



# newsletter

## Natasha gets it together



Photo: Aspect Design & Marketing

Natasha was homeless, depressed and pregnant. She had served numerous short sentences in various prisons, had an alcohol and substance abuse problem, and her other children had been taken away from her. She feared she might not be allowed to keep her new baby, and she was in danger of re-offending. Somehow, with the help of the *Together Women* programme at YWCA Doncaster, she managed to get her life back together.

For women like Natasha with a history of offending, or at risk of offending, *Together Women* offers help to reduce the likelihood of them breaking the law. It helps families stay together and reduces the number of children taken into care.

Natasha's YWCA key worker offered her support with counselling, group support from women in similar situations, and legal and housing advice. It's worked and she's made massive progress. When she had her daughter last year social services did not intervene; she has not re-offended; she has her alcohol and substance abuse under control and she has now found accommodation for herself and her daughter. And

now Natasha has resumed contact with her other children, she volunteers at YWCA Doncaster and is training for a customer services qualification.

Local agencies working with women at risk of offending refer their clients to *Together Women*; a South Yorkshire Probation Officer explains why: **"The key workers forge trusting relationships with some very damaged young women. The women I supervise enjoy the**

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## Facts about women in custody

- 66% are mothers with dependent children under 18. Just 5% of women prisoners' children remain in their own home once their mother has been sentenced
- They are more than five times more likely to have mental health problems than women in the general population
- Self-harm is a big problem: 37% have attempted suicide in the past
- 33% were excluded from school
- 84% left school at 16 or younger
- 71% have no qualifications (compared to 15% of the general population)

sources available

**RUN FOR YWCA – SEE PAGE THREE FOR DETAILS**

# Wine and women



The newspapers regularly tell us that young women in Britain have a problem with binge drinking. We wanted to know what the public really think, so we asked polling experts YouGov to do a survey for us.

*The average weekly alcohol consumption for 11- to 15-year-olds has increased from five units in 1990 to more than eleven units in 2006.*

The responses showed people thought that boredom, peer pressure and lack of parental guidance were the main reasons why young women drink heavily. Most people said they didn't want to see young women criminalised or punished for drinking. Sixty-five per cent thought that girls who drink heavily should be offered ways to change their behaviour, alternative activities, safe places to go, youth clubs and cafés.

From our experience of working with young women in deprived communities we know that they often hardly have any money and little prospect of ever finding a job. They are excluded from most of the places where adults socialise because of their age and often have to meet their friends outdoors. Some girls, including those with violent parents or partners, are not safe in their homes and have few other places they can go. Those who are dealing with difficult problems at home or school often see getting drunk as a way to forget their troubles for a while and make themselves feel more confident.

*Alcohol causes women to take risks with their personal safety*

In Kirkby, like so many places up and down the country, young people gather in parks to socialise on Friday and Saturday nights – and sometimes get very drunk. When police come and disperse them, girls are moved on into poorly lit areas where older men hang out; they are at serious risk of being attacked. YWCA workers go into the parks to talk to the young women and encourage them to come back to our centre to socialise in a safe, warm place and join in interesting activities.

*Abuse, alcohol or drug use in the family, failure at school, peer pressure and stress are all factors that cause young women to abuse alcohol.*

The Government's policy on young people and alcohol should make keeping young women safe a priority. When girls drink heavily they take dangerous physical and sexual risks. When the police move groups of young people on without giving them anywhere safe to go it can put them in even more danger. As a society we must provide young people with education, guidance, support and places to go to minimise risks.

## Natasha gets it together

*Continued from page one*



*programme and value the support they receive. I have no doubt that Together Women is a strong protective factor in keeping women out of trouble and encourages them to make something of themselves and leave abusive relationships."*

The majority of women who offend suffer a multitude of problems. Some may have

been sexually or physically abused, many struggle with substance abuse or have health problems: 80% have a diagnosed mental health condition. Many did badly at school or are in some way socially or financially excluded. The women who attend *Together Women* at YWCA Doncaster can get help to tackle all the challenges in their lives and this, we believe, may be the reason why it works so well. Now YWCA is working with partners such as Shelter to run *Together Women* across Yorkshire and Humberside.

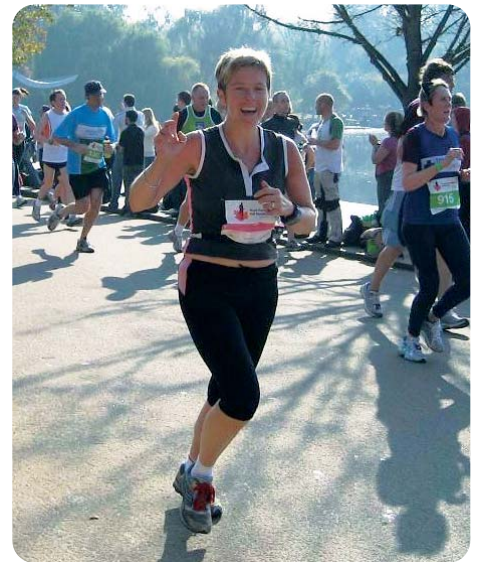
Together we plan to make a difference in the lives of many more women like Natasha. Will you help us?

