ways of mainstreaming effective practice

### 3.2 NEXT STEPS

As already discussed an objective of the peer research study was to provide a sound evidence base from which to commission pilot projects in Phase Two of the Women into Work programme. In order to facilitate this process a 'Commissioning Group' was established to act on behalf of the Development Partnership Steering Committee. The

Commissioning Group consists of selected Development Partnership members and their main tasks have been as follows: -

- To determine and implement the application process for potential projects
- To identify eligibility and criteria for selection
- To ensure that projects selected meet the key themes of Equal (empowerment, innovation, equal opportunities, transnational co-operation and mainstreaming)
- To ensure that the findings of the Peer Research are utilised appropriately throughout the whole process

One of the Peer Researchers is a member of the Commissioning Group and she has collaborated with the Trainees to ensure that their views about the pilot projects (particularly in terms of how issues of empowerment can be successfully incorporated) were fed into the commissioning process. The Commissioning Group have considered a number of initial Expressions of Interest from a wide variety of agencies and from these 8 have been invited to submit a full tender. Following a full and objective evaluation of the tenders a decision will be made about which projects are to be commissioned. All pilot projects will embrace the leading principles of **Equal** and will build directly on the findings of the peer research. The projects will be evaluated by Sheffield Hallam University and successful elements will be disseminated and mainstreamed during Phase Three of the Women into Work programme.

# APPENDICES

---

- A Interview Schedule 1 (Custody - One to One)**
- B Interview Schedule 2 (Community - One to One)**
- C Interview Schedule 3 (Custody - Focus Group)**
- D Interview Schedule 4 (Community - Focus Group)**
- E Checklist**
- F Coding System document**
- G Consent Form**
- H Information Sheet**
- I Fieldwork Pro forma**
- J Ethical Guidelines**
- K Monitoring Form**
- L Changes to Monitoring Form**
- M Protocol**
- N Thematic Framework (1)**
- O Thematic Framework (2)**
- P Who said what grid**
- Q Bibliography**

# Appendix A

## Interview Schedule No. 1 - Women in Custody (One to One)

### Introductions

PRA will:

- introduce self and thank for agreeing to participate
- ensure participant has read information sheet and ask if any questions
- ensure participant has understood and signed consent form

### Openings

1. Are you/Have you been involved in any kind of E/T/E whilst in custody? Have you ever been involved in any kind of E/T/E? (If no, move to question 4, if yes, move to question 2)
2. What have you got out of your E/T/E?
3. Can you think of any particular skills you have developed as a result of your E/T/E?

### Perceptions of E/T/E

4. Thinking about when you're released, is getting into E/T/E something you're interested in?  
(Prompt:- Is there anything that would make you want to get back into work?)
5. Are there any advantages to working?
6. Are there any advantages to not working?

### Perceived Barriers to E/T/E

7. What are your main concerns and fears when thinking about being released from custody?  
(Prompt:- How may this affect your feelings about E/T/E?)
8. How do you feel you are viewed by potential employers?
9. What is your understanding around telling future employers about your conviction?
10. How do you feel about telling employers about your conviction?

### Elements which need to be in place to support the transition from custody to E/T/E

11. If in employment whilst in custody, would you want to continue with this line of work outside? If not, why not? If yes, is there anything that may prevent you from doing this?
12. Are you aware of any support which may be available to you to help you into E/T/E?
13. Have you used any specific services/sought any particular advice to help you get into E/T/E? Have you found them useful? In what ways? How may they be improved?
14. Do you feel you have had any needs in custody, in terms of getting back into E/T/E which weren't met?
15. Are there any specific skills you may need to develop to help you get back into E/T/E when you're released?
16. Is there anything in particular you feel you need support with at this time? Or on release?
17. What kind of support do you feel would be most helpful in terms of getting into E/T/E?

## Closing

18. What do you see yourself doing, 6 months after release?
19. What are you most looking forward to when you're released?
20. Is there anything you'd like to add which you feel we haven't covered?

Thank participant for taking part in the research.

# Appendix B

## Interview Schedule No. 2 - Women on Community Sentences and 'Ex Offenders' (One to One)

### Introductions

PRA will:

- introduce self and thank for agreeing to participate
- ensure participant has read information sheet and ask if any questions
- ensure participant has understood and signed consent form

### Openings

1. Are you involved in any kind of Employment, Training or Education at the moment/Have you ever been involved in any kind of E/T/E? (If no, move to question 4 and skip question 7, if yes, move to question 2 and skip question 4)
2. What have you got out of your E/T/E?
3. Can you think of any particular skills you have developed as a result of your E/T/E?

### Perceptions of work

4. Is getting into E/T/E something you're interested in?

(Prompt:- Is there anything that would make you want to get back into work?)

5. Are there any advantages to working?
6. Are there any advantages to not working?

### Perceived Barriers to E/T/E

7. What has been your experience of accessing E/T/E since your conviction?
8. Do you have any particular fears/concerns around E/T/E?

(Prompt:- How would you feel about applying for a job?)

