

Thematic Inspection of Work with Women Offenders

Response from Women's Breakout September 2015



Women's Breakout

Women's Breakout is an infrastructure organisation with a membership of 56 organisations that provide Women's Community Services. We occupy a unique position as the only organisation that speaks for the national collective of women's organisations delivering community based services for women in the criminal justice system.

We have a primary objective to see gender specific approaches integrated into mainstream rehabilitation provision, thereby contributing to a significant reduction in the number of women in custody and an overall reduction in the number of those coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Such approaches support vulnerable women to take control of their lives and make positive progress; they are available to sentencers as a robust alternative to imprisoning women; and they support the rehabilitation of women who have offended.

A map of our member organisations is attached at Appendix One.

Women's Breakout welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence for the thematic inspection of work with female offenders and the following paper sets out an overview and our response to the key questions that you raised in your e-mail. However, there are also some specific questions that we hope that the Inspection will address.

Some key questions for the inspection

- What are the models of service delivery that the CRCs are using for women offenders, and how do these relate to their submissions?
- What is the expectation of the 'statutory service' for female offenders?
- How far are women receiving holistic services?
- How has the VCS fared in securing contracts to work with female offenders beyond March 2016?
- Will the equivalent of the £3.8 million budget for enhanced services that was transferred from NOMS to Probation Trusts in 2013 be spent on women in 2016/17?
- What is the total expenditure on women offenders in the community since April 2015?
- Have women been offered and received female only offender managers and female only environments?
- Have community payback placements been equitable in range for women to those offered to men?
- How does the distance travelled, as a concept of changes in lifestyle for women, compare to distance travelled for men?
- Since April 2015, how well are magistrates being advised of the range of women's services available in their local community?
- Are staff working with women in Community Rehabilitation Companies provided with gender-specific training?

Women's Community Services

Our member organisations play an increasingly important role in provision beyond custody and they have been widely acclaimed by the Advisory Board for Female Offenders (December 2014), by the Justice Select Committee (2014), by Probation Services and by Judges and magistrates, and more

particularly by consumers – women themselves. They bring a unique approach to supporting women with complex and multiple problems. They aim to provide women with holistic and empathetic support, in a women only environment, in order that they will be enabled to make better life choices. By putting women at the centre of support services and by understanding the complex and related nature of issues affecting their lives, projects are able to effectively deal with the underlying reasons for offending behaviour. By working with many statutory and voluntary organisations they can provide a broad range of support services to women, to help them address all of their needs through a 'one stop shop' that is focussed on empowering women to make positive choices and break patterns of offending.

Women's Community Services have been an important part of the solution for female offenders since 2007 and yet they have, since 2010, faced risk of closure as funding structures and approaches have changed to meet changing public budgeting needs. Predominantly run by charities and as social enterprises, they operate with a low cost base, yet have high impact in the lives of the women with whom they work. Traditionally they have been funded by referrers - predominantly the MoJ, NOMS and Probation Services - but have also drawn in significant additional resources from other statutory agencies and charitable and other funders, to add considerable value to the resource base available.

Women's Community Services are spread around the country and operate variously with women referred from probation services and the courts as being at risk of re-offending, women referred by social services and other agencies at risk of offending and other difficulties, and women at risk and needing one-to-one support to remove the chaos in their lives and get back on track. Currently the UK lacks adequate coverage of gender-specific provision for this group.

The economic benefits and value for money of community based services is well known and clearly evidenced (see for example NEF reports: A Wise Commission, and Unlocking Value), and yet the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda appears to have left these services even more vulnerable than at any other time in the last eight years. It will be necessary for any inspection to take account of the fact that the dust has yet to settle, as 2015/16 has been a year of rolling forward contracts and the majority of CRCs have yet to confirm longer term contracts with providers of services for female offenders. However, Alana House (Reading) has recently been through a protracted, expensive and time consuming contract negotiation with MTC Novo and in spite of accepting a number of variations to the contract price and other aspects of the contract, the CRC has recently announced that they will not be commissioning services from Alana House.

What works for women?

We are interested in understanding the approach that you will take to inspecting work with women offenders and would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you or comment on the framework that you will use for the inspection.

