



The development and impact of community services for women offenders: an evaluation

Research report, February 2013

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Acknowledgements

This evaluation was commissioned by the Corston Coalition of Independent Funders (CIFIC). We would like to thank CIFIC for their support and staff from the services and their stakeholders for giving up their valuable time to be interviewed and for providing us with all the information we requested. We are also grateful to the Magistrates' Association for helping us make contact with magistrates and to those magistrates who participated in telephone interviews. We are indebted to the women service users who were so open with us about their lives and the many challenges they have faced.

Our thanks also go to Loraine Gelsthorpe, Carol Hedderman, Mike Hough and Jackie Russell for their advice and comments on earlier drafts of this report. We are grateful to our colleagues Tracey Gyateng and Jessica Jacobson for their help with preparing the final report. Finally we would like to thank the Nuffield Foundation for funding this study.

The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at www.nuffieldfoundation.org



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SUMMARY

This evaluation examined six services developed in third sector partnerships for women offenders in the community. The study was commissioned by the Corston Coalition of Independent Funders to capture best practice in services which were known to be at risk of funding cuts. The research which included interviews with staff, stakeholders and service users, examination of project documents and the collection of monitoring data, took place in 2011/2012, one year into an initiative to extend the limited network of 'one stop shop' services for low risk women offenders.

A number of evaluations had already established the value of providing holistic services to women offenders in women-only settings, particularly for those who have suffered sexual and physical violence. There has however continued to be a shortage of evidence about the impact of these services on reoffending outcomes. As we describe, a combination of factors, including a lack of any common measurement system, has meant that reoffending data have not been consistently collected in the services that took part in our evaluation. We make recommendations for ways in which such services might in the future map women's interim progress; progress that is so richly described in the qualitative accounts of service users, staff and stakeholders.

In many ways this evaluation charts the opening of a 'policy window' that we very much hope will not be closed in the new environment of Payment by Results contracts in England and Wales. Deaths of women in custody; lobbying by campaigning groups and charitable organisations; the publication of a series of influential reports describing the exponential rise in the imprisonment of low-risk women offenders and an increasing body of evidence that showed that such imprisonment served to exacerbate the psychological strain, substance misuse and anguish that accompanies so much of women's offending, had created a consensus that made government action possible. Short-term government funds were found for the extension of an existing model of one-stop-shop service for low-risk women offenders. The new network of services was developed in hastily constructed third sector/statutory sector partnerships with the hope that they would become integrated into mainstream commissioning arrangements. As we will show, these new services have been innovative in their linking of third and statutory sector, criminal justice, health and welfare and women-specific agencies. They have achieved much within short timescales and in many ways have presented new challenges in multiagency working. In the current climate of economic austerity and belt tightening, we hope that our report will provide evidence of how such challenges can be overcome and contribute to existing learning on the provision of services for women offenders in the community.

Key Findings

In reviewing the evidence base of 15 mixed method evaluations of Women's Community Services (WCSs) we found:

- Inconsistent or inadequate monitoring data and small samples in early implementation of projects have made analysis of reconviction, reoffending and compliance rates problematic.
- A focus on preventing reoffending as the primary objective of WCSs is likely to exclude support of women at risk of offending and may make services less attractive to low level offenders.
- There is a clear need for more consistent and rigorous monitoring at the point of referral, assessment and case review in order to capture 'distance travelled' measures.
- Evaluators have been successful in describing the processes involved in establishing multiagency, third/statutory sector partnerships and reporting on the value that women derive from attending women only, holistic services. There is great consistency in findings on what it is both stakeholders and service users find valuable in women-centre based services.

In analysing the 'best practice' features of the six WCSs under evaluation we found:

- Short lead-in times for meeting official targets were not supportive of developing services.
- As established in previous research, WCSs provide safe women-only environments that are preferable to probation offices, particularly for women offenders who have experienced physical and sexual violence.

- The services vary in the extent to which they enable the integration of women offenders with other women. The increasingly narrow CJS focus of these services will make this less likely.
- The services offer a supportive learning environment and a wide range of Education, Training and Employment opportunities tailored to the needs of vulnerable women.
- Multi agency working and information sharing is crucial for this model of holistic service, enabled by co-location of a range of other service providers and effective partnership relationships.
- Although women are offered the option of returning for support should they need to, timeframes for contact at WCSs are increasingly limited.
- The case worker role is key in delivering intensive, supportive services that are focused on the identification of an individual woman's needs.
- Short- term, year by year funding arrangements have created insecurity for staff and impacted on credibility with partners. Uncertainty regarding future funding and the reorganisation of probation contracting arrangements now risks wasted investment in know-how, skills development and partnership arrangements.

In examining the key features of effective Strategic partnerships we found:

- Involvement of external partners in steering groups is particularly valuable in terms of aligning WCSs with local strategies for policing, housing, mental health, prison resettlement and substance misuse services.
- Fostering strategic relationships and the existence of champions in partnership agencies increases the likelihood of awareness raising and 'buy-in' from operational staff, and therefore increasing referrals and information sharing.
- Our findings on magistrates' views and awareness of WCSs are consistent with previous research in this area, including:
 - High numbers of magistrates sit infrequently which means that they see very few women offenders.

- The level of awareness among magistrates of WCSs in the evaluation areas was inconsistent even where promotion of services to magistrates had been attempted. Cuts to training budgets mean that there is little or no magistrate training concerning women offenders.
- Where magistrates had knowledge of the local WCSs, they valued the service.
- Attendance of WCS staff at magistrates' courts in order to promote the service amongst court probation staff, court staff and magistrates has been uneven and inconsistent.
- Magistrates are reliant for their information about women specific resources on legal clerks and court probation staff.
- There was criticism amongst magistrates regarding the uneven geographical spread of WCSs and scepticism regarding the sustainability of these services.

In assessing the Impact of the six Women's Community Services that took part in our evaluation we found:

- While WCSs face considerable pressure to provide evidence of impact, there has been limited investment into systems of outcome measurement and administrative posts to support the upkeep of service monitoring have often been the first casualty of budget cuts.
- WCSs hold considerable amounts of information about the women they see but there is clear scope for refining a proportion of these data for assessing impact. Because of local commissioning and the way in which services were developed (discussed in Section 2) there is no common assessment tool across WCSs for defining needs at entry nor are there agreed *standard* indicators of progress. However, there is enough common ground to develop such measures.
- Services, whether narratively or using tools such as Outcome Star, are recording incremental change made by the women in key resettlement areas and this is important to highlight desistance as a process.
- The large majority of women attending the WCSs are in the criminal justice system as arrestees, defendants or as convicted offenders rather than *at risk of offending*

and are referred mainly by the courts and probation. The women were presenting with multiple needs including domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health.

Interviews with women attending WCSs, followed up where possible, six months later very much supported previous research

- WCSs are highly valued by the women who attend who refer to the range of support they had received including emotional and practical help, peer support and access to a range of services.
- Women-only learning settings are safe places in which to develop self-esteem and in which women discover that their experiences are not unique.
- A number of women had moved from the supportive learning environment of the WCSs to mainstream adult education settings, volunteer placements and work. The WCSs thus provided an alternative to the criminogenic cycle of social exclusion, substance misuse and offending.

We make the following recommendations:

- In order to respond to local needs, and to integrate with mainstream commissioning cycles, services need to develop strong operational and strategic links with probation, domestic violence, housing, substance misuse and mental health services; prison resettlement and local police. Statutory requirements on the part of external agencies to respond to the needs of women offenders are necessary in order for WCSs to become integrated into the fabric of criminal justice provision.
- Investment in premises where services can be co-located is important, facilitating holistic case work, access to a range of provision on one site, enabling multidisciplinary working between providers, adding value to provision, and providing a safe centre at which women can be sure to find a case worker who knows them and sources of peer support.

- Strategies for raising awareness, actively promoting and providing regular updates on services amongst magistrates need to be in place and facilitated by contractual arrangements with probation trusts. Awareness amongst court probation staff is particularly important. We recommend that contracts include resources for WCSs staff to attend magistrates' courts regularly enabling WCSs to be included in pre-sentence planning for low risk women offenders.
- Although an impressive quantity of data is collected across the six services under evaluation, more thought needs to be put into how these can be refined to demonstrate progress made. WCSs staff do not have the expertise nor resources and cannot be expected to take responsibility for the development of robust monitoring. A single monitoring system that is specifically tailored for WCSs needs to be developed centrally either by the MOJ or the Probation Chiefs Association.

1. Introduction

The focus of our evaluation was 'one-stop-shop' services – also known as integrated women offender services, or Women's Community Services (WCSs) – which have been set up to divert low risk women offenders from crime and from the criminal justice system. The services provide case work and peer support and enable contact with a range of community based services. The evaluation has sought to capture and preserve the learning from this unique set of initiatives which is now threatened by spending cuts.

1.1 The Development of women's community services

Services in the community for women offenders developed through various routes: as 'bottom-up' initiatives in established women's centres; via probation-run programmes for women offenders; and within the well-funded Together Women pilot projects launched in 2005 in the Northwest, Yorkshire and Humberside. In her influential report, Baroness Corston identified services of this kind - including Asha, Calderdale Women's Centre, Anawim and the 218 Centre in Scotland - as centres of good practice which should be expanded nationally (2007). We refer later to the key learning from these pioneer services, described in detail by Gelsthorpe et al in their report for the Fawcett Society (2007).

Corston made the following recommendations in relation to women's community-based provision:

- The Together Women Programme must be extended as quickly as possible and a larger network of community centres should be developed in accordance with a centrally coordinated strategic national plan drawn up by the new Commissioner for women who offend or are at risk of offending.
- Services should be provided based on the one-stop-shop approach of centres like Asha and Calderdale and must be appropriate and coordinated to meet the profiled needs of local women, including minorities such as BME women.
- Women's centres should be used as referral centres for women who offend or are at risk of offending. Referral should be by schools, general practitioners, probation, prisons, police, courts, CPS, self and other individuals.

- Women's centres should also be used as court and police diversions; as part of a package of measures for community sentences; and for delivery of probation and other programmes.

The idea of a 'centrally coordinated strategic national plan' was central to Corston's proposals, and a prerequisite for the extension of WCS provision. Following the delayed government response to the Corston report in 2008, the Criminal Justice Women's Strategy Unit was set up within the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to promote the report's agenda across government and to encourage existing women's centres to develop links with local commissioners. However, the unit – which was disbanded with the change of government in 2010 - was given no additional budget for developing services and was faced with entrenched practices and strong pressures that typically emanate from within government to maintain the status quo, (Hallsworth et al., 2011) despite the wealth of evidence that the status quo was not rehabilitating women offenders. Corston maintained that the facts spoke for themselves and that extensive piloting and evaluation of women's community services was not required. Nevertheless, particularly at a time of reduced budgets across central and local government, there was evidently a need for both a *business case* for community provision for women offenders and evidence that women attending these services were less likely to recycle through the criminal justice system. We will return to a discussion of this evidence base in Section 2.

No national strategy for the development of WCSs was put into place as a response to the Corston Report, although investment in women's centre-based services for women offenders in Bristol and South Wales was announced in 2007. In February 2009, in response to lobbying by a group of charities whose funds had focused on support for women offenders and their children, Home Office minister Maria Eagle announced £15.6 million to be provided over two years to build capacity at women's centres and for the further development of bail support services for women. In addition, £1 million was provided for the extension of the national demonstration Together Women projects. Short-term grant funding, with no commitment to further monies, was envisaged as a mechanism to 'pump-prime' the sector. The letter from the Criminal Justice Women's Strategy Unit inviting bids from voluntary sector organisations stated:

There is an expectation that any organisation or consortium submitting a bid works towards sustainability to ensure enduring provision beyond the grant period (Nichol, 2009)

The background document to this letter cited the Corston report, the Fawcett Society report and a report by the new economics foundation regarding the cost effectiveness of women's centres (Corston, 2007; Gelsthorpe et al., 2007; new economics foundation, 2008). There was explicit recognition that voluntary sector-run women's centres were the ideal location in which to provide holistic services for low-risk women offenders with complex needs. These organisations were thus encouraged to apply for grant funding to develop services in partnership with criminal justice agencies; to link to health, social services and other mainstream providers; and 'to facilitate women's access to specialist services and their integration into mainstream services at the end of their support package'.

As will be described, the resulting WCSs represent a range of partnerships between voluntary sector women-specific services and criminal justice agencies. They are women-only settings which women at all stages of the criminal justice system can either attend voluntarily, as part of a community sentence, or as a condition of their licence. Women who have been referred by a magistrate or probation officer may attend as part of a formal community sanction (e.g. as a Specified Activity Requirement as part of a community order) for a specific number of sessions. The services include one-to-one case work support based around needs identified at assessment. The model of service is variously described as 'holistic', 'wrap-around' and/or 'personalised', prioritising the complex needs that have led to women's offending.

With no certain onwards funding for WCSs, towards the end of the 2009/10 financial year the group of charities which had come together to promote the recommendations of the Corston report, and had advised on the allocation of grant funding (Kaufmann, 2011), lobbied for an under-spend of MOJ funds to be distributed to the WCSs. As will be described below, the service providers had spent the first year establishing their services and making links with other agencies but had not, in the main, succeeded in integrating with local commissioning structures as the Women's Strategy Unit had hoped. Use of the MOJ under-spend for one year's further funding was agreed, with the proviso that the charities offered matched funding. As Kaufmann describes, eight charities agreed to the matched-funding proposal. They subsequently provided two further years of matched operational funding known as the Women's Diversionary Fund, and constituted themselves as the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition (CIFC). From the point of view of the WCSs, these year-by-year funding arrangements, which meant that information on future financial support for salaries and services was made available only at the last minute, created an insecure and uncertain

environment for staff and jeopardised the services' credibility with partner agencies. (This will be discussed in Section 3.)

The MOJ/Corston Coalition initiative resulted in the expansion of a fragile network of provision for women offenders in England and Wales over the years 2009 to 2012. In January 2012, Home Office Minister Crispin Blunt announced that 31 WCSs would receive National Offender Management Services (NOMS) funding in 2012/2013. It was announced too that while funds would in future be ring-fenced for women offenders, it would be up to local probation services to decide, in conjunction with NOMS, how these funds would be used. The considerable uncertainty regarding the future funding and sustainability of WCSs combines, in early 2013, with the launch of a consultation document on the reorganisation of probation services which proposes the contracting out of all services for low risk offenders (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The consultation document suggests there will be a national commissioning strategy for the contracting of WCSs on a Payment by Results basis. The ability of voluntary sector women's organisations to operate in such a market has, however, been called into question (Gelsthorpe & Hedderman, 2012). Most recently, the government has removed in committee stage an amendment to the Courts and Crime Bill¹ that would have required contracts between the MOJ and probation trusts to include an obligation to make appropriate provision for the delivery of services for women offenders (House of Lords, 2012-13; HC Hansard, 2013). Without such an obligation there is a very real possibility that many WCSs will not survive in their present form.

1.2. The research aims

There were three main components to this research:

- i) Examine the development and expansion of the 'one-stop-shop' model of service delivery for women, through a focus on six services across England;
- ii) Assess their impact for clients;
- iii) Summarise the research evidence for good and effective practice for delivering a one-stop-shop service for women.

¹ The Crime and Courts bill is concerned inter alia 'to make provision about the judiciary and the structure, administration, proceedings and powers of courts and tribunals'. Part 2, Section 31 of the Bill is 'Community and other non custodial sentencing'

It is important to emphasise that this study was focused on the history and evolution of these gender-specific models of resettlement focused on needs linked to offending. We did *not* carry out a reconviction study, and thus did not collect reoffending data.

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Selection of services for the evaluation

We emailed a questionnaire to 40 WCSs requesting a range of information about their organisational and management structures, length of operation, services offered, staffing and client caseloads. Of these, 26 responded (65%), from which we made our final selection of six services on grounds of geographic spread across the country and their reflection of different model 'types' in respect of the following:

- Length of operation (two had been operating for less than 12 months)
- Centre-based/outreach (one operated mainly as an outreach service)
- Organisational structure (all were led by voluntary sector services with a variety of histories; two had been developed from existing projects)
- Alignment to the criminal justice system (all accepted referrals directly from the CJS; three with stand-alone Specified Activity Requirements)

1.3.2 Range of data collected

The evaluation was conducted between April 2011 and July 2012. We used both qualitative and quantitative methods including:

- A review of the research and policy literature on one stop-shop services for women offenders between 2004 and 2011
- Visits to the six services to observe work in practice
- Depth interviews with 52 professional stakeholders including service staff and offender managers, prison resettlement staff, social workers, education providers and drug and mental health practitioners linked to the WCSs
- Depth interviews with 30 women service users, of whom 20 were followed up in second interviews between 6 and 9 months later.
- Interviews with 17 magistrates about their awareness and views of their local WCSs
- Review of the services' monitoring systems and collation and analysis of the available monitoring data

1.4 Report structure

To ensure the anonymity of all the research participants, the six services are referred to as A to F over the course of this report; professional interviewees are referred to by their occupation; and we use pseudonyms for the service users.

In Section 2 we review the existing evidence on effectiveness of WCSs. In Section 3, we look at the characteristics of the six evaluated services in relation to the *Nine Lessons* that arise from the work of Loraine Gelsthorpe and colleagues. In addition we discuss how short-term funding cycles and the uncertainty this creates have impacted on the development of services and on staff. In Section 4 we discuss the strategic partnerships between the WCSs and the services that make referrals to them and with which they may be aligned strategically. We describe the issues that arose from our interviews with a small sample of magistrates in local courts. In Section 5 we examine the development of monitoring and measurement systems and look at the consistency of data collected by the services about the progress made by their service users. Drawing on the monitoring data, we also describe the profile and needs of women attending these services and assess *distance travelled* towards resettlement. In Section 6 we report on women's views and experiences of the WCSs and how they feel they have benefitted from their attendance. Finally, in Section 7 we note how our findings can inform policy and practice.

