**Strategic Needs Assessment for Women in Custody**

**Executive Summary**

This Strategic Needs Assessment was undertaken to provide a shared overview of the types of service and interventions which will be required to support women in our care as we move towards implementation of the New Model of Custody for Women. The Needs Assessment has been developed following a review of the available research in relation to women needs, in carrying out this review substantial engagement has been undertaken with both internal and external service providers, capturing as wide an evidence base as possible. Additionally, the women have been central to the developments of a needs profile, women throughout the estate have taken part in specific user voice activity, including workshops and questionnaires.

The subsequent analysis of the evidence gathered identified that the specific needs of women could be brigaded under seven primary themes of **Addictions & Recovery**; **Mental Health & Wellbeing**; **Physical Health**; **Learning & Skills**, **Families**; **Criminogenic** and **Resettlement**.

A mapping exercise was then undertaken to identify all the services currently delivered to women across the estate. This information was then used to identify the specific services, supports and opportunities which will empower women to address their needs. This approach provides the evidence base required to inform operational models and service delivery models for SPS, internal and external partners, ensuring the activities and opportunities available to women now and in the future are designed to address the women’s identified needs.

**Introduction**

In 2015 the former Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced a new ‘radical and ambitious approach’ to how Scotland would manage women in prison. The new approach replaced plans to build a large women’s prison in Inverclyde. To inform this new approach SPS held a Symposium entitled ‘[From Vision to Reality- Transforming Scotland’s Care of Women in Custody](http://www.sps.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?fileName=Symposium+Report3593_1824.pdf)’[[1]](#footnote-1) which provided an international perspective on best practice in all aspects of custody for women. Shortly after, Ministers announced that plans would be developed for a smaller national prison for women with more complex needs and innovative community based custodial units for those who could benefit from closer engagement with more local services.

The Women’s Strategy 2021 - 2025 sets out the new approach to managing women in custody in a trauma informed, gender specific and holistic way. The Strategy aims to achieve the overarching vision that *‘Women’s time spent in custody will contribute to better outcomes for them, their families and communities’* and is founded on the principle that all aspects of the care of women in custody should be designed for women. All aspects of the approach will therefore be gender-specific and trauma informed.

This assessment seeks to create a shared understanding among SPS and partner organisations regarding the needs of women in custody. Through a collaborative approach identifies the key themes of women’s needs and the specific underlying services, supports and opportunities which will empower women to address them. Then, by mapping out the current service provision, it enables us to identify any gaps in service delivery and provide an evidenced base to support development of services with both Statutory and Voluntary Third Sector partners. In doing so it will assist in developing a robust network of both in reach and community based outreach services throughout Scotland to support women in our care.

**Strategic Context**

This new and distinct approach to women in custody sits within a wider national and international context.  Scotland’s Justice Strategy and the SPS Corporate Plan (2019 – 22) lay out a clear commitment to a ‘new model for custody for women’ that includes the explicit aim of reducing the number of women in custody in Scotland.

Scotland has indeed seen an overall decline in offending by women in the last 10 years, from eight to five convictions per 1,000 of the female population in Scotland between 2009-10 and 2018-19. Reductions occurred in the total numbers of convictions across every sentence type, with the largest fall being in financial penalties.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The values and principles below recognise the distinctive needs and circumstances of women and the impact of a custodial sentence no matter the length. They are intended to guide policy and practice for the future care of women in custody so that women can be appropriately supported in leading a healthy and fulfilling life.

**Key Values**

* Belief that women have the capacity to change
* Respect for individuals, their needs and rights
* Integrity, high ethical, moral and professional standards
* Openness to work with others and innovate to achieve best results
* Caring for people in distress, understanding that fear can result in behaviours that challenge
* Humility to be able to learn from others and from evidence

