

# SECOND CHANCERS



## Transcript - Kirstie's story

"It was very tough. It was definitely probably the hardest thing I've done, is coming out. People I was friends with from school stopped speaking to me and it was tough. It doesn't bother me now at all. People can have their opinions and say what they want to say but at that time you do feel quite isolated and quite alone about everything. My three stepsisters said when I did come out that they already knew. It was like massive shock to my mum. She's more accepting of it now. I've been out, that's been 12 years now. She's more accepting now but not at the time."

"I got into a relationship that was extremely toxic. When it was good, it was fantastic, but when it was bad, it was really bad. In that relationship, things had happened on both parts and I lost it one night and was arrested. Charged with a domestic. Definitely thought, I'm going to go to jail and I do deserve it, I mean, I've committed these offences and it was wrong, it was bad. I deserved to be punished, like, in the way of a custodial sentence. I was just fortunate enough that I didn't get that. I got that second chance and the judge gave me that second chance when he heard my story, my side of things and heard that, actually, wait a minute, she's just still finding her feet a bit, OWLS is helping her."

"So, OWLS is classed as the one stop women's learning service and in OWLS everything is under one roof. You can access different teams who actually come in face to face with you, housing, drug and alcohol, rape crisis, we've got venture trust. We also have a nurse because it's quite difficult to get appointments and we've got peer mentors. So, everything really that you can think of, but really it's just a safe place. OWLS has made me the person that I am today really. They've helped me be a better person in all aspects of my life and actually realise my true potential. Whereas before I didn't believe in myself at all. I've been offence free now for five years. In that time I haven't reoffended. You know, I'm now dealing with my own stuff. I still have the support of OWLS, because I'm here on a voluntary basis, but I now have the

strength to battle through days, bad days. I can go to my own appointments, I can pick up the phone and make appointments.”

“I referred myself back to my psychiatrist last year after my gran passed, instead of spiralling out of control again. Really as they say, like, the world is my oyster right now. I can do... I can do what I want with it. For example meeting Dame Elish at a conference, you know she wrote the commission report for Women Offending and having her say to me that I was inspirational, like, was a massive deal. To be sat with her and her to say to me ‘I want you to come to Oxford, to the university, and give a talk to my students and I said ‘Me?’ And she was like ‘Absolutely. Why not?’ And I said, ‘No, but me?’ I, I, I couldn’t actually believe she was asking me to do that. And I walked away, I was, I was on cloud 9 really and in June this year I went to Oxford University and gave them an insight version, not out of a book, of just how the criminal justice system works.

“Dame Elish’s report is absolutely right, that imprisoning women doesn’t work. They need to be socialised and they need to get the support in for the bad aspects of their life and you’ll see a difference. And I’m that difference. You know, I made the change. I chose to take the support and move on with it. Right now, I’m going with the flow and seeing what else comes. I am an ambassador for OWLs and an inspiration to people and really I’m just me.”