

'Justice Changes Her Face':

What Women's Problem-Solving Courts can teach us
about taking a Community Based Whole Systems
Approach to Improving Criminal
Justice Outcomes

- **Dr Shona Minson**, BBC New Generation Thinker,
Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford
- **Dr Ruth Armstrong**, Director, Justice Matters

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JUSTICE CHANGES HER FACE

A CLINKS AND JUSTICE MATTERS COLLABORATION
BY DRS RUTH ARMSTRONG AND SHONA MINSON

QUESTION:

WHEN YOU THINK OF JUSTICE,
WHAT DO YOU THINK AND WHAT
DO YOU FEEL?



THE TASK – OUR JOB

Our job - Synthesise Research and Evidence

- Conduct a literature review of problem-solving approaches to sentencing women in the UK and internationally.
- Analyse existing models and their systemic impact.
- Identify what research tells us about success factors and also barriers to effective implementation
- Highlight lessons from problem-solving courts for transforming the broader justice system

WHY DID WE TAKE ON THIS TASK?

Relationships are at the heart of systems change:



'The most important unit of analysis in a system is not the part (e.g. individual, organization, or institution), it's the relationship between the parts ... making meaningful progress on the complex challenges of our time requires totally different ways of working together that prioritize relational practices' (Zimmerman et al., 1998)



THE TASK – YOUR JOB

Your job – A collaborative effort for justice reform

- Work out what these findings mean for actionable justice reforms that reduce custody and support community alternatives
- Shape a vision for a holistic, gender-responsive justice system that serves as a model for broader systemic change
- Think about what kinds of partnerships and strategies are needed to implement and evaluate the initiatives

THE PROBLEMS ~~WITH~~ FOR WOMEN

**Disconnection
Between Offending
and Systemic
Problems**

**Criminogenic
Impact of Short
Sentences**

**Fragmented
Systems and Lack
of Support**

**Complex Needs of
Women in the
System**

**Punitive Nature of
Traditional Courts**

**Impact on Families
and Children**

A
PROBLEM-
SOLVING
APPROACH

collaborative
relational
trauma-informed
systemic
community
support
poverty
addiction
services
housing
empowering
role
listens
restores
acknowledges
based
integrated
treatment
transforms

THE FINDINGS – SUPPORTING SUCCESS



Adequate resourcing and judicial continuity



Collaborative, non-adversarial processes



Not automatically excluding high-risk people



Reducing reoffending isn't their only aim



Prioritises access to holistic support services



Flexibility and recognition of progress



Relational and restorative ethos - speaking and listening

Key to all aspects of effectiveness is the recognition of the *relational* and *systemic* nature of justice.

“They’ve built me up. I feel better than I did last year. So far, so good.” (problem-solving court participant cited in Kinsella et al, 2018)

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THE FINDINGS - WHAT INHIBITS SUCCESS?

Non-attendance at reviews (attendance at reviews was linked to successful completion)

Non-compliance with the court plan

WHY Do some people struggle with attendance and compliance?



WHAT IS SUCCESS?

‘Even participants who were now back in prison were extremely positive about it [the PSC], and when they return to the community, they could build on some of the things they have learned.’ (Eunson et al, 2018)

