



Probation cutting crime: provision for women offenders

As part of a drive to improve services for women offenders, Essex Probation's Women Offenders Working Group has set about creating the kind of provision which will reduce the likelihood of women committing crime.

The background to women's crime is often a variation on that for men. While there are similarities, key themes appear, which, if successfully dealt with, can make a substantial reduction in women's offending. An all-too-familiar scenario can be a background of abuse in the family, poor behaviour and eventual exclusion from school, unsuitable relationships with men, drugs, prostitution, battering, multiple pregnancies, loss of family support. To extract a women offender from this destructive web in which she's become embroiled needs a series of approaches. Home circumstances often mean that these can be difficult to access for many women.

Work has begun to create One-Stop Shops which provides the necessary Probation services, with others at the same time: input from counsellors, Women's Aid, other support services, and the provision of workshops that offer whatever learning is required. Emotional well-being and relationships are key areas of need.

Some centres are better set up for women than Probation Offices. Probation staff are already approaching organisations in the community to promote a big county effort to set up One-Stop Shops. Domestic Violence Forums are a useful conduit: they consist of many of the agencies we need to have on board (for example Womens Aid, District Councils, Relate, Police, Victim Support, Domestic Abuse Strategy Group, Housing Associations, Parenting Groups). Discussion of the possibilities of using other appropriate premises, and accessing the new Ministry of Justice funding for preventing reoffending by women, is currently taking place.

Directory of Services for Women Offenders

Conscious of the lack of awareness of what is available for women offenders in Essex, the Women Offenders Working Group has put together a Directory of Services which is now available to all Probation staff. All organisations are listed in one document, broken down by field office, and include services for Families, Health, Domestic Violence, Homelessness, BME. Local, regional and national contacts are available.

- The number of women in prison has doubled over the last 10 years.
- Half are there for drug offences
- A third have no previous convictions
- 3 in 4 are in prison for less than a year
- A quarter are Black or Minority Ethnic
- 2 in 3 have children
- **50% have reported abuse in their lives**

Together we can do something about it.