2. The evidence base

Evaluations of Women's Community Services

Approaches to evaluating WCSs – and indeed the question of what should be the chief outcome of these services – have been a source of some debate. As will be described, the issues have been made more problematic by the enormous diversity in their development and the lack of any common data management tools across services. Clearly there is a need to develop an evidence base to show that WCSs do indeed provide an effective alternative to custody for women offenders or those at risk of offending. Services are under pressure to demonstrate that they *work* compared to the alternatives of traditional probation supervision and/or custody. Moreover, in the context of increased contestability and competition between statutory and third sector providers in the criminal justice system, it is increasingly important to assess cost-effectiveness (Hayes, 2010).

It is likely to be more straightforward to demonstrate that low-risk women offenders have distinct needs that are best met via community interventions, and to identify the essential features of holistic, community provision, than to define and measure effectiveness. Research suggests that services for women offenders may be most successful when they do not exclusively target women offenders but are focused on vulnerable women more generally. A number of services are attempting to meet the complex needs of both women who have been identified as offenders and those who are 'at risk of offending'. These services thus have a diverse client group to whom they are providing a range of support. The measurement of their 'soft' outcome (such as increased self-esteem and access to peer support) and of incremental improvements connected to the nine offending pathways,² demands a multi-method approach that attends to process as well as impact. Evaluations that have attempted to measure these services exclusively as criminal justice interventions by comparing reconviction rates for cohorts of women who have and have not been referred to WCSs have not demonstrated the impact that was hoped for. Moreover the 'at risk' group is likely to be excluded from such analysis since, as found by the authors of the MOJ

² The following nine pathways have been identified as factors which if addressed can contribute reducing reoffending: accommodation; employment, training and education; health; drugs and alcohol; children and families; finance, benefits and debt; attitudes, thinking and behaviour; women affected by abuse and violence; women Involved in prostitution.

Together Women evaluations (Hedderman et al., 2008; Jolliffe et al., 2011), there can be no counter-factual for women who are categorised (however rigorously) as 'at risk' of offending.

While recognising that evaluation is a highly challenging process, we consider here what can be learnt from existing research of this kind. We will look at 15 evaluations of WCSs established both before and since the first round of the Women's Diversionary Fund in 2009 (see Appendix 1 for details) including three evaluations of services for women offenders in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which were set up outside the England and Wales funding initiatives.

These evaluations have used both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore effectiveness of WCSs in respect of the following:

- Evidence of meeting needs and engaging with women offenders
- Effectiveness of partnership working with referral agencies
- Effectiveness of enabling women offenders' access to specialist and mainstream provision
- Impact on reoffending

Notwithstanding the variability in approaches to evaluation and some of the specific findings, there is much consensus, particularly derived from qualitative data, about the processes involved in developing and implementing new partnership services for women offenders, the needs that these services meet, and their value for women offenders with complex needs.

2.1.1 Evaluation data sources

Evaluations comprise analysis of the following data sources:

Reconviction/reoffending/compliance/breach data have been used to examine what impact a service or programme has had on reoffending and/or reconviction. This usually entails linking data from internal monitoring systems about service users to the Police National Computer (PNC) data-base and local probation data sources.

Interview data have been used to examine processes within a service and between that service and partner agencies/referrers, from the perspective of all relevant stakeholders (including partner agencies, commissioners, staff, sentencers). Service users have also

been interviewed about their experiences of attending the service and their views about benefits derived.

Cost benefit and Social Return on Investment analysis have been used to cost the social outcomes and impacts of services for women offenders in the community compared to alternative scenarios including custody, continued acquisitive offending, children becoming 'looked after' and wider costs to families of offenders.

Although WCSs see themselves as providing a wide range of support and services to women offenders, there is a tendency for funders and the Ministry of Justice in particular to seek to measure WCSs' effectiveness in terms of their impact on reoffending. There are real problems associated with the collection of these data however, particularly during early implementation of small, voluntary sector-run initiatives which do not, for example routinely record Police National Computer numbers on referral. Evaluation findings tended to be limited by the following factors:

- Inadequate monitoring systems – a number of evaluations make recommendations for improved monitoring
- Variable time periods in which change is being monitored
- Small samples of quantitative and qualitative data

2.2 Impact evaluation

A number of studies have focused on measurable impacts while also collecting some process data from service users, stakeholders and sentencers. The interim evaluation of the Together Women demonstration projects (TWPs) (Hedderman et al., 2008) found inconsistencies in the ways in which the five services defined key variables such as 'offender', 'at risk of offending' and in how they collected and recorded referral, assessment and outcome data. In the second evaluation, this lack of consistency meant that it was only possible to report on a limited area of the TWP work and outcomes with clients (Joliffe et al, 2011 and see Hedderman et al, 2011b). Findings are disappointing in terms of the impact the TWP centres had on reoffending: examination of PNC data for the 660 offenders attending the centres, in comparison with 660 matched offenders who had attended probation over a similar time period, showed no statistically significant difference in the reoffending rates between these two groups (35.3% among TWP group compared to 36 % in

the group of comparable women supported by the Probation Service). However, the evaluators were careful to acknowledge that work carried out in the services had altered since the end of the evaluation.

The importance of developing data gathering practices that satisfy the needs of internal monitoring and funders, and can also be used by independent evaluators, is a theme that recurs in evaluations of WCSs (Hedderman, 2008; Corcoran et al, 2011; Easton and Matthews, 2010; Easton and Matthews, 2011). On the whole, services do not routinely collect or record clients' PNC numbers; evaluators have thus been unable to conduct any analysis of impact on reoffending in line with the MOJ's definition of *a proven reoffence*, defined as one:

committed in a one year follow-up period and receiving a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning in the one year follow up or a further six months waiting period (2011)

Two evaluations took place before a minimum reoffending data set had become available (Easton & Matthews, 2011; Loucks et al., 2006). In others, alternative means of measuring reoffending were attempted using more limited data, including extraction of local PNC and police reoffending data and anecdotal or reported reductions of reoffending by the women engaged in the services. Attribution of impact may not be feasible with limited samples that may not be linked to the service population. For example, Corcoran et al's evaluation of Chepstow House (2011) found an improvement in women's offending in the Stoke on Trent area compared to the previous quarter, with reference to Staffordshire Probation's extraction of PNC data, but they state that it was too early to link this reduction to the work of Chepstow House itself since there was no way of identifying whether women who had desisted from offending had engaged in the service.

The evaluation of SWAN (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010), a virtual one-stop-shop providing a service to women offenders in rural Northumberland, includes a report on arrest and conviction data acquired from Northumbria police. It also draws on qualitative interviews with stakeholders, service users and staff. Referring to a sample of only fifty women who had engaged with the project in a ten month period in 2009, the authors report that 20 women had been arrested 46 times in the six months prior to engaging with the project, while there had been only 14 arrests since their engagement - giving a reduction of 70 per cent. This

suggests an impressive impact, but extreme caution needs to be applied to results from such small samples and for variable time periods³.

A focus on reconviction may also reshape the character of WCSs. The 218 Centre in Glasgow provides residential and community programmes with a particular focus on substance misusing women. When initially set up in 2003 as a partnership between Glasgow City Council and Turning Point Scotland, 218 provided a 'time out' service to women offenders, women deemed at risk of offending and women with a substance misuse problem who were potentially at risk of offending. An evaluation by Loucks et al (2006) found that from April 2004 to March 2005, the highest proportion of referrals came from criminal justice sources, but the short timeframe for the evaluation made it impossible to undertake any analysis of reconviction. The report comprised mainly qualitative findings concerning the development of the service, including analysis of project documents and interviews with service users, staff and stakeholders. A second evaluation (Easton & Matthews, 2010) combined a process and cost benefit analysis with an evaluation of the project's impact on reoffending. This found that for the cohort of 320 women referred to 218 between June 2007 and May 2008, police-recorded offending reduced by 21% following contact with the service. Among women engaging with the service beyond their initial assessment, overall offending reduced by 31% and dishonesty offences by 44%. The evaluators also reported on recent efforts of the 218 service to narrow eligibility criteria to women with a recent conviction, such that those at risk of offending or only with substance misuse issues could no longer be referred. This narrowing may have contributed to the reported finding that low level offenders were less willing to engage with the service (Easton & Matthews, 2010; Malloch & Mclvor, 2011) because of its increasing identification with offenders. Attempts to make the impact of WCSs measurable by restricting eligibility may risk the loss of the very non-stigmatising features that attract and retain women with complex needs.

ACE scores

Reconviction data were not available to Easton and Matthews for their evaluation of the Inspire Pilot Project Northern Ireland (Easton & Matthews, 2011). This project had been funded by the Department of Justice, Northern Ireland and was established in 2008 as a partnership between NIACRO and a range of support agencies. In the absence of reconviction data, Easton and Matthews provide an analysis of probation ACE (Assessment, Case Recording, and Evaluation) scores. ACE is an instrument for assessing risks/needs

³ No criticism is intended of the Swan project which has developed an innovative model of service delivery in rural Northumbria and has been much praised by its partners and by service users. The point here relates to evaluation methodology.

and is considered to predict reconviction. Although they were not able to compare ACE scores with an equivalent urban control group outside Belfast, the authors report that there was a significant improvement in scores for the 309 women attending the Inspire project between initial assessments, indicating a decrease in risk of reoffending as a result of engagement with the service. The authors note the difficulties of applying generic risk/needs assessment tools to the assessment of women offenders. They recommend that a gender-specific instrument is designed to assess women offenders' criminogenic needs. They also recommended that Inspire Northern Ireland routinely collects PNC data at the point of referral in order to capture reoffending rates in the future.

Compliance Data

It should be relatively straightforward to measure rates of compliance and/or breach for women referred to one-stop-shop services for Specified Activity Requirements and/or are supervised by co-located probation officers. These rates can then be compared to those for a matched cohort who are supervised at a local probation office. Women's Centre, Kirklees and Calderdale was one of the services cited by Baroness Corston as an example of an established centre providing holistic support to women offenders and women at risk of offending through the Evolve programme. Researchers from West Yorkshire Probation carried out an assessment of compliance for women attending Evolve and a similar programme run by TWP in West Yorkshire (Robinson, 2010). Although there were positive findings from interviews with women who were supervised at the two centres - for example, they reported that the women-only services provided a safer, more supportive alternative to probation - the researchers found low levels of compliance with appointments at both WCSs (85%) and lower rates of non-breached clients (69%), compared to the comparison group (95% and 93%). The authors state, however, that although 31% of the Evolve and TWP sample had one or more instances of breach, only two offenders within the sample failed to complete their order successfully. The authors indicate that compliance and breach rates need to be seen in the context of the complex needs of women offenders to which the services were responsive. They state too that staff demonstrated a flexible approach to potential breach.

Although it was not possible to compare the Inspire Northern Ireland cohort with a control group, their data on compliance and breach bears comparison with the West Yorkshire Probation evaluation. For their sample of 309 women seen between October 2008 and July 2010, 72% on probation orders attending Inspire were compliant and 78% were not breached. Such evaluation findings highlight the value of combining analysis of measureable impacts with an understanding of context and processes derived from descriptions of

partnership arrangements, data on statutory disposals and reports from service users, staff and stakeholders.

2.3 Process evaluation

All 15 evaluations of WCSs considered here have used a mix of methodologies including collation of cumulative data on numbers of women referred (and from where), numbers assessed, their needs in relation to the nine offending pathways, and outcomes linked to these pathways. Such data have value in providing a broad picture of activities that extends beyond a narrow assessment of 'impact'. In addition, evaluators have conducted interviews with service users, with staff and with stakeholders from partner agencies. The numbers of service users interviewed tend to be small, and they are rarely randomly selected. As will be described in relation to our own sample, it is difficult to access women who have not engaged with services and service user respondents tend to be self-selected, satisfied customers. Something that we have detected in our own interviews in the course of our evaluation is that service users are often keen to present a service in a positive light and to 'give back' something to the service they perceive has done so much for them. That said, service user accounts are not uniformly positive (see, for example, the discussion of Inspire Northern Ireland below). Evaluators have also considered possible reasons for non-engagement; these include the characteristic 'chaos' in women offenders lives, relating to substance misuse, violent relationships and other factors (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010), and return to custody (Holloway & Brookman, 2010). Lack of compulsion to attend the service is also considered as a potential reason for failure to engage (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010) although, as discussed below, what seems most important in engaging service users is the character of the relationships between staff and women offenders and the needs-led nature of the service provided. Careful analysis of service user accounts alongside accounts of staff and stakeholders can thus enhance an understanding of the character of the work and processes that distinguish WCSs from their alternatives (Hedderman et al, 2011b). Here we discuss common themes that emerge from these qualitative evaluations.

2.3.1 The value of needs-led/holistic support

Evaluations refer to the value of the model of needs-led, holistic services provided by WCSs (Rice et al., 2011), whereby a wide range of services are made accessible to a hard-to-reach

group of offenders (NACRO, 2009; Robinson, 2010; Rungay, 2004a). Stakeholders are reported as emphasising that this is a group of offenders whose needs have not hitherto been met (Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011; Easton & Matthews, 2011). Both service users and stakeholders are reported as valuing the ways in which services are tailored to individuals' needs (Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011). Also valued are the fact that the provision acknowledges the range and complexity of women's needs (Rubus, 2010), as these are manifest across the offending pathways both in crisis situations and through the rehabilitation process (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010). Where it exists, assertive outreach is particularly welcomed (Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011; Holloway & Brookman, 2010; Women's Work, 2011), as a means of maximising engagement.

2.3.2 Relationships, attitudes of staff and ethos of WCSs

The emotional support and befriending provided by staff to service users is highlighted throughout evaluations as key to the development of trusting relationships (Paget, 2011; Rubus, 2010; Women's Work, 2011), and to the development of women's confidence and self-esteem (Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011; Rice et al., 2011; Rungay, 2004a). It is suggested that those women offenders who tend to mistrust statutory criminal justice agencies are more likely to engage with workers in a voluntary sector setting (Rice et al., 2011). Service users are quoted as saying that they prefer attending these women-only, voluntary sector-based services to attending probation, whether in the context of a formal disposal order (Easton & Matthews, 2010; Paget, 2011) or where attendance is voluntary and or supplementary to probation (Holloway and Brockman, 2010). There are some isolated examples of service users stating that staff have breached trust by passing on information they considered to be confidential; these serve to highlight that the quality of relationships is what women offenders often value most in the provision they receive from services (Easton & Matthews, 2011).

For service users, the non-judgemental attitudes of staff is reported as key to their engagement (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010; Holloway & Brookman, 2010; Rice et al., 2011; Women's Work, 2011), emphasising the extent to which women in particular may feel stigmatised by their offending (Malloch & Mclvor, 2011). Evaluators have highlighted, via stakeholder accounts that the ethos of many of these services focuses on women's needs over and above their offending behaviour. In some cases, there is considered to be a tension between the welfare aims of a service and the enforcement of criminal justice disposals (Holloway & Brookman, 2010). Elsewhere, a clear division of labour between probation and the case work staff means that 'the project workers never specifically focus on offending

behaviour as the emphasis is on the whole person' (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010: 29). As will be discussed, these findings very much support the qualitative findings from our own evaluation.

2.4 Social Return on Investment Studies

Recent criminal justice evaluations have moved away from a narrow focus on reoffending outcomes, and have attempted to provide evidence of the *social value* of interventions through Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis (Clifford, 2010; new economics foundation, 2008, 2012). This approach involves calculation of the unit costs of a range of services, and interviews with stakeholders and service users to ascertain what they find valuable in a service and to identify what theory of change is operating. The aim of SROI analysis is not just to compare the costs of custody with supporting an offender in the community (which it is acknowledged can be equivalently costly), but to examine the wider, long-term social costs to the community and to families that arise where offenders are not successfully rehabilitated. These include, for example, the costs associated with further offences, substance misuse, use of mental health services, and children entering local authority care. There the 'counterfactual' in this method is not a matched cohort of women who have not undergone the intervention, but rather hypothetical populations of offenders. While the SROI approach clearly makes a *business case* for provision of services in the community for women offenders and women at risk of offending— expressed as a ratio of costs incurred to benefits generated - longer term estimates of outcomes may exaggerate the potential benefits of a service and play down the possibility of relapse and reconviction. Measurement of social value has enormous potential, however. Commentators have argued that the adoption of an SROI approach requires investment in monitoring systems (Arvidson et al., 2010); an issue to which we will return in Section 5.

Summary of key points

- Inconsistent monitoring data, inadequate data sets and small samples have made analysis of reconviction, reoffending and compliance rates problematic, especially during early implementation of projects.

- Reconviction studies of Women's Community Services are very rare. The few which have been conducted may not reflect the breadth of the scheme's activities and outcomes which may help to explain their generally disappointing results
- A focus on preventing reoffending as the primary objective of WCSs may preclude the provision of support to women at risk of offending. Attempts to focus services on offenders may make services less attractive to low level offenders.
- There is a clear need for services to put in place more consistent and rigorous monitoring at the point of referral, assessment and case review in order to capture 'distance travelled' measures.
- Evaluators have described the processes involved in establishing partnership working in multi-agency projects. There is great consistency in findings on what both stakeholders and service users find valuable in women-centre based services.

3. The services

3.1 Characteristics of Services

The decision in 2009 to invite tenders from voluntary sector organisations to run women's community projects resulted in the development of diverse service models and partnership arrangements between the voluntary and statutory sectors. In some areas, existing women's centres already providing a range of services to vulnerable women were able, in conjunction with other voluntary and statutory organisations, to set up specific projects for women. Elsewhere new women's centres or outreach-based services have been created through partnerships of voluntary organisations which may or may not have had a track record in delivering women-specific services. While all provide a service to women offenders in the community, WCSs are characterised by diversity in their organisational form, their model of delivery and the focus of their activities. Here we attempt to capture some of this diversity and in addition discuss how short-term funding has shaped the development of the services and threatens their sustainability.

3.1.1 Learning from good practice

In their report for the Fawcett Society, Gelsthorpe and colleagues specified 'Nine lessons to be taken into account in providing services for women offenders in the community' (2007). Although the report predates the CIFIC/MOJ funding initiative, its recommendations are based on good practice in provision for women offenders in the community and provide a useful point of departure for evaluating the characteristics of the six services in this study.

