



**TOGETHER WOMEN
PROJECT**

***“When I get in the lift to come here, it is like coming
up to heaven”***

Rose: TWP Service User

An Evaluation of the Salford Together Women Project

March 2009

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This report would not have been possible without the willingness of the women at the Salford Together Women Project to talk to me so openly about their lives and experiences. My thanks go to them and I wish them happy and fulfilling lives in the future.

My thanks also to the staff and volunteers who made me feel so welcome at the Centre and patiently answered all my numerous questions.

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SUMMARY

0.1 The Salford Together Women Project was established in 2007 as one of five demonstration sites funded by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) until March 2009. The five projects were delivered in two Regional Offender Manager regions, two in the North West (including Salford) and three in Yorkshire and Humber. An external national evaluation across the five demonstration sites, conducted by Leicester University, reports in the Autumn 2009.

THE SALFORD PROJECT

0.2 The project was set up to support a more effective community-based response to women's offending by developing a holistic approach that diverted women offenders and women at risk of offending into appropriate services to meet their needs. The specific aims of the TWP programme were:

- To reduce women's offending and re-offending
- To influence decision-making by Criminal Justice Service partners positively to reduce the number of women given custodial sentences or remanded in custody and increase the number of women diverted from prosecution
- To increase the number of women accessing and being sustained in appropriate community provision
- To reduce the number of avoidable family breakdowns (specifically in relation to children)

0.3. 409 women¹ have been assessed and support plans agreed. The women are referred from a broad range of over 60 agencies, including Drugs and Alcohol Services, Social Services, Mental Health Teams, Homeless Hostels and Supported Tenancies. Over 10 per cent were self-referrals. The Salford Together Women Project works with the most vulnerable women; the average number of issues presented by each service user is four. Alongside offending behaviour these may include: substance misuse, accommodation, debts and benefits, family and relationship issues, domestic abuse and education and training. 60 per cent of the women have mental health problems, and there are 50 current Safeguarding Children cases.

0.4 The Salford Together Women Project combines a caring, respectful, non-judgemental atmosphere with a structure of clear boundaries and expectations. There are clearly defined policies and procedures on acceptable behaviour as well as written statements about rights and responsibilities for the clients and staff. The staff team are skilled at creating a positive culture, within this structured environment, and the approach is entirely woman-centred with the focus of the interventions being on the individual woman.

¹ Figures for end of February 2009

EVALUATION APPROACH

0.5 Throughout the two-year phase of TWP, there was high quality monitoring data collected, covering the breadth of the project and giving a thorough overview (appendix B). The evaluation was able to use this data and therefore the decision was taken to use qualitative methods to look more in depth at the project with a purposive² sample of clients. This would enable understanding of what worked, for which women, in what circumstances and why. The justification for this qualitative approach was to understand and illustrate the in-depth experiences of the women using the project, and whilst not intended to generalise the findings, patterns did emerge which were consistent and plausible.

0.6 A focus group, face to face narrative interviews, observations and conversations³ at the Centre were carried out (appendix D and E). Stakeholder interviews and document reviews were also held. A survey was carried out with 18 women users of the Centre, using an unstructured questionnaire, which the women completed by themselves or in discussion with TWP staff. The information from the questionnaires underpinned the data from the face-to-face interviews. The data was triangulated⁴ and analysed using a thematic approach.

OUTCOMES

0.7 The project achieved the original objectives of the NOMS project. There was evidence that it had reduced women's offending and re-offending, influenced the Criminal Justice Service, increased the number of women in community provision and reduced the number of family breakdowns. In addition the project was successful in identifying the need for additional services for those women who are at risk, or vulnerable in other ways, to social exclusion.

0.8 Four project outcomes have been identified from the data. These outcome patterns emerged from an analysis of the data and provide supporting evidence that the project's actions created change. The outcomes are:

- Reducing isolation and creating active citizens
- Moving on: support not dependency
- Reduced vulnerability through learning coping strategies
- Improved life chances- routes to training, employment and parenting

² Purposive sampling is a deliberate non-random method of sampling, which aims to sample a group of people with a particular characteristic, usually in qualitative research design, Bowling, A (2006)

³ Conversation sampling is a method of analysing societal attitudes by listening techniques, and is particularly useful when sampling in public places. See Ann Bowling (2006) and Silvermann, D (1993)

⁴ Triangulation uses multiple (triangulated) methods to enhance the validity of the data.

