Parliamentary Activities
Member of the Conveners Group

To ask the Scottish Government whether the construction of a women's prison at Greenock will take place as proposed.

Answered by Michael Matheson (26/01/2015):
I have decided that the current plans for a prison for women in Inverclyde should not go ahead. The proposals do not fit with my vision of how to address female offending, and I have taken the view that a more ambitious approach is required.

I have instructed Scottish Government and Scottish Prison Service officials to undertake a period of extensive engagement with key partners, with a view to investing in smaller regional and community-based custodial facilities across the country.

The Justice Committee have been informed of this decision, and I will be announcing the decision publicly later today.

Current Status: Answered by Michael Matheson on 26/01/2015
# Women in Prison: A Snap Shot

- **Women’s Prison Population’s in Scotland - 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentenced Female Adults</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untried Female Adults</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untried Female Young Offenders</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentenced Female Young Offenders</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Better Way

- Divert low-level female offenders away from the criminal justice system wherever possible, and channel those convicted of low-level offences towards non-custodial community-based services.

- Reducing the use of Remand

- Ensuring that bail supervision schemes are made available consistently across Scotland was a recommendation in the CWO report

- Reducing the use of short term sentences

- Sustainable resourcing of community-based services
Thinking about desistance…and best practice to facilitate desistance

1) The concept of desistance

2) What do we know about women’s needs?

3) What do we know about women’s needs

4) What do we know about what helps/supports women in their journeys towards desistance?

5) What can we learn from community based projects and services?

6) What are the lessons for the way in which women might be treated in custody?
1) Conceptualising desistance

Some preliminaries: conceptualising desistance

- Stopping and refraining from offending
- Spontaneous or ‘natural’ desistance
- Assisted desistance (and what works)
- Primary and secondary desistance
- The problems of measuring desistance
Age and Maturation

Interactionist accounts

Subjectivities, Narratives, Identities

Life Transitions, Social Bonds
The age-crime curve

Source: Recorded Offender Rates per 1,000 Relevant Population by Age-year and Sex, England and Wales, 2000
Key aspects of desistance journeys: they are hard...

- People’s resources for the journey are often limited
- Their *change pathways* are often blocked
- Temptation and provocation...
- They are complex processes, not events, characterised by *ambivalence and vacillation*
- The involve *re-biography* (at the time or post hoc); changing identities (narratives); more than learning new cognitive skills
- Prompted by life events, depending on the *meaning* of those events for the offender; inherently subjective, hence individualised, sensitive to difference/diversity
Key aspects of desistance journeys

- Solicited or sustained by someone ‘believing in’ the offender (or prevented by someone giving up on the offender?)... **Hope**

- An active process in which **agency** is discovered and exercised

- Requires **social capital** (opportunities) as well as human capital (capacities/skills)

- Desistance reinforced through ‘**redemption**’ or restoration (de-labelling); finding purpose in **generative activities** (constructive reparation)
2) What do we know about women offenders and their crime related needs?

- Consistent messages from research literature, from experienced service providers and service users
- Unmet needs in relation to sexual and violent victimisation
- Unmet needs in relation to physical and mental health (including the impact of traumatic events and experiences)
- Unmet needs in relation to housing and income
- Unmet needs in relation to training and employment
- Substance abuse
What do we know about women offenders?

- Victimisation -> Less Resilience -> Risk

- Victimisation creates ‘psychological sequelae’ which can lead to offending behaviour

- In the language of ‘capital’ – low human and social capital

- Women who offend are often driven to do so not by ‘cognitive behavioural deficits’ but by the complexity of the demands made upon them (Worrall, 2002: 144)
3) Is desistance different for women?

- Systematic review of the literature: catalogues -> screen by words -> screen by abstract -> full article/report screen = 45 items > 17 articles/reports eligible. (Of the 45 some failed to distinguish between men and women)

- Small scale studies

- Cross-cultural differences

- The need for meta-analyses

- The importance of participating in research – to build up a picture
Examples of studies...