Women's Breakout drives the effective monitoring and evaluation of work with women, and promotes knowledge exchange and good practice within the network of highly experienced professionals who work directly with women. We have produced a Statement of Service and a Quality Assurance model to support the work we are doing on developing a Social Impact Bond Funded network of service providers in order to bring some national coherence to the discussion of what works best for women. This work draws on the evidence presented in research and studies to establish the criteria and evidence against which services should be assessed, and in particular Gelsthorpe's nine lessons (2009) of what is likely to work for women in providing services:

1. Women-only to foster safety and a sense of community and to enable staff to develop expertise in work with women;
2. Integrate offenders with non-offenders so as to normalise women offenders' experiences and facilitate a supportive environment for learning
3. Foster women's empowerment so they gain sufficient self-esteem to directly engage in problem-solving themselves, and feel motivated to seek appropriate employment;
4. Utilise what is known about the effective learning styles with women;
5. Take a holistic and practical stance to helping women to address social problems which may be linked to their offending;
6. Facilitate links with mainstream agencies, especially health, debt advice and counselling;
7. Have capacity and flexibility to allow women to return for 'top ups' or continued support and development where required;
8. Ensure that women have a supportive milieu or mentor to whom they can turn when they have completed any offender-related programmes, since personal care is likely to be as important as any direct input addressing offending behaviour;
9. Provide women with practical help with transport and childcare so that they can maintain their involvement in the centre or programme.

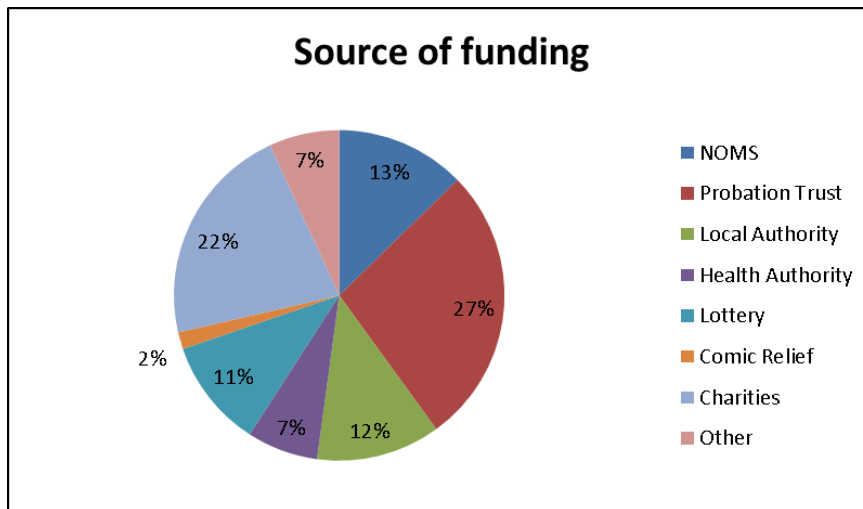
It may be beneficial to explore how our work could inform the inspection framework, and how your inspection framework could inform our work.

Who pays for holistic services?

The causes of offending are multifaceted and a holistic response is a prerequisite for success in reducing offending but also in enabling women to lead successful lives more broadly (e.g. by reuniting families, reducing substance abuse, securing accommodation and facilitating training and employment, accessing mental health treatment, etc.).

The member organisations of Women's Breakout have a strong track record in delivering effective holistic services to vulnerable women. These services provide benefits to a number of commissioners of statutory services. However, it is usual for only one commissioner to pay per woman, and often the service will be topped up from charitable and philanthropic giving. As a result of a highly critical review of weaknesses and ineffectiveness of women's treatment in the criminal justice system (the 'Corston Report'), MoJ/NOMS/Probation Trusts tended to be the lead statutory commissioner of these holistic services.

Women's Breakout Annual Survey (November 2014) includes 34 organisations reporting on their funding which totalled just under £9,889,786. The following figure shows that the principle source of funding for 2013/14 was Probation, accounting for just over a quarter of all funding. The Local Authority and Health Authority make up just under a quarter of funding (19%), while NOMS, the Lottery, Comic Relief, charities and other sources make up the remaining 54%.



