

Organisation Name		Reference code
Working Chance		2024-05-YWG43
Organisation Address		
Claremont Building 24 - 27 White Lion Street LONDON N1 9PD		
Website Address		
https://workingchance.org/		
Type of organisation? (tick all that apply and complete relevant details)		
Charity	Registered Charity Number	Date Registered
Yes	1131802	2009
Community Interest Company	Registered Companies House Number	Date Registered
No		
Social Enterprise	Social Enterprise Mark Awarded Yes/No	Date Awarded
No	No	No
Grant Summary		
Supporting young women who have had contact with the criminal justice system to develop their employability and secure employment, work experience or volunteering roles.		
Please describe the specific needs of the young women and girls you work with that this project will address		
<p>Evidence shows that employment reduces reoffending (Russell Webster, 2020), yet many young women leaving prison do not receive adequate support to address their complex needs, and to find - and maintain - a job. Women leaving prison are dealing with issues such as accommodation, navigating the benefits system, reconnecting with their families and communities, getting their children back from care and mental health. 96% of women are unemployed six weeks after leaving prison, and 58% of women leaving prison from a short sentence are reconvicted within a year (Prison Reform Trust and Working Chance, 2020) - locking them into a cycle of criminalisation and poverty.</p> <p>Young women with convictions need an income and sense of purpose to rebuild their lives, support their families and thrive in society. However, the consequences of criminal convictions often outlast the end of a sentence. 55% of employers would not consider hiring someone with a conviction (Progress & Prejudice, Working Chance, 2022). People with convictions have skills, experience and qualities that would benefit workplaces, but are often overlooked. Women are overrepresented in professions requiring criminal records checks (e.g. education, nursing, social work) and are twice as likely to have their criminal records disclosed (Unlock, 2021). We know first-hand that women's confidence and self-esteem is often shattered after a conviction, and it is a significant barrier to securing employment. For example, many women report they are deterred from even applying for jobs when asked on job applications if they have a criminal record (Worst-Case Scenario, Working Chance, 2021).</p> <p>Many women with convictions have experienced significant trauma since childhood and face other barriers to employment for which they need support. At least 57% of women</p>		

in prison and under community supervision have experienced domestic abuse (Centre for Women's Justice, 2022). A third of women in prison have been in care as children (NHS England and HMPPS, 2023). 31% have experienced addiction/substance misuse (Unlock, 2021) and 62% report having mental health issues (Working Chance, 2020). 40% of the women we support come from a racially minoritised background, reflecting this group's overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. The above barriers are far more acute for women from racially minoritised groups, because of the multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage they face. This includes worse punitive measures and treatment in the criminal justice system (Working Chance, 2021). As such, our support acknowledges, and attempts to address, how racial discrimination and exclusion can undermine a woman's chances of securing employment. Our support enables women to move into or towards employment and other positive outcomes such as volunteering, vocational training or education, all of which enable them to acquire new skills and to feel accomplished, useful, appreciated and hopeful - improving their view of their own worth and value and making them far less likely to be drawn back into the criminal justice system.

What are the key outcomes that you will be seeking to achieve for young women and girls either at risk of offending or who are already caught up in the criminal justice system?

Over the next year, we will continue to work closely with partner organisations to gain referrals of young women into our service. The key outcomes we aim to achieve through our specialist support over the next two years are:

- Young women will have the support they need to be able to move on positively with their lives. We aim to engage at least 165 young women with convictions, aged between 18-30, with our support over the next two years.
- 75% of the young women we work with will have improved employability (measured through the Work Star evaluation tool), developing the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in work.
- At least 75% of women who go on to engage in our employment support will find meaningful work.
- 80% will still be in their job six months later, enabling them to build lives that give them purpose, hope and financial independence.
- Reducing the number of young women with convictions who reoffend. Nationally almost 6 in 10 women reoffend in their first year after leaving prison. We aim for fewer than 1 in 10 reports of women reoffending during the year following the end of their engagement with us.
- At least 50% of the young women we support will have improved health and wellbeing (measured through the Work Star evaluation tool).

What are the key activities you will undertake with this funding to achieve this?