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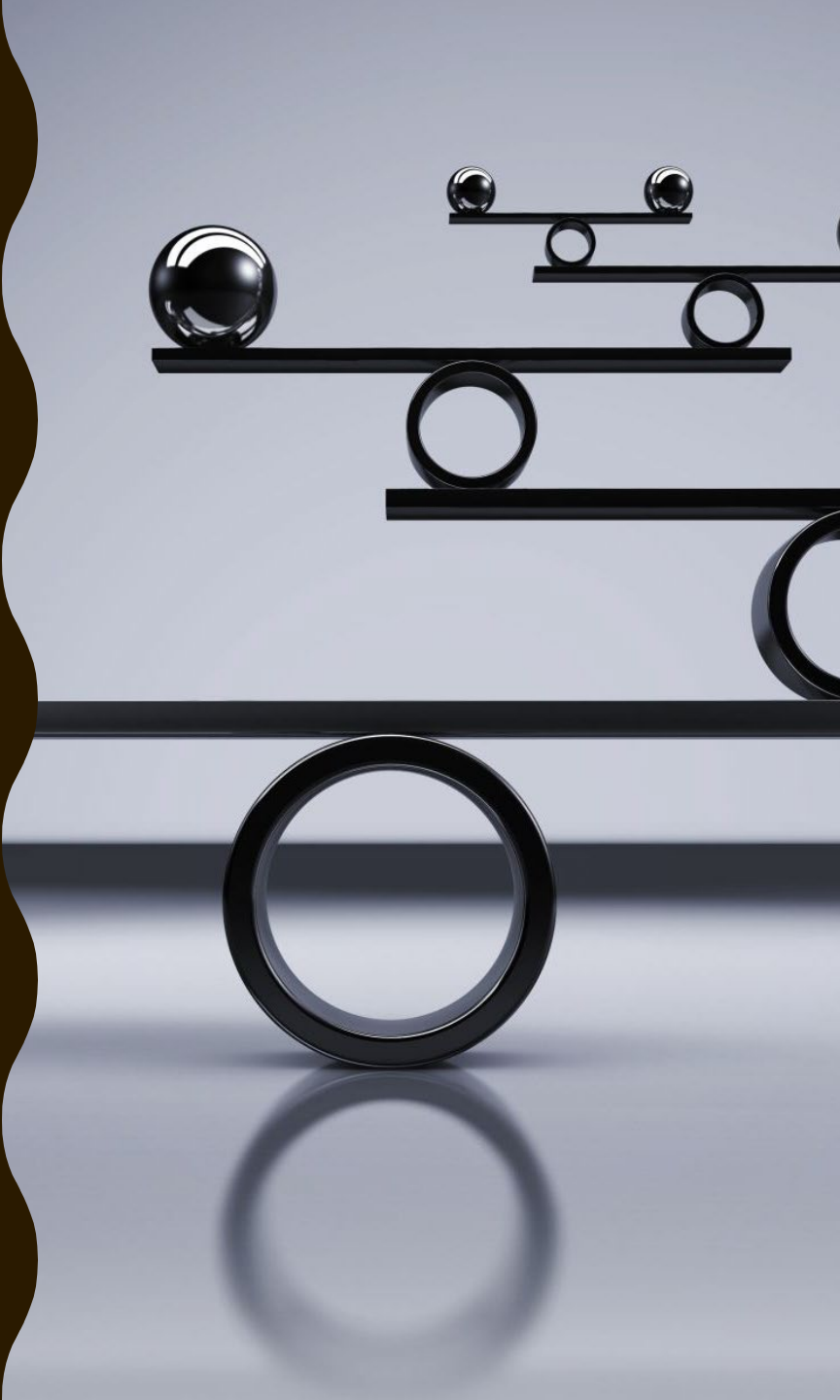
THE LEARNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

- If we have a systems problem, we need a systems solution
- When you prioritise relational practices, you change the relationships between the parts (Zimmerman, 1998)
- Professionals change ...
- Organisations change ...
- Participants change ...
- Justice changes her face ...
- Oh, and it's cheaper!



