

PRESS RELEASE

26 November 2020

London Women's Services Alliance launched

for women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system

After a successful collaboration over several years, the formal establishment and launch of the **London Women's Services Alliance (LWSA) is announced**. LWSA is a collaboration of organisations that have joined forces to provide co-ordinated specialist services and improve outcomes for women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system, or at risk of such contact, in London.

LWSA is composed of ten organisations; seven women-led organisations who are committed to delivering enhanced **services led by and for women and girls in London**, namely Advance, Birth Companions, Clean Break, Hibiscus Initiatives, Housing For Women, Women in Prison and Working Chance and three affiliate members who share the same commitment and deliver women-specific specialist support programmes in existing partnership services, namely Inspirit, PECAN and SafeGround.

The LWSA member organisations recognise the need for a joined-up, gender-informed approach to support services. The Alliance will enable them to share cross-sector expertise and information to improve services and empower women and girls in London.

Through working directly with women and understanding their lived experiences, we aim to amplify their voices to inform policy and practice that meets their needs. Accordingly, we hope to strategically shape and improve the whole systems approach to support women and girls in London, advocating for pan-London services and accessible women's only, safe spaces across the capital.

Women in contact with the criminal justice system face multiple disadvantages and inequalities.

This has never been needed more as the country enters a second lockdown, increasing isolation and limiting access to services for the women and their families, as a result of the pandemic.

Half of the women in prison are left homeless after their release from prison, over 60% of them are survivors of domestic abuse and 66% of women in prison are mothers with dependent children. Without a multi-partnership approach, including appropriate and affordable housing and community-based women-specific support services, women and their children will continue to be affected long after an intervention from the criminal justice system.

LWSA will be sharing its whole systems approach and best-practice learnings from its work during an **event on 4th December, 2020 1:00 – 2:00 pm**. The event will be part of **16 days of activism** to end violence against women and girls, and will be hosted by Advance as part of the 'ADVANCETALK about abuse' series. (<https://www.advancecharity.org.uk/whats-on/about-abuse-events/london-womens-services-alliance/>)

ENDS

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Notes for Editors

About London Women's Services Alliance

LWSA is made up of ten organisations in total, **seven women-led organisations** who are committed to enhancing service delivery to women and girls in London, namely Advance, Birth Companions, Clean Break, Hibiscus Initiatives, Housing For Women, Women in Prison and Working Chance and **three affiliate members** who share the same commitment and deliver women-specific specialist support programmes in existing partnership services, namely Inspirit, PECAN and SafeGround.

Advance

Advance, an innovative London-based charity, supports women and girls who have experienced violence and abuse, including those affected by domestic abuse and those who have committed offences or are at risk, to lead safe, violence-free, crime-free and equal lives so they can flourish and actively contribute to society.

Advance delivers services for women and by women. Advance supports over 6000 women and girls each year to be safe from violence and abuse, rebuild their lives, break the cycle of harm and prevent the breakdown of families. Since its inception, Advance has led the way in innovation in the sector with community-based services, 'through-the-gate', and whole-system co-located services for women in contact with the criminal justice system and those suffering domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence.

Through its women's centres and advocates, the organisation delivers holistic, specialist one-to-one support and engaging group interventions tailored to women's needs, based on its Minerva Approach. Advance's Minerva WrapAround service is delivered across London in partnership with 9 specialist organisations led by Advance (now the LWSA partners).

Niki Scordi, CEO of Advance said: "Advance is proud to be working with our partners as part of the London Women's Services Alliance. It is by coming together, listening to and responding to the needs of women, so that they are supported in the community to be safe and change their lives, that we can ensure they are not caught in the 'revolving door' of the criminal justice system."

www.advancecharity.org.uk @ADVANCEcharity

Birth Companions

Birth Companions is a charity specialising in the needs and experiences of women facing multiple disadvantages during pregnancy and early motherhood. Its trauma-informed and woman-centred services in prisons and in the community allow pregnant women and mothers – including those who are separated from their babies – to give those babies the best possible start in life, whatever their circumstances.

As well as providing direct services, Birth Companions works to amplify the voices of women with lived experience and to influence the policies and practices that affect them across the criminal justice, family justice, maternity and immigration systems.

www.birthcompanions.org.uk @birthcompanions

Clean Break

Clean Break is a women's theatre company changing lives and minds - on stage, in prison and in the community. Clean Break was founded in 1979 by two women prisoners who believed in the transformative power of theatre to change lives. Our vision is of a society where women can realise their full potential, free from criminalisation. We pursue this vision by producing ground-breaking theatre which puts women's voices at its heart and creates lasting change by challenging injustice in and beyond the criminal justice system.

Through theatre workshops and projects in prisons, the community, and our specialist centre in London, we help to build confidence, resilience, and wellbeing, transforming the lives of women who have experienced the criminal justice system or who are at risk of entering it. Our Members Programme offers a range of workshops and performance opportunities led by brilliant female theatre artists, underpinned by comprehensive support.