THE WAY FORWARD

0.9 The Salford Together Women Project has an established structure and, during its two-year demonstration phase, it has created a number of successful local partnerships and relationships with other organisations. Therefore, the project has a firm base on which to move forward and develop in the future.

0.10 Currently, it is not mandatory for women in the Criminal Justice System to attend TWP in place of other sentences. There is no evidence to support either way whether mandatory attendance would damage the ethos of the project, which aims to treat the women 'as women' and not as 'offenders' and build up their trust and confidence. However, it may increase the attendance of offending women if the courts took that approach. This area would benefit from further research in order that recommendations could be made in the future.

0.11 Salford Together Women project has demonstrated a high need for its service and serves a large number of vulnerable women who share a common set of experiences. The project needs to continue monitoring its referral criteria in order to maximise the inclusion of women who are at risk. This will ensure the focus stays on reaching those women who has most to gain from it.

0.12 The gender-specific nature of the project is essential and should continue. Women were aware that they needed to 're-enter' a society that includes men and some wanted relationships with men, but for many their experiences have meant they needed to rebuild trust and self-esteem before that could happen.

0.13 Accommodation and housing issues are an important aspect in supporting the women that use the Centre. This is an area where further development would be beneficial as this is a complex area with multiple providers. A dedicated TWP housing worker, who combines specialist knowledge of the needs of TWP clients with housing advice, could act as an essential link with the housing sector across the city.

0.14 Mentoring needs to be developed further with the introduction of a formal Together Women peer mentor scheme as well as increased utilisation of volunteer mentors by the project key workers. Mentoring through peers and volunteers offers positive role models and can provide a crucial hand holding process for those women who are towards the end of key worker intervention and ready for integration into the community.

0.15 Women who attend the Centre are often those with the greatest inequalities in health; they do not readily access health services and are not easily reached by health professionals. A 10-week pilot project has started at TWP (March 2009) with a Senior Practice nurse delivering workshops on health related matters, supplemented by a drop-in service on Fridays where women can access primary care advice. The outcome from this pilot work should inform how health services can be developed both within the Centre and in mainstream health systems so that services are better designed to meet the needs of this vulnerable group. A partnership between the PCT and the TWP would fulfil the commitment of the NHS to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of the local population.

“When I get in the lift to come here, it is like coming up to heaven”

An evaluation of the Salford Together Women Project

This evaluation report sets out the background to the Salford Together Women Project (TWP) and a description of the service it provides. The evaluation approach, aims and rationale for the methodology are then discussed before presenting the project outcomes. The report closes with some conclusions and recommendations for the way forward.

1 BACKGROUND TO THE SALFORD TOGETHER WOMEN PROJECT

1.1 Women commit less crime than men; less than 20 per cent of known offenders in England and Wales who are cautioned or found guilty are women (Gelsthorpe et al, 2007). However, there has been a huge increase in the number of women sentenced to imprisonment since the early 1990. Between 1995 and 2005, women remanded in custody rose by 106 per cent (compared to 24 per cent for males) and the number of women sentenced to immediate custody rose by 69 per cent. 70 per cent of women receive sentences of less than one year (Gelsthorpe et al 2007).

1.2 Women’s lives tend to be more disrupted by periods in custody than men’s, for example in terms of separation from their children and loss of family ties. Women are generally less resistant than men to accepting community supervision and resettlement help upon leaving prison (Gelsthorpe et al 2007).

1.3 A recent report by the New Economics Foundation (nef 2008) highlights how a Criminal Justice System focused on short-term cost control and narrow re-offending targets is letting women offenders down and costing more in the longer term. It found that support-focused community penalties involving high quality facilities are a more cost-effective option than imprisonment for non- violent women offenders.

1.4 The Together Women Programme took forward a commitment in the 2004 Government Spending Review to establish radical new approaches to meet the specific needs of women offenders in order to tackle the causes of crime and re-offending among this group and reduce the need for custody. In March 2005 the Home Secretary announced funding of £9.13 million over four years to take forward these initiatives in two areas in England⁵.