Provision for women offenders should:

- 1) Be 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 ways of working with women which draw on what is known about their effective learning styles;
- 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 the capacity and flexibility to allow women to return to the centre or programme for 'top up' 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 offending-related programmes, since personal support 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.

3.1.2 Women-only spaces

While not all can offer week-round, exclusively women-only *premises*, all services in our study provide a service staffed by women for women. In the same way that probation staff developing the early women offenders' programmes had recognised the value of a women-only environment (Worrall & Gelsthorpe, 2009), both staff and stakeholders interviewed for our study emphasised the contrast between a women-only service and the often intimidating experience of probation offices.

We need to have a neutral venue where no one would know if you saw them cross the threshold that they were an offender (Senior Probation Officer)

There's a real nice feeling in the centre, there's a real nice warm, nice vibe if you like, and when the women come, they're so relieved when they realise they don't have to do their reporting at probation – if they don't want to – they're so relieved especially the women who've been through domestic violence or who have had sexual or domestic abuse (Case Worker1)

This is a common finding of other evaluations of WCSs (Skinner, 2010).

Probation managers interviewed for this study additionally suggested that the women-only, *neutral* character of WCSs may be associated with improved rates of compliance in comparison to appointments at probation offices⁴.

Importantly, a WCS can ensure that women avoid the danger of meeting a violent ex-partner at the probation office (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010) and can legitimately prevent violent or controlling partners who may otherwise wish to accompany them to appointments from entering service premises, thereby facilitating the disclosure of domestic violence. Case workers in this study and other evaluations that we have reviewed (see for example, Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010; Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011; Hedderman et al., 2008; Holloway & Brookman, 2010; NACRO, 2009) have reported the positive impact for vulnerable women of being able to access a safe, non-intimidating environment:

Women feel safe. Often our women have probably or rarely felt safe in their lives because probably about ninety per cent of the women I see have suffered from abuse. And that abuse has come from men (Case Worker2)

Women-only space also affords a *positive learning environment*. The provision of a safe learning environment for women is as important as the design of the learning programme (Bloom et al., 2003). A key aspect of this is often said to be the peer support experienced by women attending support groups and Education Training and Employment classes at the WCSs. For example, an adult education tutor providing literacy, numeracy and IT skills in one of the services in our evaluation reported that:

a women only environment is particularly helpful with this group of learners because there are fewer distractions in their learning. Vulnerable people very often form [sexual] relationships very quickly and that possibility is avoided in this setting where the women-only environment provides a work ethic amongst the learners (adult education tutor)

⁴ Although we have not set out to compare compliance or breach rates for women attending WCSs with those for women attending probation appointments at probation offices, at least one of the probation trusts in partnership with one of the services in our study has collected these data. As described in Section 2, research making this comparison elsewhere has found lower rates of *breach* if not compliance for women attending probation appointments at WCSs (Evolve and TWP) compared to a matched sample attending appointments at probation offices. This suggests that offender managers co-located at WCSs are prepared to be more flexible regarding compliance and that such flexibility may be linked to the engagement of women with services that are meeting their needs (Robinson, 2010)

The provision of a women-only space is thus central to the provision of a non-stigmatising, safe environment where women offenders who may have a history of sexual and physical violence can feel positive about taking part in group learning activities. This can often lead to women engaging in more mainstream adult education (see below) (Rumgay, 2004a),

3.1.3 Integration of women offenders with non-offenders

The value of WCSs in providing a service open to all women is recognised by both stakeholders and service users. As described above, Baroness Corston argued that in order to provide holistic services, the responsibility and funding should come from across government departments, steered by an inter-ministerial group⁵ rather than being centred on criminal justice. Although MOJ funding and management of WCSs since 2009 has limited the core services that can be offered, WCSs in our study have succeeded in attracting funding from other sources including the Department of Health, local authorities and grant-making bodies. While magistrates, probation officers and a range of support services can refer women to all six WCSs in our evaluation, those services which provide for Specified Activity Requirements, as part of community sentences, prioritise CJS referrals (at the expense of referrals of women *at risk* of offending or self-referrals of women in need of support). The WCSs thus vary in the extent to which they are able to draw upon a wider range of health, well-being and education services for women and in their capacity to integrate women offenders with non-offending women. Our services can be typologised according to the extent to which they enable integration with non-offending women:

Integrated service

SERVICE A is located in a longstanding women's centre which has local authority funding and provides a range of women only education, health and wellbeing services. Women's Aid, ROSHNI (a domestic violence service for Asian women) and Rape Crisis rent space from the centre. Women offenders those at risk of offending who attend Service A are afforded the opportunity to mix with other women in education and training classes and in shared social spaces in the centre, without being identified as offenders. Centre staff believe that this provides a normalising and de-stigmatising experience for service users, in comparison to attendance at probation.

⁵ Corston recommended that the following departments be represented on the ministerial group: Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government, Department of Health, Department for Education and Science, Department of Constitutional Affairs (subsequently the Ministry of Justice), Department of Work and Pensions and HM Treasury.

A service within a service

SERVICE B is located within an Asian women's centre that was set up to provide services to Bangladeshi women in the locality. Having lost its Sure Start status in 2011, the centre now provides limited opportunities for the Asian Women's Centre users and Service B users to integrate, apart from in shared use of the crèche and access to ESOL classes. Unlike some other more integrated services in our evaluation, users of Service B do not on the whole share the same language and demographic characteristics as other users of the centre. Although the manager of Service B is managed by the director of the Asian Women's Centre, at the time of the evaluation there was little integration between the two sets of staff. Personnel changes at the time Service B was established contributed to the development of a distinct identity for the new service.

Semi-integration

SERVICE C is alone in having a dispersed funding model in which MOJ/Corston resources are shared by five women-specific services which are situated throughout the city. Service C is *partially* located within an established women's centre, where service users on stand-alone Specified Activity Requirements see case workers for one to one interventions, and may access the centre's counselling service, alternative therapies, drop-in facilities, or subsidised crèche. Service C clients may also be referred to a counselling service for families affected by violent relationships, or to a sex worker outreach project, providing alternative models of one- to-one case work support rather than centre based services.

Dedicated Premises

SERVICE D and SERVICE E have developed as stand-alone services for women offenders in recently refurbished, dedicated premises. Both services are the first women-only spaces in their respective localities, and Service E has also rented space to other women-specific services (Women's Aid, Rape Crisis), as well as providing premises where a local alcohol

service may see women clients. While not having a crèche on the premises, Service D makes use of local crèche facilities for women taking part in well-being and basic skills courses. For women moving on from its own well-being and basic skills courses, Service D can access places on ETE courses run by local adult education providers, and it also enlists service users in volunteer placements with a local agency. Both Service D and Service E provide services to a wide range of vulnerable women and see themselves as moving women into integrated and mainstream services.

Virtual Service

SERVICE F has no women-only, dedicated premises and provides individual case work, home visits, outreach work, court and prison liaison to women offenders through a virtual model of provision. Part of an established voluntary sector homeless charity, the service has a weekly drop-in that is attended by CJS-referred women and is open to women using the service of its parent organisation. In addition, the service runs a weekly drop-in for women at a health clinic, and Service F staff attend a women's reporting session run by probation at a women's centre in the city. Service F has established links with the nearby women's prison and engages women pre- and post-release. It funds accommodation in its parent organisation's women's hostel for women coming out of prison.

The above brief descriptions of the six WCSs clearly demonstrate that the voluntary/statutory sector partnerships in which they are engaged, and their physical locations and identities, all impact on the extent to which service users can integrate with women who are not identified as offenders.

3.1.4 Empowerment and learning styles

As can be seen from the table below, programmes of structured learning (including well-being courses and basic skills) feature in all six services, either on the premises or in conjunction with local providers.

Table 3.1 Provision of Courses in Services under Evaluation

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Anger and stress management, emotional well-being etc. courses	/	/	/	/	/	/
Confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem courses	/		/	/	/	
Employment and Training Group					/	/
First Aid		/				
Food Safety		/				
Nails and beauty					/	
Substance misuse support	/		/		/	
Parenting support		/				
Alcohol misuse group	/		/			
Basic Skills, maths, English IT	/			/	/	
Money matters	/				/	
Service user group				/		
Arts and craft, interior design etc.		/		/		
ESOL		/				
Self defence			/			
Freedom programme ⁶						/

⁶ The Freedom Programme© is a twelve-session domestic violence group programme, designed for female victims of male domestic violence.

Structured well-being and basic skills courses run by qualified providers offer pro-social learning experiences and should be central to WCS provision. Our interviews with service users (Section 6), show that the opportunity to acquire certificates in basic skills (English, Maths and IT) builds confidence and self-esteem and provides a bridge into mainstream further education college courses (Rumgay, 2004a). However the WCSs in our evaluation have had to draw on existing adult education providers, or make use of Learn Direct basic skills programmes; and reduced funding has meant that some services have not had capacity within their core budgets for training and education and have relied, for example, on grants or support from private sector sponsors.

3.1.5 Holistic services

A key recommendation of the Corston review was that the complex needs of women offenders need to be met with a *holistic* response. The profile of women interviewed here reflects the complex needs identified by Corston: their backgrounds include histories of childhood abuse and local authority care, sexual and physical violence as adults, suicides of close family members, mental illness, self-harm, removal of children to the care system and substance misuse. A holistic service means that intensive case work addressing service users' range of needs is undertaken alongside referral to specialist support. Specialist services may be available on the premises in co-located agencies, or via outreach with case workers who accompany service users to appointments and take part in 'three ways' appointments. The key point is the recognition that simply to refer women with complex needs to other services does not ensure they will access them.

The WCS staff and probation officers we interviewed emphasised the wide range of needs that WCSs are able to meet in comparison to probation, with its more sharply focused enforcement role. Probation staff gave the example of no longer having the time – in the way that WCS staff do – to help a woman with practical tasks such as filling in a benefits claim form or to accompany them to appointments. A WCS case worker who had previously worked as an offender manager made a similar point:

I think other agencies like probation can cover all the pathways that we cover but not to such an extent. For example, when I worked at probation I would never go with someone for a housing assessment, I'd never go with them for a DV [domestic violence] appointment, you know and that's really important for the women who we see here (Case Worker)

A holistic approach includes initially addressing the needs that are a priority for the woman herself, including those that are most urgent and those that she is 'ready' to address. The example often given was to address the need for secure accommodation prior to addressing a woman's range of more complex needs, such as those relating to substance misuse or violent relationships. All six of the services involved in our evaluation used a collaborative assessment system whereby women were actively involved in both their assessment and the monitoring of their progress. The Outcome Star system, for example (used by four services), asks women to rank their needs in ten areas and to prioritise those they want to work on first:

Usually you pick three of the strands to work on and normally it's the lowest areas that they've identified but sometimes people don't want to do that. They might be a two on drinking but they're not ready to address that so there's no point writing it down because they're just not ready so they will dictate where they want to address or maybe need will dictate if they're homeless or got social services knocking on the door so that'll dictate it (Case worker)

The evaluators of a WCS in Staffordshire (Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011) have questioned whether service users understand this approach or engage with it as an instrument to assess their needs. However, in our study, those women who mentioned the Outcome Star tool seemed to have found it a useful way of charting progress. There may be greater scope for its use as a means of measuring and recording *distance travelled*, particularly for women with substance misuse problems (new economics foundation, 2008).

3.1.6 Links with mainstream services - partnerships

Holistic working thus involves having the time to address the range of needs that may be linked to a woman's offending and, in addition, requires effective partnership working with networks of local agencies. WCSs receive most of their referrals from probation. Working relations between the WCSs and probation are thus central. In two of the six services, local probation trusts were instrumental in generating bids from voluntary sector organisations for Women's Diversionary Fund monies for the establishment of WCSs. Probation staff are co-located in three of the services; and formal information-sharing agreements had been established with probation trusts in five of the six services at the time of the evaluation, while we know that such arrangements have since been put in place in the sixth. In addition, senior probation managers are involved in steering groups in four of the six services taking part in our study.

Working in partnership with WCSs would appear to make *probation* work with women offenders more effective. Senior probation managers reported that the co-location of

probation staff in centres meant probation officers were more likely to refer to the services. Co-located probation staff indicated that *their* work was made more holistic by virtue of being located in a service which allows them to accompany clients to other sources of support on the same premises.

In three of the services (Services B, C and E) there are provisions for stand-alone Specified Activity Requirements which mean that low-risk women can attend some appointments with WCS case workers as an alternative to appointments with offender managers within national standard hours. In these services, probation staff are not co-located but retain responsibility for probation case management. Formal information-sharing agreements mean that WCSs staffs inform probation about service user attendance and progress. In five of the six services, partnership working with probation takes place both at a strategic and operational level. In the sixth service, Service F, it was reported that key workers from the project work successfully with individual probation officers on shared cases, and a probation manager sits on their steering group. However, it was also asserted by probation managers that the WCS integrates only sporadically with existing services for women offenders in the city, and probation buy-in at a strategic level appears to be poor. As discussed in the introduction, it is unclear what implications the most recent consultation on the contracting out of all community supervision to private and voluntary sector organisations will have on the future of probation trusts or on their future commissioning of WCSs.

3.1.7 Partnerships with other agencies

In addition to probation, other co-located services to which WCS service users have access (via referrals or through drop-in) include:

- Drug treatment
- Health checks and advice on blood-borne viruses, sexual health and hepatitis b immunisation
- Alcohol treatment
- Psycho-social counselling services
- Debt and housing advice
- Independent Domestic Violence Advocate Service
- Legal advice
- Complementary therapies
- Women's Aid
- Rape Crisis
- Domestic violence service for Asian women

At the same time as benefiting service users who can access multiple sources of support in the same location, probation attendance and engagement of women service users is reported to be better for agencies co-located in a women-only, WCS setting. As Rungay (2004) has suggested, therefore, there are mutual benefits for the partnership agencies involved in delivering services in WCSs. A co-located alcohol misuse adviser at Service E, for example, reported that it is very helpful to be able to refer to other services located in the same premises regarding issues, such as debt or domestic violence, that may be a trigger for a return to problem drinking.

Substance misuse services are co-located in three of the services (A, D and E). Given the established link between substance misuse treatment and desistance from offending, the co-location of substance misuse services would seem especially advantageous in the provision of holistic support of women offenders (M. Hough et al., 2003a; Loucks et al., 2006; Malloch et al., 2008). As will be described below, drug use and, particularly, alcohol misuse were implicated in the offences of a large proportion of our qualitative cohort.

3.1.8 Non co-located services

In cities where there are already a range of women-specific services, sometimes vying for reduced funding, decisions about co-location and joint working may be more complex. Although reduced duplication of services was cited by stakeholders as one benefit of the co-location of external agencies within WCSs, *avoiding* duplication and/or competition with existing women's services may also be a reason *not* to co-locate. For example, in the city where Service A is located, women given Drug Rehabilitation Requirement orders attend the women's centre rather than a mixed gender day programme; but Services B and C are both located in cities where there are established women's substance misuse services. The manager of the women-only substance misuse service linked to Service C suggested that to co-locate with the WCS would risk jeopardising their mainstream funding. In all localities, both the nature of partnership working and the mode of delivery need to fit with existing provision and be sensitive to the *market* for local health and social care provision for vulnerable women.

3.1.9 Time-limited support

Previous evaluations of WCSs have stressed that longer-term support is particularly useful for women with complex needs (Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010; Offender Health, 2010). However, service managers taking part in our evaluation stated that they were under

pressure from their funders to move women through the service more quickly, due to the increasing caseloads and the fact that funding was increasingly focused on women who were referred by probation or as part of court order. Women attending WCSs as part of a Specified Activity Requirement, or in conjunction with a supervision order, are usually asked to attend twelve sessions, thus limiting the timescale of intensive case work. In a number of projects, however, women's contact with the service via peer support groups and drop-in, mentoring and volunteering programmes can extend beyond their order. A number of the women interviewed for this evaluation stated that although they had ended their formal contact with their case workers, it had been made clear to them that they were welcome to seek support from the service in the future should they need to.

The importance of the possibility of return to a service, particularly for drug users who have relapsed, has been borne out in other evaluations of services for women offenders (Jolliffe et al., 2011; Loucks et al., 2006). At the same time, WCS staff are keen that women do not become overly reliant on individual case workers and described an ideal gradation of intervention from intensive one-to-one support at times of crisis, shifting to group activities within the centre, and then to volunteering, mentoring, work experience and educational activities with external agencies (Corcoran et al., 2010; 2011; Rumgay, 2004a). Such progression necessarily requires that there is a broad range of structured group activities both within the service as well opportunities outside it, and that WCSs' management actively seek out networks of services and agencies to which women can be moved.

3.1.10 The case worker role

As budgets diminish, WCSs management have had to be resourceful in enhancing core income by applying for grants and mobilising local resources including the use of volunteer staff. In addition to salaried case work staff, three of the six services in our evaluation have social work students on placements who act as case workers. Other services use volunteer trainee counsellors and art therapists on placement. Two services have unqualified volunteers who act as receptionists and answer the phone. In one service, volunteers are trained and supported to conduct case work. Stakeholders expressed concern about WCSs' reliance upon unqualified volunteers in a front-line role with offenders and emphasised the need for close supervision and a volunteer coordinator to organise and support them. The core work with women in all services, however, is carried out by salaried case workers. The role of the case worker in providing practical and emotional support and mentoring service users is central to the holistic model of working and common to all services under evaluation

Research has established the importance of skilled, highly trained staff within resettlement services in general and within support services for women with complex needs in particular (Covington & Bloom, 2006; Maguire & Raynor, 2006). Many case workers in WCSs interviewed for this study described having a background in voluntary sector support and welfare work, although a number also had social work and offender management qualifications. Their salaries are on a par with experienced drug workers, newly qualified social workers and Probation Service Officers.

The size of individual caseloads across the six services varied widely between 8 and 23 service users. Although service users see their case workers in individual sessions by appointment, staff from all services emphasised the flexibility of the case working relationship, meaning that they are happy to see service users outside formal appointment times, where possible.