**Core Principles**

* The principles and fundamentals of the approach will be consistent across all of the SPS women’s estate although there may be differences in how these are put into operation in different establishments.
* The accommodation, approaches and services to women in custody will reflect the women’s distinctive needs and circumstances.
* We recognise an individual’s potential and possibilities and that these can only be realised through collaborative working, from the start of her involvement in the criminal justice system to her return to the community.
* The aims of the strategy can only be achieved in a climate of positive relationships.
* The environment, supports and approach to custody will take account of women’s likely experience of trauma and the potential for re-traumatisation and will be designed to minimise the harmful effects of custody and maximise opportunities for growth and wellbeing.
* Our approach will support the development of women’s agency through opportunities to make choices, have their voices heard and rights upheld, and co-produce the arrangements that will affect their time in custody and beyond. Women will know their wishes and ideas are valued and this will encourage engagement and participation.
* All plans, interventions, approaches and activities will be based on sound evidence and designed to boost the factors known to promote desistance and improved life chances.
* Where children who were cared for by their mother are separated by her imprisonment or are with their mothers in a custodial setting, the wellbeing and rights of the child will be paramount, in accordance with the UNCRC and best practice in Getting It Right for Every Child.
* We will foster a culture of continuous improvement based on evaluation, evidence and lived experience.

**Methodology**

A wide range of evidence was gathered, reviewed and analysed to fully inform the development of the Strategic Needs Assessment for women currently in custody.

This includes reviewing a wide range of available research literature in relation to women in custody. The inclusion of qualitative data gathered through the development of a user voice questionnaire, which was distributed to all establishment that hold women within the estate (see **Annex 1**), this information was then analysed using a system of thematic coding and brigaded into common themes.

A full review was undertaken of the current service provision for each establishment that hold women, an overview map of this can be seen in current provision section. Each individual establishments provision can be found in **Annex 2**.

An analysis of Prisoner Records and population data was undertaken to give a clear and concise overview of the current women in custody and related offence profiles. Prison Records were also interrogated to provide data in relation to identified Risk and Needs. **See Annex 3**.

Upon production of the first draft of the Strategic Needs Assessment, it was circulated to all partners for feedback and comment. Partners were asked to consider the needs assessment against their own evidence base and to provide feedback to ensure the final product presents a holistic assessment of women’s needs.

Further user voice engagement was undertaken with women in all establishment, to gather views and feedback on the identified needs, opportunities, services and improvements that the women feel should be embedded into our practice, and opportunities.

**Population Overview**

The numbers of women receiving a custodial sentence in Scotland decreased by 14% between 2009-10 and 2018-19, with large reductions in the number aged under 30 but a 75% increase for the 31-40 age group.

The average daily population of women in custody since 2012 is shown in the graph below. There was a broadly downward trend until 2016 followed by a period of relative stability until the beginning of the Pandemic in March 2020. It is notable that until the start of the Pandemic there had been no appreciable decline in the numbers of women on remand since 2012.

Total Female Untried

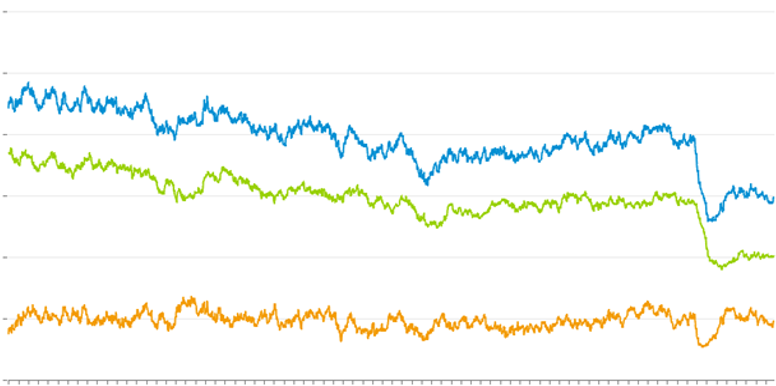


Total Female

Total Female Convicted

2021

2017



2013

2014

2015

2016

2018

2019

2020

2012

100

200

300

400

500

600

In addition to the size of the population, the new model of custody has to take account of factors such as the length of sentences and crucially, the needs, risks and circumstances of the women.

The figures below provide up to date information with regards to women in custody throughout Scotland. This has informed the development work for the Strategic Needs Assessment in terms of population overview;

The average female population was 397 in 2019. This reduced during 2020 and on 8th February 2021 there were 289 women in custody, with around 30% of the total female population on remand at any one time. The graphics below illustrates, the age profile, sentence length and offence profile.

The offence profile has been recorded and calculated in accordance with the Scottish Crime Standards Recording standard 2019. [[3]](#footnote-3)

This information has implications for the development and provision of services required to support the specific needs of women in custody. While the profile of offences for which women receive a custodial sentence in any one year includes relatively few serious violent offences, it is important to note that at any one time the number of individuals in custody who have committed serious violent offences is significant (see, for example, the proportion of women serving life sentences). A gender-based approach to managing risk within this complex population is therefore essential.