1.5 The Corston Report (Corston 2007) was an influential report that reviewed women with particular vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System and recommended that the Together Women Programme should be extended as quickly as possible. The report claimed that a radical new approach treating women holistically and individually – a woman-centred approach – was required.

⁵ National Offender Management Service (NOMS) (February 2007) *Together Women Project: the Model in Practice- a guide for practitioners*.

1.6 The author of the report, Baroness Corston, considered women's vulnerabilities fell into three main categories: domestic circumstances and problems such as domestic violence, child-care issues and being a single parent; secondly, personal circumstances such as mental illness, low self-esteem, eating disorders and substance abuse; thirdly, socio-economic factors such as poverty, isolation and employment. When women experience a combination of factors, it is likely to lead to a crisis point that ultimately results in prison. The report claims that it is these underlying issues that must be addressed by helping women develop resilience, life skills and emotional literacy.

1.7 A report produced by the Fawcett Society in 2007 (Gelsthorpe et al 2007) examined research from three particular developments: the Women's Offender Reduction Programme, the setting up of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Equality Act 2006. The report confirmed that women offenders tend to have a history of unmet needs in relation to education, training and employment, physical and mental health, housing and income. Their sexual and violent victimisation can play a part in the onset or persistence of offending.

1.8 The report recommended nine lessons, or key precepts for good practice that should be taken into account when providing for women offenders in the community. (Appendix A)

2 THE SALFORD PROJECT

2.1. The Salford Together Women Project was established in 2007 as one of five demonstration sites funded by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) until the end of March 2009. The five projects were delivered in two Regional Offender Manager regions, two in the North West (including Salford) and three in Yorkshire and Humber. The services were commissioned to lead providers who tendered for the contract to deliver Together Women Projects in their local areas. An external national evaluation across the five demonstration sites, conducted by Leicester University, is due to report in the Autumn 2009.

2.2 The lead project provider in Salford is the Salford Foundation. The Foundation is a social inclusion organisation, which has been in existence since 1988, providing a range of support for a wide variety of people in Salford particularly, and across Greater Manchester more generally. It was well placed to be a TWP demonstration site because of a number of key strategic and operational relationships it has with, for example, GM Learning and Skills Council (LSC), a number of Greater Manchester local authorities, Job Centre Plus, schools, businesses and many other private and public sector organisations. It already delivers services to lone parents, teenage parents and long term unemployed adults, offering mentoring projects, educational support and volunteering.

2.3 The 2008 Health Profile of Salford shows high levels of deprivation (48.8 per cent against a 19.9 per cent average in England), violent crime (27.3 compared with 19.3) and homelessness (14.3 compared with 4.4), all significantly above the English average. It also has high levels of incapacity benefit from mental illness and hospital stays related to alcohol. Life expectancy for women is 78.7 against the English average of 81.6.

2.4 The project was set up to support a more effective community-based response to women's offending by developing a holistic approach that diverted women offenders and women at risk of offending into appropriate services to meet their needs.

2.5 The **specific aims of the TWP programme** were:

- To reduce women's offending and re-offending
- To influence decision-making by Criminal Justice Service partners positively to reduce the number of women given custodial sentences or remanded in custody and increase the number of women diverted from prosecution
- To increase the number of women accessing and being sustained in appropriate community provision
- To reduce the number of avoidable family breakdowns (specifically in relation to children)

2.6 The project is 'centre-based', on the second floor of an office building, walking distance from Eccles town centre and close to public transport facilities. It is in a discreet location providing anonymity, and was chosen as a result of a discussion with a focus of group of local offenders (arranged by the NOMS). Outreach facilities are also provided at the courts and Styal Prison. The Centre offers a one-stop shop for women and provides them with holistic and individual support packages.

2.7 The Centre is for women-only, and therefore a gender-specific service, and this is strictly adhered to. Male professionals can access the service at specific times and the women are aware of this. If it is unavoidable at other times, it is with the full knowledge of the women.

