

**CLEAN
BREAK**

University of
Hertfordshire

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Scenes from Lost Mothers

by Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti

INFORMATION PACK



Ayesha Antoine in [BLANK] by Alice Birch at the
Donmar Warehouse. Image credit: Helen Maybanks

i *Scenes from Lost Mothers* is an engaging and impactful play designed specifically to be performed at conferences, seminars, training events or educational settings. This play sparks debate with audiences about pregnant women and mothers experiencing criminalisation.

Why have we made *Scenes from Lost Mothers*?

Scenes from Lost Mothers is a new play by Clean Break theatre company and the University of Hertfordshire. The play brings to life the findings of the Lost Mothers project and platforms the voices of the many women who brought their lived experience to the research.

Over the last few years there have been great strides in campaigning for pregnant women experiencing criminalisation. The poor outcomes for women and their babies have received sharp media attention, with headlines revealing the distressing fact that women in prison are seven times more likely to suffer a stillbirth [1].

A focus is now needed on the post-natal experience of women and their babies and young children. In 2023-24, 229 pregnant women were held in prison and 53 imprisoned women gave birth [2]. While it is estimated that that 55% of women in prison have children [3] and over 17,500 children were separated from their mothers by imprisonment in 2020 [4], there is no concrete data about how many are separated after birth in prison, or who came into prison leaving an infant behind. Without adequate data and without listening to the voices of women, it is impossible to make the changes that are so urgently needed for mothers and their children.

There is growing evidence that shows poor outcomes for women who spend their pregnancy awaiting the possibility of separation, and women who are compulsorily separated from their babies. These include mental ill health and higher risk of self harm.

The findings of the Lost Mothers Project uncover the reality of these statistics: they show the deep pain of separating mothers from their babies, and through this, women's incredible ability to hold onto hope.




About the Lost Mothers Project

The Lost Mothers project is a research project led by Dr Laura Abbott, a midwife, and Associate Professor in research at The University of Hertfordshire, in partnership with Birth Companions and their lived experience team.

The project examines how decisions are made about separating imprisoned mothers from their newborn babies. The project team have interviewed women in five prisons as well as prison officers, midwives, social workers, and health visitors. The team have also observed mother and baby decision making boards.

The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Find out more

 lostmothers.org

What to expect from *Scenes from Lost Mothers*

Scenes from Lost Mothers is produced by ground-breaking theatre company Clean Break, who have been using theatre to shed light on the realities of women with experience of the criminal justice system for over forty years.

By placing women's voices at the heart, *Scenes from Lost Mothers* shines a light on the real experiences of pregnant women and mothers in prison.

It explores the multiple challenges experienced by women who are in prison during pregnancy and early motherhood including health care provision, access to mother and baby units, living conditions, increased risk of mental ill-health, and the consequences of decisions made by professionals run ragged by a system that's falling apart.

It voices the internal narratives of these women: the terrible impact of loss and separation, and their hopes, dreams and anxieties about motherhood and their babies' futures. Raising awareness of the daily struggles endured by women and the ripple effects on their children, the show is a cry from the heart for change and compassion.

Within the scenes, there is a celebration of the vital work of women's organisations and campaigners fighting for change.

Clean Break and the University of Hertfordshire co-commissioned Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti to write *Scenes from Lost Mothers* using Dr Laura Abbott's research project *Lost Mothers* as inspiration, as well as speaking to Birth Companion's Lived Experience Team.

The play was developed with and is performed by women with experience of the criminal justice system, or at risk of entering it.

Can I read the script?

A copy of the script can be provided to bookers upon request.



It was an eye-opener to women's struggles, even when they do get involved with support networks.

Audience member



Who is the play for?

Scenes from Lost Mothers has been designed for those interested in or working with pregnant women and mothers who are in prison.

The play will make an engaging and impactful contribution for conferences, seminars or training events, and is of interest to:

- Criminal justice agencies
- Women's organisations
- Policymakers
- Social Workers and Support Workers
- Probation services
- Universities (particularly criminology, midwifery, obstetrics and gynecology, social work, and theatre departments)
- NHS services
- Service users and staff

Why should you book *Scenes from Lost Mothers*?

It felt personal, people were not numbers or statistics.

Audience member



Conversations around the criminalisation of pregnant women and mother and baby separation are complex and can be difficult to hold.