'We are delighted to be a core member of the newly formed LWSA. Responding to Covid 19 has strengthened the way we have worked together as a sector and demonstrated the absolute need to meet women and girls needs in a coordinated and well-resourced way. The LWSA will support us in achieving this moving forward.'

www.cleanbreak.org.uk @CleanBrk

Hibiscus Initiatives

Hibiscus Initiatives (Hibiscus) has a track record of delivering high-quality services for over 30 years. We have distinct expertise in working with marginalised foreign national, Black, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BMER) women in prison, in the community, in Court, and in immigration removal centres. Our work falls into four broad areas: prisons, community, international resettlement and human trafficking.

Our person-centred approach engages the clients, supporting and empowering them in dealing with their multiple and often complex needs and, importantly, addresses the disadvantage that language and cultural barriers present. In addition to being a lifeline to our clients, our work is widely respected by prison, probation and immigration staff.

Our specialist expertise in international reintegration and resettlement, and supporting migrant offenders and those at risk of offending, places Hibiscus as one of the leading organisations supporting foreign nationals and BMER groups and individuals involved in the UK criminal justice system.

www.hibiscusinitiatives.org.uk @hibiscuscharity

Housing For Women

Housing for Women is a registered charity and independent housing provider, who champion female

empowerment by providing and promoting affordable homes for women and gender-specific support services. Since 1934, Housing for Women have been working to build a more equal society for women, a world where everyone has a safe roof over their head regardless of circumstance, where violence against women is not tolerated.

Housing for Women are much more than a landlord. For over 40 years, they have been supporting women and children in London, including those escaping domestic violence and abuse, trafficked women and women leaving prison. One service, ReUnite, is a unique pan-London project providing support to help reunite women released from prison with their children. ReUnite works with mothers leaving prison who would otherwise be homeless.

In addition ReConnect, provides supported accommodation for women leaving prison dealing with substance misuse and complex needs, many of who have experienced trauma and abuse in their early lives. Women are supported to bring about positive changes in their lives, reduce substance misuse, improve emotional well-being and prevent re-offending. Housing for Women combines their expertise in housing and holistic support for women, and their children, to rebuild their lives after prison.

www.hfw.org.uk @Housing4Women

Women in Prison

Women in Prison (WIP) is a national charity which provides independent, holistic, gender-specialist support to women facing multiple disadvantages, including women involved in (or at risk of being involved in) the criminal justice system. We work in prisons, the community and 'through the gate', supporting women leaving prison. We run three Women's Centres and hubs for services (in Manchester, Surrey and London), including diversion schemes for women at an early stage of involvement in the criminal justice system. Our combined services provide women with support and advocacy, relating to domestic and sexual abuse, mental health, substance misuse, debt, education, training, employment, and parenting.

www.womeninprison.org.uk @WIP_live

Working Chance

Working Chance is the UK's only charity providing holistic rehabilitation and employability support to women leaving the criminal justice system. Based in London, it helps women with convictions develop the confidence, skills and self-belief they need to unlock their potential and thrive. The charity's gender-specific and wrap-around approach helps women to overcome any barriers to their employment, find jobs and build careers.

Working Chance works with businesses of all sizes across all industries to find opportunities for women that align with their skills and aspirations. Since its inception in 2009, it has supported thousands of women into employment and many more on their journey towards economic independence.

The charity also works to influence policy makers, employers and the public to increase understanding of why women commit crimes and the most effective ways to prevent and respond to this. For the women it supports, a job is more than just an income, it means a future where she and

her family can flourish.

www.workingchance.org.uk @WorkingChance

Inspirit

As a service user-led organisation, Inspirit have become experts in helping local authorities and organisations in all aspects of service user involvement, participation and coproduction. Inspirit have developed a unique process-oriented model that enables organisations to analyse how they are managing service user involvement and allows them to maximise the quality and level at which they are doing it. A good strategy for well-managed participation improves service outcomes, service-client communication and relationships, makes providers more attractive to commissioners and creates positive life chances for service users.

www.inspirit-training.org.uk

PECAN

Pecan's Southwark and Lewisham Women's Hubs are committed to working with women to build fairer futures by promoting the safety, dignity and strength of women affected by the criminal justice system and multiple disadvantage.

Our women's centres provide gender-specific and trauma-informed support and advocacy from two safe and welcoming spaces. In addition to 1:1 advocacy support, the centres run a holistic programme of activities and courses aimed at building skills, confidence and community, as well as a Diversion programme supporting women at the point of arrest. Opened in 2017, the women's centres build on a strong track record of delivering specialist services for women in the CJS and those affected by multiple disadvantage.

www.pecan.org.uk/womens-hubs @WomensHubPecan

Safe Ground

Safe Ground challenges people and communities to do relationships differently. We use 'do' relationships because we believe relationships to be active, alive and participatory. We are 'doing' them all the time. Our work is about the consciousness and awareness we all bring to our relationships- with ourselves, with others and with systems.

We use a range of arts, therapeutic and group work methods to reflect, analyse and really consider how we are in the world and how we each carry the world in us. We support often large groups to enhance empathy and encourage expression, developing self-awareness and promoting social justice.

www.safeground.org.uk @Safe_Ground