

Partnership Working to Support Women Offenders



Curious to Know More?

Hampshire Probation Area first piloted the **Women's Wisdom Empower Programme** in Portsmouth in late 2008. Since then, it has also been running in Southampton, Basingstoke, Fareham and Andover.

Empower is a programme which aims to increase women's ability to make changes in their lives. It runs for 7 weeks, with a one-hour introductory session, followed by 6 weekly two-hour sessions. It is relevant to any woman offender, as it can greatly enhance other work being done.

The women are supported in identifying their skills and strengths and use creative thinking and 'mind-mapping' to broaden their perspective. There is a session on **Thinking and Behaviour**, in which group members identify their triggers for negative thinking patterns and devise a strategy for replacing these with positive thoughts.

Empower makes extensive use of Visual Tools, such as the '**Kitchen Table**' Exercise, which helps people to assess their current situation and see where change is needed. There is also a '**Courage Jigsaw**', which looks at beliefs and behaviours, setbacks and resilience, and goal setting and resources.

Group members are supported in setting realistic goals for themselves and planning how they will achieve them. They use a fun and effective prioritisation tool - '**eating frogs**' - to identify the most important tasks as they progress towards their goals.

Evaluation feedback shows that all the women who took part in the programme found it useful and inspiring and many of the women didn't want it to finish. Here are some of their comments:

'I have learnt to start dealing with my problems. It has boosted my confidence 100%.'

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'I have learnt why I behave the way I do.'

'Learning to change small things leads to bigger things.'

'It has given me confidence to turn my life around.'

Trudy spent time in custody for drugs offences, and this has restricted her choices upon release. She found the 'visioning' sessions helpful in identifying her goals and overcoming obstacles. In her own words, **'Because of this course my future has changed - because you have changed my thinking.'** Trudy wants to work with women who have drug problems and has taken the first step towards this, by doing regular volunteer work with Women's Wisdom.

Debbie has been addicted to crack and heroin and has been in prison several times. She says Empower has helped her to see the consequences of her actions, and this has helped her to avoid using again. Debbie said, **'Empower has changed my behaviour because it's changed the way I think.'** She uses the 'eating frogs' approach to motivate herself to do things like sorting out her unpaid bills. Each time she deals with one of these tasks she feels more positive about herself and thus her confidence increases. Debbie found the behaviour styles sessions very useful in understanding not only her own behaviour but also that of others and says that Empower has made a huge difference to her life.