2.8. The Centre is staffed by a Centre manager, four key workers, a court liaison worker, a crèche manager and deputy manager, a project administrator and a receptionist. There are also volunteers who support the activities of the Centre, and a mentoring scheme is offered to individual women.

2.9. All women attending the Centre have a named key worker who completes an initial assessment form and works with the woman to develop a support plan. The plans are reviewed at 6-week intervals for the duration of the time the woman is with the project.

2.10 Since the beginning of the project, 409 women⁶ have been assessed and support plans agreed. The majority were white British women. However, the project saw more women from non-white backgrounds than the average in Salford's population (96.1 compared with 91 per cent). The age of the women ranges between 18 to 56 years. In a 6-month period, approximately 70 per cent of the women were under 40 years of age.

2.11 The women are referred from a broad range of over 60 agencies, including Drugs and Alcohol Services, Social Services, Mental Health Teams, Homeless Hostels and Supported Tenancies. Over 10 per cent were self-referrals. Only a few isolated cases have not been progressed after assessment and a more specialised serviced identified and signposted. The main reason for unsuitability is when the woman has a single issue, such as multiple debts, when they are referred on to the appropriate agency.

2.12 The Salford Together Women Project works with the most vulnerable women; the average number of issues presented by each service user is four. Alongside offending behaviour these may include: substance misuse, accommodation, debts and benefits, family and relationship issues, domestic abuse and education and training. 60 per cent of the women have mental health problems, and there are 50 current Safeguarding Children cases.

2.13. There is a crèche on site that is free and managed by qualified staff. It is available to any woman using the centre and to date 1822 places have been accessed.

2.14 Housing issues are a significant factor in supporting women who offend, are at risk of offending or are vulnerable for other reasons. NOMS have funded 6 beds at a local hostel for women (Project 34), and Salford TWP has an agreement that the key worker leading on housing related support would be the key worker / liaison support for any women living at the project. Any women accommodated at Project 34 can be fast tracked into an assessment at TWP to provide the foundation to their support plan and there is an arrangement to share assessments and maximise input to benefit the women using the accommodation.

2.15 The Centre is open Monday to Friday and provides a range of educational courses, activities and therapies, as well as a drop-in facility for the women to meet together. There are 21 available activities timetabled, and 723 counselling sessions have been accessed. This is in addition to those provided by statutory services and significantly reduces or eliminates the waiting period for counselling of approximately 10 weeks in Salford.

2.16 Once a week a group of volunteers, who are regular users of the Centre, cook a healthy lunch for the women and this has proved a very popular event for the service users and their children.

⁶ Figures for end of February 2009

2.17 The Salford Together Women Project combines a caring, respectful, non-judgemental atmosphere with a structure of clear boundaries and expectations. There are clearly defined policies and procedures on acceptable behaviour as well as written statements about rights and responsibilities for the clients and staff.

2.18 The staff team are skilled at creating a positive culture, within this structured environment, which supports vulnerable women who have very low self-esteem and self worth. Careful attention is paid to celebrating success and supporting women to recognise their achievements, however small they may appear. The approach is entirely woman-centred with the focus of the interventions being on the individual woman.

3 EVALUATION AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 The aim of the evaluation was to assess how far the project had been successful in meeting the aims of the NOMS demonstration programme, and how it may develop and move forward in the future to support a wider group of vulnerable women. The objectives were:

- To assess how far the project had reached its original objectives as a NOMS demonstration site (section 2.2) and to capture any added value provided by the project
- To measure the outcomes of the project in relation to vulnerable women, including a reduction in offending behaviour or risk of offending
- To identify ways the service can develop and provide additional support to women who are vulnerable and at risk of exclusion

4 EVALUATION APPROACH

4.1. The evaluation was commissioned towards the end of the demonstration phase of the TWP, and looked retrospectively at the activities in order to draw together the outcomes. The methodology was chosen to take this into account. It was also important that the evaluation process was sensitive to the principles of the Together Women Project, and this was reflected in the evaluation design.

4.2. The theoretical framework used to underpin the evaluation was taken from the Fawcett Society's nine lessons that should be taken into account when providing provision to suit women offenders (Gelsthorpe et al, 2007) (appendix A). This provided a useful structure to develop the research instruments and the analytical framework.

