

Research Paper

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**Female Offenders in a rural environment:**  
**Access to community support agencies**

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## **Female Offenders in a rural environment: access to community support agencies**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On interviewing a young female offender on her release from prison, I was interested to hear her remark that she had considered not returning to her home town in Cumbria because she wished to pursue a skill she had learnt in custody. She believed, correctly, that when released to her home address, there would not be provision for her to continue her specialised learning. This led me to consider to what extent living in a rural area impacts on the successful resettlement of female offenders and the specific disadvantages that they face. It occurred to me that if prisons are providing more varied and useful programmes for women, sentencers may decide that the offender's needs may be better met in custody rather than the community. Therefore a study into the role of community support agencies and their impact on the successful resettlement of female offenders would appear to be timely.

In addition to working with statutory agencies such as the Youth Offending Service, police, prisons and drug and alcohol action teams, the National Probation Service (NPS) works with a range of agencies in the voluntary and private sectors. Examples of formalised partnership working in the county of Cumbria include: accommodation services (Shelter), support for alcohol and substance misuse (Addaction, Cumbria Alcohol and Drug Advisory Services), advice in training and employment (Action for Employment, Rathbones) and financial management (Citizens' Advice Bureau).

This research examines how aspects of rural crime may differ from urban crime, and the particular difficulties female offenders in a rural environment face when complying with a court order or prison licence. The main focus of the research is the availability and accessibility of the aforementioned community based partnerships and agencies. It aims to highlight issues facing females and why they may be deterred from seeking assistance .

**Chapter One** presents a review of the relevant literature and places the project in context of the recently established National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the current initiatives that are focusing on the reduction in numbers of women held in custody and the reduction of female offending in general. There is a brief examination of the reasons why women are disadvantaged at points of contact within the criminal justice system, their reasons for offending, and how policies and practices affect them. A more advanced system of supervision in the community, as an alternative to the use of custodial sentences, will be examined, the main focus of which is the commissioning and use and availability of appropriate community support services for women. Probation led programmes as a means of facilitating resettlement are also considered, as some women interviewed for this research were attending programmes. The impact of the Gender Equality Duty (April 2007) on issues concerning women in the criminal justice system is timely and relevant to the research. The reasons why women are reluctant to engage with services in the community (Home Office, 2005, p.8), and the particular difficulties faced by female offenders in a rural environment, will be explored.

**Chapter Two** looks at the methodology of the research and this includes the specific questions asked of the women in order to establish the particular difficulties they face when accessing services in a rural area. The methodology explains the questions that I hope to answer and how the data was collected.

**Chapter Three** looks at the main agencies used throughout the county to help the resettlement of women offenders, the services they offer and their relationship to the National Probation Service. The findings of the research are then discussed in relation to the salient points of the literature review and how far Cumbria is prepared to extend the Together Women Programme.

**Chapter Four** contains the conclusions and recommendations.

## **Chapter One: The Literature Review**

### **Women commit fewer offences than men but receive disproportionately punitive sentences.**

Females commit significantly fewer recorded crimes than males, a fact that has been evidenced and is not a sole characteristic of the United Kingdom (Walklate, 2004, p. 4). Factors contributing to female offending, and the policies and practices that impact differently on female offenders, have been widely researched. Although women appear as offenders in all categories of offences, their offending is characterised less by risk issues than their material and social situations (Malloch, 2004. p. 294). Offences relating to drug use or property offences result in punitive disproportionate sentencing by the courts (Walklate, 2004. P. 189).

### **Women need to be treated as individuals.**

The rise in the female prison population is alarming and indicates a need for specialist, speedy treatment for female offenders. Responding to a 173 per cent increase in the women's prison population between the years 1992 and 2002 (Home Office, 2004a p. 6), the Government published a separate strategy for women offenders. An emphasis was placed on the need to reduce women's offending and to provide an alternative to custody. As a result, the Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP) was initiated under the newly created NOMS. It is the focus of WORP to make community interventions and accredited programmes more appropriate and accessible to females, possibly in a female-only environment (Home Office, 2004a, p. 7). In a criminal justice system designed by males for males (Fawcett, 2006, p. 6), WORP rejects the 'one size fits all' approach and focuses on providing a tailor made approach for each individual female (Home Office, 2005, p. 3). Such an individual approach is particularly appropriate for females living in rural areas, as access to community support agencies may be restricted and the needs and personal circumstances of these women may differ from their urban counterparts.

**Women may respond more positively to community support agencies if they are in a female-only environment.**

Although there are hundreds of organisations delivering services to offenders in custody and the community, very few deliver to women only (Clinks, undated p. 5). The 'Together Women Project' (TWP) is a resulting initiative from NOMS and the WORP Action Plan which is to establish pilot models, using expanded versions of existing projects and to monitor and evaluate them (Home Office, 2004a, p. 7). Some existing projects that are presented as examples of good practice are the Asha Centre in Worcester, the 218 Centre in Glasgow and the Calderdale Centre in Halifax. These centres aim to direct disadvantaged women to community resources and agencies, giving help on a practical basis in a safe, female-only environment. They are drop-in centres that offer a range of accredited educational and skills development programmes such as parent craft, computer skills, first aid and volunteer training. Relevant organisations work in-house and there are established links with community based agencies outside.