However, case work staff indicated in interviews that work with women offenders with complex needs can be extremely demanding, and described times when caseloads had become unmanageable. This has been highlighted by at least one other WCS evaluation (Paget, 2011). There is much variety in the regularity and formality of supervision and management support provided to case-workers. In two services, staff receive group supervision from an independent therapist in addition to regular supervision from their manager. In the other four services, they receive weekly or bi-weekly case review support and often reported that they were able to approach managers for advice at other times.

3.1.11 Practical support

A number of services are able to provide practical support to service users, such as transport costs and subsidised or free childcare, although this was sometimes only available for those attending specific accredited courses, probation appointments or National Standard Hours appointments. Three of the six services also provide food at a weekly drop in. At least one provides support from a 'hardship' fund for service users in dire financial need. Other services enable access to community furniture projects and food banks.

Where help with transport existed, service users reported that they would otherwise find it difficult to attend the service. Similarly, a number of interviewees stated that the availability of subsidised childcare places was essential for their attendance at courses and other appointments. In the context of reduced budgets, however, help with travel to the service

and the provision of food is increasingly considered unaffordable. In one service located in a city, the service manager reported that the lack of help with travel expenses had not made a difference to attendance at the service. For services where women travel from further afield this may not be the case.

3.2 Funding for Women’s Community Services

Funding for WCSs has been provided on a year-by-year basis. While NOMS, the MOJ, local probation trusts and CIPC are the main funders of these services, funds have also come from a range of sources as the following table describes:

Table 3.2 Funding sources for Women’s Community Services

Service	Probation trust (s)	Police	DWP	Corston Coalition	Domestic abuse services	NOMS/ MOJ	Adult community learning fund	Grant e.g. Big Lottery
A						/		
B				/		/		/
C	/	/		/				
D	/			/				
E	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
F						/		

In the next section we describe the implications of short-term funding for staff employed on short-term contracts, for planning for future programmes within the services and for referrers’ and stakeholders’ confidence in the service.

3.2.1 Impact on staff morale

A number of staff noted that it was particularly difficult to develop and promote a new service within very short timescales, and that towards the end of the first year they did not know if their jobs and the service would continue. Both staff and stakeholders described the ‘waste’ of time, resources and learning that its potential closure would represent:

the sheer effort and drive to get the project up and running by that initial start date was phenomenal and it was almost like once the project was started we were trying to plan how to close it, contingency planning for what core services would be held open (Probation Manager)

Uncertainty about funding affected some staff personally who worried about managing financially if their jobs were to come to an end. While some staff suggested that they were inured to the anxiety associated with short-term contracts after many years of working in the

voluntary sector, others suggested they had never before had *such* short (six months) contracts. A number of staff emphasised the emotional demands associated with work with women offenders, and that the uncertainty surrounding their own employment had added to the stress of the work.

Short-term and reduced funding after the first year also affected the running of services and the kinds of services that could be offered. Administrative posts were lost and some staff became part-time in the second year because of reduced budgets. In one service, the uncertainty about future funding was not communicated to probation partners. This meant that although they were able to provide one-to-one support to service users, case workers were not able to commit to providing wellbeing courses, for example for women on Specified Activity Requirements, until they knew their future funding was secured:

there wasn't a clear answer about whether I could say to probation 'look I really don't know if we're going to be here next month so can we put a stop on referrals' I think I was asked not to talk to them too much about funding and I can understand that, it's quite sensitive because of the interagency working but we kind of got a backlog because we got the women through the courts and we didn't have any activities to put them on (case worker)

Staff interviewed across all six services reported that they were personally committed to the service users and found their work highly rewarding; nevertheless staff turnover appears to be high in WCSs, with a number of case workers moving on during the course of the evaluation. This doubtless reflects, at least in part, the problems caused by short-term funding.

3.2.2 Impact on partners of funding uncertainties

Where partner organisations were aware of uncertainty surrounding future funding for the WCSs, they reported that this affected their willingness to make referrals to the services. Short-term funding arrangements thus impacted the credibility of services among partners. A mental health court referral worker suggested that short-term funding affected her confidence in the local project and made her reluctant to refer women to the service who needed long-term support towards the end of the first year. A probation manager similarly reported:

If you want a woman to get involved you want to know it's got some mileage and not going to leave them high and dry. If we knew their funding was coming to an end probation would have to start making alternative arrangements (Probation Manager)

WCS managers were also concerned that short-term funding jeopardised magistrates' confidence in their service and the likelihood that they would want to include the service as part of community orders. A number of WCS managers and staff also commented on the paradox of attempting to provide support and security for chaotic women offenders in the context of organisational insecurity for staff.

Another repercussion of the funding arrangements for WCSs was the opportunism of the new voluntary sector partnerships that emerged in response to the MOJ/CIFC tender. Some of these partnerships brought together third sector organisations that were not used to working together or which had little or no experience of the criminal justice sector. Staff at one of the services referred to the need to find their *angle* in the first six months of the project and to work out how their service would fit into the existing array of provision:

there was a lot of talk at the beginning, people wanted us to do assertive outreach with sex workers and go out with the police at night and stuff like that but this area is saturated with services that do that and there was no need for us to do that. We had no time to do that. You know it wasn't realistic. It's just about recognising that you've got to decide on your angle, there's got to be an angle on this one-stop-shop and you can't be everything (case worker)

Some services, at least initially, were not clear about towards whom they should be targeting their intervention. Neither were they ready to meet the MOJ targets for recruiting women offenders within short lead-in times, within which some centres, for example, were still being refurbished. The service referred to above succeeded in developing strong links with the local probation trust, the local police custody suite and women's prison in order to align itself with gaps in their provision. However, the expectation to provide evidence of targets they had not begun to meet in the first months of implementation put tremendous pressure on a number of service managers and staff we interviewed. It may be that year-by-year-funding initiatives with short lead-in times for delivery do not support developing services. Such initiatives may contribute to a commissioning environment in which it becomes expedient for voluntary sector organisations to bid for new funding streams as they emerge, rather than responding strategically to gaps in local provision.

Summary of key points

- As demonstrated in previous evaluations, WCSs provide safe women-only environments that are preferable to probation offices, particularly for women offenders who have experienced physical and sexual violence.

- Short lead-in times for meeting official targets were problematic for developing services.
- The services vary in the extent to which they enable the integration of women offenders with other women.
- The services offer a supportive learning environment and a wide range of Education, Training and Employment opportunities tailored to the needs of women offenders.
- Multi-agency working and information sharing is crucial for this model of holistic service, and is facilitated by co-location of a range of other service providers and effective partnership relationships.
- The services enable access to a range of services within and outside their premises which can help to address service users' complex needs.
- Although women are offered the option of returning for support should they need to, timeframes for contact at WCSs are increasingly time-limited.
- The case worker role is key to delivering intensive, supportive services that are focused on the identification of and response to individual women's needs.
- Short-term, year-by-year funding arrangements have created insecurity for staff and impacted on delivery and services' credibility among partners. Uncertainty regarding future funding now risks wasting the investment that has been made in the development of know-how, skills and partnership arrangements.

4. Strategic Partnerships

4.1. Referral services

As well as probation services and magistrates courts, other referral organisations play an important part in the work of WCSs. These include prisons, police custody suites and mental health court referral services. Active liaison with these services and their representation on steering groups is particularly important if there is to be buy-in from partners at all levels. It is also crucial that staff in the referring agency understand the nature and value of the WCSs. One of the WCSs in our evaluation has a service level agreement with the local police force, whereby the police are supposed to make female arrestees aware of the service, and also inform the service when they have arrested a woman who is a potential service user. However, this agreement is disregarded according to a civilian member of staff at the local police station:

We have the leaflet, but put it this way: I've never seen anyone handing it out
(police liaison officer)

Regular representation on steering groups as well as active promotion and awareness-raising may be required within some agencies to ensure that referrals are made to WCSs. This points to the importance of local *champions*⁷ in promoting services for women offenders. In one area, for example, referral to the local WCSs via a post-arrest referral scheme is highly successful thanks to the active involvement of a sympathetic senior police officer who sees the diversion of women from the criminal justice system as a priority.

4.1.2 Joint working - steering groups

During the evaluation period, five of the six services had active steering groups that both supported the development of the service and the stake-holding interests of the steering group members. Previous evaluations of WCSs have highlighted the need for steering or advisory groups particularly where diverse service providers are brought together in partnership for the first time, and in order to promote the new service within partner organisations (Loucks et al., 2006). Steering group membership includes senior probation managers, police officers, magistrates, prison outreach services, local authority housing services and representatives from a range of local women-specific organisations and third sector providers. While the chairs of WCSs steering groups are most often senior probation

⁷ Although we are aware of NOMS Women and Equalities Group's attempts to promote the development of champions for women offenders within the judiciary (NOMS Women and Equalities Group, 2012), we found little evidence of the impact of this initiative in our research. The 'champions' for community services for women offenders we came across were not appointed but were individuals who were personally committed to the Corston agenda and to raising the issues and changing practice within their organisations.

officers, the independent chair of one of the WCSs in the evaluation is a senior department store manager.

Representation from senior managers of partner agencies would seem to make more likely the integration of WCSs within local strategic plans, such as those of probation, local authority domestic violence services and local mental health services. It was clear from interviews with stakeholders that steering group membership was viewed as important not only in terms of the support and guidance provided to the WCS, but also as strategically useful for their own purposes in terms of the contacts made and information shared between members. Steering groups thus play an important role in aligning WCSs with local strategic priorities and integrating them within the network of criminal justice and wider support agencies.

4.2 Magistrates' views about Women's Community Services

A number of explanations have been given for the increasing numbers of women serving prison sentences over the last two decades (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 2002; Deakin & Spencer, 2003; Carlen & Tombs, 2006). While magistrates refute the charge, their collective contribution to this increase through their sentencing of ever greater numbers of women to short periods of custody has been highlighted (Deakin & Spencer, 2003; Hedderman, 2011). We know that magistrates have reported concerns about enforcing community disposals (Jolliffe et al., 2011) and there is evidence to show that expanding the choice of community orders does not necessarily result in reduced use of custody. It has been argued that a more radical approach to reversing the rise in women's imprisonment is needed and that magistrates' powers to imprison should be removed (Hedderman, 2010, 2012). However, in the absence of changes to sentencing policy, our starting point was to examine whether magistrates in each of our evaluation sites 1) were aware of the service and the types of intervention offered; 2) were confident in the quality of supervision provided; and 3) would consider the WCSs as a viable alternative to custody.

4.2.1 Interviews with magistrates

We contacted magistrates in the six areas through the Magistrates' Association (MA); there are no publically available lists of names or contact details for sitting magistrates, and thus recruiting them independently would have been difficult. The Association sent out an email on our behalf explaining the focus of our research and asking those who were interested to

send us their telephone numbers. We interviewed all who responded: 17 magistrates; 10 women and 7 men (see Table 4.2.1 for further details). These interviewees were not representative of sentencers in our evaluation sites but this opportunistic sample has nevertheless helped to highlight the difficulties WCSs may have communicating with sentencers. Our findings are consistent with previous research in this area (Hedderman et al., 2008; Jolliffe et al, 2011) and confirm the need to raise the profile of WCSs amongst sentencers.

Our interviews focused on:

- the extent and nature of their contact with women offenders
- their views on the types of offences that women commonly commit
- whether they had ever sentenced a woman to custody and their reasons for choosing this disposal
- their views, knowledge and training about women offenders and their local WCSs

Table 4.2.1: Magistrate interviewees

Area	Number of interviewees	Number on bench (approx. at time of interview)
A*	5	500
B*	3 (1 of whom was bench chair)	100
C*	4 (1 of whom was bench chair)	200
D	1	210
E*	2	270
F ¹	-	---

*local WCS offers Specified Activity Requirement

¹ a number of attempts were made to contact magistrates in Area F, including via the Magistrates' Association (contacted by email and then a follow-up email sent several months later) and through legal advisors at the local court.

As noted in Section 3, some of the WCSs offered and supervised Specified Activity Requirements imposed as part of a community order. This often included attending all probation appointments at the service. The WCS staff also reported using various techniques to raise awareness of their services among local sentencers:

- 1 has a local magistrate on their advisory board
- 5 had presented at local magistrates' training days
- 3 had arranged visits to the WCS for local magistrates
- 1 had distributed leaflets about the WCS in robing rooms
- 1 had organised a local training conference which 100 magistrates attended

However, the context in which the magistracy operates is key to understanding the challenges of promoting the services amongst sentencers:

- Magistrates are volunteers and their participation in training beyond what is expected of them for initial qualification, and for information on new legislation, is largely optional.
- They may only sit a few times per month and potentially across a number of different courts, including youth and family courts. This was certainly true of our respondents, the majority of whom sat for between two to four sessions (court days) per month.
- There can be upwards of 200 magistrates sitting on a bench (see Table 4.2.1).
- They may rarely come into contact with women offenders (Gelsthorpe & Loucks, 1997), given their infrequent sittings and the fact that the large proportion of offenders are male – sentencing data from magistrates’ courts in our evaluation areas in 2011 (Table 4.2.2) shows women comprised around one quarter of court throughput in relation to sentencing. Nationally in 2011, women comprised 24% of all those proceeded against in magistrates’ courts in England and Wales (MOJ, 2012). Our respondents estimated that their caseloads were approximately 90% male; the interview extracts below were typical of their comments:

I couldn’t give you a statistic, but very few. Maybe 1 in 8 or 1 in 10 women compared to men.

A very small percentage, the vast majority we see are men. If I said 10% I would think that is too high.

- They depend to a large extent on others – largely, legal advisors and probation officers - to determine sentencing options, for example, through the recommendations in probation pre-sentence reports.

4.2.2 Views on the types of offences that women commonly commit

There was consensus among our interviewees about the types of crimes committed by women, with most noting the lack of serious violence in the offending profiles of those who they see and an appreciation of the potential vulnerabilities of women offenders:

We sort of have two groups of women coming through the courts. We have petty thieves and the more harmed women, who are on drugs and of course a lot of the petty theft is to finance their drugs. So that is the main sort of things I come across in court. (Area D; Magistrate for 21 years)

It might be drug-related. They might be shoplifting. They would be the more minor assaults. I would say that they were very seldom serious assaults. (Area B2; Magistrate for 26 years)

They are mostly things like shop theft, soliciting, prostitution, drunk and disorderly, minor types of offences on the whole. (Area A3; Magistrate for 5 years)

As has been found in previous research (Gelsthorpe & Loucks, 1997; Hough et al., 2003b), our interviewees reported rarely, if ever, sending women to prison – emphasising that custody is reserved for persistence or serious violence:

I can't tell you the proportion but it would be very tiny. I would say that I think we are well trained in looking at the offence first and then the offender's circumstances. If we get those circumstances and the offender has a family, has been abused in any way earlier in her life, we would bend over backwards not to send somebody to prison for the first time so we would be looking at community sentencing. (Area B2; Magistrate for 26 years)

It is a miniscule number, as I said we only see about 10 per cent women offenders, very, very low. It is very rare for anyone to go to prison who hasn't had a whole history of offending and for whom all other options have been tried numerous times. (Area C2; Magistrate for 19 years)

Well personally I would have to be extremely, highly persuaded to sentence a woman to custody unless there was serious violence involved. (Area A3; Magistrate for 5 years)

Table 4.2.2 presents data on the sentencing of adult women in the magistrates' courts in our evaluation areas for 2011. This shows that only around 1%-2% of women going through these courts were sentenced to immediate custody.

Table 4.2.2: Adult females found guilty and sentenced at magistrates' courts within evaluation sites, by type of sentence received (2011),

Area	Immediate Custody		Community		Suspended		Other		Fine		Total number of women sentenced	Women as % of all Sentenced %
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%		
A	(39)	1	(249)	5	(44)	1	(365)	8	(3,993)	85	4,690	29
B	(55)	5	(140)	11	(38)	3	(233)	19	(766)	62	1,232	20
C	(26)	2	(148)	10	(20)	1	(132)	9	(1,192)	79	1,518	23
D	(18)	1	(204)	9	(23)	1	(235)	10	(1,871)	80	2,351	27
E	(28)	1	(243)	8	(19)	1	(284)	9	(2,609)	82	3,183	28
F	(23)	1	(182)	6	(29)	1	(514)	17	(2,227)	75	2,975	24

Source: Justice Statistics Analytical Services within the Ministry of Justice. [Ref: FOI 78281, 721-12]

4.2.3 Magistrates' awareness of the Women's Community Services

'Qualifying' to become a magistrate, as described by the Magistrates' Association (2012), entails introductory training to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge, up to 18 months

of mentoring from more experienced colleagues and three-yearly appraisals to ensure competency thereafter. Beyond this, training and self-study is mostly optional: for example, additional training is offered for those who wish to sit in the family or youth courts. While training is guided by a national syllabus, local areas can develop their own programmes.

Overall, our interviewees reported having received little in the way of training about women offenders and their needs, and most had had no specific information about their local WCS. The extract below is from an interview with a magistrate who had been asked to review sentencing options for women for the Magistrates' Association. The interviewee notes the difficulties faced by sentencers in areas where there is no or limited provision for women:

I haven't had any official training in this, and before I started looking into the question for the Magistrates Association Sentencing Committee, I was very ignorant of the effects of custody on many women. Certainly there is no update training currently in our area for existing magistrates. We have published some information already in the MA magazine and will be following up with more articles shortly and sending information directly to branches on what sentencing options there are for women in their areas. I'm sure you are aware that for many of us the alternatives to custody are few and the MA is seeking to improve the situation. It is of limited use to tell magistrates what the effects of imprisoning women are if we have no orders in place which we can use instead. And with no local women's project to provide gender-specific community sentences, many women breach standard community sentences – and it can be very hard to find sentences which have a realistic chance of being complied with.