## Run for YWCA

Will you run for YWCA and support young women? This autumn YWCA is taking part in two London running events – the Royal Parks half marathon on Sunday 11 October and the Adidas women's 5k challenge on Sunday 6 September. We're looking for people to join our team of runners and raise money to support young women.

Kate Eddy who ran the Royal Parks half marathon last year explains *"It's a good route and a great day out taking in many of London's sights, and with the right preparation anyone should be able to do it."*

We'll help you with the fundraising by providing you with a fundraising guide, sponsorship forms, posters, t-shirts and an online fundraising page. If you would like to join our team of runners in either event please contact Kate Bailey on 01865 304235 or email [kate.bailey@ywca.org.uk](mailto:kate.bailey@ywca.org.uk)



**YWCA supporter Samantha Alexander ran in the Royal Parks half marathon last year** (Photo courtesy of Sam Pashley)

## Welsh girls have their say

The young women in YWCA's centre in Cwmafan near Port Talbot were recently visited by Bethan Jenkins, the Assembly Member for South Wales West, where she spoke to the girls about the things that matter to them. They took part in focus groups to help the Welsh Assembly understand how young women felt about their community and what they thought should be done about child poverty. Their views were sent to the Assembly. Now some of the young women have been invited to meet MPs in Parliament to have their say on the Equality Bill. The Bill protects people using services

from discrimination but does not apply to people aged under 18 and we think it should.

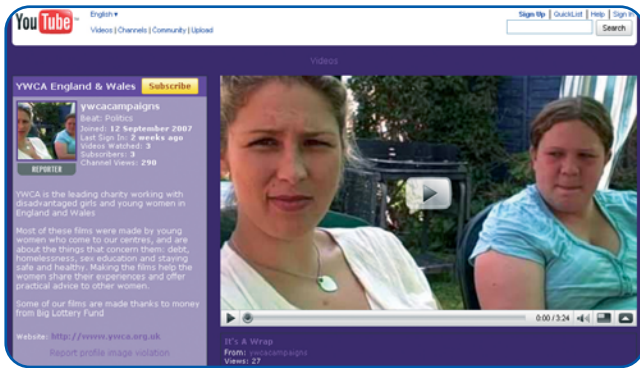
Kayley, a young woman, explains: *"It's great coming to YWCA as I have been allowed a voice and to be an equal. I have been encouraged to speak to people in authority."*

The enthusiasm of girls like Kayley spurs us on. When the Welsh Assembly makes decisions on subjects like equality, poverty and education, we will continue to help young women in Wales have their opinions heard on these matters.

**Girls from YWCA Cwmafan like to get their opinions heard**



# News in brief



## Films on YouTube

Young women from YWCA centres have written, directed and starred in their own short films about things that matter to them, like domestic violence, homelessness and debt.

Film-making gave the young women the chance to voice their opinions and advise other young people in similar situations. The finished films have been shown in local schools.

The young women learned about film-making and gained valuable experience and confidence from the projects. One young woman said: *"I've got so much out of it, it's inspired me to go back to college and do media studies."*

Watch the movies here:  
[www.youtube.com/user/ywcacampaigns](http://www.youtube.com/user/ywcacampaigns)



## THE CREDIT CRUNCH survival guide

We've recently produced a free credit crunch survival guide to help young women cope during the recession. It explains about managing loans, credit cards and bills and offers tips on how to make money go further and stay out of debt.

Download the survival guide free from our completely redesigned website at [www.ywca.org.uk](http://www.ywca.org.uk)

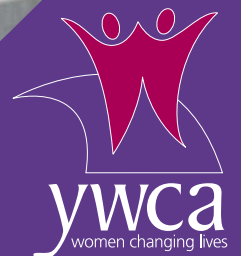
## International Women's Day fundraiser

Thank you to the students at Green Templeton College in Oxford, who raised £555 for YWCA with an evening of music and drama on the theme of womanhood to celebrate International Women's Day 2009.

If you or your community group would like to organise an event to raise money for YWCA's work, call our supporters' team on **01865 304208** or email [supporters@ywca.org.uk](mailto:supporters@ywca.org.uk)



**Young women are increasingly susceptible to alcohol-related illness – find out more on page 2.**



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To make a donation call **01865 304205**  
email [supporters@ywca.org.uk](mailto:supporters@ywca.org.uk)  
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