9. What kind of things may put you off getting into E/T/E / applying for E/T/E?
10. How do you feel you are viewed by current/potential employers?
11. What is your understanding around telling future employers about your conviction?
12. Have you ever had to tell an employer about your conviction? How did you find that?

## Elements which need to be in place to support the transition from sentence to E/T/E

13. Are you aware of any support which may be available to you in relation to E/T/E?
14. Have you used any specific services/sought any particular advice in relation to E/T/E? Have you found them useful? In what ways?
15. Do you feel you have had any needs since your conviction, in relation to E/T/E which haven't been met?
16. Are there any specific skills you feel you need to develop in relation to E/T/E?
17. Is there anything in particular you feel you need support with at this time? Or in the future?
18. What kind of support do you feel would be most helpful in relation to E/T/E?

## Closing

19. What do you see yourself doing in 6 months time?
20. What are you most looking forward to in the future?
21. Is there anything you'd like to add which you feel we haven't covered?

Thank participant for taking part.

# Appendix C

## Interview Schedule No. 3 - Women in Custody (Focus Groups)

### Introductions

PRA will:

- introduce self and thank for agreeing to participate
- ensure participants have read information sheet and ask if any questions
- ensure participants have understood and signed consent form
- ensure participants have completed monitoring form
- distribute name badges
- establish ground rules (speak one at a time, respect opinions of others, assure each other of confidentiality)

### Openings

1. (Round robin) Ask all participants to introduce self to group and say something about why they wanted to take part in the group.
2. (Round robin) Is anyone involved with/Has anyone been involved in any kind of E/T/E whilst in custody? If so, what?
3. What have you got out of your E/T/E?
4. Can you think of any particular skills you have developed as a result of your E/T/E?

### Perceptions of work

4. Thinking about when you're released, is getting into E/T/E something you're interested in?  
(Prompt:- Is there anything that would make you want to get back into work?)

5. Are there any advantages to working?
6. Are there any advantages to not working?

### **Perceived Barriers to E/T/E**

7. What are your main concerns and fears when thinking about being released from custody?  
(Prompt:- How may this affect your feelings about E/T/E?)
8. How do you feel you are viewed by potential employers?
9. What is your understanding around telling future employers about your conviction?
10. How do you feel about telling employers about your conviction?

### **Elements which need to be in place to support the transition from custody to E/T/E**

11. If in employment whilst in custody, would you want to continue with this line of work outside? If not, why not? If yes, is there anything that may prevent you from doing this?
12. Are you aware of any support which may be available to you to help you into E/T/E? (Inside/Outside)
13. Have you used any specific services/sought any particular advice to help you get into E/T/E? Have you found them useful? In what ways? How may they be improved?
14. Do you feel you have had any needs in custody, in terms of getting back into E/T/E which weren't met?
15. Are there any specific skills you may need to develop to help you get back into E/T/E when you're released?
16. Is there anything in particular you feel you need support with at this time? Or on release?
17. What kind of support do you feel would be most helpful in terms of getting into E/T/E?

### **Closing**

19. (Round robin) What do you feel are the most important aspects of what we've discussed today?

### **Offer oral summary of group discussion**

20. Do you feel this is an accurate summary of what we've discussed?
21. Is there anything you'd like to add which you feel we haven't covered?

Thank participants for taking part in the research

## Appendix D

### **Interview Schedule No. 4 - Women on Community Sentences and 'Ex Offenders' (Focus Groups)**

#### **Introductions**

PRA will:

- introduce self and thank for agreeing to participate
- ensure participants have read information sheet and ask if any questions
- ensure participants have understood and signed consent form
- ensure participants have completed monitoring form

- distribute name badges
- establish ground rules (speak one at a time, respect opinions of others, assure each other of confidentiality)

## Openings

1. (Round robin) Ask all participants to introduce self to group and say something about why they wanted to take part in the group.
2. (Round robin) Is anyone involved with any kind of E/T/E at the moment/Has anyone ever been involved in any kind of E/T/E? If so, what?
3. What have you got out of your E/T/E?
4. Can you think of any particular skills you have developed as a result of your E/T/E?

## Perceptions of work

5. Is getting into E/T/E something you're interested in?  
(Prompt:- Is there anything that would make you want to get back into work?)
6. Are there any advantages to working?
7. Are there any advantages to not working?

## Perceived Barriers to E/T/E

8. What has been your experience of accessing E/T/E since your conviction?
9. Do you have any particular fears/concerns around E/T/E?  
(Prompt:- How would you feel about applying for a job?)
10. What kind of things may put you off getting into E/T/E / applying for E/T/E?
11. How do you feel you are viewed by current/potential employers?
12. What is your understanding around telling future employers about your conviction?
13. Have you ever had to tell an employer about your conviction? How did you find that?

## Elements which need to be in place to support the transition from sentence to E/T/E

14. Are you aware of any support which may be available to you in relation to E/T/E?
15. Have you used any specific services/sought any particular advice in relation to E/T/E? Have you found them useful? In what ways?
16. Do you feel you have had any needs since your conviction, in relation to E/T/E which haven't been met?
17. Are there any specific skills you feel you need to develop in relation to E/T/E?
18. Is there anything in particular you feel you need support with at this time? Or in the future?
19. What kind of support do you feel would be most helpful in relation to E/T/E?