Through our experience, we know that presenting sensitive issues through theatre reaches audiences in a unique and accessible way. Opening up these conversations creatively makes space for preconceptions to be challenged, and expands learning opportunities for a wide range of audiences in an interactive way. *Scenes from Lost Mothers* immerses audiences in a story about pregnant women and mothers in prison.

The topics covered in the play are:

- Pregnancy in prison
- Experiences of women being separated from their babies
- Mother and Baby units
- Health Care provision
- Peer support
- Mental ill-health
- Relationships with staff and healthcare workers

The performance was excellent and very powerful. You could have heard a pin drop in the room... thank you for your invaluable contribution at the conference.

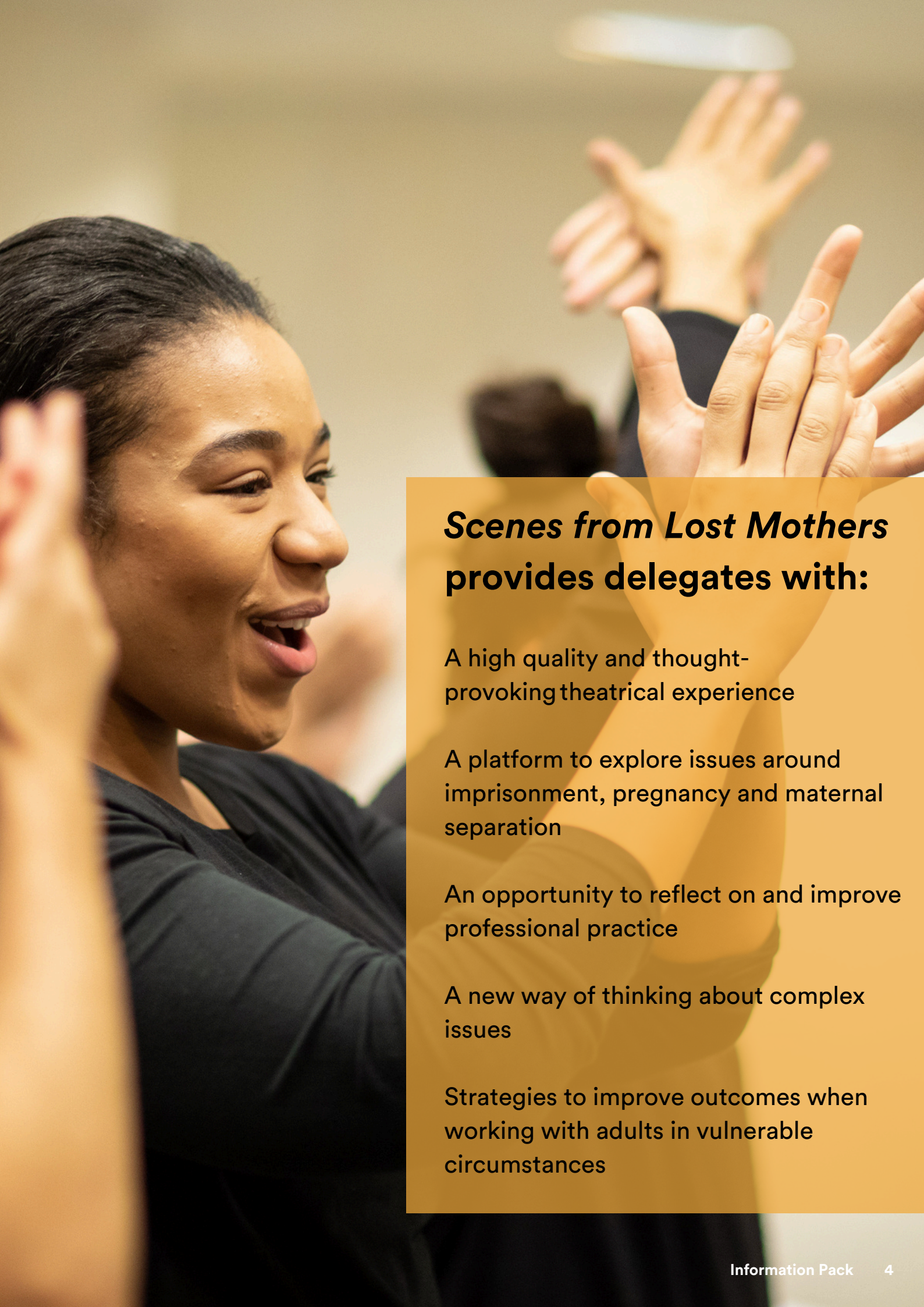
Organiser of a criminal justice conference featuring Clean Break

Our productions are based on detailed research and development with women with lived experience. Our artistic approach allows us to reveal obstacles faced by many, without divulging the personal information of individual women.