'Services catering exclusively for women offenders may not be sustainable outside big cities, due to limited numbers and long distances to travel. At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that such difficulties can be overcome and that with foresight, transport can be provided or satellite centres set up' (Fawcett, 2007, p. 52). The Fawcett Society is perhaps referring to

**The need for improvement in the provision of community support agencies**

The NPS has neglected the needs of female offenders and historically has lacked a clear and specific strategy for working with them (Worrall, 2002, cited by Nellis & Gelsthorpe, 2003, p. 231). The most recent good practice guide for delivering effective services for women offenders in the community was published by NOMS in November 2006, stating that 'the provision of services and guidance remains inconsistent nationally and there has been no recent national audit of service provision for women' (NOMS, 2006, p. 3). The TWP aims to redress this by using a radical, integrated approach to divert female offenders from custody and reduce the number of female offenders by addressing their multiple, complex and specific needs. By providing a one-stop-shop and an outreach service, the TWP proposes to bridge the gap in community provision for female offenders.

On 17 November 2005, Baroness Scotland, Minister of State for the Criminal Justice System and Offender Management, made a statement in relation to the series of deaths at the female prison HMP Styal and the work that is being done for women who come into contact with the criminal justice system. The statement resulted in the commissioning of a Review by Baroness Jean Corston in which she gives 'wholehearted support to the Minister's wish to extend the Together Women Programme across the country' (Carston, 2007, p. 63). The TWP, therefore is the clear and specific strategy for working with female offenders that historically has been lacking. It would appear that the time is ripe for development and expansion.

The NPS and the use of community support agencies and partnerships

If the TWP were to be established nationwide as an alternative to custody, effective working between multi-agency partnerships is integral to its implementation. There are multiple advantages of partnership working; for example the sharing of information and responsibilities and the opportunity to improve the quality of service provision. The NPS is used to working in this manner on a daily basis and has been required, since 1998, to improve offenders' training and employment opportunities by enlisting multi-agency agreements (Fletcher, 2001, cited by Rumgay, 2004, p. 124). The use of partnerships by the NPS has developed over the years; from the knowledge of local welfare agencies to officers within the probation service taking the initiative to establish working relationships with them (Rumgay, 2000, P. 22). Currently NOMS contestability intends to remove the power of commissioning services from local Probation Boards and give it to the Secretary of State who will then delegate to the Regional Offender Managers (ROMS).

An innovative approach to delivering community support services is required

It would appear therefore, that the delivery of community support services is about to receive more attention and emphasis.

Women and programmes

Diverting female offenders away from custody towards individual, tailor-made community sentences gives scope to the consideration of the provision of programmes. It is now recognised that cognitive behavioural programmes failed to consider women and other

minority groups by basing meta-analytic evaluations on white males only (Shaw & Hannah-Moffat, 2004, p. 108). Home Office research concludes that 'there is no clear evidence that cognitive deficits are causally linked to women's offending and no evidence that such programmes reduce women prisoners' re-conviction rates' (Home Office, 2006). Clearly programme developers, evaluation and teaching staff acknowledge that programme accreditation has been slow in addressing the needs of female offenders (Rex & Bottoms, 2003, p. 363) and that there has to be recognition of the diversity of outcome in terms of responsibility which differs significantly between males and females (Home Office, 2004, p. 6).

Women may do less well in mixed gender groups (Home Office, 2004b). An intensive programme for serious women offenders at the Women's Probation Centre in London produced a reduction in reconviction rates compared to the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS) predictions and no doubt strengthened the case for women only groups (Durrance & Ablitt, 2001, p. 247/8). The programme used a holistic approach, emphasising employment, training, empowerment and respectful relationships in a safe female-only environment. More recently the Real Women Acquisitive Offender Programme is an accredited Probation Service pilot programme designed to focus on acquisitive offending, the most common offence committed by females (Hedderman, 2000, cited by Home Office 2004b, p. 2). Recognising that offending behaviour programmes are designed for men and may not be transferable to women, it was the first programme to be developed specifically for women and delivered by women. It was developed on the basis of the best available evidence on what works with female offenders, with the understanding that the evidence base is not strong (Home Office, 2004b, p. 2). In addition, the National Probation Service (NPS), in conjunction with HM Prison Service, is developing accredited group work programmes such as CARE (Choices, Actions, Relationships and Emotions) which address the complex issues linked to women's offending (Fawcett, 2006, p.14).

**Many female offenders are also victims of abuse.**

'After several years of running a probation programme for women offenders, we identified that sixty per cent of women offenders were also victims of abuse' (Roberts, 2004, p. 22). This concept of dual identity (victims and offenders) has been given little attention until the

Fawcett Society's Gender and Justice Policy Network (GJPN) commissioned research on women's experience of victimisation and its impact on their offending. The conclusion was that many females in the criminal justice system have experiences of victimisation that may be linked to their involvement in crime (Rumgay, 2004a, p. 19). The Government's Strategy for Women's Offenders asserted a lack of evidence to support the contention that victimisation may contribute to offending behaviour 'seeming to imply that attention to the issue is unnecessary' (Rumgay, 2004, p. 5). Despite the significant number of female offenders who have suffered abuse, the indication that their victimisation may be linked to their offending behaviour is not sufficiently recognised to be classed as a criminogenic need on the Offender Assessment System (OASys). Such an omission, for whatever reason, may suggest another instance of neglecting the diverse needs of female offenders.