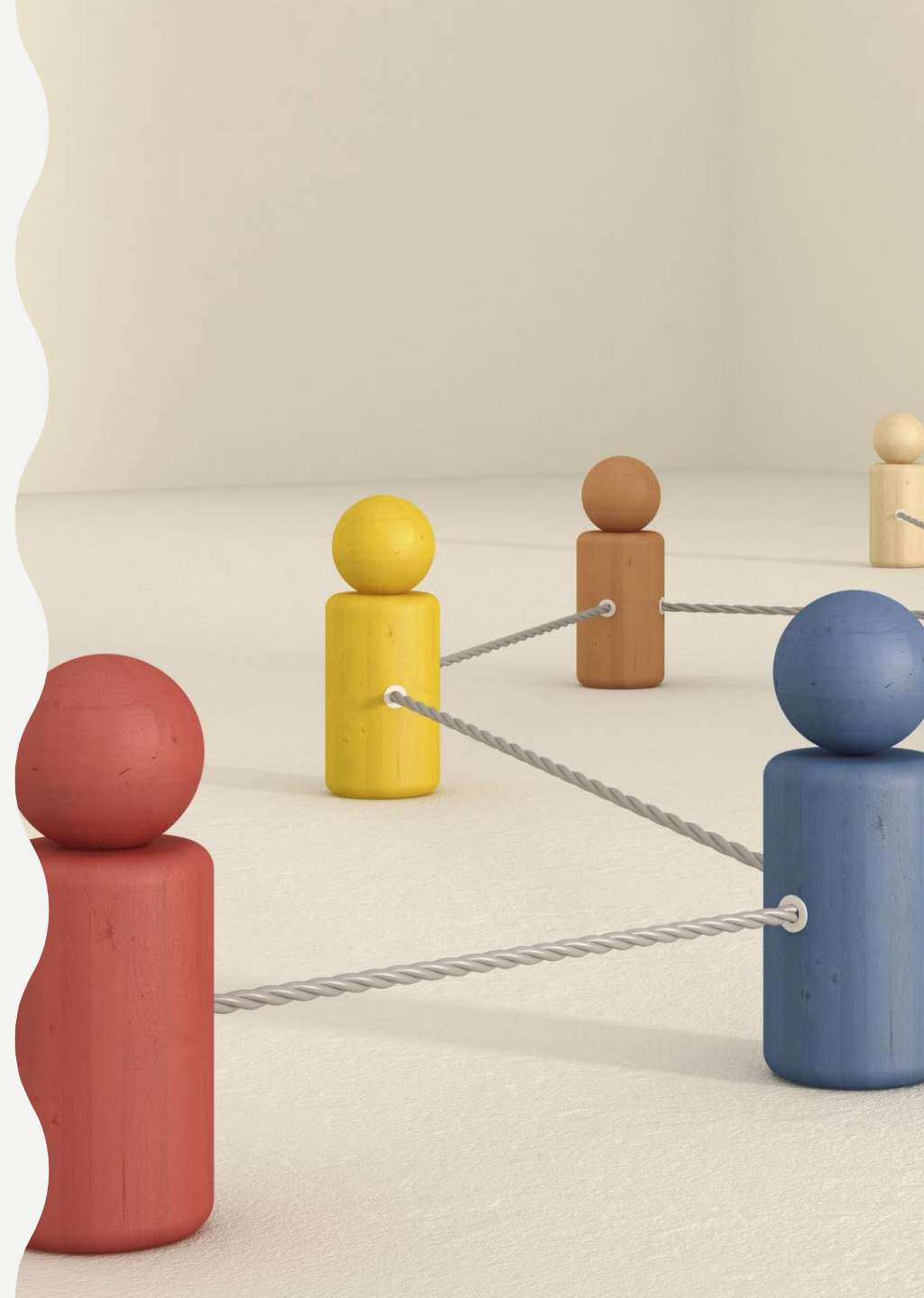
OVER TO YOU ...

- In your sphere, what would need to change so relationships, voice and collaboration could form a more integral part of your practice?
- What connections do you need so that your approach is more effective?



FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

- 1. Explore Longitudinal Outcomes:** Assess the long-term impacts of WPSC on recidivism, social reintegration, and participant wellbeing.
- 2. Evaluate Scalability and Equity:** Examine how these models can be adapted to diverse socio-cultural contexts without exacerbating disparities in access to justice.
- 3. Develop Holistic Metrics:** Move beyond traditional reoffending rates to include broader indicators of success, such as improvements in housing stability, mental health, and empowerment.
- 4. Examine Systemic Barriers:** Investigate how structural factors—such as funding constraints and inter-agency coordination—affect the sustainability of these courts.



Lessons from Hope Street

- **Lady Edwina Grosvenor**

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one small thing



Edwina Grosvenor
Lessons from Hope Street

Justice and Women: A New Direction
Church House, Westminster
30/01/2025

Hope Street

Hope Street is a residential community, trauma-informed and gender-specific by design. A place where women can get support and keep their children with them.

Women can be referred as an alternative to custody (including remand), if released from prison with ongoing support needs or at risk from recall in the community.



Hope Street Aims

We want to prove that this approach will:

- Reduce the number of women going to prison
- Prevent maternal separation and intergenerational trauma
- Support women and children to lead happier lives free from the impact of crime



Hope Street in numbers

Since opening in summer 2023 we have had:

- 51 residents including:
 - 24 women with children under 18
 - 5 children residing with their mum at Hope Street, and others supported with contact in the community.
- 3076 attendances to groups at Hope Street from women in the community



Snapshot of learning so far:

- A community approach **keeping women and children together** can truly turn lives around.
- Trauma-informed **physical environments** can benefit women, children and those who support them.
- **Housing** pathways are essential and can be established using a social finance model.
- Systemic change takes **time** and **strong partnerships** – we are still building up our court referral pathway, still working with evaluators to gather data.



Into the future

- **Sharing learning** -The independent evaluation will show what's worked (and not!) - our process plus qualitative, quantitative and economic impact across health, justice, social care...
- **Collaboration** – Hope Street has learnt from amazing work across the sector especially Women's Centres. We know these community-based models work, and alliances such as the NWJC are vital to continue to combine efforts.
- **Momentum** – now is definitely the time to work together and transform the justice system for women and children.