Even in our evaluation sites, where 'gender-specific' services are available, awareness of the projects was limited; this low visibility of WCSs among sentencers has also been found elsewhere (Joliffe et al, 2011):

In all honesty, I don't think we've had any [training or information]. Not that I can remember, that specifically targeted women offenders and ways of reducing this. I mean women offenders come up in general training but it's never been that focused. (Area A1; Magistrate for 7 years)

Only five interviewees had attended presentations about the WCS or made visits to their local project, and a further two reported having seen some literature about the service. Two of our interviewees had more detailed knowledge by virtue of additional voluntary roles; one sat on the advisory group for the WCS and one on the Probation Liaison Committee. For another, a professional background in criminal justice meant he had a more specialist knowledge in this area.

A number of potential barriers to training and dissemination of information were discussed by the magistrates, including:

- Cuts to training budgets or the expenses allowed for attendance at training events, both for magistrates and for the probation service which provides some magistrates' training;
- The difficulty of keeping up with the wide-ranging information received about new initiatives or sentencing options, particularly when one sits infrequently across a variety of courts:

We do get a lot of training on any new initiative.. I think the problem with magistrates is that we sit at a variety of different courts, so tomorrow I will be at a family court, which is different to a remand court. We might only sit at that sort of court once a month, which is a problem as we are very part time and keeping up with the training that you have. It's not quite so easy to put into practice. (Area C1; Magistrate for 9 years)

- The high number of magistrates in any one area who would need to receive the information:

My concern is that we have 400 plus magistrates and we just don't have the availability to tell them what [WCS] is all about so I have left leaflets in the Magistrates' assembly rooms but whether they read them or not, that's another thing. (Area A2; Magistrate for 16 years)

A main finding was the importance of the role probation plays in determining sentencing options for magistrates (Joliffe et al, 2011); and legal advisors (formerly justices' clerks) have also been reported as key influencers of magistrates' sentencing decisions (Gelsthorpe & Loucks, 1997). Although, there was some variation in the policies of different benches on when a pre-sentence report (PSR) is required from probation and its format –(reports can be provided on a same-day basis in written or oral form, while a full PSR which necessitates an adjournment), some form of PSR is highly likely to be requested if a community or custodial disposal is being considered. Our interviewees made it clear that they tend to depend on probation to outline what options are available to them:

Of course probation themselves, when they interview the person, they are the ones who make proposals. So there are two opportunities when it will come up and it is my impression that more and more it's [probation's] job to advise us and we will take that advice on board. (Area C4; Magistrate for 6 years)

We are so affected by the proposals in pre-sentence reports, not to say that the Probation Service do the sentencing, they don't but they put proposals, as you probably know, and it highlights things even if we don't chose that. If it isn't there, it's extremely difficult as many benches simply wouldn't know about [name of WCS]. (Area B2; Magistrate for 26 years)

One interviewee argued that it may be more effective to target training and information about the WCSs towards those probation officers who write the PSRs:

I don't know whether it's me really that needs to have it or whether it's the people who write the pre-sentence reports. The big problem we have is that in our area the probation is woefully underfunded and they have an enormous amount of work so I find they tend to recommend a limited repertoire of programmes, addressing substance related offending, ASRO that comes up quite often and the DTTO if we request them but very few other things get suggested to us actively. (Area B3; Magistrate for 15 years)

This is underlined by another who described the process by which the WCS might end up in a sentence as happenstance and largely dependent on the knowledge of the court probation officer or the legal advisor:

It sort of filters down to us when we're in the process of sentencing if someone happens to have heard of it or the legal advisor has or it's in the PSR report but there doesn't seem to be a systematic channel where we could hear about new developments. (Area A3; Magistrate for 5 years)

Among the six services in our evaluation, staff attendance at magistrates' courts to promote awareness of the service as a potential disposal has been uneven and inconsistent, particularly as caseloads have grown. In one of the magistrates' courts, a women-specific mental health court diversion officer promotes the WCS among court staff and probation officers, but this sort of resource is unusual. One of our magistrate interviewees, who sat on the WCS advisory group, had been (as yet unsuccessfully) canvassing the probation service to include some kind of prompt in the PSR pro-forma to remind the writer about the service.

4.2.4 Views about the value of women's community services

Seven interviewees reported recommending referral to the WCS as part of their sentencing, and of those two noted this had been a PSR recommendation which they had followed. Yet none could recall WCS referral being recommended as an alternative to custody. This confirms other findings of our own and others' studies (Joliffe et al, 2011) that WCSs are rarely for offenders who might otherwise be sentenced to custody.

Overall, the feedback from magistrates who were aware of their local WCS was favourable, and they commended the holistic approach of the service. These views are consistent with those found by previous evaluations of WCSs (Hedderman et al, 2008; Joliffe et al, 2011):

The [project] is proving to be very, very useful and it is obviously a great deal of help to a considerable number of women, whether it's their personal problems or housing problems or whether it's because of, shall we say oppressive partners, the women's centre certainly seems to deal with all of that. (Area D1; Magistrate for 21 years)

It seems to me to be a welcome change with a One Stop because it brought all the things together and as you know women who offend invariably are presenting, the crime is on the tip of the iceberg of cause and effect. (Area E1; Magistrate for 2 years)

And those magistrates who were unaware of the projects generally wanted to know more about them and what they could offer:

I would be extremely interested to know more about it. I am interested in women's issues.. It's quite upsetting to me as a magistrate that I do not know more about the project. (Area A4; Magistrate for 2 years)

With regard to the viability of WCS attendance as an alternative to custody, a range of views were expressed, including some concerns about service capacities and a lack of feedback on progress of women attending (also found by Joliffe et al, 2011). Further, there was a view that those women who are sentenced to custody are an entrenched group who have already failed to comply with various community disposals:

These are not the same group of people, the people who get community orders and the people who get custodials. Because generally the people who get custodial sentences are people who have been through the community orders and have failed, so you are getting the worst offenders going into custody, so it is hardly surprising that these are the people who come out and reoffend. (Area C2; Magistrate for 19 years)

Although, as noted above, the WCSs were also lauded for their holistic approach:

I know it's been promoted as an alternative to custody. I wouldn't see it as being at all limited to that, of the options we have for dealing with women offenders, in my mind, unquestionably it is the best option we have as it offers such a range of interventions that can help overall with the offender. Most of the women we deal with are in a very difficult situation. We have to punish the offending but 9 times out of 10 I would say these are not people who are hardened criminals, they are in a desperate, difficult and in chaotic situations. (Area C4; Magistrate for 6 years)

As a final point, when asked about confidence in the WCS model, a magistrate in Area B expressed some scepticism about their sustainability over the longer-term:

I do have a certain level of cynicism about all of this. The Ministry of Justice will fund a pilot, they will fund it reasonably and when the pilot is successful they'll try and roll it out on about a tenth of the resourcing and then it doesn't work, well are we surprised? (Area B3; Magistrate for 15 years)

Summary of key points

- Involvement of partners in steering groups is particularly valuable in terms of aligning WCSs with local strategies for policing, housing, mental health, prison resettlement and substance misuse services.
- Fostering strategic relationships (and champions in partnership agencies) increases awareness of WCSs and the likelihood of 'buy-in' from operational staff, thereby increasing referrals and information sharing.
- Our findings on magistrates' views and awareness of WCSs are consistent with previous research in this area.
- As magistrates sit infrequently, they see very few women offenders.
- Magistrates' awareness of WCSs in the evaluation areas was inconsistent, even where the promotion of the services to magistrates had been attempted. Cuts to training budgets mean that there is little or no magistrate training on women offenders.
- Attendance of WCS staff at magistrates' courts in order to promote the service amongst court probation staff, court staff and magistrates has been uneven and inconsistent.
- Magistrates are reliant for their information about women-specific resources on legal clerks and court probation officers.
- Where magistrates had knowledge of the local WCSs, they valued the service.
- There were concerns amongst magistrates about the uneven geographical spread of WCSs and the sustainability of these services.

5. Assessing the impact of Women's Community Services

5.1 Measuring progress towards resettlement

The importance of providing *quantifiable* evidence of impact has long been recognised, but so are the challenges inherent in demonstrating intervention cause and effect in the real world as opposed to the randomly controlled conditions of the laboratory. More recently, Government spending cuts and the funding arrangements for *Payment by Results* commissioning creates a new urgency for services to review their monitoring and measurement systems to ensure they can provide evidence of impact and there is considerable activity towards helping third sector and voluntary services build their capacity in this regard (NPC, 2011; Clinks, 2012). Further, the National Offender Management Service has commissioned work to develop measures of intermediate outcomes for rehabilitation programmes for offenders⁸.

There are common problems in assessing the effectiveness of community-based interventions for offenders, including:

- Limited funding or administrative support for setting up and maintaining data systems
- Inherited monitoring systems that may not fit current purpose
- Lack of training for service staff on the collation and analysis of data
- Staff can view monitoring as a burden which detracts from their key work priorities
- Unrealistic timescales from funders for assessment of impact
- Different commissioners asking for different types of information on impact
- Voluntary services working in isolation when developing measurement approaches
- Lack of shared understanding of what commissioners/funders want to see in terms of measurement and no clarity about what constitutes success, or indeed what outcomes are being measured.
- A focus on reoffending as a key outcome often in isolation from other indicators of progress towards resettlement, and with limited recognition of desistance as long-term and often uneven process.
- Difficulty in quantifying so-called 'soft' measures of impact which are nonetheless crucial to desistance and resettlement (see Section 6).

⁸ This work is focusing on creating shared systems of measurement for assessing the impact of arts-based, mentoring, peer and family interventions for offenders

At the simplest level, measuring impact means '*looking at what has changed in someone's situation since they have received support*' (NPC, 2011; p3). However, assessment of change will also require a record of what the individual's situation was before that support was provided. We wanted to examine the development of the monitoring and measurement systems used by the services, the levels of consistency or inconsistency in what they collect, and how they measure progress towards resettlement. Ultimately our plan was to collate a core set of data that could indicate type of progress made in key resettlement areas. Table 5.1 provides an overview of monitoring and assessment arrangements and Table 5.2 presents the kinds of data that are available and recorded routinely.

5.1.1 Monitoring and assessment systems

- The services report little in the way of administrative support for the upkeep of client databases and this situation has been exacerbated further by recent budget cuts. Overall, there has been limited investment in designing systems of outcome measurement, however this is difficult for individual services when funding is increasingly scarce.
- All apart from Service E *designed their monitoring and assessment systems* when managers first came into post, although these were informed by systems utilised by probation (e.g. risk assessments) or inherited from a parent agency (e.g. B and F). Each client contact generates a considerable amount of paperwork including referral forms, needs and risk assessment, and action/support plans, of which a proportion are collated electronically, and it is the electronic data which are key to routine impact measurement. Assessment forms vary in level of detail required but all involve discussion between client and worker about needs across the key resettlement areas. One service uses a scoring system to determine level of need and intervention required (E) and four services (B, C, D, F) also report using the Outcome Star⁹ method to discuss with clients their problems at service entry and to review progress made over time. Previous research has raised questions about the extent to which women understand the Outcome Star assessment process (Corcoran et al, 2011) and, given its popularity, it would seem important to examine how this tool is applied or adapted at local level.

⁹ Outcome Star is a suite of tools for measuring change in health, life-skills, attitudes and other domains
<http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/>

- *Frequency of review of client progress* varied depending on the intensity of contact. For example, progress *could* be monitored at each one-to-one appointment or at the end of a specified number of sessions or every six weeks (E). Those services using the Outcome Star reviewed progress with clients every three months. Some information about progress is recorded electronically, however this is done in various ways, including narratively – short key worker note about progress – or simply a *yes/no* to progress and there are problems with missing data. Breach is monitored at services offering SAR.
- Some services (A, E) described *clear formal criteria for closing a case*, such as a set number of missed appointments or completion of a required number of sessions. One project (C) took their steer from probation on this and three services (B, D, F) had no formal criteria, although Service B was being encouraged by funders to increase their throughput of women, and Service D tended to move women out of intensive one-to-one support into group, peer-based support and voluntary work.
- Funding sources tend to drive what data are collected and how these are used. All provide some feedback to their funders and stakeholders and have provided quarterly returns to the MOJ (2010-2011), NOMs (2011-2012) and more recently directly to probation trusts (2012-2013). Information requirements for MOJ and NOMS have tended to involve descriptions of throughput and activities; however, data requested for local probation trusts may be more variable. Five services had information sharing agreements with probation.
- Only two services monitored reoffending in-house. Others reported that this was done by probation or that they had the necessary local agreements in place with the police to check reconviction when required.

Table 5.1 Monitoring procedures by service

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Storage of client information (demographics, need and indicators of progress)	Paper files/ electronically	Paper files/electronically	Paper files/electronically	Paper files only	Paper files/electronically	Paper files/ electronically
Database system used	Excel	Salesforce	Excel	-----	Tailor-made	Salesforce
Responsibility for data collation and quality	Case worker	Case worker	Case worker	Admin worker	Case worker	Service Manager
Administrative help for data collation	None	Part-time	None	Full time	None	None
How are needs assessed?	Interview - staff and client	Interview - staff and client Outcome Star	Interview- staff and client Outcome Star	Interview – staff and client Outcome Star	Interview -staff and client (scoring system)	Interview - staff and client Outcome Star
Information sharing agreements	Police & Probation	Probation	Probation	Police & Probation	Probation	-----
Is reoffending monitored routinely?	Information sharing agreement with police	Yes	Done by probation	Information sharing agreement with police	Yes	Information sharing agreement with police

Table 5.2: Type of data collected across services

Demographic	All collect date of birth, some form of unique identifier and information about whether women have children. A range of other information is collated by some agencies regarding sexuality, religion and disability.
Referral date, source of referral	Referral and assessment dates are collated by all services and source of referral is available for most.
Offending	All record whether the woman is a current CJS client and the type of disposal being served; most but not all record some detail about current offence; sometimes this information is held by probation. Beyond this, information about offending history varies, with assessment forms allowing for open narrative about woman's past pattern of offending or past experience of CJS disposals. PNC numbers are not routinely collected by all the services
Needs at entry to service	<p>All assess need across agreed key pathway areas (accommodation, ETE, debt and finance, mental and physical health, substance misuse, attitudes, thinking and behaviour, domestic violence, prostitution) but how this is done varies. Service E was unique in routinely assessing the link between need and trigger for offending. Depending on partnership agreement, some services have access to OASys and Pre-Sentence Reports, so also have referrer information about client needs. Methods of assessment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative record of discussion between Key worker and client about situation at baseline; • Use of <i>Outcome Star</i> as tool to discuss support needs • Series of closed questions to establish situation at entry • Scoring needs - low, medium and high support requirements based on series of assessment questions; <p>For example questions about substance misuse can vary from an open question about any problems with drugs or alcohol to detailed closed questions about frequency type, quantity and mode of ingestion of substances consumed. Similarly, mental health is discussed in various formats including through questions about contact with mental health services and any medication that has been prescribed, as well as through more general open questions about anxieties and mental health issues.</p>
Support provided	There is some record of the types of support provided by the services on all the areas of need that have been identified at assessment and this can often be collated as part of an action or support plan, or as a key worker short file note about support received. Thus 'dose' is not necessarily recorded in any systematic way and often missing from electronic monitoring.
Progress made	This is done in a number of different ways. As noted, <i>Outcome Star</i> can be used as part of client/key worker discussion of progress, although scores are not necessarily recorded electronically. Key worker narrative records of progress can range from items like ' <i>has attended for drug treatment appointment</i> ' as evidence of engagement with the service to more concrete outcomes relating to particular needs, such as ' <i>tenancy has been secured</i> '. Some projects were aiming to use more standardised indicators of progress. Project B for example was using a series of outcome indicators designed for reporting to MOJ.

5.2. Profile of WCS service users

We asked for a range¹⁰ of data on all the women referred and attending the WCSs between April 2011 and March 2012. The findings reported in Tables 5.2.1 to 5.3.2 are taken from the electronic data provided by each of the services. As mentioned, these data are not consistently collated across the services as assessment protocols vary. There are also considerable amounts of missing data on needs and progress for some contacts and it is not always clear if no note is equal to no progress or administrative backlog.

Tables 5.2.1 to 5.2.5 describe the demographic, offending profile and needs of women as assessed at entry to the services. The large majority were defined as current CJS clients, referred via probation and/or courts, although Service B was unique in receiving nearly a third of its referrals from prison; it also had the highest proportion of women self-referring.

5.2.1: Throughput and demographic profile of women attending WCS April 2011 to March 2012

Project	A	B	C	D	E	F
No. referred	124	147	100	164	380	28
% current Offender ¹	84%	71%	90%	60%	89%	100%
Mean Age	34yrs (20-67yrs)	36 yrs (19-57yrs)	35yrs (18-58yrs)	-----	32yrs (17-81yrs)	30yrs (18-48yrs)
White ethnic background	74%	51%	-----	-----	87%	96%
Any children under 18yrs	-----	59%	72%	54%	-----	54%

Source: Services monitoring data; Notes: 1: currently serving community order or receiving post custody supervision; excludes missing data

Unsurprisingly, most women were completing community orders when attending the WCSs, with a minority (other than in Service B) receiving support whilst in custody as part of resettlement planning. A minority at some WCSs were attending for support whilst awaiting sentencing.