We want more young women under 30 to benefit from our service, because the earlier diversion happens in someone's life, the better the chance of securing long-term positive life outcomes. Working Chance provides tailored, trauma-informed and gender-specific support for women with convictions. We work closely with each woman, taking time to understand her unique strengths and challenges, and helping her get to where she wants to be. This includes a very personalised approach, with cultural sensitivity. When a woman first comes to us, she is assigned an Employability Coach - a keyworker who will support her throughout her journey with us. A woman's Employability Coach/keyworker will help her become ready for work, involving one-to-one support sessions. We support women to address issues that may be barriers to their employability, e.g. with money management support, and signposting or referring to other services (e.g. mental health, housing services). This includes bringing in other services who offer relevant specialisms, such as support around domestic violence (which features heavily in the lives of our clients). We support women to disclose their convictions to employers, which for many, can be one

of the most daunting barriers to overcome. We build each woman's confidence and aspirations, and using a career coaching model, we help her identify what she loves and is good at and how that might translate into a career, bearing in mind that some women we work with have never had a job.

We offer free weekly psychotherapy for up to six months for any woman who would benefit from it, to help her come to terms with traumatic experiences (e.g. abuse as children and/or adults, her time in prison or of being convicted of a crime). This therapy enables women to understand and accept the circumstances that contributed to their offending and helps them to build hope and confidence for the future.

Once a woman is considered by all parties to be work-ready, she is matched with one of our specialist Employment Advisors. They work closely with her (alongside her keyworker) to find opportunities aligning with her skills, strengths and career aspirations, usually with one of the 100+ employers that we partner with (offering 5,000 vacancies at any one time, and across a wide range of sectors - including national reach through companies such as Thames Water, IKEA, and Superdrug, as well as smaller, local businesses). Our Employment Advisors support women with job-searching, including, for example, setting up a LinkedIn profile (our clients have a lower level of IT literacy than average). They support each woman to create a great CV and supporting statement, and provide training so she can tailor these for job applications. They also work together on interview techniques and support her to ensure she has suitable interview clothing. When a woman has secured a job, our keyworkers offer her in-work support for up to a year, to provide continuity of support.

Does your proposed project already exist or is this a new piece of work?

We work with women (from age 18) who have a criminal conviction. We have an excellent track record of achieving positive outcomes for them, but we want to reach more young women. We know that early support and intervention is critical, with long-term positive impacts for a young woman's life, including a much lower chance of re-entering the criminal justice system, and a greater likelihood of moving on positively with her life. Currently, 28% of the women we work with through our core service are under 30, and we would like to use this funding to increase the proportion of young women in our service to at least a third.

To better meet the needs of young women, and to increase the number of young women we attract to our service, we will develop our outreach and partnerships work to target organisations working with young women who already have a conviction or who are at risk of CJS involvement.

We have strong relationships with trusted external partners, including all 12 women's prisons, the probation service, Job Centres, and many specialist support organisations (both national, eg. Advance, Solace, Step Change; and local, eg. Nelson Trust Women's Centre in Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire Action Trust). This includes women's centres (e.g. Beth Centre, Lambeth; South London Women's Hubs; Anawim Birmingham Women's Centre, Cornwall Women's Centre). We actively work with our partners to ensure they know about Working Chance and the support we offer, so they can refer women to our services. These relationships also enable us to signpost clients to specialist support organisations for issues which are barriers to employment (e.g. Housing for Women, Nacro). However, as part of increasing the proportion of young women we work with, we will develop relationships with Youth Offending Teams so that they understand our service and can refer into it and recommend it to young women.

We supported Katie, who told us, "Mounting debt and mental health issues all contributed towards my offending, but I was determined to take responsibility and start getting my life back on track. Working Chance gave me the support needed to rewrite my CV, prepare for interviews and the confidence to disclose my convictions to potential employers".

What expertise and track record do you have to be able to deliver this work successfully?