## Closing

20. (Round robin) What do you feel are the most important aspects of what we've discussed today?

## Offer oral summary of group discussion

21. Do you feel this is an accurate summary of what we've discussed?
22. Is there anything you'd like to add which you feel we haven't covered?

Thank participants for taking part in the research.

# Appendix E

## Checklist – before, during and after interviews

Before you leave for the interview check that you have;

- A tape recorder, batteries and tapes/discs
- A form of identification (i.e. drivers licence/ passport)
- Your SOVA I.D. card
- Spare information sheets
- Interview schedules
- Pens
- Arranged parking space
- A do not disturb sign
- Expenses sheet (where necessary)
- A map or directions
- Sticky labels and marker pens
- Consent form(s)
- Reward??
- Monitoring form
- Rehabilitation of offenders leaflet

### On arrival remember to;

- Leave personnel possessions at the gate
- Also leave mobile phones at the gate
- Check that the participant(s) have read and understand the information sheets
- Check that the participant(s) have completed the consent form

### After the interview remember to;

- Conduct a debriefing session with the participant
- Ask if the participant would like to receive information about the pilot projects

### On arrival back to base;

- Code up tape and store securely
- Ring Julie to confirm that you have arrived back safely

# Appendix F

## Coding System for 'Women into Work' Tapes and Reference Numbers

Below is a coding system for the Women into Work study. The code established should be used to code up the tape and also provides the Beneficiary Reference Number for the ESF Enrolment Form. The numbers are related to the steps in which they should be coded:

- 1) Prison/Probation area code
- 2) Initials of researchers
- 3) Date of Fieldwork
- 4) Fieldwork number & Number of tape
- 5) Individual or group

**1. The Prison/Probation area code relates to the number that has been assigned to individual Prison/Probation area in which the interview takes place.**

01 = Askham Grange

02 = Cookham Wood

03 = Holloway

04 = Low Newton

05 = Morton Hall

06 = Send

07 = East Sutton Park

08 = Winchester

001 = North Yorkshire probation

002 = West Mercia

003 = Essex

004 = Greater Manchester

005 = Kent

006 = Surrey

007 = Staffordshire

008 = Durham

009 = Avon and Somerset

0010 = Derbyshire

0011 = Suffolk

0012 = London Central

0013 = Lincolnshire

0014 = West Yorkshire

0015 = Cheshire

0016 = Hampshire  
0017 = Thames Valley (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire)  
0018 = Bedfordshire  
0019 = Cambridgeshire  
0020 = Cumbria  
0021 = Devon and Cornwall  
0022 = Gloucestershire  
0023 = Hertfordshire  
0024 = Humberside  
0025 = Lancashire  
0026 = Leicestershire and Rutland  
0027 = Merseyside  
0028 = Norfolk  
0029 = Northampton  
0030 = Northumbria  
0031 = Nottinghamshire  
0032 = Sussex  
0033 = Teeside  
0034 = Warwickshire  
0034 = West Midlands  
0035 = Wiltshire  
0036 = South Yorkshire

**2. Please use all of the researcher's initials that participated in the fieldwork.**

CO = Caroline O'Keeffe  
AR = Angie Roberts  
ST = Sandra Thompson  
LW= Leanne Wicks

**3. The date means the date that the particular fieldwork actually occurred. Please use the structure below:**

e.g. 051102

**4. The fieldwork number refers to whether there was more than one group or individual being interviewed that day, and the number of the tape relates to whether more than one tape was used for the specific piece of fieldwork. Therefore, if there were two focus groups, the first group's first tape would be referred to as A1, and the second group's would be B1. The second tape would be A2 etc.**

**5. The code for 'individual' or 'group' relates to whether it was an individual being interviewed or whether it was a group.**

GRP = Group  
IND = Individual

**Example:**

01/COAR/051102/A1/GRP

This example shows that the tape refers to fieldwork carried out by Caroline O’Keeffe and Angie Roberts at Askham Grange on the 5th November 2002 with a group of women. This group were the first to participate in the research that day and this is their first tape.

# Appendix G

## Consent Form

SOVA’s ‘Women Into Work’ Research Project

Consent for Interview/Focus group

I agree to be interviewed by any one of the researchers as part of the above project.

I have read and understood the information sheet which has been given to me regarding the ‘Women Into Work’ study.

I understand that my conversation will be confidential and my name or any identifying characteristics will not be used in any discussion or report unless I request otherwise. I understand that I can stop the interview or exit the focus group or refuse to answer a question whenever I wish.

This confidentiality applies throughout my interview with the ‘Women Into Work’ researchers. The only exception to this would be in the unlikely event that I inform them of any activity which may be harmful to myself or others.

I agree to my details being kept on a computerised or manual database as stated under The Data Protection Act 1998, and upon request I can access these records at any time.

**Signature:** .....

**Name in Full:** .....

**Date:** .....

## Consent for Tape Recording

I agree for a tape recorder to be used during the interview or focus group.

I understand that I am free to stop the tape recorder at any time during the interview or focus group.

**Signature:** .....

**Name in Full:** .....