**Equality of treatment does not mean equality of outcome.**

The recent introduction of the Gender Equality Duty in April 2007 places a duty on public bodies, the criminal justice system included, to consider gender issues in a proactive manner, and to take responsibility to address inequality in the first instance. This would be achieved not by treating men and women in the same way: to do so may result in the inequality of outcome. Treatment is to be afforded according to need (Fawcett, 2006, p. 5). An example would be that at the point of arrest, women should be treated differently from men as they may have childcare responsibilities or may be pregnant. The NPS will be looking at employment practices and service delivery, as it is required to produce its own Gender Equality Scheme and action plan (Draft Guide, p. 45) but the Duty will also affect the services that are used by women offenders. Specifically, services will be required to examine their users and establish what the different needs of women are, how they can be met, whether services could be more effective if delivered to women, or men, only and who does not use the service and should do (NOMS, 2007, p. 3). This approach is appropriate for those females who have specific, individual needs that are related to living in a rural area.

The equality impact assessment on the National Probation Directorate draft Gender Strategy states that the strategy is very weak on consultation with other agencies and with women offenders themselves and what they think about key issues (Ionann Management Consultants). The assessment, based on interviews with NOMS, NPD and ROMS staff, and



with other organisations working with women offenders, states that referring women to other agencies is unlikely to work without some 'hand holding' or support because of the multiple needs of women and their low self-esteem'. Clearly when twenty per cent of women on remand are acquitted and about sixty per cent do not go on to serve a custodial sentence, bail and remand is an issue. The assessment also emphasises the need for expanding the Together Women Project to all regions and it focuses on inter-agency support for bail.

### **Rural areas**

There are 9.5 million people who live in rural England and of those, 0.6 million live in the sparser areas such as Cumbria, Cornwall, the Fens, Devon and Northumberland (Countryside Agency, 2005). According to the 'Rural and Urban Area Classification 2004',\* the definition of rural and urban areas is not based on socio-economic characteristics but on population densities across settlements or built up areas. When considering service delivery, there are variations in the perception of the term 'rural'. For example, someone living in a remote farm on the fells is not going to have the same opportunity for access to services as commuters living in a small village or hamlet within miles of the nearest large town. This research is looking at women who live some distance away from the nearest probation office and other services.

Some offences committed in the countryside can be seen as a feature of rural living, for example, wildlife crime (poaching and illegal pesticide poisoning) trespassing, criminal damage to crops and fields and theft of livestock or farming implements. Other offences are common to both urban and rural lifestyles, such as car crime and anti-social behaviour.

Alcohol and drug related offences are committed by inhabitants of farms and villages as well as people living in urban or inner city areas. A Home Office review indicates that drugs are increasingly available in rural areas (Home Office, 2003) with the nature and extent of misuse varying from area to area. It may be suggested that the closure of many rural police stations has a negative impact on crime in rural areas and that the increased use of CCTV in towns and cities results in more criminal activity in rural areas. However, it is reported that

in the last two years, most measures of crime have fallen in rural areas (Countryside Agency, 2005).

\*The Rural and Urban Classification Guide 2004 is the product of a joint project between the Countryside Agency, (CA), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Office for the National Statistics (ONS), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Welsh Assembly Government. The classification is updated on a five yearly basis.

A woman living in what appears to be an idyllic farm in picturesque countryside may be dependent on alcohol, drugs, or may be a victim of domestic violence as much as her urban counterpart. Her isolation and her lack of contact with the larger community may put her at further disadvantage. If she is a victim of domestic violence, there may be few people to hear, notice or report any incidents. If she is caring for children and the abuse comes to light, both the mother and the children are disadvantaged by their rural habitat. A report from Save the Children and the Countryside Agency identified serious gaps in the provision of services for children living in rural areas, in particular, housing and education and a lack of awareness of services available. The subsequent disruption in education and the loss of established friendships for children housed in emergency accommodation is particularly distressing (The Countryside Agency, 2003).

For a female who is alcohol or drug dependent, any advantages of engaging with agencies may be overshadowed by the practicalities of accessibility, transport and lack of nearby communal support. In addition, women may be reluctant to access services if they believe that the person answering the phone is a member of their own community and familiar to them.

The Research Development and Statistics Directorate published a study of the (NOMS) North-West Pathfinder Project and stated significant financial implications for Cumbria Probation Board because of the time and distance involved in travelling to any one prison for sentence planning meetings and reviews (Home Office, 2005). The impact of rurality on probation practice is not confined to the role of offender manager, but has wid ,

implications for the quality and accessibility of service provision for female (and male) offenders struggling to comply with requirements of licences or court orders.

## **Conclusion**

The literature review has revealed certain points of particular interest to this research;

In comparison with males, females in the criminal justice system are disadvantaged. This gives scope for innovative methods for improved treatment. The 'Together Women Programme', with the outreach system, can be used as a model for community based treatment in a rural area, with the development of a more sophisticated provision of services by community based agencies.

