



Quaker Peace  
& Social Witness

# Peaceworker journal letter from London

**Abigail Darton, June 2018, No. 2**

## **LEAP CONFRONTING CONFLICT**

Dear Friends

A lot has happened since I wrote my last journal letter in November and my time at Leap Confronting Conflict has continued to be full of new experiences and learning. We have now come to the end of the first pilot of the Peaceful Prisons Project, a piece of action research which aims to reduce violence in prisons by building community. We trained over 50 prisoners and staff at HMYOI Brinsford in conflict management skills and ran eight community circles. These circles are a chance for prisoners and staff to come together and discuss the issues which lead to violence on their wings and come up with solutions to reduce them together. Some prisoners and staff have also been trained as conflict coaches to run the circles and provide one-to-one support around conflict to those coming into the prison and those involved in violence.

Being a part of such a dynamic project has been really exciting and I've enjoyed learning from experts as well as having opportunities to put my own ideas and suggestions forward and seeing them

incorporated into the design. We have just begun the second pilot at the same prison and will begin pilot 3 in a different prison in July. It will be great to see how the learning from pilot one can be incorporated into these pilots to increase the impact of the project and continue to help make prisons safer places for rehabilitation.

The other prison project I am working on is at Bronzefield women's prison in Surrey. Managing this project has challenged me to develop new skills around running meetings, liaising with various stakeholders, managing budgets and long-term planning. Initially these were aspects of the job which I found quite daunting, having never been involved in project management work before. However, although I still feel nervous at times, I have become a lot more comfortable in the role and feel I have learnt many transferable skills which I can carry into future peace work. As well as this, I have learnt an awful lot about the experiences of women in prison and have become increasingly passionate about the need to offer interventions which address their specific needs.

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Published by Quaker Peace & Social Witness, Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ  
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- 57% of women in prison report having been victims of domestic violence
- 53% report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child, compared to just 27% of men in prison
- 49% report needing help with a drug problem on entry to prison compared to 29% of men.

As women make up only about 5% of the prison population, most interventions are designed for male offenders and then replicated for women, meaning they often don't address these specific needs. Therefore we are working hard to ensure that our programme at Bronzefield directly deals with the conflicts most relevant to female offenders, including those which are internal and/or psychological. More about this can be found in the blog I wrote for this year's International Women's Day: [www.leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk/news/hiden-violence-women-in-prison](http://www.leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk/news/hiden-violence-women-in-prison).

One highlight of my placement so far was attending Leap's annual awards ceremony 'Lighting the Fire' in May. The ceremony was completely led by young people and it was a really positive showcase of their talent, passion and commitment to managing conflict in their lives and reducing violence in their communities. It was also great to hear the inspirational stories of the individuals and organisations who won awards on the night. It has felt almost impossible to read the news this year without being hit by the story of another young person losing their life to violent crime, so recognizing the work of people working tirelessly to address this issue felt incredibly important and motivating.

Having been embedded at Leap for nine months now, I've become incredibly aware of how powerful a force for change conflict can be if positively managed. The skills I've learnt from attending training have changed the way I approach conflict in my own life, in both professional and personal settings. I really believe that these skills should be taught universally and I hope to carry this into whatever work I go on to do in the future.

I continue to be incredibly grateful to QPSW and Quakers in Britain for the opportunity to be working in a field that I feel so passionately about and I'm excited to see what the rest of my time at Leap will bring!

In Friendship, Abigail