

Sofia's Story

When I was first told that I had to do the Change Programme with Women's Work by my OM I thought 'what the hell is that?' I was quite scared at the thought of going, I didn't know what to expect or who was going to be there. I thought that the other people there might laugh at me or take the 'mick' out of me but my OM reassured me that the tutors at Women's Work are lovely and would look after me –knowing that my OM had a good relationship with the Women's Work ladies made me feel better.

Don't get me wrong, I did want the support but was just scared about going for the first time walking into the room where the group was. I had a 1:1 with Karen and that made me feel a lot better about going also I had a 1:1 with a peer mentor who knew exactly what I was feeling as she had been to prison too -that was a huge relief knowing she was going to be in the group with me as well.

The day finally arrived, I was so worried and nervous but as soon as I entered the room a huge sense of relief came over me, I was greeted by smiling faces. I instantly felt comfortable, I was made a cup of tea and was welcomed into the room where all the ladies were talking and getting to know one another. I sat with the peer mentor and was filled with confidence.

After the group I went home in total surprise (in a good way) I couldn't wait for the next session! Everyone on the course was so friendly and they didn't judge me or look at me in a bad way, we all respected each other.

It is so comforting knowing that every week you can go somewhere where you can learn new things, talk openly and know that everything is confidential -surrounded by women who have been in the same position as you. The support I have got from the Women's Work tutors is fantastic; they have helped me so much in so many different ways from giving me advice on relationships to how to solve everyday problems that I have faced throughout the previous week –just getting it off my chest to someone who is willing to listen has helped me so much.

I really enjoyed the interactive parts of the programme especially the tower building in the 'Communications' session, it was really fun –all the women in the group didn't stop laughing. The 'Healthy Lifestyles' session helped me a lot too it helped me gain knowledge of how to handle my debts, how to work out my money and how to prioritise my bills. In that session I also learnt how to eat healthier and have eaten so much better ever since. I really learnt a lot from the 'Problem Solving' session, we were shown how to deal with our emotional stress and how to break down our problems and resolve them in the best way possible and do you know what –it really works!

I definitely won't reoffend again! The programme gives you an insight as to what to look out for and how to keep yourself calm just like simple things like going for a walk and when you

have had a bad day to talk to someone about your problems and not bottle them up. Some of the women I was inside with have recently got in touch saying they want to meet me on the outside but I have to think about myself so I won't meet up with them now because they will just drink and take drugs and I don't want to get back in to that.

I really don't want the Change Programme to finish, I think it should be longer and should be open to any woman that needs help. At nights I work so in the day I really enjoy going to the Change Programme, without it I would be so bored and down, I wouldn't have anyone to talk too, learn from or get advice from. I've really enjoyed going to the Women's Work group, I wish there was something I could go to after the programme has finished like a coffee day where we can all get together again either fortnightly or monthly. I am really going to miss going every week.