Gender-and Trauma-Responsive Assessment and Case Management

- **Chloé Geoghegan**, Director - Women's Centres and Specialist Support - The JABBS Foundation
- **Donna Lewis**, Chief Operating Officer, Anawim – Birmingham's Centre for Women

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GENDER- AND TRAUMA- RESPONSIVE ASSESSMENT AND CASE MANAGEMENT

The Effective Women's Centre
Project

OVERVIEW

- The Women's Risk Needs Assessment (WRNA) is a comprehensive, **trauma- and gender-responsive risk needs, and strengths assessment** designed specifically to be used with criminal justice involved women
- WRNA drives a **comprehensive, holistic case-planning** designed to enable frontline professionals to work alongside women in a way that best accounts for their specific needs and strengths
- The WRNA validation study lead by the **University of Birmingham (UoB)** successfully recruited over **five hundred women** across three women's centre organisations - **Anawim, the Nelson Trust, and Together Women.**
- The Effective Women's Centre (EWC) project involves the full implementation of the WRNA at these three organisations, alongside new partners **Farida Women's Centre (Partners of Prisoners), the Salford Foundation, Stockport Women's Centre, and The Women's Centre Cornwall.**
- UoB's research seeks to **demonstrate the effectiveness of the Corstonian 'one stop' shop model**, identify the 'core offer' that distinguishes the unique support that women's centres provide to criminal justice involved women and women with multiple unmet need, and **further the case for women's centres as a viable alternative to custody for women.**
- The project involves the development of training and implementation guidelines for the WRNA, the delivery of numerous academic and policy papers on from the WRNA validation findings, a casework model study, and a trauma intervention study.
- The Gendered Wellbeing Assessment (GWA) has also been developed by UoB. It is a trauma informed quality of life assessment **suitable for women with multiple, unmet needs who have no prior contact with the criminal justice system.** It is a comprehensive and holistic assessment which evaluates levels of wellbeing across key domains, and uses needs and strengths data to **calculate the likelihood of future adverse life events.**

RESEARCH FINDINGS TO DATE

Examining the Effectiveness of Interventions for Criminal Justice-involved Women: A Meta-Analytic Review (2024), The Women, Crime and Justice Research Group – Dr Richard Summers, Professor Simon Pemberton and Dr Joanna Long:

- **Gender responsive interventions are most effective**, reducing reoffending by 42% and partially gendered interventions reduce reoffending by 30%.
- **Therapeutic interventions** are, on average, **24% more effective** than non-therapeutic interventions, when controlling for other factors
- The results suggest that **longer interventions** (12 months or more) **were 12% more effective** than 0-6 month interventions.

Examining the Relationship Between Severity and Complexity of Needs Among Women Involved in the Criminal Justice System (2024), The Women, Crime and Justice Research Group – Dr Richard Summers, Prof. Simon Pemberton, Dr Denise Ruprai, Dr Kelly Mackenzie, Dr Ella Holdsworth and Dr Joanna Long

- Adult physical abuse, mental health, financial problems and trauma were the **most highly scored needs**
- The **complexity of needs and strengths networks increases with the severity of need**, thus as the severity of needs escalate, the connections among them also become more intricate.
- Those who experience **abuse as adults and children are likely to develop PTSD**, mental health problems and substance abuse in general. It is also a driver of employment and financial problems.
- **Childhood abuse particularly can drive homelessness and mental health issues** that go on to drive substance abuse, which in turn drives antisocial friends, employment/financial troubles and involvement in the CJS.

RESEARCH FINDINGS TO DATE



Exploring Needs Profiles in Criminal Justice Involved Women (2024), The Women, Crime and Justice Research Group – Dr Richard Summers, Prof. Simon Pemberton, Dr Denise Ruprai, Dr Kelly Mackenzie, Dr Ella Holdsworth and Dr Joanna Long

- **Mental Health**

- **Mental health and disability challenges were particularly pervasive** with 81.4% having a mental health diagnosis/referral, 80.2% on prescribed emotional medication. Severity indicators show 57.1% attempted suicide.
- This cohort **are over 4x more likely to** experience common mental health disorders and **over 8.5x more likely to** attempt suicide compared to the general population.

- **Abuse and Trauma**

- **80.8% experienced physical or sexual abuse at some point**, with childhood trauma particularly prevalent (37% sexual abuse, 48% physical abuse). 67.8% experienced physical abuse and 38% experiencing sexual abuse as adults.
- Abuse prevalence in this cohort of women is **4x higher than the general population, childhood trauma is significantly elevated compared to the general population** and domestic abuse rates are double the average.

- **Substance Use and Related Issues**

- Substance use was significantly embedded in offending patterns with **51.2% reporting it to be involved with their current offence and 51% using most or all days**. A further 29.6% use drugs as a coping mechanism. Yet **only 32.6% received substance abuse treatment**.
- This cohort has approximately **30x substance use rates** compared to the general population.