Much less agency-building and recovery work can be undertaking with a woman who has a short sentence and very little planning for support is possible for the relatively high number who are on remand. This emphasises the importance of non-custodial alternatives to remand and the presumption against short sentences.

There is evidence that the age profile of women in custody is changing, with an increase in relatively older women. There will be a need to continue to monitor the profile and identify any implications of this emerging trend. The very small number of young women under 21 and, in particular, the fact that there is rarely more than one female child aged 16 or 17 in custody at any one time present significant challenges to avoiding social isolation and providing age- and stage-appropriate care and activities.

**Current Service Delivery Overview**

All establishments that hold women within the estate were contacted to aid in the mapping of current services, opportunities and interventions. This information was analysed and themes developed, based on the emerging themes from the user voice and research areas. The table below illustrates the current estate wide provision of services, opportunities and interventions.

A breakdown per individual establishment can be found in **Annex 2.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Addictions Recovery** | **Mental Health & Wellbeing** | **Physical Health** | **Learning & Skills** | **Families** | **Resettlement** | **Psychosocial** |
| Scottish Prison Service |  | Chaplaincy  Peer Supporters  Walking club  Arts & Crafts | Gym Buddies  Fitness & Exercises intervention & qualifications  Duke of Edinburgh Awards  Yoga  1:1 Health & wellbeing support | Life Skills course  VT Cleaners  VT Laundry  VT Horticulture  VT Hair & Beauty  Catering  Introduction to Painting & Decorating  “Ultimate Self “Offending behaviour programme  Community Safety Unit Polmont- short courses  Media Centre  SMART Works | Chaplaincy Services  Visits  Family Contact Officer  Email a prisoner scheme  In Room Telephony | Training kitchen | Chaplaincy Services |
| Statutory Partners | PHAS  Social Work Services  NHS Services  Aberdeen Women’s Social Work- Women’s Connections | Art Therapy | Primary Care  Dentistry  Podiatry  Occupational Therapy  Mouth Matters  Maternity Services | Art Therapy  Fife College  Art & Crafts  Library Services | Social Work Services | Voluntary Through care  Fife Housing Authority  DWP  Social Work Services |  |
| Third Sector Partners | Simpson House  WLDAS  SMART Recovery  Hope Recovery Group  Alcoholics Anonymous  Narcotics Anonymous  Moving on Inverclyde | Willow Project  Paws for Progress |  | Reading Friends  APEX  Inverclyde Community Learning & Development  Activate University of Glasgow | Willow Project  Early Years Scotland  Stirling Interface Community Justice Group  Action for Children  Families Outside  Barnardos Parenting Matters  Brew & Blether  Barnardos Parenting | SHINE  Edinburgh Housing Advice Partnership  Willow Project  Shelter Scotland  Women’s Connections  Aberdeen Foyer Employment Mentors  Tomorrows Women  Faith in Through care  Routes out of Prostitution  Simon Community  Scottish Welfare Fund  218 Service | Simpson House  WLDAS  Stirling & District Women’s Aid  Quite Waters  Samaritans  Glasgow & Clyde Rape Crisis centre  Barnardos Here & Now Service  CEA Domestic Abuse Service |

**Key Themes of Women’s Needs**

Trauma is a central importance to the specific needs of women in custody, cutting across each of the identified themes. Trauma is a key driver to the offending behaviours of women, and is central to the approach supporting women in custody and their transition into the community. Thus, all services will be gender specific, operational practice trauma informed and individual to the specific needs of each women.

Women in custody may be experiencing issues related to several or all of the key themes identified. This level of complexity creates addition challenges for women in prison and for those working with them, which requires a joint approach across different areas and effective communication and information sharing.

Through analysis of the range of research, data, SPS information, wider stakeholder feedback and the user voice feedback the needs of women have been brigaded into common themes below:

**Addiction & Recovery**

There is a long-established association between mental ill-health and substance misuse (The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2018). This is reflected within the female prison population, the 2019 Prison Survey found that there has been a significant increase in women in custody who report drug taking being a problem on the outside (59% compared to 49% in 2017), and those who report being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offence. (60% compared to 53% in 2017).[[4]](#footnote-4) 34 % of women reported in the same time period of being under the influence of alcohol at the time of their offence, furthermore 20% reported they are worried about alcohol being a problem upon release. Four in ten women reporting (41%) were being prescribed methadone compared with just under one fifth of men in custody (17%).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Approximately a quarter of women in custody attended ‘Substances Related’ (28%) and ‘Smoking cessation’ programme (23%) during 2019. It is worthy to note that in 2019, smoke free prisons were introduced. This was the removal of all tobacco products and the introduction of nicotine replacement, for example Vapes, E Cig and patches and development of smoking cessation and support services.