¹⁰ Demographic and offending information, including current offence, type of disposal, needs at entry to service, support provided (per need); data on recorded progress by support need, length of contact. Completion/disengagement

5.2.2: Referral source of women attending WCS April 2011 to March 2012

Project	A (N=122)		B (N=147)		C (N=100)		D (N=164)		E (N=380)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Probation	84	(103)	27	(40)	12	(12)	52	(85)	68	(258)
Courts	4	(5)	4	(6)	77	(77)	1	(1)	9	(34)
Prison	7	(8)	31	(46)	3	(3)	1	(1)	2	(6)
Police	-----		1	(2)	2	(2)	8	(13)	5	(18)
Other service	-----		5	(7)	4	(4)	24	(39)	8	(29)
Self-referral	5	(6)	24	(35)	1	(1)	15	(25)	9	(34)
Other	-----		7	(11)	1	(1)	-----		-----	(1)

Source: Services monitoring data; Notes: excludes missing data

5.2.3: Current disposals for CJS clients

Project	A (N=103)		B (N=96)		C (N=90)		E (N=335)		F (N=26)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Community Order	86	(89)	22	(21)	100 ¹	(90)	71	(238)	42	(11)
Suspended sentence order	1	(1)	8	(8)	-----		8	(27)	8	(2)
Custody sentence	5	(5)	29	(28)	-----		4	(15)	23	(6)
Custody remand			13	(12)	-----		1	(2)	8	(2)
On licence	3	(3)	3	(3)	-----		6	(21)	8	(2)
Pre-court disposal			1	(1)	-----		---	(1)	-----	
Pre-sentence	5	(5)	7	(7)	-----		1	(3)	-----	
Other			17	(16)	-----		8	(28)	11	(3)

Source: Services Monitoring data; Notes: excludes missing data; 1 combines community order with suspended sentence

Not all services were able to provide details of current offence electronically. In these cases, the information was usually held by the probation, although the services had paper copies of files including OASys and PSRs. Where electronic data were available, the offence profile showed some differences by service, but the most common offence types among women attending the WCSs were violence, acquisitive crime, fraud and drugs offences.

5.2.4: Current offence for those clients attending via referral from CJS

Project	A		E		F	
	(N=75)		(n=337)		(N=28)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Violence	21	(16)	24	(80)	11	(3)
Theft & handling	21	(16)	31	(103)	54	(15)
Fraud/forgery	13	(10)	7	(25)	7	(2)
Drug offences	11	(8)	12	(42)	-----	
Offences against children	4	(3)	3	(11)	-----	
Robbery	1	(1)	-----		11	(3)
Burglary	-----		4	(13)	5	(1)
Motoring	9	(7)	4	(15)	-----	
Criminal damage	1	(1)	2	(8)	-----	
Soliciting/prostitution	-----		---	(1)	-----	
Public order offence	5	(4)	1	(4)	4	(1)
Other	12	(9)	5	(18)	5	(2)
Breach	-----		5	(17)	4	(1)

Source: Services monitoring data; Notes: excludes missing data

Across all the services the women were presenting with multiple needs, as is consistent with the usual profile of women offenders (and see Appendix 3 for needs data for a sample of all women for Service D during the evaluation period). We have presented here the support needs as assessed at referral or entry to the project; however, it is likely that a fuller understanding of a woman's situation and the range of support she might require would be gained over time, as the relationship between client and case worker becomes more established.

Considerable proportions of women were described as having issues relating to their accommodation, employment and training, substance misuse, and mental health; and in three of the five services the majority had experienced domestic violence. Some of the apparent differences in proportions presenting with specific needs are likely to result from different approaches to assessment. For example, Service E scored level of need on a scale from 'no need' to 'high needs'; Table 5.2.5 includes those scored at medium to high levels as requiring of some intervention.

5.2.5: Needs profile of women offenders at entry to service between April 2011 to March 2012

Project	A (N=74) ¹		B (105)		C (N=90)		E (N=246) ⁴		F (N=28)	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
Accommodation	53	(39)	68	(71)	36	(32)	48	(118)	89	(25)
ETE	68	(50)	45	(47)	39	(35)	75	(184)	43	(12)
Drugs			37	(39)			40	(99)		
Alcohol			31	(33)			37	(92)		
Substance misuse gen	36 ²	(27)			39	(35)			89	(25)
Health general	42 ³	(31)	19	(20)	48	(43)	23	(57)	25	(7)
Health mental	-----		49	(51)			70	(171)	71	(20)
Finance/debt	43	(32)	30	(44)	38	(34)	71	(174)	-----	
Families/parenting	14	(10)	42	(44)	33	(30)	37	(91)	-----	
Domestic violence	38	(28)	50	(53)	39	(35)	53	(131) ⁵	50	(14)
Prostitution	1	(1)	8	(8)	7	(6)	See footnote 5		7	(2)
Attitudes	46	(34)	N/A		72	(65)	39 ⁶	(95)	-----	
Mean number of needs at entry	3		4		4		4		4	

Source: Service monitoring data; Notes: excludes missing data; 1 In project A only 74/103 CJS clients referred attended for assessment. 2 A combines drugs and alcohol; and 2 notes general health needs; 4 project E score level of need from 0 (no need) to 100 (high need). We have included medium and high need here; 5 E combines issues around domestic violence, self-harm and involvement in the sex industry in Safety category; 6 E assesses need in terms of motivation rather than attitude

5.3 Progress made

As noted above, the services use a variety of methods for defining needs at entry. Similarly, there are no agreed *standard* indicators of progress in any area where support has been reported. Moreover, from looking at narrative descriptions recorded electronically, it is clear that 'progress' can be defined in many ways. For example, small incremental changes such as keeping appointments at substance misuse services or agreeing to discuss domestic violence can be seen as important indicators of progress, as can more *tangible* achievements such as securing a tenancy or completing literacy and numeracy courses. Service B continued to use specific indicators which had been required by MOJ in the preceding financial year.

Table 5.3.1 focuses on only those women who have attended the service for a period of time during 2011 to 2012 and who have either completed their contact or disengaged from the service. Definitions used for each service are provided as footnotes as they vary depending on what information is available electronically per service. For example, where services had set criteria for closure this was usually recorded as case closed but in other cases it was less clear whether the woman had completed or disengaged.

The variation in the proportion making some progress in different areas of need across the services must be, to some extent, related to difference in assessment processes and this highlights the difficulties of making judgments about service effect.

5.3.1: Some progress reported for women offenders who completed or disengaged from the service after contact during April 2011 to March 2012

Project	A		B		C		E		F	
	Need (N=29) ¹ % (n)	Progress % (n)	Need N=91 ² % (n)	Progress % (n)	Need N=53 ³ % (n)	Progress % (n)	Need N=206 ² % (n)	Progress % (n)	Need N=28 ⁴ % (n)	Progress % (n)
Accommodation	52 (15)	67 (10)	69 (63)	13 (12)	38 (20)	85 (17)	49 (100)	54 (54)	89 (25)	71 (20)
ETE	66 (19)	21 (4)	44 (40)	12 (11)	40 (21)	95 (20)	76 (157)	55 (86)	43 (12)	75 (9)
Drugs			35 (32)	-----			40 (82)	59 (48)	-----	-----
Alcohol			30 (27)	-----			35 (72)	61 (44)	-----	-----
Substance misuse	41 ² (12)	75 (9)		9 (8)	43 (23)	96 (22)	-----	-----	89 (25)	92 (23)
Health general	28 ³ (8)	38 (3)	51 (46)	17 (8)	42 (22)	91 (20)	-----	-----	-----	
Health physical	-----			-----			24 (50)	50 (25)	25 (7)	71 (5)
Health mental							68 (140)	74 (103)	71 (20)	70 (14)
Finance/debt	38 (11)	82 (9)	35 (32)	11 (10)	38 (20)	90 (18)	72 (148)	64 (95)	-----	-----
Families	7 (2)	50 (1)	41 (37)	10 (9)	34 (18)	89 (16)	37 (77)	48 (37)	-----	-----
Domestic violence	41 (12)	100 (12)	49 (45)	7 (6)	38 (20)	85 (17)	53 (110)	55 (60)	50 (14)	57 (8)
Prostitution	3 (1)	100 (1)	8 (7)	-----	8 (4)	75 (3)	-----	-----	7 (2)	50 (1)
Attitudes	55 (16)	88 (14)	-----	12 (11)	75 (40)	85 (34)	37 (77)	53 (41)	-----	-----

Source: Services monitoring data 1 Includes only those who have had a final assessment with the service; 2 Includes those whose case is defined by service as 'closed'; 3 Includes those who have completed or disengaged from the service; 4 includes all clients because of outreach nature of service

Finally, Table 5.3.2 provides a rather crude overview, based on the data we have, of 'items' of progress recorded relative to identified needs. This shows that the large majority of women are recorded as having made some progress across their needs as identified at entry to the service; and, interestingly, a proportion are reported as having made progress in additional areas.

5.3.2: Progress recorded across all needs for women offenders during service contact April 2011 to March 2012

	A %	B* %	C %	E %	F %
Progress on all needs	23	5	61	16	39
Progress on some but not all needs	77	90	36	42	57
Progress on needs which were not identified at assessment		4	3	42	4

*Notes: *Not all outcomes for this project were recorded in the monitoring system downloaded*

Summary of key points

- While WCSs face considerable pressure to provide evidence of impact, there has been limited investment in systems of outcome measurement and administrative posts to support service monitoring have often been the first casualty of budget cuts.
- WCSs hold considerable amounts of information about the women they see, but there is clear scope for refining systems for assessing impact. Because of local commissioning and the way in which services were developed (discussed in Section 3) there is no common assessment tool across WCSs for defining needs at entry, and nor are there agreed *standard* indicators of progress. However, there is enough common ground to develop such measures, and certainly there is a growing impetus to do so, as commissioning based on payment by results becomes more pervasive.
- Services are recording incremental changes made by the women in key resettlement areas, whether this recording is undertaken narratively or through tools such as Outcome Star. It is important that the systems used to monitor changes recognise that desistance is a long-term process. Based on the monitoring information to which we have had access, the majority of women are making progress in their areas of need.

- The large majority of women attending the WCSs are in the criminal justice system rather than defined as *at risk of offending*, and are referred mainly by the courts and probation. The women were presenting with multiple needs, including in relation to domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health.

6. What the women say

Our aim was to interview five service users from each service twice: once during June/July 2011 and again in January 2012. The intention had been to recruit service users randomly via project records. In the event, this proved not to be possible. Instead, case workers suggested women for interview who they considered were sufficiently 'stable' in their substance misuse and/or in their lives more generally, and would be happy to take part in the research. Although all the women interviewed were engaged with the service, the initial interviews took place at different stages of involvement: some had been referred fairly recently while others were well on in their engagement. As with previous evaluations of WCSs, the approach to recruiting women for interview heavily skewed the sample towards those who had benefited from the services, and it has therefore been difficult to capture information about attrition. Although we did not succeed in interviewing women who had been referred to the service but failed to engage – an inevitably hard-to-reach group – service managers described a pattern of women disengaging and then re-engaging when their substance misuse becomes more stable. This suggests that initial failure to engage with a WCS may be linked to the complexity of a woman's problems at a time of crisis rather than that their needs have not been met. While the women interviewed were not at their most 'chaotic', a number were continuing to struggle with substance misuse or unstable housing, or were experiencing violent relationships. The interviews were halted on two occasions when the respondents became upset while discussing their experiences.

6.1 Interviewee profile

Three of the 30 women interviewed were of mixed heritage (White British and African Caribbean, and White British and South Asian); three were African Caribbean; two were South Asian; one was Southeast Asian; and twenty-two were White British. The mean age of the women interviewed was 37. Only two had post-18 education, and two others had post-16 education. Many of the remaining 26 women spoke of having had little or no school attendance after the age of 13 or 14 years. While the two women with post-18 education had pursued professional careers, many of the women interviewed had had little employment, aside from involvement in government training schemes. Where they had been employed, this had very often been on short-term contracts and included working in take-away restaurants, supermarkets and in cleaning jobs. Others described having worked as hairdressers, serving in bars and factory work. Two women had been sex workers and one had had her own business.

Twenty-nine of the women interviewed had been referred to the WCS via the criminal justice system, as part of a Specified Activity Requirement of a community order, as a condition of a suspended sentence, as part of licence conditions or via the Criminal Justice Intervention Team. One woman, who was considered to be at risk of domestic violence from her partner, was referred from an alcohol detoxification treatment service.

Substance misuse, most commonly alcohol misuse, was involved in the offending or contributed to the risk of offending for 18, or nearly two-thirds, of the women interviewed. In interview, 17 of the 30 disclosed past or on-going experiences of violent relationships, and/or having been sexually abused or raped as children. Twenty described experiencing depressive or other mental illness. Seven women disclosed that they had lost children to local authority care. The service user table in Appendix 2 shows the links between experiences of sexual and physical violence, depressive and other mental illness, substance misuse and offending for many of those interviewed.

Six women were attending the services as part of a community order for a repeated drink driving offence or for being drunk in charge of a child under seven years old. Seven women had been convicted of a violent offence (including three convictions for assaulting a police officer). Six women had been convicted of acquisitive crimes. Two women had been convicted of benefit fraud.

Table 6.1 Type of primary offence in qualitative sample

Type of primary offence	Number of women
Violent offences	7
Acquisitive crime including handling	6
Drug possession, intent to supply, importing	5
Drink Driving and drunk in charge of a child	6
Criminal damage	3
Benefit fraud	2
All offences	29

6.2 Re-interviews

We succeeded in re-interviewing by telephone 20 of the 30 women approximately six months after the initial interviews, which gave us some insight into 'distance travelled'. Of the 10 whom we failed to re-interview despite calling mobile phone numbers and writing letters, we understand that three had disengaged with services because of substance misuse. We spoke to one woman on the telephone who had just been released from prison where she had served a short custodial sentence with a view to re-interviewing her, but did not succeed in speaking to her again. One woman who was attending the service as part of a conditional caution had disengaged from the service soon after the original interview and there was no indication that she had re-offended. Three women were now working and no longer attending services. Two had moved out of the area and were continuing to do well. Of those we did re-interview who had been problem drinkers or drug users, only two stated that they had relapsed or continued to drink.

6.3 Views of the services

Service users were asked questions about their routes into the service, their experiences of engagement, what they found valuable about the service, the extent to which their needs had been met, and whether there was anything the service was not able to provide. Although we are aware that the non-random selection of service users means that definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from their accounts, these findings are wholly consistent with previous evaluations of WCSs which have reported on women's views (see for example Hedderman, et al, 2011b). In particular, our findings confirm and are bolstered by previous research which found that women attending WCSs value safe, non-stigmatising women-only spaces, within which one-to-one case support is provided in combination with a range of other support, advice and educational services, including peer support.

As described, in some WCSs women can have appointments with co-located offender managers, while in others which provide stand-alone Specified Activities, the women's appointments with their case workers can substitute for some of their probation appointments. Many women stated that they preferred attending women's services to attending the probation office. For some this was linked to feelings of shame and discomfort associated with sitting in a probation waiting room that was dominated by male offenders:

I: How would you compare going to the Project to going to the probation service?

R: Awful, awful, awful. I did not like it in probation at all. Sitting just in the waiting room. I sat for about five minutes and just the sort of people that were sitting there. I just didn't feel comfortable at all. And I did ask that please don't send me down there again. (Lara, 38)

Some women referred to the inappropriateness of probation as a place to bring young children:

When I walked out of there I'm getting like a lot of guys coming up and stopping and my mind was everywhere I didn't like it. And then I had to take him [child] with me one time and when I see everyone hanging around and sitting all over, this horrible place, to be honest with you I would not want to walk in there with a child. I felt really bad afterwards, I was really upset. (Isha, 27)

Many of the women interviewed who had experienced sexual and physical violence in the past reported particularly strong feelings of fear and intimidation in the probation office environment, which their sense of safety in the women-only environment of the WCSs. For one woman, the risk of meeting her ex-partner, the perpetrator of extensive violence over many years, meant that she was never asked to attend appointments at the probation offices. Another woman stated that she had found the experience of attending a mixed sex, low-intensity drink driving course at probation so difficult that prior to being told she could see her probation officer at the women's centre, she had breached her order. She stated that she would have preferred to go to prison than attend the probation office. Others were keen not to bump into men or women with whom they had used drugs or gone drinking in the past:

My CJIT worker, I choose to see her here because the office where she works there's still a lot of people that go there that are using, and I find it really difficult because it's people that I used to use with and it'll only take me to be having a bad day and I could use again. So I choose to meet her here. (Jackie, 34)

6.3.2 Support

We note current work by researchers to develop proxy and interim outcome measures for progress in third sector services (nef, 2012; Rickey et al., 2011). As is evident from the provision of wellbeing and confidence-raising courses at all six services in our evaluation, the development of confidence and self-esteem among service users is a preliminary objective of much of the work of the WCSs. Women's self-esteem and confidence is often at rock bottom when they first attend WCSs, and many of our interviewees reported on the unexpectedly friendly, non-judgemental and accepting reception they had received from both staff and other service users:

As soon as I walked in here I knew that it was all right to feel what I was feeling because I wasn't the only one. Obviously there's lot of women that come in here

with all different types of situations and you're not going to get judged or... And I felt that as soon as I walked in. (Philippa, 30)

I was so scared the first drop-in centre and believe it or not, nobody just looked at you, they didn't think oh why are you here, you or you, there was nothing like that, I was just like very shocked, I was like 'okay' , everyone was like, 'oh hi' you know, 'how are you doing?' you know, 'you doing anything today?' (Shahra, 27)

When asked about the support offered by their case workers, service users identified the quality of the relationship, and the combination of practical with emotional support, as crucial to their progress. They stated that WCS key workers had *time* for them and provided flexible support when they faced crises.

6.3.3 Multi-agency support

Women reported that the case worker was a conduit to other services. Of the 30 women interviewed, 22 said that they had been referred to or been able to access other services (beyond those that were co-located) or resources via case workers. Furthermore, their case workers' access to other professionals meant that they were able to 'sort' specific, apparently intractable, difficulties relating to, for example, debt, housing, legal advice and advocacy at court. Case workers would sometimes find solutions to problems that could otherwise have led to further offending. A number of women interviewed, for example, had debts arising from fines and social fund loans that were being deducted from their benefits. Others had borrowed money from loan companies and were being threatened by bailiffs. In such cases, case workers were able to arrange realistic re-payment terms, thereby removing a major source of anxiety and the motivation to reoffend in order to get hold of cash quickly.

6.3.4 Networks of support

Many of the women had experienced social isolation in addition to social exclusion, which is often a feature of life within a violent and controlling relationship: '*For years and months I'd been ground down to having no emotional support, nobody there at all.*' A number of services run drop-in groups, in which shared meals, craft activities and other normalising, pro-social activities are provided. These create opportunities for social integration and the creation of networks of peer support. Research has shown that support networks are crucial in helping offenders to desist from crime (Maruna, 2001, 2008). Although, as we have noted above, there are benefits to women offenders being able to integrate with non-offenders, service users spoke of the acceptance and encouragement offered by peers at WCSs who also had experience of offending.