With 15 years' experience, we are the only UK organisation focused on the unique employment needs of women with convictions. Last year, we helped 262 women to improve their employability, and supported women into 82 jobs, volunteering roles or work experience placements. Of the paid roles we supported women into over the last 12 months, the average FTE salary was £26,533, and during their in-work support check-ins, 86% remained in their roles beyond 12 months. We have access to around 5,000 vacancies at any given time through the 100+ employers we partner with (both national household names and local employers), offering our clients unprecedented choice in finding a role that suits their needs, abilities and locations, and across a range of sectors (eg. IT, energy, utilities, media, and recruitment).

The majority of women in prison are serving short sentences, with a reoffending rate of 73% (MoJ, 2023). The women we support into employment almost never reoffend, with no reports of reoffending in the last two years, showing that employment, self-belief and hope for the future really do make all the difference. Evidence indicates that our support reduces reoffending - one analysis from the MoJ's Justice Data Labs found a 53% reduction in reoffending compared to a control group.

We place lived experience at the heart of our decision making and service provision. Around a third of both our staff and Trustees are women with lived experience of the criminal justice system. Our Advisory Panel is made up of 14 women with lived experience, providing guidance and feedback on the changing needs of women with convictions and our strategic focus.

Our staff team of 18 people has a wide range of relevant skills, knowledge and experiences. Our eight Trustees have broad expertise, spanning recruitment, HR, communications, policy, social work, fundraising, finance and the criminal justice system.

As a women's charity, our approach is gender-specific. We recognise the issues that women with convictions tend to face (eg. they are much more likely to have experienced domestic violence or childhood abuse, experience of being in care, addiction, and poor mental health - often caused by trauma). We work closely with other women's services as part of a joined-up, multi-agency approach.

Our trauma-informed approach is embedded throughout our work. We are careful with the language and framing we use, we do not make assumptions about women's experiences, and we explain why we are asking for information. We help women feel safe with us and ensure they know we are aware of the types of trauma women experience, so they don't feel they need to hide things or worry they will be judged. Our keyworker model came from our trauma-informed approach, enabling us to build a trusting relationship, through which we can ask women what they need and get to know them in a safe, relational way. In 2022, we achieved the Trauma Aware Award (Bronze), awarded by One Small Thing.

Explain how the grant will be spent

Who will be responsible for overseeing and delivering this work?

Our Head of Employability manages our small team of four Employability Coaches, who build women's confidence and self-esteem, help them identify their career goals and act as keyworkers for the young women we will support. They also help women to confidently disclose their convictions to prospective employers. She will be responsible for overseeing the employability element of our work and the keyworker model we use. Our Head of Strategic Partnerships manages our three Employment Advisors, who provide specific employment support for women in finding and applying for suitable job opportunities, developing CVs and interview practice. They also support women's resilience in the event of any setbacks. Our Chief Executive has overall responsibility and provides broader oversight for this work.

To understand the impact of our support, we use a range of monitoring tools, including a case management database to record the numbers of enquiries and referrals we

receive, and details of the support we have provided (eg. 1:1 support, disclosure support, CV writing, applications, interviews). We gather client information such as their demographic data (including their age, ethnicity, location etc). We also record outcomes, including offers of employment received/accepted, voluntary roles gained, or clients enrolling on training or education courses. We collect feedback from women via surveys, interviews, and direct conversations. We also learn from the case studies we gather.

We use a bespoke version of the Work Star (an Outcome Star - a recognised evaluation tool) to help us measure our impact. Supported by their keyworker, women complete the Work Star at the beginning, middle and end of their journey with us. This is used to rate how they feel about their progress across five key areas of life that are important in gaining and keeping a job: job skills and experience; aspiration and motivation; job-search skills; stability; and health and wellbeing. The Work Star helps us track women's progress since joining our service.

Led by our Data and Impact Lead, we conduct regular targeted analysis and reviews throughout the year. Insights gained help us to identify trends, new client needs, any gaps in the service, and improvements we can make. For example, recent areas of focus include looking closely at the client journey, analysing demographic data to ensure we are inclusive and accessible, and identifying wider issues to support our policy work.

How do you plan to continue this work once the grant ends?

We are actively fundraising to ensure we are running a sustainable service for years to come, including the pursuit of multi-year funding agreements to enable long-term planning and stability. Currently, the majority of our funding comes from trusts and foundations (66% last year). We are working to diversify our funding base, actively seeking to grow our income from a range of sources, including companies, major donors and individuals. In addition, we are exploring the potential of earned income through offering consultancy.

