

Kate Paradine – Women in Prison (WIP)

Women in Prison, as lots of you will know, was founded about 35 years ago by Chris Tchaikovsky who spent time in prison, and Pat Carlen, a feminist criminologist academic, who saw what was happening to women in prison, and saw that it was a system designed for men, by men.

Today we're still in prisons, and we run three women's centres in Manchester, Lambeth and Woking. We campaign to radically reduce the women's prison population and replace prisons with community alternatives, such as Baroness Jean Corston recommended over ten year ago.

The root causes of women's offending are still not addressed by the prison and criminal justice system, and women make up 5% of the prison population but they account for 20% of self-harm incidents in custody. As a group, they are the most disadvantaged group in prison, and that is a pretty marginalised and disadvantaged group. Their needs include incidences of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and trauma, substance misuse, mental ill health, and of course poverty. Women are much more likely than men to be primary carers, so when a woman goes to prison in 9 out of 10 cases her children will go into care, or they'll go and live with relatives. So in 9 out of 10 cases they'll have to leave their own home.

WIP is proud of its feminist foundations, and we're an all women team. [the foundations] were first laid by Chris and Pat in the 1980s. We continue to tackle social injustice. We supported the Lammy Report - about the marginalisation and discrimination against black and minority ethnic people in the criminal justice system - by holding focus groups with women in prison, so that their voices could be heard about the double disadvantage that they experience in the criminal justice system. But we cannot begin to argue that we in WIP, or we in the women's sector, are anywhere near having this issue covered. So, I won't be giving you any tips. I'll be talking firstly about our three challenges, and then three ways that I think we might be able to work together to tackle some common things.

The first is that diversity has dropped far too low down the to-do list. A few months ago I was talking to a really brilliant women's sector manager, ready to make the next step up to leadership. As a black woman, she made a throwaway comment, "I just don't see women like me in these leadership positions". That really hit home to me. On charity boards, as we all know, men outnumber women 2:1, and 93% of charity trustees are white. At conferences and sector gatherings the majority of senior roles are also overwhelmingly white – far from the diversity of women that we work with, and in society as a whole.

When I joined Women in Prison, which was only three years ago, diversity was high on my agenda. On my first day, I faced the wreckage of Transforming Rehabilitation, and the news that a key partner – the wonderful Eaves Charity – were going into

administration the day I arrived. Eaves were a partner of ours, running one of our Women's Centres. And the challenges have kept on coming; this is a very difficult climate. Part of the reason that diversity has slipped, and this is no excuse, are the serious crises that grip our sector. We are both overwhelmed by demand and radically underfunded. We are further hampered by dysfunctional public sector commissioning, and often an anachronistic relationship with funders. Though I don't include Esmée in that, they're our gold standard funder.

The daily grind of managing problems created by inadequate core resources, and the constant risk of redundancies from short term contracts, takes its toll. But the constant fight to survive cannot mean diversity is marginalised, because we know it's part of our survival. Too much talent and ability is going to waste, and I include our own organisation and the whole women's sector in that. Because we operate on one axis of inclusion – creating gender responsive services – we know that we can fall in the trap, and I include myself in this, of ignoring the intersectional nature of disempowerment, discrimination. Diversity can't be seen as a separate agenda that delivering services is seen as separate to. It shouldn't actually be on our to-do list. We are trying to get to a place - and we're just at the beginning - where it's our core values and social transformation that are the foundation, and not diversity, because that will be a given.

The second challenge is that we're not comfortable confronting the uncomfortable conversations. Many of you will have read Reni Eddo-Lodge's book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*. And the article by Thomas Lawson, CEO of Leap, "Us white CEOs need to talk". I think both of those are really worth reading, if you haven't already. Both are uncomfortable reads about the power of privilege. In a sector where fairness and justice are at its core, it's uncomfortable to face up to the way that white people have benefited from injustice done to those that aren't white. And worse, many of us - and I include myself - have lacked awareness of the extent of this issue and this kind of inequality.