An alternative and suitable trend of sentencing in the community is needed to halt the ongoing dramatic increase in the population of women in custody. Women in rural areas who are given custodial sentences are located in prisons many miles from home. Their distance away from families has a negative impact on childcare and relationships. An improved system of community sentencing would reduce the unfair disadvantage that children and other family members of female offenders face when living in a rural environment.

On the whole, community provision for female offenders has been inadequate. The alternative trend of sentencing would look at improving community-based provision for each individual female. This study looks at the unique needs of women in a rural environment and how community provision can be designed to meet those needs.

There are indications that women's experiences of victimisation can influence their offending behaviour. Females in a rural area are doubly disadvantaged if, for example, they may be socially isolated in addition to being victimised.

Programmes for women only are considered to be advantageous when aiming for the reduction of re-offending. Such programmes need to be available and accessible to all female offenders.

Drop-in centres and outreach services are showing encouraging results and this may be an appropriate model to follow when treating female offenders in a rural environment.

It will be necessary to conduct gender impact assessments when considering the allocation of resources and the commissioning of services for females in a rural environment. The circumstances of women on remand in a prison very far from their rural home should be taken into account.

Research demonstrates that probation practice in a largely rural county such as Cumbria requires more commitment financially and time-wise than in an urban area. It follows that other services will find similar obstacles.

## **Chapter Two Methodology**

It has been established that a rural setting has its own problems when delivering or receiving services. The intention of this study is as follows;

- To hear about the difficulties in attending community based agencies, and the services they deliver, first hand from individuals.
- To ascertain any reason or circumstance that prevents the women from accessing community based agencies.
- To assess the level of knowledge and use the women have of these agencies.
- To assess the women's confidence in agencies that offer community support.
- To assess how far women in a rural/small community feel there is a stigma in attending community support agencies.
- To identify any main areas of need.

### **Demographics**

A snapshot of female offenders on community orders, or licence, in Cumbria was taken on 1February 2007. Information was obtained from OASys and then further details were checked on the Case Recording and Management System (CRAMS). The check revealed one hundred and ninety-five female offenders in the community in Cumbria. There were one hundred and forty-five females on community orders of varying lengths and intensity, thirty-five on suspended sentence orders and thirteen

on licence. Across the county there were twelve females in custody. Those females who were given a Community Order with a single requirement of Unpaid Work were not included because access to services, the focus of this research, is not within the sphere of this intervention. The largest clusters of female offenders were, in descending order of number, and town population, in Carlisle, Barrow-in-Furness, Workington, Whitehaven and Kendal; the five Cumbrian towns that have probation offices which are open full time. Forty-one females lived more than ten miles from the office where they reported. Eight females lived further afield, in rural areas with limited public transport .

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was a tick box exercise designed to initiate a discussion and contained the following statements for consideration and discussion;

- 1 I attend Probation but use another agency as well.
- 2 I knew about this agency before I came to Probation.
- 3 Probation referred me to this agency/someone else referred me/I referred myself.
- 4 Attending the agency is important to me.
- 5 I wish I had attended the agency before I came to probation.
- 6 Attending the agency is not easy for me because....
- 7 I knew enough about the agency to feel confident about attending my first appointment.
- 8 I knew where to go for my first appointment.
- 9 I was nervous about my first appointment.
- 10 Before my first appointment I was given the name of my key worker.
- 11 I have a good relationship with my key worker.
- 12 I would prefer to have a female key worker.
- 13 I prefer to see the same person at each appointment.
- 14 I am happy to attend this agency because...
- 15 I am given enough time at appointments.
- 16 When attending appointments;
  - a) I have no problem arriving on time

b) I have difficulty arriving on time because....

- 17 Childcare arrangements make attendance difficult.
- 18 I have support from family and friends when I work with this agency.
- 19 Support from family and friends is important to me.
- 20 I do not like other people to know that I attend this agency.
- 21 Seeing other service users in the waiting room bothers me.
- 22 I would prefer to attend an agency for women only.
- 23 I need more support than the agency is able to provide.
- 24 I have made progress since my first appointment.
- 25 Overall, my involvement with the agency has been a positive experience.

### **The Women**

A total of eighteen women were interviewed in the probation office where they reported. I interviewed five female offenders in Carlisle, eight in Barrow-in-Furness, four in Whitehaven and one in Workington. While interviewing a female for parole in HMP Drake Hall, I was able to apply the principles of the research, so she too is included. The questionnaire was delivered only to women I interviewed and was used as a basis for further discussion.

Permission had to be sought and granted from the Senior Probation Officer, in whose office I wanted to conduct the interviews. The supervising Probation Officer, and the interviewees, kindly granted consent to participating in the research. I interviewed the women at the time of their National Standards appointment, after each had completed the session with her probation officer. Distance and time were both issues, explaining why more women were interviewed in the Barrow office, where I work, and none in the Kendal office, where at the time of my research, no women were reporting when I could make the journey to Kendal. Among the participants, there was a diversity of ages, some were mothers and some were employed. However, all attended agencies other than probation, all came from a rural background and all described their ethnicity as white British.

The women had a combination of mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse and accommodation problems.