Some of them [at the drop-in] have been to prison; some have been on drugs, got off drugs, prison. Some have been sent here from the courts for fighting, it's like just basically you're all the same not like... you know if you go somewhere else they think oh gosh they're you know, you been like arrested or you've got a suspended sentence or you've been in prison. They judge ya. In here everyone like's just makes you feel at home. Because everyone's just like you, you know. So no-one's looking down their nose at you. (Cerys,23)

[the peer support group is] very helpful. There are an awful lot of different women with different issues and I think everybody just enjoys it. Everybody gets something from it. We might all get different things but we all get something. (June, 38)

As well as mutually supportive peer groups, WCSs also provide opportunities to undertake courses on peer mentoring and offer volunteering placements, sometimes in the service itself. A number of the women interviewed reported that they were pleased to be able to 'give back' to the women's centre that had supported them, and also, more broadly, to be able to draw on their own experiences in providing help to others. As research has shown, successful desistance from crime may involve developing an alternative and socially approved personal identity (Rumgay, 2004b). Volunteering for the WCS and involvement in mentoring other women may play an important part in this kind of process of identity change. As was clear from a number of our second interviews, the assumption of such a role would seem to be a mark of the extent to which a woman has been enabled to change:

This time last year when I come in to talk to Worker about my situation I'd cry, I'd be in flood of tears, I wouldn't be able to talk about it because it was terrible. Now I can talk about it to yourself and to others and I would talk about it to other women and feel that yeah all right sometimes people do feel ashamed and do feel bad but I can say that I felt ashamed but I've come through it the other side. (Philippa, 30)

I'm their support now 'cause I'm actually mentoring one lady at the moment. The tables have turned a little bit, if you understand what I mean? I've become more of the supporters than needing supporting. (Jackie, 34)

So I pop in most days and Thursdays and Fridays are my days on a Thurs I do 10 until 12pm and I have lunch with the girls and on a Friday 1 until 3pm. That's a DIY group.. and I'm helping with a DSS appeal next week so I feel I'm giving back to the Women's Centre what they gave me. (Lydia, 44)

6.3.5 Educational achievement

As already noted, and as is typical of women offenders, with notable exceptions, educational achievement prior to attendance at WCSs is low (Hamlyn, 2000). The benefits of the access provided by these services to small group, women-only confidence-building workshops and learning activities cannot be over-emphasised. In interview, service users spoke of being empowered through their participation in educational activities. They described the following:

- The value of sharing stories and recognising commonalities in their experiences.

And we did a course yesterday and every bit of it is, is what I'd gone through, every bit, a lot of it would be what they come out with and I'm thinking that's me, that's me that is. (Rosie, 44)

- Learning techniques for dealing with stress and anger, managing money and dealing with other day-to-day issues.

They were really good, I had a session with them, managing your money, even the littlest like a cup of tea when you go out, you could save it and it works out quite a lot in the whole year, things like that, just things that you wouldn't think that it would help but it did. (Shahra, 27)

- The self-confidence acquired through gaining certificates in maths, English and IT.

I've got an appointment to enrol at the college to do my NVQ tomorrow.

I: Oh right and what are you doing an NVQ in?

H: It's in social care.

I: And how did you get into that?

H: I just phoned them up and asked to go and see them but if it wasn't for doing my maths and English here I probably wouldn't even have done that. (Nicola, 40)

As well as providing activity that helps to structure their time - very often filling the gap left when substance misuse ceases - accredited courses offer women Level One qualifications that allow access to mainstream adult education. This was described in the following way by a service user who reported experiences of childhood abuse, depression and a history of offending (including arson, assault and criminal damage) linked to mental health problems and substance misuse:

I'm doing maths and English at the library at the moment but doing the courses at the women's centre give me the confidence to do the courses at the library. I didn't have any confidence at all until I went to the women's centre. I was just alone and drinking [laughs], feeling sorry for myself. (Georgina, 43)

A service user who was first interviewed soon after she had accessed the service, and who had previously been a long-term heroin user with a history of street prostitution, described in her second interview her recent educational achievements and future goals:

Well I want to be classroom support for special needs. That's my long-term goal. It will be something in the lines of that. So obviously I've gained my level 1 and 2 in English now so educational wise, there's nothing really left for me at the women's centre. Once I've done the mentoring, I've accessed everything I can access at the Women's Centre and then obviously what Service A's plan is, is

eventually to integrate you back into mainstream college or education or employment. And obviously I need more qualifications to do what I want to do so the route for me is college. (Jackie, 34)

Summary of key points

- As previous research has shown, attendance at WCSs is highly valued by women offenders as a safe, non-stigmatising alternative to reporting at probation.
- Women interviewed valued the range of support they had received, including emotional and practical help, and the access provided to a variety of services.
- Women welcomed the peer support offered within WCS, and the opportunities to provide peer support to others.
- Women-only learning settings are safe places within which women can build up their self-esteem and confidence, and discover that their experiences are not unique.
- A number of women had moved from the supportive learning environment of the WCSs into mainstream adult education settings, which they found to be a transformative experience.

7. Implications for policy and practice

Women have too long been a neglected constituency in a criminal justice system designed for male offenders. The development of the current network of Women's Community Services – some of which were set up from scratch - is an impressive achievement. It is vital that these services are integrated into criminal justice provision and further developed for low-risk women offenders. We have found remarkable commitment on the part of case workers and managers to their work with women offenders. As previous researchers have shown, the services are highly valued both by the women who use them and by partner agencies. The co-location of services and their partnerships with health, welfare, advice services and criminal justice agencies generate considerable added value.

Much of what these services provide for women offenders with complex needs has not been captured in data returns to NOMS and the Ministry of Justice. Women's Community Services provide safe, non-stigmatising settings for women who may be low risk offenders, but have also been socially isolated, are very often full of shame and involved in dangerous and violent relationships. Their offending has frequently been linked to substance misuse and histories of abuse; this research and that of others has described the valuable role these services play in reintegrating women back into society, and thereby frequently enabling them to realise potentials they did not know they had.

Despite consistent recommendations from evaluators on the need for WCSs to collect a common set of variables, the Ministry of Justice short-sightedly allowed WCSs to develop their own monitoring systems, perhaps under the guise of 'localism'. Although we have found that WCSs have collected a huge array of data in order to report to their various funders, the opportunity to develop a robust measurement system has been lost, meaning that it is very difficult for WCSs to now provide evidence of their effectiveness. If these organisations are to compete in Payment by Results contracts – and not be swallowed up by large private sector providers such as G4S - urgent consideration must now be given to investment in monitoring systems and training in monitoring and evaluation. This is not a new proposal. In their 2011 report *The Women's Justice Taskforce* recommended that the Ministry of Justice 'should develop a clear set of evaluation tools to enable women's centres to demonstrate outcomes' (Prison Reform Trust, 2011, p17).

Our research and that of others suggests that WCSs are not being used by sentencers as an alternative to custody but instead to enhance both community sentences and post-custody resettlement. Until there are well-funded women's community services available as

disposals in each magistrates' court area in England and Wales, and concerted work is undertaken with legal advisors and sentencers on their role in providing a range of women-specific programming and case work that both supports women offenders and challenges offending behaviour, the long-term impact of WCSs on levels of women's imprisonment will remain limited.

The failure to integrate these services into provision for women offenders, and also women at risk of offending, would represent a huge waste in terms of the *work* that has gone into establishing the partnerships; and it would be a great loss in learning and social and human capital that has been accrued in their development. It is already clear that the year-by-year reduction of budgets has meant that many of the features that make this provision distinct, including one-to-one case work and high quality education provision, are being compromised. The value of these services as hubs for vulnerable women is manifest not only in criminal justice outcomes, but also health and social welfare outcomes. Thus there is enormous potential for their integration into local commissioning cycles and strategic plans for a wide range of services including community health, mental health, domestic violence, children and families and substance misuse. Where this is taking place there is reason to be optimistic regarding the sustainability of WCSs.

Recommendations

- In order to become sustainable WCSs must become statutorily integrated with strategic commissioning, contracting and procurement systems. WCSs have achieved much in developing strong operational and strategic partnerships with criminal justice and health and welfare agencies but the onus on partnership working cannot be theirs alone. External agencies including probation trusts must now be required to make provision for women offenders in the community.
- Investment in women-only premises or ensuring that premises are women-only at specific times is important. Co-location of services in women-only premises facilitates holistic case work, access to a range of provision on one site, enables multidisciplinary working between providers, adds value to provision, and provides a safe environment in which women can be sure to find a case worker who will get to know them and sources of peer support.
- Strategies need to be in place for actively promoting the services among magistrates and, particularly, court-based probation staff. We recommend that probation contracts with WCSs provide resources for staff to attend magistrates' courts

regularly, to ensure that their services are included in pre-sentence planning for low risk women offenders. We have submitted a proposal to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding for a pilot of women-centred, multidisciplinary sentencing in three probation trust areas.

- Few WCSs have monitoring systems that were specifically designed for them, and, with the loss of administrative posts, the collection of monitoring data has been inconsistent and uneven. Investment must now be made either by MOJ or the Association of Chief Probation Officers in a single monitoring system that is specifically tailored to measuring outcomes in WCSs.

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APPENDIX 1 Evaluations Consulted

Study Title, Author	Aim Report	Data/methodology	Main findings
<p>Chepstow House Chepstow House Community Project for Women Offenders, Process Evaluation, Final report February, Mary Corcoran, Claire Fox, Anne Worrall, 2011</p>	<p>Independent process/impact evaluation</p>	<p>Mixed methods evaluation Lit review, Case analysis. Non-participant observation of activities, courses at CH Interviews with service users, co-located staff, CH key worker staff; CJS agency personnel Case studies provide 'snap shot' complex social need offenders , taken from random sample 20 file</p>	<p>Improvement reoffending April-July 2010 compared to previous quarter, notes too early to draw firm conclusion impact of service. Description routes into service, needs met. Reporting limited reoffending data. Recommendations for development data base for monitoring distance travelled.</p>
<p>Women Ahead at Jagonari Jagonari Women's Educational Resource Centre Evaluation of the Women Ahead Project Evaluation report, Emma Rice, 2011</p>	<p>Independent evaluation based on qualitative and quantitative data</p>	<p>Interviews stake holders, focus groups service users, interviews 11 individual service users, survey 23 service users, observation drop-in. Analysis of project data base</p>	<p>Effectiveness service, relationships with parent organisations and probation service. Stakeholders reported need for greater advertising of service. Concern uncertainty created future funding, need divert time/resources for fund raising.</p>

<p>Re-offending analysis of women offenders referred to Together Women (TW) and the scope to divert from custody Darrick Jolliffe, Carol Hedderman, Emma Palmer and Clive Hollin, 2011</p>	<p>The evaluation aimed to identify: the impact of TW on proven re-offending among women with a recent criminal conviction referred to a centre; and, whether TW encouraged sentencers to divert women offenders from custody, December 2006-March 2009</p>	<p>Proven re-offending examined through Propensity score matching: Matching of 660 women with control group women not referred to TW (number of women recorded as referred during demonstration project 3,466)</p>	<p>Inconsistent means of recording, monitoring, meant comparison problematic across projects. TW projects no significant impact on offending in propensity matched sample.</p>
<p>Inspire, Brighton Women's Centre, Inspire: Positive alternatives for women, Georgina Paget, 2011</p>	<p>Process evaluation 6 months into implementation focusing on whether the project is creating lasting change, evidence of personal strategies for change as well as supportive mechanisms for sustaining change</p>	<p>Interviews with 8 service users – based on 'appreciative enquiry' Change Management tools applied to qualitative interview data with stake holder providers. Analysis data base</p>	<p>Reports on rapid increase referrals first six months project. Reports tangible benefits of Inspire, short timescales, new organisational form partnership 5 diff organisations. Analysis of project data base, 78 per cent women referred two or more needs. 67% 4 or more needs</p>
<p>Evaluation of the Inspire Women's Project (Northern Ireland), Helen Easton, Roger Matthews, South Bank University, 2011</p>	<p>Process, impact evaluation project in relation to its objectives.</p>	<p>Analysis project data base, ACE scores, compliance data, (no matched control group) interviews service users, stake holders, project costs.</p>	<p>Reduction in self-reported offending, reduction ACE scores 309 referred women. Compliance rate 72% (October 2008-July 2010) Overall women service users positive about project, safe, women-only space, non-judgemental attitude co-located probation officers, peer support, support housing, debt etc.</p> <p>Need for greater information for women about project prior to referral. Need to</p>

<p>Anawim Evaluation Footsteps to the Future: An Evaluation of the work of Anawim, Birmingham, Rubus, 2010</p>	<p>To provide evidence numbers of women worked with, outcomes, identification what WCP does well where room for</p>	<p>Mixed method qual/quant Interviews with five support workers id process, interventions and outcomes achieved Case study data describes detail of intensive support given to women with complex needs. Extracts from service user feedback taken from annual report Telephone interviews with five external partners. Analysis data monitoring system</p>	<p>Aggregate output data analysed for two centres, total numbers of women achieved outcomes over four quarters for one centre and two quarters for second centre. 102/209 women assessed for offending pathway, 29% maintaining non-offending status; 59% reduction offending. Includes data on breaches of community orders and changes offending behaviour. Key features for service user engagement identified.</p>
<p>Just Women An Interim Evaluation of the Just Women project, (New Dawn New Day) Rebecca Skinner, 2010</p>	<p>Assessment how well the Just Women project was working</p>	<p>SWOT analyses undertaken with 6 staff. <i>Knowledge café</i> activity involving key stakeholders. Individual interviews with 9 stakeholders and one Probation programme. Focus group Questionnaires-women and referrers. Case studies</p>	
<p>Support for Women Around Northumberland (SWAN) Project Evaluation, Barefoot Research and Evaluation, 2010</p>	<p>Process/impact evaluation project</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, semi-structured interviews and participatory appraisal sessions with service users, project staff, operational and strategic partners. Analysis of project records and monitoring information for 120 referred and 70 engaged women feb-november 2010</p>	<p>Project meets needs women with complex needs, good partnership working. Innovative partnership model makes services accessible to women in rural Northumberland via 'virtual' one stop shop. Analysis of offending data from the Police National Computer for 50 women finds 70 %reduction offending</p>

Women's Turn Around Project, Derbyshire, Evaluation of the Turn Around Project, Women's Work Phase One 2010-2011, 2011	Internal evaluation	Mixed method study, small sample. Ten service users interviewed ten Women's Work staff and ten staff from referral agencies. Analysis of project data base 125 women..	Anecdotal evidence from staff interviews of low level of reoffending in women engaged with project and none reoffended more seriously. Judgement of Significant Progress made by client (subjective). 57 women on community orders, 14 post-custody, outreach link with Foston Hall prison helpful engagement women prior to release. Project valued by service users. Short timescale project disincentive for referral agencies.
Evaluation of the 218 service: examining implementation and outcomes, Easton and Matthews, 2010	Process and Outcomes Evaluation. Examination of effectiveness of the 218 Service in relation to its ability to meet its key objectives:	Mixed method quantitative and qualitative; combining analysis of quantitative data with analysis semi-structured interviews. Cost benefit based on estimated costs continued substance use/offending	Service highly regarded, holistic, 'person centred' residential and day service for adult women offenders. Programme incorporate a recovery focussed model of change Police-recorded offending reduced by 21% following contact with the service among the cohort of 320 women referred between 1 June 2007 and 31 May 2008. Overall offending reduced by 31% and dishonesty offences by 44% women engaged beyond their assessment. Cost benefit established that for every £1 invested in the service there was a potential saving of £2.50 per year (source Scottish government data for one year of costs of crime linked to problematic drug use as proxy measure) Breakdown routes into service. Most referrals from cjs,
An evaluation of the women's turnaround project final report prepared for NOMS Cymru Katy Holloway, Fiona Brookman, Centre for Criminology, University of Glamorgan, 2010	Process/ impact evaluation Focus impact • Achieving personal goals • Reducing offending	Qual Interviews with 15 service users Analysis project data base	Service users, unanimously positive Priorities: (1) general emotional support (2) housing and (3) Employment/education. Indications positive impact on self-esteem, measures of 'progress', levels of perceived need and 'distance travelled'. Non time bound nature of service appreciated 'allows clients to work at their own pace' Client centred ethos thought to be empowering Non-judgemental environment.
Evaluation of the evolve project Womencentre , NACRO, May 2009	Process/impact Evaluation	Analysis of project administrative data and project documents; individual interviews with women accessing Evolve services which were repeated after three months where possible; and interviews with project staff and key stakeholders in the local area.	Service users had signif improved: personal, domestic, socio-economic. Service provides safe and conducive environment. Holistic, approach made services more available to women. Staff commitment delivering long lasting solutions. Good strategic leadership

<p>Implementing services for women offenders and those 'at risk' of offending: action research with Together Women, Carol Hedderman, Emma Palmer and Clive Hollin with the assistance of Clare Gunby, Nikki Shelton and Melody Askari, Ministry of Justice, 2008</p>	<p>Action research process evaluation implementation Together Women pilot projects.</p>	<p>Non-participative observation services, analysis project documents, interviews 40 staff , stakeholders, sentencers concerning early implementation projects, referrals, view value of project. Interviews 43 randomly selected service users across two areas (Yorkshire and Humberside, North West). Data audit 50 cases in one area.</p>	<p>Authors question how working with non-criminogenic needs can lead to change in offending, questions whether services should instead be considered less focused on preventing re-offending, provision for severely socially excluded. Services deemed to be filling a need by stakeholders (poor profile amongst sentencers); service users valued women only provision. Data audit revealed problems with consistency data, overreliance on key workers' judgement change, lack of consistent measurement distance travelled across five sites, make assessment change problematic.</p>
<p>Evaluation of the 218 Centre, Nancy Loucks, Margaret Malloch, Gill McIvor, Loraine Gelsthorpe, Scottish Executive, 2006</p>	<p>Process and outcomes evaluation</p>	<p>Project documents and records; focus groups and individual interviews with service users; and interviews with project staff and key stakeholders</p>	<p>Service developed over the course of the evaluation. Difficulties partnership, interagency working early implementation. Greater level of engagement from non-cjs referred women. Service appreciated by service users and stakeholder, referrers.</p>
<p>Asha Women's Centre Asha Women's Centre. Report of an evaluation of work with women offenders Judith Rumgay, 2004</p>	<p>Evaluation of effectiveness of the multi-agency partnership model of practice.</p>	<p>Qualitative interviews service users and partners.</p>	<p>Focus on experience of service users and staff. Service users overwhelmingly positive about service. Interesting focus instrumental character partnerships, access afforded to services, mutual benefit partnership organisations</p>