Following the transfer of ownership of Community Rehabilitation Companies (previously Probation Trusts), the financial offer for services for female offenders has dramatically reduced and while it has been difficult to get concrete information, there are indications that the primes are not interested in buying the holistic service model. Despite the lack of a clear evidence base to support these steps, they are seemingly more interested in a mentoring approach or group work, and the financial envelope appears to be in the region of £300 per woman, or is based on an hourly rate of £25. Yet the 2007 Corston Review's findings suggest this is very unlikely to be enough to support effective interventions, unless other funding is accessed to tackle practical issues such as a lack of stable housing, a lack access to mental health and substance abuse services and so on.

Further, members are reporting that philanthropic giving has become more challenging, as many Trusts and Foundations are not willing to fund services that should now be delivered by commercial organisations.

Barriers to gender-specific work

As mentioned previously, the true direction of travel for probation services under the Community Rehabilitation Companies is not yet clear, however, there does seem to be an indication from CRCs that they want to deliver as much as possible in-house, with some working on a generic offer for all offenders in the first instance. If this is so, this is a distinct move away from the holistic, women specific services that are at the heart of what has been proven to work for female offenders and there is a very real danger that the quality of services delivered to female offenders will be compromised.

The last two years

Move to Probation Trusts 2013/15

In April 2013 the funding for enhanced services for women offenders moved from NOMS to Probation Trusts. This was a budget of **£3.8 million** that was for additional services for women, not for providing all of Probation Trusts services to all women. Initially there were some problems as Probation Trusts considered how they might use this funding, and in February 2013 I reported to

the Minister (Helen Grant) that in spite of NOMS guidance to Probation Trusts that the funding was to support the Women's Community Services where they had been effective:

- Five projects had been told they will not continue to be commissioned past 31 March 2013, a disinvestment of £576,907
- Eight projects had been advised of funding reductions totalling £424, 090
- Nine projects did not know what their offer for 2013/14 might be.
- There was no evidence that the alternative proposals that we are hearing have worked.
- There was no recognition of the considerable resources and services that Women's Community Services draw in to support women with complex vulnerabilities.

A copy of the full report that I sent to the Minister is available if required.

As we moved into the 2013/14 financial year, the potential damage was lessened and in the event only two projects were not re-commissioned for the 2013/14 year, although many received less funding. At this time, consultation had been undertaken on the Transforming Rehabilitation initiative (February 2013) and we were moving into an even more uncertain time. The 2014/15 financial year saw services that had received funding in 2013/14 refunded in the main.

Contracts with CRCs 2015/16

As we moved into the current financial year, there was general agreement across the sector that this has been the worst time for the last five years. The timing of the transfer of ownership of Community Rehabilitation Companies could not have been worse for the voluntary sector, coming so close to the end of the financial year when decisions about contract renewal should have already been made. There was a general paralysis in decision-making before the transfer of ownership of the CRCs; and following transfer mobilisation was the priority for the CRCs and so decisions to fund the VCS were seriously delayed. When decisions were taken it was in the main to roll contracts forward from three to six months initially. For many areas contracts have continued to roll forward although a small number of organisations have now negotiated three year contracts.

It is also of great concern that our new Community Rehabilitation Companies may not make an appropriate investment in support to women. While companies bidding for those contracts were required to demonstrate an effective identification and recognition of women's needs, we have yet to see this understanding transfer to delivery models and we question whether contract accountability is strong enough to ensure that women's needs are met. Further, there is no specification of what the statutory service for women offenders should be.

In January 2015 Simon Hughes (the then Minister) said that we should halve the population of female offenders. In order to achieve this appropriate services must be available to support women before they offend, and as alternatives to custody when they do offend. If this is to be carried forward under the new Ministerial ambitions, then resources must be diverted into the place where women are provided with the support they need to not offend. There is a growing consensus that most of the solutions to women's offending lie outside prison walls in treatment for addictions and mental health problems, protection from domestic violence and coercive relationships, secure housing, debt management, education, skills development and employment. Community services enable women to take control of their lives, care for their children and address the causes of their offending. However, there is a very real danger that these community services that work for women will be eroded if not this year, then at contract renewal in three years time.

Case Studies

Some case studies are attached, but Women's Breakout has a case study section to the website with examples drawn from across our membership. www.womensbreakout.org.uk

Good Practice

We would be pleased to work with you to identify a balanced national and thematic picture of good practice for visits if that would be helpful.

