

AFTER HOLLOWAY - A PRECIS

After Holloway ¹, A new report, from Women in Prison and the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, finds that the closure of the prison in 2016, caused significant distress and anxiety among prisoners and led to many women being imprisoned further away from home, hindering visits from family and children. The closure of HMP Holloway - the only women's prison in London and largest in Western Europe - is continuing to have a negative impact on the rest of the women's prison estate including being raised during a recent inquest as a possible factor in the death of a woman who died in HMP Drake Hall a few months after Holloway's closure.

In the UK there is a chronic overuse of imprisonment with 84% of women sentenced to prison for a non-violent crime on a short sentence, often for theft such as shoplifting. One in four women sentenced to prison last year were sentenced to one month or less ². Most women in prison have experience of domestic or sexual violence, are battling addiction, serious mental ill-health or are homeless and living in poverty. A third of women in prison grew up in care. It is these issues that are the root cause of offending.

The report points out that the best way to reduce crime is through community support and housing which enables women to address the root causes of offending and away from the additional harm caused by imprisonment.

The charity, Women in Prison, with support from the local planning authority, Islington Council, ³ is calling for any redevelopment of the site to include housing that is genuinely affordable and investment in community support services for women. The key demand is for a Women's Building to be built, an idea inspired by the closure and redevelopment of a woman's prison in New York ⁴ - a hub to host multiple women's support services and to promote women's empowerment and justice.

Dr Kate Paradine, Women in Prison's Chief Executive says,

"Holloway was closed without consultation with either the women directly affected or charities, such as Women in Prison, delivering services there. Despite this we, and many others, hoped that the

decision signalled a change in public policy to focus on radically reducing the prison population and moving away from prison to community alternatives. Sadly, the reality could not be further from the truth. As our report After Holloway shows the rushed and ill-thought out closure of Holloway led to a lot of anxiety and distress for women in prison and continues to have a negative impact as women are imprisoned further from their families and home communities.

“The closure of Holloway caused a ripple across the prison estate with an increase in numbers of women coming into the other prisons with high complex needs and rooms doubling up - resulting in more noise and chaos. For the first three months that women were moved to the re-opened Downview the prison was not yet fully up and running with very little activities and support services in place.

“The year of Holloway’s closure, 2016, saw the highest number of deaths in the women’s prison estate on record. Two years later and prison governors and staff have worked hard to recover from the closure. HMP Downview, for instance, offers activities, education and healthcare on a greater scale.

“However, the whole experience of the closure has shown that women in prison are still completely invisible,” Dr Paradine says. “They have been pushed further out of sight, and continue to be harmed by the criminal justice system.”

“Holloway’s closure has so far proved to be a deeply harmful process. But we believe this can still change and lead to a great social justice victory. We hope the calls from women in the report for the land to be used for genuinely affordable housing and women’s support services are heard.

“With the redevelopment of Holloway and the Ministry of Justice due to publish its Women’s Justice Strategy setting out the vision for women and the criminal justice system for the next 5-10 years we have a golden opportunity to choose social justice, , and the empowerment of communities so that the site is used to demonstrate what a different system could look like: Where communities hold the answer to issues faced by women with complex needs and those who offend - not prisons.”

Richard Garside, Director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, says:

“The closure of Holloway was botched and I hope the government has learned the lessons from this.

“The closure has also ignited a campaign - Community Plan for Holloway - aimed at achieving a positive legacy: a redeveloped site guided by the needs and aspirations of the local population.

“The momentum behind this campaign highlights the potential for the positive redevelopment of former prison sites, using the land to promote human flourishing, rather than punishment and exclusion.”

Key findings from interviews held with women affected by the criminal justice system in After Holloway (p4-5):

- The closure of Holloway had, and continues to have, a significant negative impact on women affected by the criminal justice system.
- The redevelopment of the Holloway site should include specialist housing for women affected by the criminal justice system.
- Support services for mental health and domestic violence were identified by participants as a key need to be developed on the site.
- The Holloway site should be used to support and empower women.
- The redevelopment should acknowledge that the site was a prison of historical significance.

Key quotes in After Holloway from women currently in prison or affected by the criminal justice system on the impact of the closure (p8):

“I moved to Downview where nothing was up and running, then I tried killing myself twice, because all the help and support was taken away from me. Holloway was the only prison where I saw progress, within myself and life. All that was taken away from me for no reason.”

