[title] **Supporting vulnerable people with brain injuries through our Foundation**

[intro]

**To mark our 40th anniversary, Head of Foundation, Jocelyn Gaynor, shares highlights of The Disabilities Trust Foundation's work. This includes everything from guaranteeing screening for all prisoners with brain injuries caused by domestic violence, to a large-scale study of traumatic brain injury in homeless people in Leeds.**

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“'I think it definitely raised awareness... that there are women in here with brain injuries ...nobody knew about it before …Nobody knew what they meant for a woman and what kind of things they need, so I definitely think that having somebody in here helped us a lot and put an awareness out there really.’

These are the words of Jennifer\*, a prisoner with a brain injury at Drake Hall, a prison and young offender institution in Staffordshire. She benefited from support through The Disabilities Trust Foundation’s Brain Injury Linkworker Service. It gave female prisoners with brain injuries direct one-to-one support and makes sure they have an appropriate network in place when they are released from prison.

In six years, Linkworker’s have improved the lives of prisoners with a brain injury in more than 10 prisons across England and Wales.

Since 2009, The Foundation has made a difference to people like Jennifer who can't access care services provided by The Disabilities Trust. The Foundation may not have been around for 40 years like The Disabilities Trust, but it is an integral part of the charity’s work.

*“I joined the Foundation in 2016 after working within the substance misuse sector for many years. I was really interested in the opportunity to work within an innovative team, translating research into both policy and practice changes which could have a real lasting change on the lives of people who have experienced histories of trauma and vulnerability.”*

The aim of the Foundation is to share The Disabilities Trust’s expertise, extend its reach and work to develop projects and programmes which seek to amplify the voices of those who are multiply disadvantaged. We work across the organisation to pull together our expertise in research, influence and policy change to improve outcomes for people. The Foundation does this by carrying out research and piloting new ways of working. We campaign, improve best practice and influence policy within brain injury rehabilitation, learning and physical disabilities and autism.

[subheading] **Our achievements**

In 11 years, the Foundation has helped vulnerable people through a range of projects across the UK. These include research, like a 2012 project which investigated traumatic brain injury in homeless people in Glasgow. And direct support, such as our programme for homeless people in Liverpool.

Some of our achievements include:

* Securing the inclusion of brain injury screening for all prisoners in England who have sustained their injury through domestic abuse, starting from April 2021. This will mean that survivors of abuse with a brain injury are identified as soon as they enter prison and appropriate support can be identified.
* publishing research to demonstrate the need for improved support for women with brain injuries in the criminal justice system. *The Impact of Brain Injury and Domestic Abuse: A Further Analysis* examined the link between traumatic brain injury, domestic abuse and female offending.
* identifying that the leading cause of brain injuries of female offenders was domestic violence from our work at HMP Drake Hall. We published *Making the Link* in February 2019. The report found that, of the female offenders who had sustained a brain injury, over six in 10 (62%) had experienced domestic violence.
* conducting research which highlighted the high prevalence of adults with traumatic brain injury in prisons in England . Our study found that almost half (47%) of 613 male offenders in HMP Leeds reported a history of traumatic brain injury. The study was used to do shine a spotlight on the issue and call for screening, training and support for offenders with a brain injury.
* providing evidence that there are significantly higher levels of cognitive impairment among those who are homeless, compared to the general population. This finding came out of our research into traumatic brain injury in homeless people in Leeds.

I hope that the legacy of The Foundation’s work will lead to changes in statutory and local guidance, improving support for vulnerable people. We also hope to add more diverse voices to the national debate about brain injury and help develop best practice.

[subheading] **Making the case for rehabilitation**

To demonstrate the value of our work, we need to build an evidence base and show the difference rehabilitation makes to people like Jennifer. This can take time. Especially when working with vulnerable groups. The people we support through our Linkworker Service face a range of challenges, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol use and domestic abuse. They have faced these challenges for many years, which means they may struggle to take part in rehabilitation. Our aim is to support them to do this by doing raise awareness of the impacts of brain injury through our research, lobby for change at a policy level and develop practical and innovative interventions to improve support in front line services.

[subheading] **Shaping policy**

We will carry out further research to support our findings on domestic abuse and brain injury. This will raise awareness of the impact of brain injuries on domestic abuse survivors. We will also continue to work with the UK government and the criminal justice system to make sure offenders with brain injuries are effectively screened and supported to take part in rehabilitation programmes.

The people we support are at the heart of The Disabilities Trust Foundation's work. We will continue to amplify the voices of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities and use their experiences to identify gaps in policy and practice. This will help to improve their quality of life and that of their families.”

[Read more about The Foundation's work](https://www.thedtgroup.org/foundation)

\*Jennifer is not her real name. The quote comes from our [*Making the Link*](https://www.thedtgroup.org/media/163444/making-the-link-female-offending-and-brain-injury.pdf) report.