Addictions service provision should be focused on the recovery journey of the individual women and be available throughout all areas of the women’s estate, this should be a blend of both in reach and outreach services, to support both in open and closed conditions allowing women who are able to access the community to develop community based relationships.

Women have highlighted though user voice groups, they feel one of the most beneficial services when they initially come into custody was the access additions services. This was also reflected that this transition of care should be supported into the community, as this is seen by some of the women as a real barrier, in their experience.

**Mental Health & Well Being**

The prevalence of physical and mental health conditions among the prison population is high, especially when compared to the non-prison population. According to Fitzpatrick and Bramley (2019), offending is likely to co-occur with at least one other severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD), including homelessness, substance dependency, mental health issues and domestic violence and abuse.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Prison Survey 2019 reflects that 53% of the women in custody accessed mental health services, in comparison to 33% of men. During the same period two thirds of women (66%) reported they had been assessed and diagnosed with depression, over half (57%) with anxiety and or a panic disorder and a quarterly were assed and diagnosed with PTSD. 70 % of women have reported being victims of domestic violence[[7]](#footnote-7) from their spouse or partner. One study found that 82% and 92% of women had experienced trauma as children and adults respectively.[[8]](#footnote-8) 61% of women met the diagnosis criteria for DSM-5 PTSD (signalling actual or threatening death, serious injury or sexual violence) and 58% had self-harmed.[[9]](#footnote-9)

A cross section of women highlighted the importance of being able to access a range of physical activities, and the positive impact this has on their mental Health. The women felt this helped normalised their day and something they looked forward too.

User voice feedback has found that having the support of a peer mentor in custody, makes a real improvement to their anxiety levels and wider mental health, especially upon admission.

A wide range of evidence suggests that women in custody in Scotland disproportionately experience both physical and psychological problem, which are exacerbated by substance misuse and mental and physical advertises in childhood and adulthood. These factors are critical to understanding the gender specific needs of women and require to be embedded in the provision of a wide range of mental health services and non-clinical supports available to women in custody, to effectively addresses mental ill health, anxiety, depression, PTSD, trauma stress disorders and trauma.

**Physical Health**

As a direct consequence of the often a chaotic lifestyle, traumatic histories and addictions issues women in custody face, there is a direct impact upon their physical health. In 2019, the Prisoner survey found that 80% women accessed the services of the doctor, in comparison to 66% of men. [[10]](#footnote-10) People in custody often suffer from physical and mental health conditions that might be present before admission to prison, some of which may naturally deteriorate over time or due to imprisonment. [[11]](#footnote-11) Due to lifestyles, trauma histories and high levels of reported domestic violence, women suffer a wide range of physical health issues, including a requirement for high levels of support for sexual health services.

Embedded through the voice feedback is the positive impact of the being able to access a range of physical activities, several women noted this, along education in healthy eating has contributed to an improvement in their physical health.

**Learning & Skills**

Assessments have shown that 51% of the population of women in custody exhibit traits consistent with a learning disability or difficulty. 23% of the women who we assessed have literacy level at SCQF 2 or 3, with the reminder at a higher level of functioning literacy. The overall numbers for functional numeracy are lower with 61% of women assessed at SCQF levels 2 and 3, requiring additional support.[[12]](#footnote-12) In relation to qualifications and access to work opportunities, in a sample of 99 women, 5% had post-secondary level qualifications, 42% had no formal qualifications and 33% were unable to work due to illness or disability.

These findings suggest that many women will experience barriers to daily functioning and a lack of functional literacy, which result in women having difficulties with self-management and independent living.

Women will require the opportunity to undertake a range of learning and employment opportunities, these range from service led interventions, real-life Vocational training opportunities i.e. Hairdressers etc., as well as life skills development programmes. All opportunities will be aligned to Scottish Government and Scottish Government Digital Strategy ambitions for the Scottish workforce. 78 % of women during a recent prison survey stated that work in prison helped them take more responsibility, while 76% of the women found that work available in prison has helped the learn to work with others. Interestingly under half the women stated that they found prison work helpful in preparing for a job upon release from custody, indicating that a revised approach to employability will be required.