The 30-minute play can stand alone or accompanied by a 20-60 minute workshop and discussion, enabling audiences to explore in more detail the issues raised by the play.



Due to the challenging themes in *Scenes from Lost Mothers*, Clean Break has created a self-care guide which is available to all bookers.



***Scenes from Lost Mothers* provides delegates with:**

A high quality and thought-provoking theatrical experience

A platform to explore issues around imprisonment, pregnancy and maternal separation

An opportunity to reflect on and improve professional practice

A new way of thinking about complex issues

Strategies to improve outcomes when working with adults in vulnerable circumstances



Pictured: Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti

Who is involved?

Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti | Playwright

Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti writes for stage, screen and radio.

Her first play *Behsharam* broke box office records at Soho/Birmingham Rep. Her second play *Behzti* was sensationally closed after protests and won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Other credits include *A Kind of People* (Royal Court Downstairs); *Khandan* (Royal Court/The Rep); *Behud* (Soho/Coventry Belgrade); *Elephant* (Birmingham Rep); *Dishoom* (Rifco/Watford Palace Theatre); *Fourteen* (Watford Palace Theatre); the feature film *Everywhere And Nowhere*; *DCI Stone* (Radio 4); *Londonee* (Rich Mix); *Dead Meat* (Channel 4); and *An Enemy Of The People* (BBC World Service).

She was a core writer on *The Archers* from 2012-19, part of the team that created the groundbreaking ‘Helen and Rob’ domestic violence story.

Her first collection of plays, *Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti: PLAYS ONE*, is published by Bloomsbury.

She is currently developing original series *Masala* for Hometeam/Universal, *The Tutor* for Moonage Pictures, adapting *Black & Blue* by Parm Sandhu for Cuba Pictures as well as *Brando's Bride* by Sarah Broughton as a feature for Martha Stone Productions/Ffilm Cymru Wales.

She is also adapting Sathnam Sanghera’s *Marriage Material* for the stage and writing plays for the National Theatre, Chichester Festival Theatre and Tara Theatre.

When speaking to mothers in prison, I came to realise that our broken system simply perpetuates another kind of brokenness.

I saw how becoming a mother could unlock fresh potential in women, but that sense of hope was too often crushed by the oppressive patterns and structures which are part of daily life in an institution.

It’s time for radical action and for the justice system to start viewing mothers and pregnant women as human beings instead of problems that cannot be solved.

Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, Playwright

Who is involved?



Dr Laura Abbott | ESRC Principal Investigator & Lost Mothers Project lead

Laura is a dedicated qualitative researcher with a strong commitment to making a difference in the lives of incarcerated pregnant women and mothers. Her research has focused on experiences of pregnancy and early parenthood in prison and expanded into various facets of midwifery, sociology and criminology. Laura has made significant contributions to the academic field with multiple international peer reviewed publications, book chapters in collected volumes and an edited book. She has provided expertise to government bodies, contributing to policy development and frequently delivering keynote speeches. She is a fellow of The Royal College of Midwives and holds registrations as a nurse and a midwife ensuring her research is deeply rooted in practical experience.

Anna Herrmann | Director

Anna is Artistic Director at Clean Break. For Clean Break her directing credits include *Catch* by Sonia Jalaly, *Missing Out* by Mary Cooper, *Not Pretty Like the Rainbow* by Daisy King, *Hear* by Deborah Bruce, *Sweatbox* by Chloë Moss and *Through This Mist* by various playwrights. Anna joined Clean Break as Head of Education in 2002 and led its award-winning Education programme for 15 years.

Cast

The three strong cast are Clean Break Members; women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system or are at risk of entering it. The Members selected for this production are on Clean Break's traineeship scheme and are specialising in performance. The scheme offers first-hand experience of touring, whilst providing additional training and development to support women moving beyond Clean Break to consider a career in the creative industries.