Contact details

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Some case studies - Isis

Kathleen

I met Kate during in-reach to HMP Eastwood Park. Kate had been sentenced to a three year prison sentence for conspiracy to supply cocaine. Kate had no history of drug misuse and no previous convictions. I was intrigued as to how Kate had got into this situation. This is Kate's story.

It was September 2008 and Kate was 34 years old. Before going to prison Kate had a job in a private hospital and she worked hard for her family. At this time Kate had two sons, aged 15 and 11. However Kate was struggling financially and she found herself in significant debt. Kate's relationship had broken down with her son's Father and she was struggling as a single Mother.

It was at this point that her next door neighbour asked Kate to 'hold' a package of cocaine for £20. Kate was vulnerable and in desperate need for money. Reluctantly she agreed. Unbeknown to Kate, she was at the very bottom of a major drug chain which was being investigated by Gloucestershire police.

Kate was arrested and police recovered £400,000 of cocaine as a result of the operation. Kate realised the enormity of the crime that she had committed. Kate was released on bail and it would be two years until she was sentenced.

Whilst Kate was on bail she reunited with the Father of her sons. Kate became pregnant and she gave birth to her third son in September 2010. Two months later Kate was sentenced. Kate was devastated to be separated from her sons and her new born baby.

Kate describes the journey from Bristol Crown court to HMP Eastwood Park. She was terrified and desperate for her baby. Kate immediately put in an application for the Mother and Baby Unit and three days later she was re-united with her baby Son.

By January 2011, Kate was facing a devastating problem. Kate's family home was being repossessed by the Housing Association and her Family were facing homelessness. Kate had the tenancy solely in her name and by committing her crime she had breached her tenancy agreement. Kate sought specialist advice from Shelter and they took on her case. However, unfortunately in March 2011 her family were made homeless. Kate felt powerless and her son's moved in with their maternal Grandmother.

Kate was due to be released on HDC in December 2011 and over the year I saw Kate fortnightly on the Mother and Baby Unit. Kate and I built a solid rapport and we began working on Kate's support needs. I told Kate about Re-Unite Gloucestershire, a new project we were launching aimed at reuniting Mothers in prison with their children by providing housing and support. Kate was excited about the project and agreed to be our first client. We set about finding Kate accommodation for release and I stayed in contact with her family to keep them updated of any progress.

Due to the severe financial difficulty Kate had experienced before going to prison she sought advice from Citizen's Advice Bureau. Kate successfully applied for bankruptcy and she now faced a fresh start once she was released from prison.

Kate applied to Women in Prison and was granted funding to enrol onto a Counselling course in prison. Kate started to consider opportunities for her future and expressed a desire to help others in her situation.

Intensive support was offered to Kate leading up to her release as she became more anxious about the reality of her situation. Joint visits were initiated between Myself, Probation, Housing Providers and Family Focus in order provide the multi-agency support that Kate and her Family required.

In December 2011 Kate was granted HDC. Kate was excited to be reunited with her Family for Christmas and she moved into private rented accommodation. However, two months later Kate was offered a brand new three bedroom house through Oxbode Housing Association and Kate was overjoyed. We managed to negotiate with her landlord and he allowed her to end her tenancy early.

Kate moved into her new family home and we made applications for financial support to carpet and furnish the property. Kate has experienced ups and downs since being released from prison but she is working hard to rebuild her life for her Family. Kate often expresses her gratitude for the support she receives from ISIS Women's Centre and Re-Unite Gloucestershire and she describes this support as her 'guardian angel'

Now Kate is settled into her new family home we are starting to explore educational opportunities. Kate has a strong desire to train to support other women in her situation and she will be starting a mentoring course at ISIS in the near future.

Throughout the time I have known Kate I have admired her determination to stay positive about the future. Kate is an inspiration; she is a mother who made a terrible mistake, a mother who with support, is striving to rebuild her life for her family.

Lorraine

I met Lorraine whilst delivering in-reach to HMP Eastwood Park. Lorraine was 19 years old and had been remanded in custody for her involvement in a gang related offence and she wasn't due to be sentenced for another 6 months. When I met Lorraine she told me that she had a 3 year old son who she desperately missed. His name was Jack and he was staying with Lorraine's mother temporarily whilst she was in prison.