Consideration given to a Cognitive functioning assessment completed early in sentence planning to ensure that any deficits in comprehension, reasoning, working memory and process skills are identified at an early stage and the individual learning needs of women are taken into account when creating plans and identifying interventions.[[13]](#footnote-13) Cognitive difficulties will impact on an individual’s ability to process and retain information and follow instruction and comply with licence on release. Activities will be focused on building self-esteem and promoting a sense of hope/aspiration for the future i.e. motivational speakers/ those with lived experience.

**Criminogenic Needs**

The Scottish Prison Service developed the ‘Ultimate Self’ programme in recognition of the fact that women in prison often display multitude interconnected needs. The programme aims to identify and enhance existing individual strengths and to raise awareness of individual participants’ pathways into offending and areas of criminogenic need relevant to their future risk of re-offending e.g. anti-social attitudes and related thinking patterns, pro-criminal peers, self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as the ability to cope with problems, including those brought about through substance misuse.

Due to the level of Women with Personality disorders in custody[[14]](#footnote-14), opportunities and interventions should be delivery in multi-disciplinary way, individualised offending behaviour work for women with complex personality traits. The design and delivery of these interventions will be undertaken in collaboration with psychology and Prison based Social Work services, including short term brief interventions.

**Families**

Women reported having regular contact with their friends and family via telephone and by letter whilst in custody, with 75% reporting contact via telephone and 67% via letters. Only 10% of women stated they have no regular contact. However only around half (53%) of women self-reported as having contact via physical visits. Almost half (47%) of the women in the 2019 Prisoner survey reported that their families and friends faced difficulties visiting them. Cost, distance and time limitations were noted as the most common problems.

Almost 31% of women reported being in care as a child, with 67% of these women also in care at the age of 16. 61% of women self-reported as having children albeit it cannot be established if children were living with their mothers prior to admission into custody, and currently unable to get a true reflection of how many children are impacted by maternal imprisonment.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In a recent study Beresford[[16]](#footnote-16) identified Five broad themes emerged from our research and conversations with young people, mothers, and those working with families in a statutory or voluntary capacity. These are:

* Children with a mother in prison are invisible within systems that should protect them
* Every aspect of a child’s life is disrupted when a mother goes to prison
* Children feel especially stigmatised as a result of their mother’s imprisonment
* Children affected by maternal imprisonment face many barriers to support
* With the right support, children can be resilient and develop the skills to thrive.

Most importantly, children and young people identified that:

* The experience of having their mother sent to prison is particularly hard. A mother is supposed to be there for her children, so her absence is more unusual and therefore difficult to explain to others
* Feelings may change over time and will vary within sibling groups. Having opportunities to revisit decisions (e.g. about contact with their mother) is crucial
* Their views, concerns, and best interests are rarely considered in criminal justice processes.

The UN Human Rights Commission recently published a global study on children deprived of liberty, which included children living in prison with their parents [[17]](#footnote-17) this highlights that all children in contact with justice systems are met with processes that are designed to meet their specific needs, emphasing the negative impact that maternity imprison can have on children, and the importance of the mother child bound and relationship.

Given the specific needs of pregnant women and mothers, services must be available to all pregnant women or mothers, this includes parenting advice and ongoing supports whilst in custody. This includes active engagement with community based family services, to promote contact between women and their children.

For women who give birth or have a new baby it can be considered that it is in the child’s best interest to be placed with the mother to promote bonding and establish the parenting relationship. The best interests and safety of the child are of primary importance.

**Resettlement**

Resettlement plays a critical role in the successful reintegration of women back into their local communities. This covers a wide range of needs including but not exclusive to accommodation, benefits, health care, social work, citizenship, social services, employment skills and opportunities, self-management and self-esteem.

