RIP N1

Closing Holloway Prison: the women's voices

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The closure of Holloway prison

- Exploring the lived experience of the closure
- Chaos & arbitrary management
- Loss of investment - women's narratives
- "…it's kind of a big loss, because I was there, Holloway's completely different" – **Downview focus group**

It was just chaos really - Sue

From the announcement, to the transition, to new institutions

The announcement: reactions

- They had this staff meeting…and then we all got called up to an association room and they sat us all round and told us. The staff lady that told us, she was almost in tears. The ***staff were really shocked***. They had no idea – *Erika*
- …the ***staff went a little mad***, and a few staff got walked off the premises and everything ***so people stopped giving a shit*** and then, the atmosphere… it was heightened in Holloway anyway, but it just got worse, like nobody really cared anymore – *Downview focus group*

Transition to closure

- It was just a ***hot mess*** - *Downview focus group*
- through the process, ***they didn't really have a plan***, they just done it on a whim - *Downview focus group*
- They started to kind of put up notices saying that people that go to court won't be returning back here…it was…like a ***ghost town*** really. Because they gradually closed down each wing – *Sue*
- towards the end it was just ***exodus***, they'd be shipping 30 people out a day sometimes…they had a white board that they write the numbers on every day, it would be going down and down and down - *Erika*
- I remember actually they were all having interviews about where they wanted to go and ***they didn't get a choice*** particularly. They could put in a preference - *Erika*

Chaos: move to new prison

- I think they had routine there as well, like here ***it's kind of mishmash*** and the officers don't know where they sort of stand with the rules and regulations because ***it's always changing*** in here. Whereas with Holloway it was kind of set – *Bronzefield focus group*
- And I felt really sorry for the people that were leaving Holloway because it happened quite quickly. [The new prison] wasn't really established so when people were going there ***staff were winging it*** everyone was just locked down because there was no activities set up and running. – *Bronzefield focus group*
- People that I've spoken to that have had family days here actually their children or grandchildren leave feeling quite ***distressed*** because they get dragged from the gym back out or sometimes the parents the grandparents can't even take their child back through right. The nursery staff have to take them and that's not right at all - *Bronzefield focus group*
- ***Holloway did everything***, they did everything. Gym access, all, education training, it's everything there…***I miss that*** side of it - *Delia*

Loss of investment

What was lost when Holloway closed?

Investment: in relationships – history and understanding

- I think ***it had built up something really special*** for that. I suppose because it was the only prison in London, within London, and it's the first port of call for the courts and things like that, they'd see women come and go a lot and they'd see women come back to they got to know their stories – *Erika*

- On the workers' landing it was much quieter and so from that point onwards you've got a ***better relationship with the staff*** and then you start to find out things, like ***the history of the staff*** being there, and how long they've been there and what they think of it, and what they're trying to do to make things better and over a bit of time you start to see the process of how it works - *Erika*

Investment: quality and experience of staff

- They were very friendly, ***very friendly***, very non-judgmental, understanding and very supportive – *Delia*
- I just found Holloway way more friendlier, as a staff / prisoner relationship type thing. I felt that ***they really cared*** about the job – *Erika*
- The mental health department it's quite phenomenal at Holloway and at other prisons ***there isn't so much support*** - *Delia*
- They supported me very well. And I didn't, when I went to Bronzefield, none of that was available, ***you just have to get on with it*** – *Delia*
- Bring back the Holloway staff back, not these ***rapscallions*** – *Downview focus group*

Investment: quality and experience of staff

- It was so much better like the officers were like Indian officers, black officers Jamaican, African the whole shebang English from everywhere and it kind of had that ***sense of community*** as well because I think the girls got comfortable approaching different officers - *Bronzefield focus group*

- If there's a group of black girls in this prison, then it's a problem if they're being loud and this is like they're rowdy and they're going to have a fight with someone but in Holloway they would've been like 'oh just shut up man', they wouldn't have been worried that they're about to attack someone but ***here it's like, it's a gang*** – *Downview focus group*

New carceral spaces

- It's been closed down for 2 years, 3 years even. And since, there was all limescale in the sink, cobwebs. They didn't even get a cleaner to come in and clean it…***It was disgusting*** - *Downview focus group*
- They moved people in here when it wasn't ready - *Downview focus group*
- I think that ***this prison made my sentence feel harsher***. When I first come here, I come in and end up getting banged in straight away because it was quite late, and then I got in the room and just felt ***instantly depressed***… *Downview focus group*
- [I] Felt like I was in ***a tomb***" - *Downview focus group*
- when I arrived here I remember coming onto the courtyard and I was like what the f*** I'm at a holiday camp - *Bronzefield focus group*
- It felt like a university campus - *Bronzefield focus group*
- …in the prison in Holloway you have to queue to use the phone so that was a big relief when I went to Bronzefield…Bronzefield had just been ***newly refurbished*** so you had everything, flat screen everything, handset. I could phone any time of the night which for me, I have to phone my partner every day to make sure he everything is okay - *Delia*

RIP N1: peripheral punishment

- 3: It [Holloway] was just different
- 4: I don't know if it's because Holloway's in London maybe that, when you look out you still see a car drive past and…
- 3: You can hear the traffic go past.
- 2: I feel part of-
- 4: Part of the world.
- 3: Sirens, when you hear sirens outside.
- 2: Yeah, you feel a part of the world.
- 1: You can see the flats in Holloway…
- 2: See families in their homes doing their thing. - *Downview focus group*

Thank you

Questions welcome