REFLECTIONS, LEARNING, IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

What has felt powerful, significant and surprising:

- **Consistent support** from The JABBS Foundation even with small things e.g payment of Champions
- **Distance travelled** from Phase 1 to where we are now
- The women's responses when we **identify needs/strengths that they didn't know they had**
- Intensive Supervision Court adopting the WRNA and it being recognised in the MoJ process evaluation as particularly impactful for the pilot:

“The assessment framework used... has profoundly increased the understanding of the needs of women, and therefore the ability to address them. And without that, you'd have people coming through to the courtroom where you just did not know that they needed all that support.”



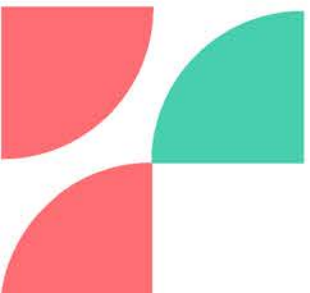
REFLECTIONS, LEARNING, IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

Emerging needs:

- Employment /finance
- Physical abuse
- PTSD
- Depression/anxiety
- History of mental illness

Emerging strengths:

- Education
- Parental involvement



REFLECTIONS, LEARNING, IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

Greatest achievements:

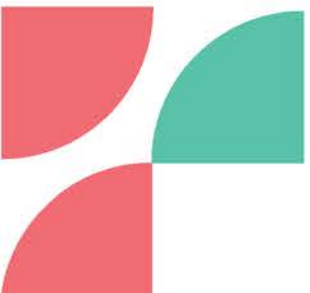
- Implementation of WRNA **across our CRS services**
- Consistent communication/selling the WRNA so that **staff understand the importance of the tool**
- **Opportunity to review our trauma informed practice** and incorporate this into the implementation of the WRNA
- **Establishment of the WRNA Champions** – encouraging existing caseworkers & embedding approach in inductions for new starters
- **Star of the week, newsletters and display boards**



REFLECTIONS, LEARNING, IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

What do we commit to taking forward:

- Work to bring better recognition of the importance of WRNA externally, **disseminating evidence as we collect it in partnership** with the University of Birmingham
- Ensuring the **new modular online training platform** is effective and applicable to all team members at women's centres
- **Implementation of the Gendered Wellbeing Assessment** for women with multiple, unmet needs
- **Opportunities to network with and roll out to other women's centres** and build positive relationships
- **Develop and embed the voices of the women** into the EWC project



REFLECTIONS, LEARNING, IMPLEMENTATION & IMPACT

Impact:

- **Women are able to share their whole history once** in a trauma and gendered responsive way and work with caseworkers to develop a support plan which meets their needs and strengths
- **Women's end goal** - they have a say in defining what good looks like for them
- Women **recognise their strengths** and incorporate these into their journey
- **Women are seen as more than just a number** – they matter!
- The **impact of policy and legislation changes can be mapped against a longitudinal data set** as all WRNA and GWA data will be stored on the new Themis case management system - built by, with, and for women's centres for the first time
- Analysis of interventions against outcomes to understand what works for women and what works for different groups of women, **creating a shared impact framework and making sure we measure what matters!**

CALL TO ACTION

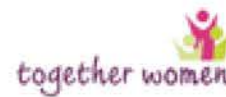


- **19 years after the publication of the Corston Report** and we are yet to realise its vision of a distinct radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred, integrated approach.
- **Funders and the Government must be bolder, more creative, be more willing to take risks, and commit to long-term partnership with the women's justice sector if this vision is to be realised.**
- Rosa's Mapping the UK Women and Girls Sector and its Funding: Where Does the Money Go? research shows that in 2021, a total of £4.1 billion worth of grants was awarded to charities, **but the women and girls sector received just 1.8% of these funds. With one third of all grants for 'women and girls' focused activity – worth £24.7m – going to organisations with no specific focus on women and girls. This must change.**
- Today's Justice and Women: A New Direction summit is a fantastic opportunity to come together to reimagine the possible and plan for this long-term, ambitious work but it must be followed up by **sustained action from funders and Government to resource the solutions we know exist and the ones yet to be found.**

The Effective Women's Centres Partnership



Ensuring women have the chance to thrive.



For more details of the EWC project and research being published please contact:

chloe.geoghegan@thejabbsfoundation.co.uk

lucy.lamb@thejabbsfoundation.co.uk

or see www.jabbswomenandgirls.org.uk (live from Jan 31st!)