Referrals to the agencies came from a number of sources. Although probation referred four of the women, other referrals came from the police, a solicitor, a GP, prison, and the local

council. Some women referred themselves, having seen the agencies advertised or having heard about them through friends. The 2007 Fawcett Report (p. 49), when considering women-offender specific provision, stated that a low number of referrals from criminal justice agencies may threaten the sustainability of these agencies, particularly outside large metropolitan areas.

### **The Agencies**

**Cumbria Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service (CADAS)** employs 25 full-time staff with 76 volunteers throughout the county. Training courses for volunteers are held regularly in the five centres in Cumbria.

**Cumbria Drug and Alcohol Action Team (CDAAT)** is a partnership between many agencies and is responsible for delivering the national drug strategy in Cumbria.

**North Cumbria Addictive Behaviour Services (NCABS)** is a National Health Service organisation directing people to the services they require.

**Addaction** is a leading drugs charity that runs structured day-care services that include assessment, group work, and liaison with National Health Service (NHS) services and other providers of drug and alcohol education, treatment and counselling.

**Turning Point** is a social care organisation in England and Wales. Its intention is to work holistically and provide services for people with drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues and learning disabilities. Some services specialise in the government backed employment scheme 'Progress2Work' and there are also supported accommodation schemes. In Cumbria, the main service Turning Point provides is the Drug and Alcohol Service. This agency comprises of a Criminal Justice Team which offers a prison link service and an arrest referral service. Also, in the north of the county, Allerdale Day Services provides assessment, one to one support, group programmes and alternate therapy to the people in this part of Cumbria. The parent carer service provides support on a one to one, or group basis, to parents or carers of people with drug or alcohol problems.

**Shelter** is an accommodation agency that gives support and advice to offenders with accommodation problems, with a focus on the prevention of homelessness. Access to Shelter is generally through the 'surgeries' that are run in most offices in Cumbria.

**Impact Housing** is a charitable organisation involved in many community based services such as recycling but is mainly occupied with the regeneration of communities and affordable housing.

### **Chapter Three Research Findings**

The main reason the women gave for attending agency appointments was that they knew they were getting the help that they need. Specifically, they identified talking to someone who they knew would listen, and being treated with respect, as being most helpful. Non-judgemental attitudes from key workers were appreciated and 'being able to say how I'm feeling at the time without question of how, why and when' was valued. One research participant said that 'it's good counselling and good information'. Another, who had to travel some distance in order to attend an agency and a probation programme in Maryport, said that she was training to be a counsellor herself and was co-chairing another group nearer to her home. Therefore her motivation in attending was not only for her own benefit but also to help other people. Another interviewee said that her primary motivation was to give clear tests in order to 'show the court that I am not using drugs so that I have more chance of getting my children back'. Another two said that they wanted to 'get off drugs for the sake of my child'. Only one female, while acknowledging the benefits of accessing the agency, said 'I have to attend, it's a court order'.

#### **The Positives**



All the women had positive experiences of using agencies. Without exception, the interviewees reported making progress since having first attended the agencies and also having a good relationship with their key workers. All women agreed with the following statements;

'Overall, my involvement with the agency has been a positive experience'.

'I was given enough information about this agency to feel confident about attending my first appointment'.

'I am given enough time at appointments'.

'Attending the agency is important to me'.

Every interviewee knew the name of her key worker in advance and knew where to go for her first appointment. There was no doubt about the benefits of engaging with agencies and all women were confident when speaking about their association with the particular agency they were attending.

Two females, who had significant travelling time to attend probation, said that their officers had helped them to see that there was a lot of help available. Both had experienced feelings of isolation, living in rural areas, and were unaware of the extent of services available. Both felt that a lot of women living in a rural area would be unaware of these services. One of these two females said that she 'loved coming to probation' because it gave her the chance to talk to another female about her own circumstances. She valued the contact with her officer and felt that accessing another agency was not needed because 'probation was good enough'. Another female, from a small village, had experienced hostility from people in surrounding areas. She welcomed the opportunity to meet new people without the burden of being known by the label she had been given, and which had perpetuated in a small community.

### **The Difficulties**

All but two of the women interviewed were nervous about attending their first appointment at an agency and one female described herself as 'very worried'. Various coping strategies were used to overcome apprehension. One participant said that she was 'so poorly that I knew I had to go'. Another female said that coming to the city (Carlisle) and 'liking a day out'

was an incentive to attend. Some females were accompanied by partners or friends for support. Others realised that on balance, the benefits of attending outweighed their anxiety.

Although all the women valued help from various agencies, some said there were obstacles to attending. The following difficulties were cited;

Distance, train times and travel arrangements, all of which present a significant challenge for those living in a rural environment.

Childcare and school holidays.

Employment commitments.

Feeling uncomfortable about seeing other agency users in the waiting room.

Avoiding particular service users known to the women. One participant in the survey said that she purposely chose early morning slots to avoid certain people who she knew attended the agency.

Unexpectedly recognising other agency users in the waiting room and being confronted by them. One female, who recognised her father's friend, said that the encounter left her feeling defensive about her own involvement with the agency, while at the same time shocked and surprised at his. Such encounters are more likely in smaller, rural communities.

Being seen entering the agency's premises and being afraid that family members will find out about the individual's problem with drugs or alcohol after having tried to disguise it.