4.3. Throughout the two-year phase of TWP, there was high quality monitoring data collected, covering the breadth of the project and giving a thorough overview (appendix B). The evaluation was able to use this data and therefore the decision was taken to use qualitative methods to look more in depth at the project with a

purposive⁷ sample of clients. This would enable understanding of what worked, for which women, in what circumstances and why.

4.4. The justification for this qualitative approach was to understand and illustrate the in-depth experiences of the women using the project, and whilst not intended to generalise the findings, patterns did emerge which were consistent and plausible.

4.5. A focus group, face to face narrative interviews, observations and conversations⁸ at the Centre were carried out (appendix D and E). High quality data was produced because the evaluation methods enabled the women to talk freely and openly about their experiences. Stakeholder interviews and document reviews were also held.

4.6. A survey was carried out with 18 women users of the Centre. An unstructured questionnaire was developed, which the women completed by themselves or in discussion with TWP staff. It was recognised that in this client group, low levels of literacy and numeracy could be an issue. The information from the questionnaires underpinned the data from the face-to-face interviews.

4.7 The data was triangulated⁹ and analysed using a thematic approach. This approach to analysis is particularly appropriate for qualitative research as it allows themes and patterns to emerge from primary data. Four key themes were identified and are discussed in section 5, project outcomes.

4.8. Details of the methods, sampling and analysis framework can be found in appendix C.

5 PROJECT OUTCOMES¹⁰

5.1 The section presents the project outcomes and supporting evidence. It also identifies **why** these outcomes occurred and in what circumstances. It is important to understand the reasons behind the change in order to inform future development of the TWP.

5.2 The project achieved all the original objectives of the NOMS project. These were:

- To reduce women's offending and re-offending

⁷ Purposive sampling is a deliberate non-random method of sampling, which aims to sample a group of people with a particular characteristic, usually in qualitative research design, Bowling, A (2006)

⁸ Conversation sampling is a method of analysing societal attitudes by listening techniques, and is particularly useful when sampling in public places. See Ann Bowling (2006) and Silvermann, D (1993)

⁹ Triangulation uses multiple (triangulated) methods to enhance the validity of the data.

¹⁰ Outcomes are the changes or difference that a project can make overtime. They are the results of the project's actions, rather than the activities and services that are provided (Burns and MacKeith (2006) Big Lottery Fund).

- To influence decision-making by Criminal Justice Service partners positively to reduce the number of women given custodial sentences or remanded in custody and increase the number of women diverted from prosecution
- To increase the number of women accessing and being sustained in appropriate community provision
- To reduce the number of avoidable family breakdowns (specifically in relation to children)

5.3 In addition the project was successful in identifying the need for additional services for those women who are at risk, or vulnerable in other ways to social exclusion.

5.4 The evidence comes from a combination of the monitoring data and the qualitative evaluation. The names of the women have been changed and their words are presented in italics and quotation marks.

5.5 **Four** project outcomes have been identified from the data. These outcome patterns emerged from an analysis of the data and provide supporting evidence that the project's actions created change, and that it met its original objectives and identified future areas of development.

5.6 The outcomes are:

- Reducing isolation and creating active citizens
- Moving on: support not dependency
- Reduced vulnerability through learning coping strategies
- Improved life chances- routes to training, employment and parenting

Reducing isolation and creating active citizens

5.7. The project has been successful in providing women with the confidence to re-engage with the local community and reduce social isolation. This has been achieved through building relationships with peers, professionals and members of the community, enabling access to mainstream services and creating volunteering and mentoring opportunities for service users and individuals outside the project.

Building relationships

5.8 Most of the women attending TWP have become completely isolated and excluded from their friends, family and local community due to the low self esteem created by the stigma, (perceived or otherwise) associated with their experiences of neglect, domestic abuse, offending, drug and alcohol problems.

5.9. The project has been able to break down that isolation and build relationships through firstly creating a trusting environment. The women-only service, the skills and attributes of the staff and the positive attitude that runs throughout TWP were all factors that led to trust. Women feel safe at TWP and are able to relax and make friends. *"You know you can trust people"*.

