

# A Game of SNAKES & LADDERS ADDERS

*A Criminal Justice Showcase In Collaboration with  
Women with Lived Experience*



Advance, in partnership with women with lived experience, has co-produced today's event to amplify the journeys of women involved in the criminal justice system. Today's themes, chosen by ambassadors with lived experience, spotlight the unique challenges these women face—including trauma, caregiving and stigma.

Contact with the justice system often has lasting effects so addressing these issues is essential for a fairer, more effective approach that supports rehabilitation and reduces reoffending. While today's discussions will address hardships, there is also room for optimism; the event will explore sources of comfort and healing that women have found in their journeys.

A systemic shift to community-based justice, steeped in the experience of those who have lived it, is crucial to reduce and prevent harm to women and girls.

**“I've got people who are in my corner giving me the best advice...just giving me that support that I need as a young mum.” - young woman supported by Advance**

## **The experiences of young women and girls**

- Girls in the youth justice system are likely to face multiple disadvantages, including experiences of childhood abuse and trauma.
- In 2023, girls represented just **3% of children in youth justice system** but accounted for **63% of self-harm incidents**.

## **The impact of women's criminalisation on family and children**

- As many as 17,000 children are separated from their mothers by parental imprisonment; only 5% of these children will remain in their family home.
- A criminal record – in particular a prison sentence – can lead to the **loss of income, housing, and family relationships**, which can totally derail a woman's life and her children's lives, and take many years to rebuild.

## **Employment barriers, stigma, and preconceptions**

- The proportion of women in employment six weeks after release from prison is **three times lower than for men** (4% vs. 11%).
- Of the women supported by Advance's CJS services in 2023:
  - 14% were able to gain or keep employment.
  - Nearly half needed support with education, training or employment.



### Community-based solutions and alternatives to prison

- Community-based sentences reduce the likelihood of reoffending and can prevent harm from escalating.
- Only 7% of women who received meaningful support through Advance's diversion service in 2021 were rearrested, compared to the **national average women reoffending rate of 20%**.
- In 2023, 7 in 10 women of the women who had been given a community sentence had a settled home when they came to us for help. This was nearly **twice as many as those leave prison**.

### The therapeutic effect of art, creativity, and Women's Centres

- Some experiences can be challenging to express in words. Engaging in creative activities can provide therapeutic ways for women to express themselves.
- Women's centres offer a space where women can receive practical and emotional help from support workers and peers, which allows them to address underlying trauma in a dedicated safe space.

**"This has been a brilliant thing to get me away from problems, to create. I carry the heart I made during the group in my bag"** - Advance art group attendee

### About Advance

- Advance is the largest specialist provider of **community-based support** for women in contact with the CJS, with a network of 10 women's centres across London and the southeast.
- Each year, we support around **3,500 women who are in contact with the CJS** and a further **3,500 survivors of domestic abuse**. We are uniquely positioned at the intersection of domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, both for women who are victimised and those who are criminalised.
- We work in **partnership** across the sector and are members of the National Women's Justice Coalition. Alongside our expert staff, our peer mentors & lived experience ambassadors give their time to educate on the impact of the CJS on women.

**In 2023, 94% of women said that their quality of life and wellbeing had improved following our support.**

### Change

- Invest in women's centres as an essential community resource
- Invest in early intervention and prevention services for girls, young women and women in the CJS.
- Incorporate and learn from the experience and expertise of women who have had contact with the CJS.