

Third Sector Community Services for Women Offenders

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- Corston Independent Funders Coalition group established 2009 to realise recommendations of Corston Review
- Funding of one-stop-shop services in the community for women offenders and for women at risk of offending
- Third sector partnerships to bid for MOJ/CIFC moneys

Evaluation of CIFC 'One Stop Shops' for women diverted from the criminal justice system

- Multi method evaluation of six women's community services
- Collecting three lots of monitoring data
- Interviews with staff, stake holders and service users
- Examination of models of partnership and joint working

Research role

- Possible selection bias research subjects
- Researcher can become ‘embedded’ ,
loss of critical eye
- Blurring research/advocacy

The need for evidence?

‘protracted piloting and evaluation of an extended network of women’s centres is not necessary because the evidence is already clearly visible and accepted by government [that].. community centres will help many women stop re-offending in a way in which prison has manifestly failed to do so’ (Corston, 2007, 63)

Holism vs risk management

What we really need to do is to evidence that these project really are having an impact ‘not just ooh we’re doing all these lovely things’ but what is the impact on offending, what is the impact on custody’ (NOMS manager)

We’re here to support the women, to help them .. address their reoffending behaviour yes, but to look at what’s causing it really in a more holistic way I think ..you know it’s more of a holistic approach (programme manager)

Promotion of desistance by:

- Addressing links between women's offending and social exclusion
- Mobilising of women-centred, human capital
- Focus on women's common experiences
- Capacity of women's organisation for **bonding social capital** within the organisation and **bridging social capital** with other organisation may be key for service users (Chenall, Hall and Smith, 2010)

Range of Service Models

- Women's community project in established women's centre
- Creation of dedicated women's centre-based service
- 'virtual' one stop shop service

Negative impacts of tendering process

- Opportunistic bids led by organisations without background in providing services to women or to offenders
- Competition between women's voluntary sector organisations
- Inadequate premises

- Short lead-in times
- Inflexible targets for intervention before the service was in place
- Year by year funding arrangement creates insecurity for staff

Insecurity

You have to manage anxiety and chaos when you're actually here to contain chaos and anxiety for women (Service Manager)

Working with Probation

- Strategic partnerships, probation staff on project steering groups
- Operational partnerships – colocation of probation staff in women's project
- Joint meetings, information sharing, clear division of labour
- Danger of loss of identity

I used to do things like that

In the past I used to do things like that, liaising with the benefits and housing departments and, you know, gas and electric - things like that but we haven't got the time to do that anymore. I think the service is, as you say, bridging the gap, the work I used to do with women or men on order that we aren't given the time to do anymore
(Probation Service Officer)

Division of labour

Although [it] is quite a useful service, in terms of the work that we do, it's different because we are tasked with the role of protecting the public and managing the risk that offenders present (Senior Probation Officer)

Lack of integration women's service

to be honest for probation if the Service wasn't here it wouldn't have a huge impact because they don't work with a lot of our offenders. Having said that, the work they do do, the women they work with, it is good quality work but it wouldn't have a huge impact, we would be able to pick it up (Probation Team Leader)

I wasn't the only one

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 a lot of women that come in here with all different types of situations and you're not going to be judged

(Sarah)

Comparisons with attending probation

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 (Melanie)

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

(Sunila)

Conclusions

- Need to be wary of over-identifying with the research subjects
- Negative impacts of the creation of a market in integrated services for women offenders
- Built in insecurity in funding arrangements
- Tensions between criminal justice and needs based model of working
- *Bonding* and *bridging* capacity may be key in generating social capital for service users