Whilst we are developing these areas, continued income from trusts and foundations is vital to ensure we can continue supporting the women who need us. Our current funders include the National Lottery, City Bridge Foundation, the Ministry of Justice, Charles Hayward Foundation, BlackRock, Julia and Hans Rausing Trust, A B Charitable Trust and The Big Yellow Foundation. Applications are pending to funders such as Henry Smith Charity, Weavers' Company, L'Oreal Foundation and the Girdlers' Company. We have also developed a prospective funders list, and plan to approach funders including the Garfield Weston Foundation, Dulverton Trust, Bernard Lewis Family Charitable Trust and Hollyhock Charitable Foundation.

Does your organisation only work with women and girls?

We have always been a 'by and for' organisation. Working Chance is here to support anyone with a conviction who identifies as a woman or nonbinary (assigned as female at birth) and who needs help to develop her employability and to find employment. We refer to our client group as 'women with convictions', but as an organisation we are inclusive of gender identities and welcome non-binary people and trans women into our service. We work with women from age 18.

We are led by women, and we place lived experience at the heart of our service. Our Trustee Board is made up of eight women (including around a third with lived experience), and a large majority of our staff are women, including our CEO. Around a third of our staff have lived experience of the criminal justice system. In addition, we have a strategic Advisory Panel made up of 14 women with lived experience of the criminal justice system, who provide guidance and direction on all aspects of our work.

Does your organisation have existing knowledge and expertise working across the criminal justice system?

Working Chance has been supporting women who have been caught up in the criminal justice system for 15 years, and we are the only UK organisation working to meet the

specific employment needs of this group. Since 2009, we have helped thousands of women with convictions to secure employment and to change the trajectory of their lives. This includes reducing reoffending, by developing a trusting, sensitive and personal keyworker relationship, enabling women to come to terms with the circumstances surrounding their conviction, and supporting them to move forward positively with their lives.

Our service delivery team is trained and experienced in providing trauma-aware support, and we are committed to working with women on an individualised basis, including cultural sensitivity and recognising the issues that tend to be faced by women with convictions (eg. domestic violence, removal of their children).

We have excellent relationships with key staff in all women's prisons and with the probation service, as well as other charities in this sector.

Over the last two years we have specifically extended our expertise around working with younger women who are at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. We have been partnering with Advance (a charity supporting women and girls affected by domestic abuse and the criminal justice system) to deliver a project for young women in London who have experienced or are at risk of domestic abuse and contact with the criminal justice system. We support the young women on the project to build their aspiration, self-belief and to identify possible career paths and ways to gain experience in their fields of interest. We are knowledgeable about the issues younger women are experiencing, such as social media and peer pressures, as well as low confidence and self-esteem.

Given the over-representation of care-experienced people in the criminal justice system, it is helpful that our Chief Executive has significant experience of working with young people in care (through her previous role as the Chief Executive of the national charity for children in care and care leavers) and has sat on government taskforces focusing on national care policy (eg. ending the criminalisation of children in care).

We have confidence in the effectiveness of our service, as evidenced by women successfully securing employment, remaining in those positions, and providing us with glowing feedback on the support they have received.

One client said, "The Employability Coach built my confidence that had been shattered through the criminal justice system and she made me believe that I have so much to offer, so much potential."

Another woman told us, "Without Working Chance, I'd still be hiding away after my prison sentence."

Will you be receiving funding from any other sources for this project?	
Yes	
Do all staff have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks? If no please state why.	
Yes	
Reason why not all staff have DBS checks.	
Total funding requested in this application (£10,000 to £80,000 with a maximum of £40,000 in one year)	
£80000	
Proposed grant start date	Proposed grant duration in months
1/1/2025	24
How much funding is required each year?	
Year 1	Year 2
£40000	£40000
What was your organisation's expenditure in the most recent financial year?	What was your organisation's annual income in the most recent financial year?

£829271	£628742
What value of unrestricted reserves did your organisation have at the end of the most recent financial year?	
£789552	