



# HEAR FROM HER

## Karen Keith

**System Impacted Women Speak Series**  
**Brought to you by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition**

My original sentence was 10 years probation, however I was revoked and sent to prison on a 7-year sentence for non-payment of restitution.

Revoking my probation for non-payment, then requiring me to still pay restitution as part of my parole, didn't make sense. Had I been employable at the time I was revoked, I could have paid the restitution, but instead I had to check a box.

When I walked into prison for the first time, I was certain that place was filled with really bad people. I wasn't a bad person; I was a good person who made a bad decision. What I learned while incarcerated was that there were many good people in prison who made bad decisions or maybe they just made the best decision they could at that time.

The first time students I had worked with graduated with their GEDs, I was so proud of each one of them. Before they began their test, I remember telling them I would take a sex case and hug each one of them if they graduated. I did hug each one and thankfully never caught a case for it! Watching these women bloom, find self-esteem & understand their true value was an awesome experience.

When you walk out of prison with \$100 and are expected to start life over, it's difficult. When you know what you are capable of and no one seems to care or give you a second chance, it's demeaning. 500+ job applications and not one call, it just about breaks you when part of your parole stipulations are you must be employed. Living in transitional housing because your choices have cost you everything brings new meaning to starting over.



## What do you think can be done to prevent women from entering the CJ system in the first place?

**Diversion, diversion, diversion – it is imperative to keeping women at home, allowing them to continue being parents to their children. Services outside the judicial system for addiction and mental health will divert many from ever entering the system.**

**My personal journey into prison cost me everything I value most – my 3 children and 3 grandchildren. The system does not just send a person to prison, it tears a family apart – sometimes permanently, and there are no services to reunite those families once a sentence is completed. For many of us, our families are lost to us.**

**For more information about women in Texas' criminal justice system, visit [TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice](https://TexasCJC.org/Womens-Justice)**