Seeing people in the waiting room who may offer drugs, which would tempt the individual to relapse.

Not wanting to be around other people who drink for fear of being drawn into the drinking culture again.

Feeling ashamed of the social stigma which is associated with attending the agency.

One participant said that she had been attending the agency for a significant amount of time and that she felt there was a limited amount of help that could be offered to her at this stage. Two females reported discovering they were pregnant, saying that this gave them

sufficient motivation to stop drinking alcohol and they felt they no longer needed to attend the agency.

The Fawcett Report (July 2007 p.) suggests that services for women only may foster safety and a sense of community and enable staff to develop expertise. Most women in the survey had not thought of this scenario and considered separate service provision for women to be unnecessary saying 'it does not bother me'. Only two women stated that they would prefer to attend a female only agency because they would feel safer and better supported.

#### Delivering services in a rural area from agency workers' perspectives

Key-workers from various agencies were interviewed in their place of work or by telephone and the problems of delivering a service to offenders in rural areas were discussed. The agencies acknowledged the difficulties of distance, travel, employment and childcare and made efforts to provide an outreach service. Those agencies not belonging to the National Health Service, reported the biggest difficulty being the struggle to find places to interview people. Probation offices were accommodating when the rooms were free but sometimes they were not, and in any case, unless the client was subject to a court order, rooms at probation offices would not be accessed.

#### Turning Point and Cumbria Drug and Alcohol Services

Interviews with Turning Point key workers highlighted the struggle to find convenient and appropriate places in which to meet service users. Turning Point's office in Workington reported using premises owned by Barnardo Children's Homes and medical group health centres for their outreach work. In the south of the county, however, requests for the use of such premises were often refused. One member of staff recalled that on one occasion, after having been let down at the last minute, she completed an assessment on a car park wall. On other occasions, as a last resort, she conducted the session in a coffee shop, with herself and the client seated out of earshot of other customers, and with the price of the coffee being met by her. The meeting became a regular occurrence at the same time each week, a

certain coffee shop being particularly obliging, possibly because of the proclaimed values and ethics that the establishment was striving to uphold and pass on to its customers. Public tolerance and acceptance in this situation is also an issue. It could be argued that such arrangements are preferable to no contact at all, but the issues of confidentiality and anonymity are crucial. In addition to the possibility of conversations being overheard, workers and service users are easily recognisable in small communities and the purpose of their meetings is plain for all to see.

Some key workers thought that making home visits would be preferable to continually seeking suitable premises in various parts of the county; a task that can be costly in time and money. Some service users had requested home visits because of difficulties with distance and travel. It was reported that in one week, two females had requested home visits because they were suffering from panic attacks or phobias. However, health and safety restrictions, staff resources, and the lone worker's policy, make home visits by Turning Point staff prohibitive. While making home visits to females who request them may prove to be more convenient for the worker and the service user, it is recognised that home visits in rural locations may also compromise the individual's confidentiality. Probation officers and staff from other agencies would be more noticeable arriving at an individual's home in a small community than in a built up area in a town or city.

Whether outreach working, or home visiting, the implication for staff is similar in that it involves significant travel around the county. A number of agency users (or, importantly, would-be agency users) are employed in the hotel business in remote areas in the county. They have live-in accommodation and a low income and do not receive subsidised travel for attending appointments with the Cumbria Drug and Alcohol Service (although they receive assistance for attending probation appointments).

Turning Point workers make appointments to see females within school times. They know that they have to be flexible in arranging times and places for sessions. Following recent research by Addaction, which states that in some areas, half of all the drug dependent adults treated have dependent children (Templeton and Swinford, 2007), agency staff are now concerned about the children and an increasingly important issue is getting parents into treatment because of the effect their drug or alcohol use is having on their children. It is

felt that there are a lot more women who would benefit from Turning Point services if these women are aware of the agencies and if they agree to treatment.

### **The Cumbria Drug and Alcohol Team and the Drug Intervention Programme**

It is suggested by a worker for Cumbria's Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) that there is a difference in the characteristics of the agency users, depending on where in the county the user lives. It is noticed, for example, that in the larger towns of Carlisle, Workington, Penrith, and Kendal, the team has a regular turnover of female (and male) agency users. When an offender is given a Court Order to complete a Drug Reduction and Rehabilitation (ORR) Requirement, the commencement target for the DIP team is achievable. However, in the town of Barrow-in-Furness, which geographically is set out on a limb, the drug population is largely static and many service users have been known to the team for a number of years. New faces to the drug team are more the exception than the rule, making it difficult to achieve commencement and completion targets because clients are largely in continuous contact.

Cumbria's Drug Intervention Programme, whose workers provide 1:1 contact with male and female offenders and liaise with their Offender Manager, regarding progress and compliance, was put out to tender by the Drug and Alcohol Team in late 2006. The contract was awarded to Crime Reduction Initiative (CRI), a charitable organisation who will continue to undertake Drug Reduction and Rehabilitation (DRR) assessments. At the time of writing it is understood that CRI possibly will not be delivering the 1:1 contact that the care coordinators previously provided. The new arrangements will have implications for Offender Managers, as it is understood that they will be charged with the tasks of drawing up diaries and following up feedback and attendance. From the perspective of the female offender, the loss of 1:1 contact with the care coordinator may have a detrimental effect. The following statements were made by women with complex needs who live in rural areas and who said that they were happy to attend the agency they were registered with because;

'I think it can help you by talking'.

