

PRESS RELEASE

Embargo: 00:01 Tuesday 24 January

Unique funding model a key to reducing the number of women in prison

Today the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition (CIFC) publishes an external evaluation on the work it has undertaken since 2008. The report shows that its unique approach to funding advocacy has ensured the crucial issue of women in prison remains a priority for the government and UK public.

In the decade since the start of 2000 the number of women in prison had risen by 60%. Most served ineffective and wasteful short sentences of six months or less. With many having experienced high rates of mental health problems, sexual abuse, domestic violence and substance misuse, custodial sentences were increasingly seen to be adding to the trauma, chaos and disruption to the lives of the women and their children.

In an unprecedented move, during June 2008, concerned that their grant-making investments in this field were being applied to a failing system, more than 20 independent philanthropic foundations formed the CIFC to challenge the government to implement the Corston Report. This called for an end to putting non-violent women offenders in jail and moves towards placing them in far more effective community solutions.

The aim of the CIFC was to:

- Give a single voice to the concerns of funders in relation to the treatment of women offenders
- Keep the women's agenda in the criminal justice system in the public eye
- Work with the Government to implement the Corston report and ensure the women's agenda was not lost to the public spending squeeze

The evaluation, published today demonstrates the impact the CIFC has had. It finds that through funder advocacy and collaboration the CIFC achieved outcomes that individual trusts and foundations could not have achieved alone. Its contribution was helpful and timely, demonstrating the role of funder advocacy and the potential of funder-Government collaboration.

Achievements include:

- An expanded network of women's centres offering alternatives to custody
- A new national body supporting women's centres – Women's Breakout – has received sufficient MoJ funding to secure its future for the next few years
- The Prison Minister publically declaring that he would build on the work started by his predecessor, Labour minister, Maria Eagle, and reduce the number of women in prison by the supporting a network of women only community provision

At the launch, in the House of Lords today, the CIFIC announced that they are to continue their work as more needs to be done to establish a just and proportionate response to women caught up in the criminal justice system and for their children who were inadvertently punished as a result.

Liz Cadogan, from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and a member of the CIFIC stated 'We believe that in the last couple of years, by working together trust funders have had a strong influence on community-based women's services and have held a light to government policy. We believe that we have to continue this work together.'

Notes:

About the CIFIC

The Corston Independent Funders' Coalition was formed during June 2008 by more than 20 independent philanthropic foundations who wanted to challenge the government to implement the Corston Report.

About the evaluation:

The independent evaluation was undertaken by the Centre for Charity Effectiveness at CASS business school. It covered a period of three years between June 2008 and May 2011 and involved scrutiny of a wide range of CIFIC documents, a literature search, semi-structured interviews and two online surveys.

It is available to down load from the LankellyChase Foundation website and The Bromley Trust website.

For more information contact Peter Kilgarriff, Chair of the CIFIC, on 07914529984