Although Lorraine has several close family members, her teenage years were not without disruption. Lorraine's Father was in and out of prison throughout her life and was therefore absent for most of her childhood. He was also very notorious and well known in Gloucestershire which made it difficult for Lorraine to steer away from association with this reputation. Although Lorraine did not get involved in drugs or petty crime as she did not want to follow the path of her Father she did become involved with some young people who were involved with a gang. Due to Lorraine's vulnerability, she had quickly become affiliated with the gang and she was soon used by the gang as a 'honeytrap' which led to her offence.

Before going to prison Lorraine had lived in a 2 bedroom property in Gloucestershire with her son Jack which had been provided to her via a local Housing Association. Lorraine had waited a long time

for this accommodation as she had spent time sofa surfing and in supported accommodation before Jack was born. Finally she had managed to secure a family home for her and her son. However, due to the nature of Lorraine's offence, the Housing Association had evicted Lorraine and her son from the property and consequently they were both homeless. Lorraine was very worried that when she would be released from prison she wouldn't be eligible for adequate housing for her son and would consequently struggle to get him back in her care. I talked to Lorraine about Re-unite Gloucestershire which is a project we offer that provides accommodation and support to mothers coming out of prison who have lost their accommodation so that they can be re-united with their children. Lorraine was very interested in this and we met regularly whilst she was in prison at EWP to make plans for her release.

Part of this preparation included contacting Lorraine's mother so that she was completely involved with the process. This would ensure consistency for Jack when the time came for the reunification of Jack and his mother. Lorraine's mother had been struggling financially to support Jack and had been forced to decrease her work hours to care for Jack causing further financial strain. We were able to support her with this and offer advice regarding benefits and further financial assistance and support.

Six months later, Lorraine was finally sentenced. She received a custodial sentence of 2 years and 3 months. Unfortunately, Lorraine was transferred to HMP Drake Hall which was 75 miles away meaning that she could no longer see her son. This was devastating for them both as they had always shared a close bond. We stayed in contact throughout this time until eventually Lorraine was transferred back to HMP Eastwood Park for local release. Lorraine was released after serving a year for good behaviour.

With support from ISIS, Lorraine managed to secure a 2 bedroom flat provided by Stonham Housing as part of Re-unite Gloucestershire which Lorraine and her son moved into after she was released. The property was provided furnished but we made applications for funding for kitchen equipment and a double bed and other items to make the property more homely as Lorraine had lost all of her belongings whilst in prison. Lorraine and I met frequently along with her link worker from Stonham to address any upcoming support needs. Together we ensured that Lorraine was in receipt of the correct benefits, emotional wellbeing courses and appropriate support such as access to Children's centres for Jack.

Gradually Lorraine started to rebuild her life and prepare for the future she desired for herself and Jack. Lorraine was keen to start work when Jack was at nursery and she saw the Education and Training advisor at ISIS to complete a CV and research courses and employment opportunities. Lorraine felt that she wanted to 'give back' in the future and help other women who have been through similar situations so she enrolled on a Level 3 qualification in Peer Mentoring at ISIS in November 2014 which she is doing extremely well in.

Since release Lorraine has worked hard with ISIS and is able to reflect on her offending behaviour and her personal circumstances which contributed to this. Consequently, Lorraine has grown in confidence and has become a positive role model for her young son. Lorraine also became involved in offering peer support to other young mothers living in the Stonham accommodation and she is hoping to enrol on an apprenticeship scheme with Stonham in the future. Furthermore, Lorraine has also applied to become a volunteer at Gloucester Foodbank as she is extremely motivated to gain

experience working with vulnerable individuals. Jack is currently doing well and is a very happy little boy who has recently started school which he loves. Together they are looking forward to a bright and fulfilling future together.

Natasha

Natasha was referred to ISIS by her probation officer in September 2010 as she was serving a Suspended Sentence Order with an Alcohol Treatment Requirement. Natasha had been in an abusive relationship and one evening she had retaliated and stabbed her abusive partner during a domestic dispute. Natasha and her partner had broken up and they were no longer living together but the council had re-housed her ex partner five minutes down the road and he would often turn up at Natasha's flat drunk, hurling abuse.

One Monday morning, a couple of weeks after being referred, Natasha contacted ISIS asking for help. She was distressed as her ex-partner had assaulted her again over the weekend. Natasha was desperate to move to get away from her ex-partner and she needed our support to do so.