APPENDIX 2 Women Interviewed

pseudonym	Age range/ ethnicity	Offence	Previous offence	DV	Substance misuse	Mental health	Support from Women's Centre	First Interview June/July 2011	Second Interview Jan/March 2012
June	35-40 White British	Risk	Yes	Fled domestic violence	Undertaken alcohol detox	Not disclosed	One to one support, emergency funds for food and clothes, peer group support, Confidence Building, Assertiveness and Knowing your Rights courses. Additional support from Alcohol case worker; AA	Came into service post detox, having left violent husband, initially hostel accommodation, help women's centre, now in her own flat	Voluntary work in care home. Not reoffended
Ailsa	50-55 White British	Drink driving	yes	Yes	Problem drinking	Not disclosed	Ten sessions part of community order, including one:one support; structured group; looking to start counselling qualification	Second drink driving conviction, involved in violent relationship interested in getting involved in group activities and qualifications to teach in adult education	Completed mentoring course On course, Practice teaching in the Life long learning sector; wants to volunteer with service. Not reoffended
Annabel	30-35 White British	Assault	no	Historic dv	Problem drinking	Depression in past following miscarriage	One: one support, structured group support at women's centre as part of six months probation order	Convicted for fight with younger cousin while drunk. Young children, previous domestic violence, finding group helpful	Completed community order, not re-offended, continuing to care for young children
Jessica	20-25 White British	Assault on police officer	no	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Twelve sessions at WCS as part of community order; one:one support, worker had helped her to get a grant for furniture. Health and beauty course planned	First conviction for assault, planning to start health and beauty course	No contact for second interview. Reported that Jessica had completed order. Not reoffended
Tamsin	40-45 White British	Benefit fraud	no	Historic dv	Problem drinker, number of detoxes	Depression	12 months community order, 25 sessions at WCS. One:one support; taken part in groups. Worker written her letter for court appeal, referred to mental health worker. Also receiving support	Depressed, drinking. Benefits stopped awaiting court appeal.	Had not lost her house, working part time, completed court order. Not reoffended

							from drug and alcohol service and Samaritans		
Philippa	30-35 White British	Shop lifting – referral from IDVA post	Number previous shop lifting offences	Restraining orders and injunctions against violent ex-partner	Not disclosed	Stress and anxiety	One to one support, Health and Wellbeing course	Had been shoplifting to fund partner’s drug use. Has received a lot of support from service, begun to volunteer at agency	No contact second interview. Informed that Philippa is now working in supermarket. Not reoffended
Nicola	40-45 White British	Assault on police officer	Two previous convictions for violence	Historic abuse from husband	Not disclosed	Stress and anxiety	Seen probation officer at centre 12 months probation order, confidence building and anger management courses, basic skills courses, peer support group,	Had received a lot of support from service. Had advice from solicitor to start divorce proceedings now retracted	Now attending centre voluntarily for maths course and peer support group. About to enrol at college for NVQ course in health and social care. Not reoffended
Georgina	40-45 White British	Criminal damage	Previous convictions including for arson, assault	Child hood abuse	Historic problem drinking, undergone dx	Stress, anxiety, depression, previous suicide attempts	Seen probation officer at centre, 12 months’ probation order, confidence building and assertiveness course, basic skills, peer support; referral to alcohol service	One to one support from service, provided with full programme of activities to structure her time, supported her through court case and detox. Support from women’s group	Not drinking, about to start volunteering in charity shop, attending women’s centre voluntarily for drop-in and peer support group twice weekly. Not reoffended
Lydia	40-45 White British	Drunk and disorderly	Nine previous drunk and disorderly convictions	Historical DV	Historic problem drinking	Non specified mental health diagnosis	Referred by probation to women’s centre, suspended custodial sentence, community order. One to one support; also support from AA	Had found women’s centre very supportive, had written her a letter to successfully appeal negative disability living allowance decision.	Continuing to have regular one to one support, Involved in fundraising and organising events for women’s centre, involved in the peer support group. Not reoffended
Freya	35-40 Mixed heritage, White British/ African Caribbean	Shop lifting	Number previous convictions including custodial sentence for	Injunctions and restraining order on ex partner	Opiate use, recently come out of rehab	Stress, compulsive shop lifting and depression linked to dv and substance misuse. Previously prescribed	Suspended sentence, referral to women’s centre from court (SAR); one to one support; referral to family worker from women’s refuge,	Had finished suspended sentence, rehab and Women’s Centre SAR sessions. Worried because she knew ex partner was out of prison. Seeing	Had not reoffended although feeling like she’s at risk of reoffending. Just been rehoused in an unfurnished flat a long way from family, feeling

			shop lifting linked to substance misuse.			Diazepam.	support with DLA application	children at her mother's house.	isolated and anxious. Needed help to apply for grants for furniture. Had been referred by women's centre for further mental health support, back on diazepam.
Iris	40-45 White British	Drink driving and drunk in charge of child under seven	none	Historic domestic violence	Problem drinking, recently completed dx and rehab as day patient	None disclosed was receiving psycho social support at alcohol service.	Probation order, had been referred to hospital for alcohol support, just started SAR at women's centre, referral to domestic violence support, still accessing support from alcohol service.	Just started at women's centre, accessing range of one to one support. Had not drunk for 14 weeks	Made contact for re-interview and Iris obviously sounded as if she had started drinking again but had not reoffended.
Ruby	45-50 White British	Criminal damage	Number of previous convictions for shop lifting, theft, drug dealing. Previous custodial sentences although not for 12 years	Current domestic violence	Problem drinking, heroin, methadone.	Anxiety, depression stress linked to substance misuse, dv	Probation order, one to one support, referral for counselling at women's centre, receiving support from substance misuse service, homelessness unit.	Had on going problem with domestic violence, substance misuse, problem housing was being addressed through council homelessness unit. Interview halted because of her distress.	Was not drinking, living in hostel accommodation, had completed order. Not reoffended
Lara	35-40 White British	Drink driving	Second conviction	Historic domestic violence (husband dead)	Didn't consider drinking an issue	Depression anxiety linked to dv	Recent referral to women's centre for one to one support, had been able to leave child at crèche to be able to, referral for counselling, referral for ICT course	Accessing a range of services at women's centre, hoping to start counselling, had had complementary therapy, wanting to start course to assist with getting a job.	Has now accessed a book keeping course, counselling via the service, and made use of the crèche. Has not reoffended said was a one off.
Cerys	20-25 White British	Assault	Approximately ten convictions for assault and drunk	raped when she was 15	has had periods of problem drinking	depression, anxiety, medicated for depression	Suspended sentence and 20 sessions at women's centre, one: one support attended drop in and structured group	Has found service great help, supportive, friendly environment, attending twice a week in addition to probation appointments. Is	Unable to contact. Had had returned to drinking and had been out of contact with service. There had been a fear

			and disorderly charges				sessions.	waiting to hear about support from an alcohol worker	that she may be breached but had returned to service to finish order
Shahra	25-30 British S Asian	benefit fraud	no	not disclosed	not disclosed	medication for depression	Twelve months suspended for 12 weeks, SAR at women's centre for 20 sessions. Receiving one to one support, debt advice, legal advice, attending drop in, structured learning activities, e.g. money management, relaxation, first aid, parenting courses.	Has found weekly attendance at centre very helpful, has been able to use the crèche. Has made friends with other women through the drop in.	Finished the order at centre, started NVQ level 1 in child care and has worked voluntarily at children's school. Not reoffended
Margaret	45-50 White British	criminal damage	multiple convictions, custodial sentences.	Sexual violence, domestic violence	history of substance misuse, alcohol, heroin, opiate substitution therapy	on depression medication for psychiatric disorder	Referred by probation officer to service. Has received benefits advice, travel pass, mental health referral. Has taken part in structured courses	Long term offender with multiple problems, living in a hostel, was also receiving support from probation and substance misuse services. Also attending AA.	Was unable to make contact, reported that she was drinking again. Unknown if reoffended
Millie	35-40 Southeast Asian	Intent to supply (cannabis farming)	no	Domestic abuse, violence, on-going threat violence	Not disclosed	Anxiety and depression linked to domestic abuse, and violence and threats from organised criminals	On licence having spent 4.5 months of a 2 year sentence for cannabis farming, referred by probation. Attends drop in, case worker helping her get rehoused, appeal return to northern town, ESOL classes, nail and beauty course	Found women's centre very supportive, anxious about possible return to northern town where crime committed and who threatened her life. Wants to start course, ESOL classes at centre	Unable to contact for telephone interview, (English very poor), reported that she is doing well, resettled in new accommodation, not returned to northern city, not reoffended
Janet	25-30 White British	assault	Previous convictions for assault	Recent and historic domestic violence, reportedly very severe	History of problem drinking, reported organ failure as a result alcohol poisoning	History of mental health problems	Supervision order plus 10 sessions at women's centre. Recent contact with service, referred from court mental health liaison worker, seeking support mental health referral, rehousing, no interest in groups.	Pregnant, living in hostel having fled domestic violence, seeking rehousing, community mental health referral, legal advice.	Spoke on phone as she was leaving short custodial sentence (remand?); had had miscarriage. Unclear nature of offence.

							Support from probation officer		
Rosie	40-45 Mixed heritage, South Asian/White British	Carrying a bladed article	no	Some historic dv, controlling relationship. She is violent in current relationship	Problem drinker	Not disclosed	6 months' probation, community order, 15 sessions at women's centre. Had attended centre 8 times, taken part in group structured learning activities,	Accessing one to one support and group sessions at service, had started counselling, talking about attending AA. Living in house co-owned by ex-partner, in mortgage arrears	Completed order, sessions at women's centre. Has not re-offended. Moved out of ex-partner's house, living in rented social housing flat; case worker had assisted with housing application. No longer with boyfriend she had attacked. Continuing to drink, not ready to stop drinking
Catherine	50-55 White British	Driving while banned	Yes, previous conviction for drink driving	Not disclosed	Problem drinker	Panic attacks, anxiety	6 months' probation, community order, 15 sessions at women's centres. Had accessed women's centre via GP prior to her case coming up in court. One to one support with case worker who had come to court with her, and made an appointment for alcohol worker. Accessing groups	Much relieved to be accessing support, had found experience of arrest, court etc. traumatic. Already accessing one to one support, group activities and support from co-located alcohol worker	Has not reoffended, nearly completed order. Was seeing co-located alcohol counsellor at service. Women's centre case worker sorted out housing benefit claim. Has stopped drinking, now rehoused and working part time.
Isha	25-30 British South Asian	Possession , intent to supply drugs	no	Fled forced marriage, childhood physical abuse	Not disclosed	Distress, anxiety linked to conviction, linked to partner's drug problem	Two years' probation supervision can see probation officer at women's centre. One to one support, Job Club, help with CV, debt advice, accessed furniture project	Recently engaged with service, finding one to one support helpful. Seeking work	Just had interview for volunteering at the women's centre. Attending job club, seeking work. Has made friends at Job Club at women's centre.
Jackie	30-35 White British	Most recently received an ASBO for loitering	Yes – string of convictions since she was 14 including theft,	Childhood sexual abuse. Former sex worker	Longstanding substance misuse problems, including heroin, crack	Psychiatric diagnosis, medication, had time in hospital	CJIT referral to women's centre. Sees her CJIT worker at centre. Accessing one to one support, basic skills	Accessing range of basic skills courses, now given up drugs (including methadone) wants activities to structure time.	Has not reoffended. Has completed level 2 maths and English, and nearly finished mentoring and level two computer

			possession with intent to supply (custodial)				courses, mentoring course	Keen to become qualified to get job to support children with problems. Completed English and maths courses at centre, and doing computer course and mentoring course. Concerned about lack of activities in summer holidays	course, acting as mentor to woman at centre. Receiving counselling at centre. Planning to start full time college to get NVQ child care qualification to get work as class room support
Hannah	30-35 White British	ASBO for loitering most recently	Previous drugs offences	Recent and historic domestic violence; childhood sexual abuse	Longstanding substance misuse problems, including heroin, crack	Receiving treatment for depression has Community Psychiatric Nurse	CJIT referral, accessing English and maths classes, had been taken to furniture project. Sees CJIT worker at women's centre, also accessing Prostitute Outreach project	Recently engaged women's centre, has support from CJIT worker at centre, accessing maths and English courses. Planning to do assertiveness, other wellbeing courses. Interested in starting one to one counselling	Has not reoffended or relapsed. Was attempting to come down on her methadone gradually and had got to 20 milligrams a day and was suffering from withdrawal symptoms. Decided she didn't want support from prostitutes' outreach project so now sees a prescribing worker at the women's centre. Hoping to resume courses and volunteering at service once finished on methadone
Alexandra	35-40 Black British	Drink driving	Two recent concurrent offence for drink driving, assault. Previously had convictions for shop lifting as teenager	Historic domestic violence	No does not see herself has having a problem with alcohol	Receiving treatment for depression	12 months probation community order. Had breached probation because she hated going there so much, returned to court and suggested she see probation officer at women's centre. Accessing one to one support. May access counselling at women's centre	Had started to access one to one support at women's centre; started maths and English course at centre although nervous that she won't be able to concentrate because of her depression.	Has not reoffended. Still in touch with services, still depressed. Hasn't pursued courses, continued with one to one support
Samantha	25-30	Importing drugs	no	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	4 years custodial	Stable housing, benefit	Has not reoffended

	African Caribbean						sentence, served two years, two years suspended in the community; attending women's centre instead of probation. Taking English and maths courses, wanting to start voluntary work at women's centre to improve her CV	claim. Taking maths and English classes.	One more year to go on her order. Only seeing probation officer once every two months but attending centre for weekly English class. Would like to do ICT. Case worker helping her with job search
Paula	45-50 mixed heritage white British/African Caribbean	Shop lifting two and a half thousand pounds worth of goods	Yes, number of convictions for shop lifting, custodial sentences	Not disclosed	Methadone	Not disclosed	One years probation and 60 hours of women centre sessions. Accessing one to one support, attending drop in, attending probation run women's centre,	Stable housing, benefit claim. Just started attending service. Happy to attend	Continued to attend service had not reoffended
Harriet	2--25 White British	Number of shop lifting offences	No	Not disclosed	Formerly problem drinking but stopped	Not disclosed	Referred to women's centre via mixed specified activity requirement. Attending a lot of training, activities mixed and women only	Offending had been linked to mix up with benefits. Wasn't receiving any money. Having moved out of grandparents, now living in temporary hostel, pregnant. Support from women's service to be rehoused. Accessing a range of services including women's service.	Unable to re-contact for interview. Had moved into her own place and had the baby. Not reoffended as far as the service knew.
Sarah	40-45 White British	Two convictions for shop lifting (meat from supermarket)	Recent conviction for criminal damage	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Receiving treatment for depression	Six months' probation and 20 sessions at women's centre. Seeing case worker at her house.	Did not want to go to the women's centre premises, happy for case worker to come to see her at her house. Nervous to take part in groups, said that she might be interested in doing a beauty course. Not interested in counselling or maths or English classes.	Has not reoffended, finished her probation and stopped seeing case worker. Did not want to attend service saw case worker at her house. Did not take part in any group activities.
Natasha	25-30	Shop lifting	no	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	12 months conditional	Had not started attending	Was not able to re-

	White British						discharge. Voluntary referral women's service. Had not started attending service	service,	contact. Service user had not engaged with service.
Claire	40-45 White British	Drink driving	Third conviction for drink driving	Not disclosed	Problem drinking	Receiving treatment for depression	12 months' probation, community order, referred to women's centre from probation (not part of order). Accessing one to one support, also receiving support from AA. Receiving support from a psychiatrist and	Accessing one: one support, begun to volunteer at service. Case worker has organised legal representation for employment tribunal and interview coaching	Was not able to contact for second interview. Claire is now working in the midlands and is doing well.

APPENDIX 3 Needs Profile Sample, Service D

Service D does not have an electronic system for recording individual case data. Referral, assessment data and progress is all recorded on paper files. In an attempt to include the needs profile for Service D, we randomly sampled fifteen case files for all women assessed at the service between April 2012 and March 2012. Unlike other data sources profiling needs in Section Five which only includes CJS referrals, only three of these fifteen case files sampled, were CJS referrals. Education, Training and Employment; Mental Health and Families and Parenting were the three areas of need that were most important in this sample of fifteen cases. While most women in the sample had had previous experience of domestic violence, only 6 identified Domestic Violence as a need that they wanted to address. Similarly although the case files showed two women who had a history of prostitution, none identified prostitution as a need. Six of the women in the sample cited substance misuse as a need. Ten of the fifteen case files sampled included families/and parenting as an area of need which is high compared to the proportion of CJS referrals from the other WCSs, perhaps reflecting the link Service D has established with local solicitors who signpost women who are contesting care proceedings and residency orders into the service.

Needs profile of women at entry to service between April 2011 to March 2012

Project	D Random sample 15
Support needs for	
Accommodation	5
ETE	12
Substance misuse	6
gen	
Health general	2
Health mental	12
Finance/debt	6
Families/parenting	10
Domestic violence	6
Prostitution	0
Attitudes	5
Mean number of needs at entry	4