

Exploring provisions for women in approved premises

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Abstract

This study explores female need and provision within Approved Premises settings, primarily the particular needs of female residents/offenders including bailees, probationers and licensees.

The study examines the structure of support to help women regain control of their lives, to empower them to progress to the next stage, ie. semi-independent/independent living. It aims to highlight the strengths, weaknesses and, effectiveness of regimes in reducing offending for women; and to identify any gaps which exist.

NB. The term Approved Premises refers to (Home Office) defined standards of practice.

Findings

- Women recognised the importance of group work programmes, which were challenging, affirming and empowering.
- Needs in relation to addictions, education, training and employment, mental health, childcare, diversity and accommodation cannot be dealt with in isolation to each other — a holistic approach is required.
- The research highlighted the importance of accessing education/training and in many cases having this on site, especially for those who were not in employment or education.
- There are major inconsistencies and a great lack of co-ordination in respect of the critical needs of women in relation to mental health.
- The exploration of issues and concerns of women around childcare highlighted the great benefits and necessity of partnerships within the community.
- Much of the work undertaken by approved premises for women is both constructive and positive. However, there are inconsistencies which require some standardisation across the board.

Recommendations

- All Approved Premises providers should meet annually to share good practice and identify common problems for female provision.
- Programmes should run on a regular consistent basis and be compulsory, particularly for those who are not out at work within the community.
- There should be support for female ex-offenders requiring permanent accommodation. There also needs to be more supportive housing for women with mental health issues; and more medium to low risk hostels under the Supporting People programme.
- Central co-ordination is required in relation to mental health issues for women. This is an area in which women suffer disproportionate discrimination by comparison to men.
- Drug and alcohol services and agencies need to be mother and child friendly to reduce the stigma and fear to access this within the community and where children can accompany their mothers. Constructive planning needs to be undertaken to incorporate this in providing positive services for women.
- The research showed that under-occupation by ethnic minorities was not as a result of any failing of the hostels themselves. However, further research needs to be undertaken to specifically examine the reasons/issues underlying under-occupancy, taking into account perception of offenders and knowledge of approved premises relayed to offender about the positive and what can be gained.
- Although childcare was not the main focus of the interviews, travelling distance to see children and family was mentioned by some women. It is suggested that community centres could be used effectively at a half-way point to avoid travelling long distances for offenders and children.
- A resource pack with a sound network of relevant contacts should be compiled as a contingency plan for those women who have refused move-on accommodation, or whose own accommodation fails to materialise.