I went to Dursley and collected Natasha. Together we went to the council and explained Natasha's situation. After some discussion and persuasion the council agreed to help Natasha and she was re-banded to 'Gold' both locally and regionally meaning that she was now considered a priority to be re-housed and she could move away from Dursley. Natasha was delighted and started bidding on properties in Gloucester. Meanwhile Natasha and I started the process of taking out a non-molestation order against her ex-partner and I accompanied her to Family court during this process. Natasha was successful, and a non-molestation order was issued. A couple of months later Natasha was re-housed and she relocated to Gloucester.

Natasha had a history of alcohol misuse, and had started drinking age 16. Natasha said she would like to become abstinent again as she had achieved this a few years previous after completing treatment at The Nelson Trust. However, Natasha had started turning to alcohol again in attempt to cope with the trauma of her abusive relationship and she wanted support to address this. Natasha started attending groups at ISIS including relapse prevention and drug and alcohol awareness.

Natasha saw her probation officer regularly at ISIS throughout her order and successfully completed her Alcohol Treatment Requirement, attending the LIAP programme to address her alcohol misuse. Natasha and I would often have three ways with probation in order to ensure consistent support and effective communication for which Natasha was grateful and she successfully completed her order in September 2011.

Throughout Natasha's order and beyond she attended ISIS regularly. Natasha attended several therapeutic groups a week including self esteem, anxiety management, emotional wellbeing and anger management alongside groups aimed at addressing her alcohol misuse. Natasha also completed OCN qualifications in Crime and its Impact and Drug and Alcohol Awareness.

Natasha worked hard to address the domestic abuse she had experienced in the past and attended The Freedom Programme at ISIS which is a 12 week programme for women who have experienced domestic abuse. Natasha found this extremely beneficial and it helped her to understand the dynamics of her abusive relationship and the effects the abuse had upon herself and her children.

Natasha had three sons at the time of the offence. Her eldest sons, aged 11 and 13 lived with their Father in London but Natasha also had a young son, aged three. The Father of her youngest son was the man she had recently broken up with; her abusive ex-partner. Due to the domestic abuse and alcohol misuse within the relationship, Social Services had become involved and her son was in the care of his paternal grandparents. Natasha was desperate to increase her contact with her son as the grandparents often prevented Natasha from seeing him due to their concerns about her past. However, Natasha had made significant progress and was now abstinent from alcohol so we went together to a local solicitors and Natasha started the court process to apply for a contact order for her youngest son.

We attended Family court together and Natasha now has unsupervised contact with her youngest son. Natasha's eldest sons often come to stay during the school holidays and Natasha has put a lot of effort into decorating a bedroom for them which she furnished with a grant we applied for from the Fluck Convalescent Fund.

Natasha was keen to work towards employment so we referred her to Action for Employment and she started considering work options and putting together a Curriculum Vita. Natasha started volunteering at Marie Curie which she really enjoyed and she was recently offered paid employment there.

Natasha's motivation to rebuild her life was extraordinary. Her self esteem and confidence continued to grow and Natasha started thinking about using her experiences to help other women in similar situations. Natasha had become an inspiration to other women at ISIS and her peers had started turning to Natasha for advice and support. Natasha enrolled on a Mentoring course at ISIS and successfully completed an OCR, Level 3 Award in Mentoring Skills. The facilitators of the mentoring course were so impressed with Natasha that they applied for funding for her to go on and work towards the next level of qualification in mentoring. Natasha is currently working towards this qualification and is due to complete it in the near future.

Two years later, Natasha had made significant progress and had remained abstinent from alcohol for over a year. Natasha realised she was ready to exit from ISIS; that she was ready to go out and gain experience working towards her goal of helping others. Natasha attended her last group at ISIS on 4th October 2012, enjoying a farewell lunch with her peers. This was an emotional day for Natasha which signified the start of the rest of her life. Natasha still pops in to ISIS to say hello and she is always willing to share her story with important people who come to visit ISIS. Natasha truly is an inspirational woman who with support from ISIS, found the strength within herself to turn her life around. She is now a role model of determination and strength, who can tell her story of survival, giving hope to other women, starting on their journey of recovery.