5.10. The crèche was singled out as a safe place to begin developing friendships when first coming to the Centre. It was possible to “*break the ice*” there by sharing common issues over motherhood. For one woman, having her child near her in the crèche made her feel safer and she felt able to relax and begin to interact with the other women.

5.11 The courses to build self-esteem and self worth helped the women value themselves more highly and therefore more likely to develop positive relationships. Peer support is a strong feature with women being able to identify commonality with others with similar experiences. The women described the friendships they had made: “*you make a lot of friends here*”, and “*you can support each other and still be strong*”.

5.12 Many of those friendships were flourishing outside the project. Women, who had had no friends and had often been confined to their homes, spoke of meeting up with other women and going to the cinema, bingo or each other’s houses. One woman described going out with a group of women from the Centre: “*You feel less vulnerable when we go out because we are together*”. Della had started a new relationship with a man after having been in a long- term abusive relationship. She did not know how it was going to work out, but she spoke of feeling in control of the relationship: “*This is me controlling myself, the relationship, rather than him – and I have only learnt that by coming here*”.

5.13 The ability of the women to build and sustain friendships with other women who had experienced similar situations could potentially be seen as an area for concern, which has been recognised by the TWP staff team. If the women are vulnerable, they could potentially be put in situations where they were easily influenced by others and return to some of their previous behaviours. However, the evidence gathered did not support this because the activities at the Centre aim to build confidence and enable the women to make appropriate relationships. The staff aim to prevent difficult situations occurring through the clearly defined policies of acceptable behaviour.

5.14 One example of building relationships that reconnected women who had become socially isolated came from Rose who four years ago had completely lost contact with her family since becoming involved in an abusive relationship, taking drugs and stealing from her family. Through the support offered at the Centre she has made contact with her parents, and has been invited to participate in a family holiday.

Accessing mainstream services

5.15 The evidence suggests that the one stop shop approach to the activities at the Centre and the opportunity to learn in a safe and trusted environment enabled the women interviewed to show increased understanding and confidence in accessing and using mainstream services. Previously they had been unaware of what may be available or through their experiences did not trust the main systems: “*You learn how to use other services, for example Citizens Advice Bureau and the Job Centre, by building your confidence*”.

5.16 On many occasions the key worker would identify where specialist services were required and be able to signpost women to services or accompany them in order to offer support. This was felt to work particularly well with some agencies such as housing, benefits, debts or mental health services where there were individual points of contact. 23 women registered either with a GP or dentist as a result of TWP intervention.

5.17 Other women spoke of finding their own child care facilities in the community, joining a local gym or going to the Job Centre. Some of the women also used the mainstream drug and alcohol services. There was little evidence however of the women's use of mainstream health services, including primary care, which would support evidence from elsewhere.

Volunteering and mentoring opportunities

5.18 Volunteering is a key indicator of social inclusion and at the Salford TWP there are a number of service user volunteers within the Centre:

- Every Friday a lunch is provided for service users, the aim is to encourage peer interaction and support, promote healthy eating and encourage attendance and feedback regarding services. At present five women prepare, serve and clean away the lunch working on a rota basis, 3 hours each per week.
- One service user who is a qualified florist volunteers to deliver a flower craft session once per week for two hours
- Service users assist with Centre events by volunteering to greet guests, provide refreshments and show people around the centre
- 6 service users have volunteered to attend events as guest speakers and act as ambassadors for case studies and media stories.
- 2 service users have undertaken training to become volunteer mentors, one for a teenage parent programme and one for TWP.

5.19 There was also evidence that some of the women would consider volunteering in the future. There was talk of "*wanting to give something back*", both in terms of the project and in the wider community.

5.20 TWP also provides a rich source of volunteering opportunities for individuals and organisations from outside the project. Women volunteers provide holistic therapies and craft classes. Also there are placements for counselling and social work students who get the opportunity to gain experience of true casework (under supervision) and develop group work sessions. Other examples have included a qualified Community Studies student who lacks confidence and is gaining valuable experience of working in a real workplace and another who completed a mental health research study¹¹.