“I was upset, I was from King’s Cross and all my friends and community was from that area, then I was moved out of London where it’s difficult for friends to visit and get back into work for ROTLs (Release on Temporary License which involves day release to go out to volunteer or work).”

“People who are not in prison will have to pay out a lot more money to visit their loved ones...some prisoners will not get visits and that has a knock on effect for the family and prisoners.”

“I was upset to hear that Holloway was closing down as the jail on the whole had a lot for us no matter what type of sentence you had. Now it seems courses that are needed are in jails out of London meaning visits are harder too now and there’s no stability.”

“I was upset about the closure of Holloway... Staff were approachable and cared for the prisoners, there were more interesting jobs and activities there, the prison was well run. I personally liked that you could see beyond the prison walls from the top floor, it was well located and you didn’t feel so closed off, you could see and hear the outside world.”

Deborah Coles, Executive Director of INQUEST ⁵ says;

“Maria Burke was found hanging in her cell at HMP Drake Hall on 11 November 2016, just 8 days after she had arrived. There had not been a death at Drake Hall since 1996.

“The inquest into Maria Burke’s death heard evidence that the closure of Holloway five months prior had a significant impact, with staff unable to manage more challenging prisoners with 78% having had some form of mental health issue. It was clear the prison was unable to cope with the sudden change in their population, leaving many women at risk.

“The failures identified at Maria’s inquest were all too familiar. Maria’s risk of self-harm and suicide was not identified and there were failures in bullying and self-harm procedures. What is urgently needed to stop yet more preventable deaths is investment in community services for women, to properly and humanely address mental ill health and addiction.”

Erika, a former prisoner in HMP Holloway and campaigner for the women’s building says;

“As someone who has spent time in Holloway at the time that it was announced to close, I have to say that I think its closure felt forced and ill-conceived, the spin masking the real reasons of pure financial gain. The prison was unique and felt very much a family amongst the officers.

“Personally, my time on bail prior to my sentence was actually the most traumatic; having to pack up my life and not knowing what was going to happen. I certainly felt at the time that my sentence would have been better served in the community doing something useful than being locked away at great expense. There must be a range of alternative solutions rather than imprisonment that would work for both offender and society, and I hope that having a progressive women’s building on the site of the prison would be a positive and forward thinking legacy to all those that have had contact with HMP Holloway in any capacity.”

Maureen Mansfield, Campaigner with Reclaim Holloway ⁶ - a coalition of activists, local residents and grassroots campaign groups working to ensure the site is used for collective good says;

“We want to see a Women’s Building that can carry forward, as a positive legacy, the community, creativity, solidarity and innovation that Holloway, for all its faults, inspired. Such an opportunity is a fitting legacy to the long history of the site as a women’s prison. Women who were held in the prison should not be forgotten, displaced and moved further out of sight. This land, on which their tears, their memories, their babies, their laughter was heard holds echoes from the past and hope for the future. A Women’s Building, of women and women’s organisations working together to bring about change, along with housing and other supports, would reduce the need for prisons and needs to be a government priority.”

References

1. After Holloway is a consultation with 50 women affected by the criminal justice system many of whom were imprisoned in HMP Holloway asking whether and how the closure has had an impact and what they hope to see developed on the site.
2. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/women-prison-sentences-short-jailed-periods-less-month-inmates-minor-offences-children-labour-a8124896.html>
3. http://islington.media/r/62993/holloway_prison_site_record_consultation_response_reveals
4. <http://womensbuildingnyc.org/>
5. <https://www.inquest.org.uk/>
6. <http://reclaimholloway.strikingly.com/#home>

About Women in Prison:

Founded in 1983, Women in Prison (WIP) is a national charity that supports women affected by the criminal justice system in prison, the community and with three women's centres in Woking, Manchester and Lambeth, London. Our combined services provide support for advocacy, complex needs, domestic and sexual violence, physical health, mental health, substance misuse, parenting and education. Our community projects include diversion schemes for women at early stages of involvement in the criminal justice system. Women in Prison is leading the 2020 Ambition to halve the women's prison population to 2,020 by 2020.

www.womeninprison.org.uk