'Talking gets you thinking more about why you got into trouble'.

'If I know I'm seeing somebody, I don't want to let them down'.

Women who travel from rural areas to keep agency appointments are putting in a significant amount of time and effort. As all participants of this research agree that attending the agency is important to them, and that they have a good relationship with their key worker, it follows that if 1:1 contact time is reduced or withdrawn, the women may feel unsupported and devalued. It may be concluded that if the women are already feeling isolated within a remote rural setting, that sense of isolation will increase if there is little chance of maintaining a relationship with the person from whom they seek, and expect, human contact, understanding and support.

### **Addaction**

Staff report difficulties in finding accommodation that is user-friendly, welcoming and accessible. One agency worker reports, on one occasion, sitting for hours in a village hall with no-one attending, an obvious waste of time and money resources. It is the worker's opinion that the village hall does not provide sufficient anonymity and that the women fear identification. Also the worker feels that there is insufficient awareness of the service she is representing. Women service users are under represented and it could be that their unique problems of shame, difficulties and isolation are more keenly felt and largely unmet.

### **Shelter**

The issue of rurality and the county's dependence on the tourist trade has a direct impact on this agency providing a service. One Shelter worker cites problems in areas surrounding Lake Windermere, where seasonal workers in hotels can lose their job and accommodation within the space of a week. Another trouble spot is the Kendal area, where the tourist industry impacts on the rise in property and rental prices to the extent that private landlords prefer to take seasonal workers and not referrals from the DSS. There is a shortage of council properties, even for those of priority need, resulting in homeless people living in tents along the riverside.

Staff working for the various agencies, including probation, who live and work in a rural county face different dilemmas from their urban counterparts. An agency worker's knowledge of the geographical area, schools, amenities, community events and local background can contribute to a feeling of trust and understanding between the agency worker and the agency user. Following this, the agency user may show an interest in the agency worker's own identity and background. It is not unusual, for example, for a worker to be asked where s/he lives. This is a question not only asked out of the natural curiosity which stems from living in an environment where daily contact is with people who are known and familiar. It is also a desire to 'place' the worker in order to assess the worker's reliability, and professionalism and to estimate the worker's levels of commitment and confidentiality. The service user may also be making some assessment about her own extent of compliance and engagement, depending on how far she feels the worker will understand her individual circumstances, her place in the community and the specific problems of rural living. 'Placing' is a common feature of work in rural areas and small towns (Pugh, 2007, p. 152) and is not likely to be encountered in the more general atmosphere of urban anonymity.

Already being acquainted with the service user and her extended family is not an unusual situation for workers in a largely rural county. A relationship where the offender and the worker are known to each other can restrict the worker's leisure opportunities. For example, one worker said that she would not go into her local pub, the only one in the village, because the person she supervised was a regular there and the worker did not want a social situation that would encroach on professional boundaries. The same problem of familiarity also may be assumed on the part of the offender, who may be reluctant to divulge personal information and problems to someone who is known in the community.

### **Accredited Programmes**

At the time of research, there were ten women attending accredited programmes throughout the county. In the north of the county one female was attending Think First. In the south, there were three attending Think First and two attending Addressing Substance Related Offending (ASRO). The remaining four women, in the west of Cumbria were all

attending the Drink Impaired Drivers (DIDS) programme. The women attending the DIDS programme recounted the following difficulties;

);;- Attending the 0105 programme in the west of the county presented significant problems with transport, especially as driving was not an option because of loss of licence. One female reported a round trip of four and a half hours, if she travelled by public transport. Taxis were provided for return journeys and one female reported that she was given a lift home by a member of programme staff. (However, this gesture was offered not because of transport difficulties but to avoid passing a store where alcohol could be purchased, as the female was experiencing cravings during the sessions and thought the programme was going to trigger a relapse).

Anxieties about group work.

The lack of knowledge and understanding from family and friends, and the wider public, about issues surrounding alcohol dependency.

Another female had moved areas because of her work in the catering and hotel industry and had joined another programme in a different area of the county.

One woman reported being the only female on the group. She did not see this as problematic, she said that she felt comfortable and was treated with respect by the male group members. She was living in a rural area and knew that this was wrong for her and that her feelings of isolation were triggers to potential relapse into alcohol misuse. Her probation officer was helping her to relocate, so that she could attend Alcoholics Anonymous.