Informed by conversations with women who have lived through pregnancy in prison or being separated from their babies, Scenes from Lost Mothers poignantly sheds light on their often-hidden stories, amplifying their voices. The play shifts perceptions, fosters deeper understanding, and inspires greater compassion. It should be seen not only by the public, but by health, social care, and prison staff, making women's experiences more visible and advocating for meaningful change.

Dr Laura Abbott, Lead Researcher



Pictured: Anna Herrmann, director

About Clean Break

Clean Break is a theatre company producing groundbreaking theatre which creates lasting change by challenging injustice in and beyond the criminal justice system.

Clean Break was established by two women in prison in 1979, at HMP Askham Grange. An Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, Clean Break produces groundbreaking theatre which puts women's voices at its heart.

Our collaboration with artists, women with criminal justice experience and our partnerships across theatre, criminal justice and the women's sector means we are uniquely placed to engage with audiences who are trying to make sense of the world and looking for new and inspiring narratives.

Clean Break uses theatre in prison and with women in the community, and commissions and produces plays which compellingly reveal to audiences the hidden stories of women and criminalisation. We achieve this in collaboration with theatres and other organisations including the National Theatre, Donmar Warehouse, Sheffield Theatres, and the Royal Court.

Over the past 40 years Clean Break has proven itself to be a trailblazer in both theatre and the criminal justice system; creating bold work, innovating best practices and creating lasting change.




This phenomenal company's activity: it is vital, humane work with real theatrical heft.
Lynn Gardner, The Stage

Find us online

 cleanbreak.org.uk

 linkedin.com/company/clean-break

 @CleanBrk

 @CleanBrk

About Birth Companions


Birth Companions is a women's charity dedicated to tackling inequalities and disadvantage during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood. Birth Companions was founded in 1996 to support pregnant women and new mothers in Holloway Prison and since then has become expert in meeting the needs of women living in the most challenging situations in prison and in the community.

Birth Companions supports women who have experienced contact with the criminal justice system, involvement with children's social care, immigration issues, homelessness, poverty, mental ill-health and a history of domestic violence or sexual abuse. Time and again its work has shown that with the right support cycles of disadvantage can be broken, and the futures of mothers and their babies improved.

Many of those supported go on to join Birth Companion's Lived Experience Team; a group of over 50 women who are committed to drawing on their experiences for research and policy work. Together, Birth Companions are achieving real change in the way women and their babies are cared for across the UK and beyond.

Find us online

 [birthcompanions.org.uk](https://www.birthcompanions.org.uk)

 [linkedin.com/company/birth-companions](https://www.linkedin.com/company/birth-companions)

 [@brthcompanions](https://www.instagram.com/birthcompanions)



Scenes from Lost Mothers powerfully brings women's voices to life, and spotlights many of the cruel injustices experienced by mothers and babies separated by our criminal justice system.

Prisons will never be a safe or appropriate place for mothers of infants; they harm women's mental and physical health, and prevent them from giving their babies the best start in life.

Scenes from Lost Mothers should guide us all, across systems and services, as we push for an end to the imprisonment of mothers of infants.

**Naomi Delap,
Director of Birth Companions**

The Details

There are two options for how your organisation could book this production, depending on your need and the size of the audience:

Regular performance booking

- *Scenes from Lost Mothers* performed to your audience.
- Total time 30 minutes.
- Ideal for conferences.

Performance & workshop booking

- *Scenes from Lost Mothers* performed to your audience.
- After the play, a workshop facilitated by a Clean Break artist to explore the themes of the play in more detail and to ignite discussion. This workshop can be tailored to a range of settings to suit the objectives and group sizes of your organisation.
- Total time 1 hour 30 minutes.
- Ideal for educational institutions and seminars.

There is also an option for bespoke packages and hosting at Clean Break's building in Kentish Town if you have specific requirements.

Photography by Tracey Anderson U.O.S.

 For more information and costs contact:

Dezh Zhelyazkova, Producer

020 7482 8600

dezh.zhelyazkova@cleanbreak.org.uk

Technical requirements

Timing

Scenes from Lost Mothers is a 30 minute long play with no interval, but please allow a few minutes additional time for start and finish.

Space

We can be flexible about this depending on your audience numbers.

Set

The play tours with a compact set and we can discuss specific requirements dependent on the performance space.

Hosting

Our team of four, three cast members and a Company Stage Manager, will require a private space they can use as a dressing room and to safely store their personal belongings during the performance.



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