**CONNECT**

BIG LOTTERY INNOVATION FUNDING FOR WOMEN EX-OFFENDERS.

We are delighted to receive funding from BIG Innovation for two years to work with women ex-offenders; to support their resettlement, reduce re-offending and help them to find work. CONNECT will be delivered across Wales to support 800 women ex-offenders.

We will help women ex-offenders in Wales to settle back into their communities through peer mentoring, access to new technology and around the clock telephone support. Women will be helped through peer mentor and buddy networks.

In May 2012 there were 242 Welsh women in custody and 1,948 Welsh women on probation in Wales. A joint inspection by HMI probation and HMI Prisons found that female offenders or those at risk of offending are a group faced with multiple disadvantages and complex needs. These include mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems and being vulnerable to self harm and attempted suicide. The Wales Probation Trust found that transport, no money, a lack of communication channels and childcare are significant issues for Welsh women at risk of reoffending.

Explaining the importance of the project, **Gill Hurley**, the Managing Director of Gibran UK, said: “The project will enable women ex-offenders to help themselves and tackle the root causes of reoffending.

Both the peer mentor and the women ex-offenders will be provided with the temporary loan of a `tablet`. By providing reduced reoffending interventions via Skype and hand held devices, the project will improve women's sense of well being and combat isolation. This will replace some of the face to face communication and the costs and difficulties associated with traditional outreach work.

“Research has shown that women want 24 hour support outside of the normal office hours, and that more information is needed when in prison around resettling. It also showed that women really value peer support and require more regular contact.”

BIG Innovation fund is specifically about supporting projects that test new ways of tackling emerging and existing social problems

“A thorough evaluation will be carried out with findings disseminated to key practitioners and policy makers.”

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