Though engaging with partners, external agencies and appropriate organisations to assist women in (i) accessing any necessary service provision, (ii) establishing / re-establishing pro-social relationships, (iii) influencing and motivating change. This should be embedded into the prison officer role within the Women’s National Facility and Community Custody Units. Working with partner’s agencies and communities to:

* Undertake an advocacy role on behalf of the person to support them and their families to engage with key services prior to release and in the community;
* Act as role models for positive relationships and actively seek opportunities that act as a change catalyst in the person’s life;
* Individualised case management plans are agreed with each women and shared appropriately prior to release to allow a smooth transition into community;
* Through case management processes agree the lead professional or agency best suited to support the person across the different aspects of their plan;
* Engage with and support families prior to and post release to support smooth transition into the community.

Evidence shows that accommodation is a significant issue for women leaving custody, with over half of women (54%) reporting that they lost their tenancy when they came into prison. One fifth believed a lack of support in the community (21%) and unemployment (18%), accommodation type (16%) and local neighbourhood (11%), played a part in their offending. Almost half of the women stated they were council tenants (45%), in comparison to a quarter (24%) of men. 9% of women held private lets with 2% staying in hostel accommodation. In 2019 40% of women stated they did not know where they would live in release.

The 2019 Prisoner survey illustrates that (75%) of women were claiming benefits prior to coming into custody. This further highlights the importance of ensuring robust multi-disciplinary post release plans with a focus on housing and benefits are essential for a successful reintegration into the community.

Prison Based Social Work have a key roles and responsibilities in the resettlement planning for statutory prisoners. Community Justice Teams are required to offer voluntary throughcare support for those who have experience of custody for up to 12 months’ post release. This includes PBSW to refer and encourage women to positively engage with community services on release.

In recent user voice feedback, the women stated that they feel that relationship building is vitally important to the success of resettlement into the community. Specifically, the importance of having face to face contact and engagement with support workers, mentors etc. prior to release, which they feel it vitally important to the transition into community and the development of trust and the relationship.

Resettlement is vitally important for all women in their successful transition into the community, external partners and women both highlighted the importance of ensuring the continuity of services, support and opportunities for all women in this area, as key to success. Women specifically highlighted the felt on their own when they leave custody and external services are not followed through. Therefore, is fundamental requirement to supporting a successful transition of women into their communities.

**Overarching Psychosocial Needs**

Research widely evidences that women in custody have high levels of mental ill-health, trauma experiences, addictions issues and exposure to domestic and sexual violence. A recent study found that the prevalence of trauma and bereavement experiences is significant amongst female populations and in many cases is significantly higher when compared to experiences amongst male populations.[[18]](#footnote-18) With 30% of females disclosing personal experiences of multiple unexpected or traumatic bereavements. Research widely acknowledges this is not uncommon with many women in custody having experienced chaotic childhoods, mental and physical abuse, domestic violence and exceptional levels of sexual abuse.

Due to the high levels of needs within the women’s population a robust well rounded provision of counselling services is required to cover a broad range of areas: addictions services, alcohol support, gambling, bereavement care, both pastoral or and non-religious, sexual abuse, trauma and domestic violence.

Relationships Education is critical to support women to recognise the signs of unhealthy or unsafe relationships and develop strategies to exit these relationships safely, keeping themselves and their child safe and to nurture positive and prosocial relationships.

Evidence illustrates that the use of lived experiences is a critical factor in the success of a person’s recovery journey. This should be embedded into the provision of a wide range of services women can access including peer support. Over the last decade prisons have introduced the recovery model and supports, widely used within the community, which has had a positive impact, particularly with regards to domestic violence and substance misuse.

**Conclusion**

The Strategic Needs assessment highlights the gender specific needs for women in custody, it is clear that a wide and varied range of services, experiences and opportunities are key to addressing these specific needs. It is vital that women are supported to build agency, develop skills and overcome their past experiences.

The implications for the approach and the services that will support it include the need for practice and services to be trauma informed; the need for services that support and improve women’s mental and physical health and wellbeing and recovery from addictions; the importance of work with families; and the need for comprehensive through care support which will enable women to return to suitable accommodation.

It is critically important to provide a range of learning, work and pro-social activities to enable women to use time well, to learn, address individual needs, and to contribute to others’ wellbeing, exercising citizenship. These activities offer opportunities to exercise choices and responsibility which motivate women to engage in these activities. As a result, they are able to develop new skills and attributes, at a pace directed by them but supported and encouraged by staff.

This approach requires collaboration between partners to ensure all women have access to the services and opportunities they require to allow them to develop the skills, knowledge, agency and confidence which will allow them to reintegrate successfully into their communities on release.

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3. Information from SPS Prisoner Records Information March 5th 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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