¹¹ Findings available in May 2009

5.21 Mentoring is another volunteering opportunity offered at the Centre and currently there are 14 volunteer mentors supporting the project. The volunteers are women recruited from the community who undertake accredited training in mentoring alongside a number of other training sessions to prepare them for their role. On average mentors give 2.5 hours each per week to the project. 13 TWP women have been referred to mentoring, 12 of which have been matched with a mentor.

Moving on: support not dependency

5.22 An important outcome of the TWP has been the way it supports women to move forward and manage their own lives rather than create another form of dependency. Women spoke proudly of their achievements in *“being ready to fly”*.

5.23 Margaret who had been a service user between November 07 and October 08 and had presented with alcohol problems, some parenting difficulties and low self-esteem. She attended counselling, Mums & Tots and Positive You (a confidence building course) and called in to the centre during the evaluation to tell the staff and women there that having completed a course at the local college, she had an interview for a University place. She said:

“I was ready to move on – I did it off my own back, I wanted to do it on my own. I could phone up whenever I needed to, I still had that link with them, I could pop in whenever I wanted to. And I did move on”.

5.24 Della had been attending the Centre since September and spoke of how the staff had *“built her back up”* to the way she used to be before she was in a violent situation with her ex-partner. She felt that:

“A few of us here are ready to fly, but we just need to get our wings a little bit stronger.....I feel as though I have come from being an ugly duckling to a swan. I am not quite there but I will be in a couple of months”.

5.25 A number of mechanisms were identified which can explain why the TWP has been so successful in achieving this lack of dependency with such a vulnerable group of women. These included:

- The role of the key worker was highly significant with the one to one support tailored to individual women’s needs: *“They are there for you”*
- Individualised support plans provide the women with achievable goals in their own timescales, and the review process helps them see their progress however small *“they work with you for as long as it takes”*. The skills of the staff support the women to develop and maintain a positive outlook on their lives.
- Practical support at the right time enabled the women to take advantage of the activities to build their self-esteem and move forward. Practical help included finding suitable accommodation, sourcing furniture, providing food and toiletries starter packs for new tenants (which all increases the likelihood of sustaining the tenancy), dealing with urgent debt matters and support in attending court.

- Through the courses and learning styles adopted at the Centre, within its safe and trusted atmosphere, the women learn coping mechanisms to use outside the Centre. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.
- Peer support and role modelling is a strong feature of Salford TWP. The women supported each other, as well as being able to drop into the Centre even when they had moved on, *“You CAN get out of it, look at me”*. The value of support from the peer group was an important aspect in confidence building and moving on. Numerous examples were given of how they supported each other, solving problems together, knowing they were not alone and sharing a common set of issues.
- The women know that if their circumstances begin to deteriorate again, they can come back to the Centre for support in moving forward. This provides a vital mechanism for enabling the women *“going it alone”*.

5.26. CASE STUDY

Della had been referred to TWP from a parenting project six months ago. She had left an abusive relationship and had been unable to take her daughter with her. Consequently, the partner had been unable to look after the child and she had been taken into care. Della had a mental breakdown and needed to prove she could care for her daughter, so she was referred to a time-limited parenting project. Her daughter came back to live with her and Della was referred by the social worker to TWP in order to build her confidence and prevent further break down.

Della spoke of how she had got her life back together, knew she had a future and that it was a positive one. She attributed this to contact with her key worker, improving her literacy and numeracy skills and doing the courses to improve her self-esteem and self-confidence. She had recently felt able to take up counselling at the Centre and this was proving extremely helpful.

She plans to leave the Centre in a couple of months and go to college to train to become a counsellor. She is also anxious to give something back and works as a volunteer at the Centre once a week.

Reduced vulnerability through learning coping strategies

5.27 For women accessing the Salford TWP the re-offending rate is 7 per cent, compared to 25 per cent across Salford; the national rate (measured by NOMS over two years) is 50 per cent. 99 women (approximately 20 per cent) accessed drug and alcohol services resulting in substance reduction or management, and 26 women left abusive relationships. There were 9 cases of children being removed from the Child Protection Register or returned to their families.