## **Chapter Four Conclusions and Recommendations**

Conducting the research has led me to conclude that female offenders in rural areas have similar needs as those in the towns or cities but are disadvantaged in comparison. In addition, it cannot be assumed that what is successful in the town or city will be successful in dispersed villages and settlements. Specifically, females in a rural area are disadvantaged in the following ways:

- Females who are employed in hotels have seasonal work and transient accommodation. With regular employment and accommodation changes it is difficult to meet agency workers and sustain regular contact with any one agency.
- Continuity and stability of contact meetings with key workers from various agencies is difficult to sustain. This is because agencies have difficulties in finding suitable accommodation which would cater for service users living in remote areas. Choice of accommodation impacts upon the offender as the venue may be too public, too distant or unsuitable because it is arranged on a temporary basis.
- Female offenders attending accredited programmes have further to travel and the time taken to complete the journeys make attendance more onerous and compliance more difficult.
- The relationship between an offender and an agency worker takes on a different perspective in a rural environment. Issues of confidentiality and familiarity are more prominent than in the relative anonymity of an urban environment. Both parties may have to be prepared for potential social contact and how to deal with it.
- Female offenders are aware that attending a drug and alcohol agency may expose them to other service users that are known to them. The lack of anonymity is a disincentive to attend because the females fear stigma and being judged in a small community. One female, subject to an ASBO, believed that had she lived in a city

centre, her reputation and behaviour would not have attracted the same degree of attention and condemnation as it did in the rural countryside .

- Those female offenders who are living in a rural environment and who are victims of domestic abuse are doubly disadvantaged. They are psychologically damaged because of the abuse they receive and they are geographically isolated because of the difficulty in accessing emergency services and specialist agencies. Not only do the women have less access to support and information they are also conscious that they are probably known to the people providing the services.

### **Recommendation 1**

The first recommendation is that there is a specific venue that caters for an outreach programme (a one-stop shop). This is a scheme that responds to the needs of women in both rural and urban areas but also develops a service that responds to the specific needs of females who live in a remote area. The proposed outreach service would overcome the barriers experienced by women who are in need of professional agencies but have difficulty in accessing them. The women would not be restricted to a set appointment at a certain venue that is problematic for the agency to arrange and difficult and time consuming for the females to reach. The service would be adaptable to the needs of females living in a rural environment. It would take into account employment and childcare issues and the females' sense of personal identity and feeling of belonging in the rural community.

In essence it would take as its model the Together Women Project in Salford, extending it to provide 'a 'virtual' one-stop-shop, with outreach workers going out to engage with women, assess needs and coordinate access to services' as proposed by Baroness Corston (The Carston Report, 2007 p. 63).

Designated female offender managers in the north, south and west of the county could take a caseload of female offenders only and be responsible for the treatment of all women in that area. The offender manager's duties would include assessment at pre-sentence stage, sentence planning, facilitating links with mainstream agencies, supervision, home visits, and reviews. The female offender manager could take the role of a link worker, as outlined by the Revolving Doors Agency (2006), working with individuals who require support to engage with appropriate statutory and non-statutory services

The outreach/link workers could liaise with the CPS and the courts to identify the females at the earliest opportunity. Women who are in custody and due for release could also be contacted. Following a referral from either the female herself or agencies such as courts, police, probation, housing, health, domestic violence, job centres, children's agencies, training agencies, drug and alcohol agencies, the female would be assessed and a holistic, achievable support plan would be designed for her specific needs. As progress is made, the goals can be reduced and the plan reviewed and then completed when change is achieved.

The worker would be visiting the female at her home and therefore, if she is working on her own, a robust lone worker's policy would have to be established and a risk assessment undertaken. Once boundaries regarding vehicles, properties and venues have been agreed between the worker and the agency user, then the member of staff is responsible for not putting herself at any risk.

### **Benefits**

- 1 It provides a suitable and appropriate community alternative to imprisonment for women who have multiple and complex needs and who are convicted of non-violent offences. Women can therefore be diverted from imprisonment and remand.
- 2 More women will be able to complete probation orders and programmes.
- 3 The support that the women receive will increase their self-confidence and self-image. In turn this will lead to better decision-making and a constructive and offence-free lifestyle.

### **Recommendation 2**

It is recommended that the service to women is delivered by women. This is not to undermine the value of appropriate and positive male role models, but to offer women the opportunity to increase self-confidence, make their own choices and decisions and develop supportive friendships. The females would experience a joined-up network of support which would develop a method of working with women that looks at each individual and her own underlying anxieties. Each female is treated as an individual according to her own needs and

problems and is encouraged to plan her own life instead of accepting that she is a victim of circumstance with no control over her own life.

### **Benefits**

- 1 This is to engender a feeling of security and a sense of community as demonstrated by the successful women-only run community centres of Asha and Calderdale.
- 2 A sense of empowerment and of achieving potential is engendered in a positive and reassuring manner.
- 3 Women in rural areas are given the opportunity to have regular contact with other females, thus hopefully reducing their sense of isolation. Some of the interviewees for this research stated that they saw no advantage in single gender services, but they had neither experienced nor considered them. They may be surprised to realise the extent of unanimous support from all who do access gender specific services and the benefits to females.

### **Recommendation 3**

The third recommendation is that women who receive custodial sentences for non-violent offences are not imprisoned hundreds of miles from home but are contained in a small residential unit where they are able to access services from the outreach programme. One female from Cumbria was interviewed in an open prison some considerable distance from her home. She reported feeling depressed and discriminated against when other female inmates, who lived nearby, were able to pay home visits on day release, while she was not. In addition, her relatives from Cumbria are only able to make infrequent visits because of the distance.

### **Benefits**

- 1 Family ties are retained. The women can be supported with parenting and relationship issues.
- 2 There is a reduction in the amount of accommodation problems on release.

- 3 This arrangement may lead to the reduction of the need for non-violent women to be sentenced to imprisonment in the first place.

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