

Building a Campaign to End Unsafe Remand for Women

By Lilly Lewis, Women's Involvement Advisor at One Small Thing

Last month I attended the Remand Collective Campaigning Workshop hosted by Howard League for Penal Reform and facilitated by clean break, alongside women with lived experience of remand, campaigners and partners committed to creating change. The focus of the day was clear: how do we build a campaign strong enough to challenge the unsafe and unjust use of remand for women?

What struck me most was the honesty and energy in the room. From the start, there was a shared determination not to stay in discussion mode, but to move towards action. The women in the room spoke with real clarity about wanting practical next steps, stronger messages and a clear direction for how we campaign together. It reinforced something I see often in my role at One Small Thing lived experience is not an add-on to this work, it is the foundation of it.

Throughout the workshop we explored the building blocks of campaigning: what we are trying to say, what we want to change and how we create enough momentum for people to listen. At the heart of this is a simple truth: too many women are being remanded into prison unsafely, often before trial, causing harm that can't be undone.

Looking at previous successful campaigns, particularly Pregnancy Behind Bars, helped us understand what makes campaigns land. Strong storytelling, media reach, emotional connection and the courage to challenge systems and decision-makers all stood out. It reminded us that campaigns create change when they make the invisible visible.

Some powerful ideas started to emerge. One of the strongest was looking at international approaches asking why other countries use alternatives to remand more effectively and what we can learn from them. (possibly even visit these countries) There was also real energy around promoting alternatives here in the UK, particularly women's centres, trauma-informed support and community-based services that offer safety and support instead of punishment.

A key theme that kept coming up was the need to expose the reality behind remand decisions. So many women entering the justice system are carrying experiences of abuse, coercion, poverty and poor mental health. Yet those realities are often invisible in decision-making. We talked about how important it is to challenge those assumptions and tell the fuller story.

One campaign concept that really stayed with me was: *"This could be you."* It is simple but powerful. It challenges people to see the human reality behind remand and understand how quickly circumstances, trauma and system failure can lead women into crisis.

What became clear is that if we want this campaign to succeed, it cannot be built on policy language alone. It needs to connect with people emotionally, centre women's voices and make the issue impossible to ignore. Whether through storytelling, public action, media or partnerships, the opportunity to build momentum is there.

Unsafe remand is not just a justice issue. It is a women's rights issue, a public health issue and a social justice issue. This workshop felt like the beginning of something important a campaign rooted in truth, lived experience and collective determination to push for something better.

The challenge now is turning those ideas into action and making sure women's voices continue to lead the way.