Alternatives to Prison and What Happens to Women when Released from Prison

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About AdvocAid

• AdvocAid has been operating in Sierra Leone since 2006.

• AdvocAid works with women and girls caught up in all stages of Sierra Leone’s often unjust criminal justice system. We are the only organization in Sierra Leone that offers holistic access to justice for women in contact with the law.

• AdvocAid has built a firm reputation as a successful campaign and service delivery organisation.

• Over the years, AdvocAid has developed innovative legal education and empowerment programmes, acknowledging that rights cannot be enforced unless there is knowledge of those rights.

• Through our advocacy work, we have increased visibility and attention to the needs of women in prison, both in Sierra Leone and regionally.
About Advocaid II

• AdvocAid strengthens access to legal advice, legal representation and legal education for girls and women in Sierra Leone

• We provide creative legal education and training to ensure women know their rights. For example, our TV and radio drama series, Police Case, reached over a million people, educating them on their rights when or if they come into contact with the law.

• We ensure that girls, women and their children in detention are treated in accordance with minimum standards set by the United Nations.

• AdvocAid also assists women in detention, and provides post-prison support through our Go Bifo (meaning ‘moving forward’ in Krio) programme, which educates, empowers and reintegrate former detainees ensuring that they return to their communities as stronger women with brighter prospects.
AdvocAid’s Post-Prison-Support

Pre-Release
• Before a woman is released, we get in touch with a family member to inform them about the upcoming release and develop an individual post-release plan (if they get released on bail, we include respective bail conditions in the plan)
• AdvocAid ensures each woman has a place to go to after release and a small transport grant for the journey

Post-Release
• Exit interviews: AdvocAid Social Workers conduct interviews to assess their needs and to collect information on their experience in the criminal justice system
• Start-up grants: AdvocAid provides newly released women with a start-up grant which can be spend on setting up a small business or on meeting other immediate needs

Post-Prison-Support
• Go Bifo support group: Newly released women are encouraged to join the self-organized group of women supporting each other and themselves through jewellery making & selling, and other small enterprises
• For the first few post-release months, AdvocAid Social Workers follow up with formerly incarcerated women through monthly meetings

Women live increasingly self-sufficient lives
Case Study 1 – Kadie’s* Story

• Kadie* was arrested for trafficking a child

• She was detained at the Waterloo police station for 10 days where she met an AdvocAid paralegal who assigned her case to a duty counsel. On her first appearance in court she was remanded at the Freetown Female Correctional Centre, where she spent 5 years of her life on pre-trial, before appearing in court for fair trial.

• While in incarceration, she experienced a psychological breakdown and threatened to commit suicide. Her depression was also due to the fact that she left her 7 year old daughter all by herself with no secondary caregiver since she was unexpectedly arrested at her residence

• To manage Kadie’s mental status, our social worker conducted a series of psycho-social empowerment sessions through the use of a focus group, some behavioral schemes. A family tracing of her daughter was also done and she was referred to the Don Bosco Interim Care Centre for girls.

• In March 2020, Kadie’s case was acquitted and discharged for lack of evidence
Kadie’s* Story Continued

• To deter her from reoffending, upon release Kadie was provided with psycho-social counseling, post-prison transportation and a needs assessment was done through our client exit interview. She was also encouraged to register to the Go Bifo group.
• Kadie was provided with a post-prison business start-up grant to start a small-scale food business (selling cooked meals).

• This small business has helped her earn income to upkeep herself and her daughter.
• To further assist her in reintegrating into society, AdvocAid planned to employ her as one of our office assistance in Freetown, but this was forestalled due COVID 19 pandemic till after the restrictions are lifted.
• Kadie is now living happily with her daughter and hoping for a brighter and better future.
Case Study 2 – Adama* and Aminata’s* Story

• Adama and Aminata were detained at the Freetown Female Correctional Centre for fraudulent conversion for six months. They had been duped by a man in America who told them he could help them go to America and stole money on his behalf.

• With representation from an AdvocAid Duty Counsel, they were granted bail with the condition to repay the full amount back to the complainant through a 1-year payment plan.

• Upon release, AdvocAid supported the women to set up a small business and developed a plan to meet the payment plan’s conditions and repay the complainant.

• So far, each month they have been able to make some payment to the complainant while earning income for themselves. They laid out what they were able to accomplish with the first grant and presented their progress with the payment plan in court, which confirmed that they had made considerable progress.

• After several months, they turned to AdvocAid requesting a follow-up start-up grant because of some unexpected personal challenges. In a meeting with an AdvocAid Social Worker, the post-prison support plan was amended, and the follow-up grant granted.
AdvocAid’s Call to Release Vulnerable Detainees

• AdvocAid has also been engaging the Sierra Leone Government concerning the spread of the COVID-19 in prisons. In the past months, we have published 3 press releases calling for the release of vulnerable, pre-trial and child detainees in Sierra Leone to prevent the spread of COVID-19 detention facilities.

• Partially responding the call of AdvocAid and other civil society organisations, the Government released 235 detainees (including 4 women) as part of the annual Presidential Pardon on 27 April 2020, Sierra Leone Independence Day.

• The pardoned detainees are yet to be released. Their release has been delayed due to COVID-19 and an attempted prison break that left several prisoners and one officer dead.

• AdvocAid continues to advocate for the Government to release detainees and reduce prison overcrowding.

• Additionally, AdvocAid conducts mediation between complainants and those accused. We support and encourage Alternative Dispute Resolution at police stations for minor offences to resolve cases and reduce prison overcrowding.
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!