

“A Space on the Floor” For women prisoners returning to Wales



Not even a bed, just a mattress on the floor of a hostel; was the offer for one woman hoping to start a new life after serving her sentence at HMP Eastwood Park.

“Welsh women held in custody in England have greater difficulties maintaining contact with their children, their family and returning to home”, say dozens of women in HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Styal.

Women from Wales, are held in prisons miles away from their homes; the nearest prisons being HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire and HMP Styal in Cheshire. For women serving longer sentences even greater distances must be travelled by their families to maintain contact with them.

Their resettlement problems are exacerbated by shortage of housing for women. Temporary accommodation offered in the capital city of Wales, includes “ a space on the floor under our emergency overnight provision”.

The difficulties do not end with inadequate accommodation. One woman released on a Friday received her discharge grant of about £47 from the prison and a top up of £1.17p in benefits to last her the weekend. Four weeks later she has still only received that original £1.17p in benefits. The claims forms carefully completed by prison staff prior to her release and sent by courier, have been lost, twice. This lack of joined up working, creates huge additional difficulties for ex-offenders as they try to start a new life without a job, without accommodation and with broken family ties.

The Centre for Research and Education Development(CRED) , in partnership with the National Assembly for Wales, the European Social Fund and HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire has enabled a group of Welsh women develop a DVD of self-help material to help overcome some of the problems for Welsh women serving their sentence before returning to Wales. This

information has been drawn together into a self- help DVD which will later this year be distributed to 400 Welsh women in custody.

Six women prisoners at HMP Eastwood Park have created a film about their hopes and fears returning to Wales. This film is supplemented with a series of satellite films giving advice and information about housing; maintaining contact with family, employment; help with substance misuse and mental well bring. The DVD also holds a directory of support services and agencies that can help women with their resettlement issues.

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration Edwina Hart, is supporting the official launch of the DVD at the Sennad Building in the Welsh Assembly on 7th November 2006. 400 copies will then be distributed to free to all Welsh women in prisons to aid their resettlement

The launch will be followed by a one day conference about Welsh women in the Criminal Justice System on 14th November 2006 sponsored by the Unlocking Potential Group (Europe) at The Village Hotel Cardiff. The key note address will be from Ms Sian West, a former Governor of a Women Prison and currently the Acting Director of NOMS for Wales.



For more details and a conference booking form contact Gill Hurley or Geraldine Reddington on 01600 860 804.