

scottish justice matters

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WOMEN AND JUSTICE ARE WE MAKING PROGRESS?

ESCAPING THE FOG

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IT IS IMPORTANT that the histories of trauma, abuse and mental illness common among women on the receiving end of criminal justice inform both sentencing and wider criminal justice practice. That said, I do wonder what unintended side effects the focus on these aspects of many women's experiences can have. Could it be that we risk painting reductive portraits of 'women as victims', rather than as people whose identities and abilities are as complex and rich as anyone else's?

Over the last six months differently situated groups of people have brought together their knowledge of women's justice issues in Scotland. Working with professional musicians they have translated their experiences into songs. Hosted by Vox Liminis, the workshops have included women who are part of community justice services, women prisoners, community justice services project and management staff, a prison Governor, a Criminologist and a former Judge.

Escaping The Fog was written by Cheryl Ferguson and Carly with Jo Mango during one such workshop with Includem. The song was inspired by a young person's journey through uncertain times, with conflicted feelings. Listen to the song here: <https://voxliminis.bandcamp.com/track/escaping-the-fog>

A month after the workshop I was able to reflect on the song with the young person whose story shaped it. I was able to let her know that listening to the song had helped me navigate a foggy patch of complexity and change in my own life, and brought me hope. It was brilliant to see her face light up, realising that her story could help someone else.



One of the practitioner participants involved in the wider project reflected on the process:

To be sitting in a room with the Chief Executive of our company and one of our young people ... all doing the same thing ... I wasn't sure how it would work but now that I've been here and seen it, it's made me wonder why it doesn't happen more often? For me, that was a big part I've taken from it ... that regardless of where we all are in our own lives we all share similar experiences.

Since being written, the songs have reached a wide public audience. A 'live' audience listened and responded to them at 'Things Left Unsaid', a music and art event that we organised in May 2017. On top of that a number of the songs, including *Escaping The Fog*, have been discussed and played on various shows on BBC Radio Scotland.

Could coming together to 'make' things from our diverse yet common stories result in developing understandings of justice that are truer to the nuances and complexities of human experience? And could creating and sharing work such as this be part of escaping the fog on the journey towards a more just Scotland for women?

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Note: This work on women's justice is part of the wider Distant Voices project, an on-going collaboration between SCCJR and Vox Liminis. It was delivered in partnership with Tomorrow's Women, Includem, 218 and Catalyst, with funding from Glasgow Community Justice Authority, SPS and Creative Scotland.

**"Escape those foggy thoughts, and let them all go
Search through that blizzard, until the rainbow shows"**

From *Escaping The Fog* by Cheryl Ferguson and Carly with Jo Mango