One of the issues that we're working on in WIP is how to become more comfortable with the uncomfortable conversations about positive action and the need for that, and all sorts of other things. Lawson talks about how we might think our organisations are quite diverse, but as [Sophie Yates Lu] talked about, people may be afraid to speak out and challenge the prevailing culture, and feel that their careers might be damaged by being labelled "trouble". Some of this is about recognising the impact on staff of raising concerns, and how this is compounded by experience outside. There are common experiences in the women's sector of "battle fatigue" by women working in male dominated environments, and those tackling racism in white dominated organisations and we need to talk more about this. We have to be more open. If we're struggling on an issue we feel that we need to open our doors to let other people in to tell us where we're going wrong.

Which brings me to challenge 3, the big one: giving up power.

Core to WIP's existence is human rights and active citizenship and we provide a platform for the voices of women. They often feel they don't have a voice, so our Women in Prison magazine is written by women in prison and is distributed across the Estate. Women in HMP Style recently wrote their own newsletter and I was actually in tears when I saw how brilliant it was, and can't wait for one of the groups to take over one of our national editions. In WIP we know we need to surrender more power. Prison itself is a really toxic environment designed to infantilise, and power over another infects everything. Of course, women can't tackle diversity and raise the issues. Women talk to us about how even being friends, gathering and talking with other women of colour can draw unwelcome attention, and how they talk about "unfairness" rather than "racism", because talking about racism is seen as being threatening. Silencing isn't just the problem of prisons, it's our problem in WIP too. We need to develop a culture in which everyone believes that it's not only safe but constructive to raise issues like this, which would previously be labelled as difficult.

So, what's to be done? Firstly, we need to apply more innovation for finding dangerous spaces. Tom's article talks about some of this. At WIP we've set up a values committee and Alesha Augustin, one of team, is leading at driving forward some of the issues there. We're trying to look at issues we've previously pushed down the to-do list. We're planning staff awaydays and training that includes trustees and staff, facilitated by people from outside to diffuse the hierarchical power dynamics. We're also introducing diversity and inclusion as a standing agenda item on our supervision and our team meetings and our board, so that it's not a case of finding your right moment to raise these issues, that it's automatic.

Second, we desperately need to open up recruitment. We all know this. What we're doing isn't working in many organisations. Welcoming applications and advertising broadly just isn't enough. We would like funders to invest in targeted research specifically about the women's sector to see what can work. We've heard from Sophie some of the things that are working at Campaign Bootcamp. But we do need some help, and we do need to also target a recruitment drive across the sector to groups that are under-represented to sell our sector. People often feel they don't belong. We know diverse candidates are drawn to diverse workplaces, and it isn't enough to sell our values if they're not reflected in the way we work. Institutionalised racism is a reality in the criminal justice system, but also in the charities that are working in it. That's going to require some brave decision making, but we think that now's the time. The problem is that it allows the fallacy, if we don't tackle this, to creep in that diverse candidates just aren't interested in working in this kind of environment, which is tough. And obviously this isn't true and entrenches the exclusion that some people of colour face in our sector.

So to end on my final point. **The third element is possibly the hardest of all. Some of us, including people like me, will have to step aside** if true diversity is to

become a reality. And last week Sophie Walker, head of the Women's Equality Party, resigned. And she spoke about making spaces for new voices and new leaders because, she said, in order to lead sometimes you need to get out of the way. The truth is that the vast majority of women's sector leaders, like me, are white. We need a large, sector-wide, coaching and mentoring programme designed by a diverse cross-section of the sector that specifically targets women like Jodie, who I mentioned earlier, and says to her "you can be a future leader, so we'll backfill your post" – this is key for charities like ours – "and offer you a bonus while you complete a programme to equip you to rise with confidence and ambition. Why? Because you have talent and, if we are really to change the world we can no longer marginalise those who we need to make it happen". This can't be patronising and tokenistic. Opportunities for development and advancement have got to be real, and the decision to take a step back by people like me truly for the wider good.

To end, the wonderful Audre Lorde - poet, feminist and activist. She said "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", and she also said, "your silence will not protect you". So today it would be brilliant if you could think of that one question you're uncomfortable to ask.

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