- Bui and Morash (2010) *The Impact of Network Relationships, Prison Experiences, and Internal Transformation on Women’s Success After Prison* 20 interviews with women on parole (USA study)

  > material resources (housing and finance/dealing with debts)  >
  ending abusive relationships  > time with pro –social friends

- Cobbina (2010) *Reintegration Success and Failure* (file study + interviews of 50 women; USA)

  > stable positive family, practical support with finances and
  childcare  > being listened to, encouraged + practical help re finding
  jobs  > access to post release services (help with housing, managing
  money)
Cobbina continued... hinderances to desistance

- Difficult to sever ties with other family members who were offending and abusive partners
- Lack of attention from parole officers (probation officers) who had very large caseloads
- The variety of competing demands for time and energy upon release from prison

- Study based on 25 mentees and 26 mentors.
- Conclusions point to the benefits of mentoring:
  - personal agency
  - dealing with shame
  - shaping a ‘replacement self’
Based on interviews with 69 women 12 months after their release from prison in Australia (only 23 claimed to have been desisting after 12 months)

- success or failure in dealing with drug addiction determined success or otherwise regarding desistance
- self-efficacy of the women
- support from family
‘Is desistance from crime different for girls?’
McIvor, Murray and Jamieson (2004) in Maruna & Immarigeon (eds) *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to offender reintegration*

- Study 138 young women and 138 young men
- 14-15, 18-19, 22-25 years olds – self reports and interviews
- Samples drawn from two Scottish towns
- Females – more likely to cite moral rationales for stopping offending than males (image of being law abiding)
- Females more likely to emphasise the relational aspects of desistance
- Dissociation from offending peers important for the young women
4) What do we know about what helps women/supports women in their journeys towards desistance: Common themes

- Human agency (‘resolve’ and timing)

- Supportive relationships (emotionally and materially supportive relationships which encourage interdependence)

- Severing relationships with abusive partners/offending peers....

- Understanding and acknowledging trauma... (environment -> relationships -> services and supervision -> opportunities to change -> comprehensive and collaborative community services)
Common themes

- Dealing with practical problems
- Reasons to stop offending & ways to continue desistance
- Women’s ways of learning...
5) What can we learn from community based projects and services?: Nine lessons drawn from research (Gelsthorpe, 2010).

The benefits of centres and services for women

1. Women centred
2. Mixed provision (offenders and non-offenders)
3. Focus on empowerment
4. Use of effective learning styles
5. Holistic stance
6. Facilitate links with mainstream agencies
7. Provision for ‘top ups’
8. Supportive milieu
9. Practical help with transport and childcare
The potential of women’s community services to promote desistance

- Supportive relationships
- Pro-social modelling
- Learning new skills/new ways of being
- Practical management of life
- Empowerment
- Positive psychology

Potential for women’s centres to contribute to desistance (by meeting their probation officers/offender managers there even…). Lessons from Centre 218
What we know and don’t know about work with women offenders

1. Models of change – more theorising

2. Consistency in monitoring and evaluation

3. Intermediate outcomes – distance travelled

4. Measuring change within individual support plans

5. Comparison and control groups (e.g. non starters following referral to Together Women)

6. Reconvictions (data collection & data cleansing)… the limitation of snapshots and the need to show the process of changes (See Jolliffe et al., 2011 MoJ 11/11)
6) What lessons we can draw for the custodial treatment of women....?

- Holistic approaches (offending may be the least of women’s problems...)
- Relational theory
- Supportive milieu
- Positive psychology
- Empowerment
- Sensitivity to trauma...acknowledging trauma and not repeating it via the custodial experience – being aware of ‘triggers’ e.g. (searches, seclusion and restraint)
Becoming trauma and gender informed...

- Safety, Trustworthiness, Choice, Collaboration, Empowerment

(See the work of Dr Stephanie Covington: [http://www.stephaniecovington.com/books-and-curricula.php](http://www.stephaniecovington.com/books-and-curricula.php))

- What is needed to facilitate desistance during the custodial experience?
Useful references...


