

# **KEEPING WOMEN OUT OF PRISON**

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Coalition

**Position Statement 2018**

# KEEPING WOMEN OUT OF PRISON

Coalition

came together in 2013 to address some of the key systemic failures and major human rights issues impacting women in NSW prisons. Under the leadership of the Sydney Community Foundation, the Coalition members resolved to work together to reduce the number of women in prison, and lessen

the impact of women's custodial sentences on their families and children. Imprisonment is not the best option.

## We know that from 2011 to 2017 the number of women in prison increased by almost 50%

- There has been no commensurate increase in crime over this period.
- There are HIGH numbers of women cycling in and out of our prison system on short sentences.
- Women are going to prison for crimes that the courts consider not serious enough to attract a long prison sentence.
- 95.9% of women are in prison for under 2 years.
- 58% of women are in prison for under 6 months.

**Why are we sending so many women to prison?**

**From 2011 to 2017**  
the number of  
women in prison  
increased by almost

**50%**



There has been no commensurate increase in crime over this period.



## We know that imprisoning women further punishes an already vulnerable population

- Aboriginal women are the fastest growing prison population in NSW. From 2011 to 2017, the number of Aboriginal women in prison increased by 74%.
- 32% of women in prison in NSW were in either primary or secondary homelessness in the 6 months prior to entering prison.
- 61% have a diagnosis of depression, 51% have a diagnosis of anxiety.
- 70% of women have experienced at least one traumatic event.
- 30% have diagnosed drug dependence.
- 56% were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of committing their most recent offence.
- 20% were in juvenile detention as children.

**Why are we still imprisoning disadvantage?**

## We know that high incarceration rates hurt families, and do not make communities safer

- When women go to prison, communities, family networks and relationships suffer.
- 60% of women in prison in NSW have at least one child under the age of 16 years, and 41% have dependent children who were living with them prior to their imprisonment.
- A 2004 study has estimated large numbers of children, some 60,000, suffer the imprisonment of a parent at some time in their childhood.
- Women affected by the criminal justice system generally do not have access to labour market opportunities once released from custody and subsequently return to criminal activity.
- Imprisonment is one of the most significant predictors of recidivism. The more frequently someone goes to prison, the more likely they are to return to prison.

**Is it time to seriously consider an alternative to prison?**

Between July 2017 and June 2018, a total of



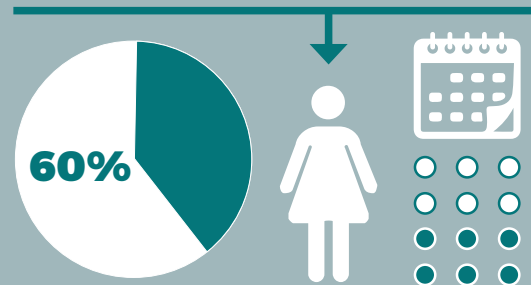
**2686**

women were sent to prison in NSW.

**60%**

had children.

Nearly **60%** of women are in prison for **under 6 months**.



**ABORIGINAL WOMEN ARE THE FASTEST GROWING PRISON POPULATION IN NSW.**



From 2011 to 2017, the number of Aboriginal women in prison **increased by**

**74%**

**162%** increase in proportion of females with one or more court appearances appearing in NSW criminal courts between 2011 and 2017.



Imprisonment is one of the most significant predictors of recidivism. The more frequently someone goes to prison, the more likely they are to return.

## ADVOCACY AND ACTION FOR CHANGE

- ◆ Introduce targeted statewide diversionary programs as alternatives to custodial sentence.
- ◆ Strengthen laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of a criminal record.
- ◆ Develop meaningful employment options for women affected by the criminal justice system.
- ◆ Actively support legislative changes so that only women convicted of violent crime receive custodial sentence - the current UK model. All others to be sentenced to community based management.

**It's everybody's business.**

# IMPRISONMENT

IS NOT THE BEST OPTION



Sydney  
Community  
Foundation



Sydney  
Women's Fund

Sydney Community Foundation, through its Sydney Women's Fund and its By My Side Fund, is working in partnership with SHINE for Kids, Community Restorative Centre (CRC) through its Miranda Project, Women's Justice Network and the Zonta Club of Sydney, to change community attitudes and government practice relating to the incarceration of women.

Collaborating organisations are the Australian Centre for Public and Population Health Research UTS, Corrective Services NSW, Dress for Success Sydney, Justice NSW, and UNSW School of Social Sciences.

*Statistics sourced from Corrective Services NSW and Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network.*



We can never imprison our way to a safer society. Support advocacy and action for change. For further information on how you can support action for change email:

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