5.28 There is enough evidence to attribute these successes to the TWP, in particular through enabling the women to develop coping strategies when faced with the reality of their every day lives. The ability to use strategies learnt through the project meant that they were less likely to return to crime, issues of self-harm, drug and alcohol misuse. Here are some examples from the women:

- *“You learn how to cope with things better, how to deal with things a lot better”.*
- *“In crime you need something that helps you get away from it. They give you the tools here to cope”.*
- *“They show you how to fix things, they don’t tell you what to do”*
- *“I know what I can do if he turns up, where I can go in the night”*
- *“I can break it down step by step, so I can see the situation”*
- *“You can’t get rid of your problems but you can break them down and work around them”*

5.29 One woman spoke of taking control in regards to compliance with her probation order. She had chosen to meet her probation officer at the Centre rather than at the probation office, even though the office was much nearer her home. She said:

“I can talk better here, I’m not in her (probation officer) environment, I am in my own environment”.

5.30 The women-only service was fundamental to the women’s ability to learn. Many had come from abusive relationships with men and if men were around they were frightened and withdrawn. Many spoke of how they could relax here and how they had gradually learnt to trust people. Some felt that they could talk more openly to women and share experiences together.

5.31 The ability to learn coping mechanisms was demonstrated in a number of ways. Although the women came from different backgrounds, they all shared a common factor: they had low self esteem, loss of self respect and lack of confidence in their abilities to change their life experiences. Many of the courses start from this aspect and work to build up the women’s confidence and self worth *“I can do it now, I am better than that, I feel really positive about myself”.*

5.32 The courses also develop particular skills in problem solving. One woman told how if she woke up ‘feeling down’ she did not immediately ring her key worker, but instead got some paper and wrote down 10 positive things which made her feel better. Another example was Della who said when she was faced with a problem, she wrote down her options, *“I can do this or this, see where we go, I can do this”.*

5.33 Nicola, who had only recently come to the Centre and had experienced problems with depression, said that as a result of completing the course on Understanding Anxiety and Depression she had been able to put into practice some of the techniques. For example, she learnt techniques to breathe to reduce panic feelings and how to look at her situation in real detail and break things down into smaller parts.

5.34 Coping skills were also developed through the women accessing appropriate and most importantly, **timely** services. The in-house counselling service was particularly valued and was perceived by the women as demonstrating empathy with *“the type of place this is”* and *“what the women are going through”*, therefore making it particularly sensitive to their needs. The women spoke of previous experiences with counsellors when they had been unable to talk openly. The importance of not having to wait for an appointment was also stressed; one woman described having

to wait a year for a psychologist appointment with her post natal depression, during which time she continued to self harm. (Since attending TWP she has not self-harmed for 12 months).

5.35 The Centre offers the women an opportunity to have a range of alternative therapies. The women attending TWP had lost their self-respect, so the chance to have massages and other therapies focusing solely on them, enabled them to relax and feel more positive about themselves.

5.36 CASE STUDY

Rose found out about the TWP when she appeared in court for stealing money to pay her debts. She was in an abusive relationship and had become completely isolated from her friends and family. She was taking drugs to help her cope with her circumstances and frequently self - harmed.

Through the support of the Centre Rose was able to leave her abusive relationship and has not used drugs for 7 months. She did become unsettled at the hostel she was in and started breaking the rules, going out at night and meeting the people she had been involved with and which led to crime. She recognised the danger she was in and contacted her key worker with her problem. She was found another hostel and is now continuing to rebuild her life without drugs or crime. She believes that through the trust she had built up at the Centre and its connections to other services she was able to find a way of coping with her situation. Techniques taught at the Centre have stopped her self-harming.

Previously she thought that stealing was the only way to help herself, but through the courses and counselling, she realised that she did not have to lead that life. She recognises she still has a way to go before she can leave the Centre but she knows how far she has come. She spoke of feeling 're-born'.

Improved life chances - routes to training, employment, parenting

5.37 There was strong evidence that the project improved the future life chances of a group of women who for multiple – and often inter-related – reasons were vulnerable to exclusion from mainstream activities. Beyond moving away from destructive behaviours and equipping them with coping strategies, the women showed how they had progressed to improve their lives and be part of society.

5.38 Financial stability was a key factor. Women were helped through the comprehensive assessment process to face up to their financial situations and to find ways to deal with them. 161 women have been successful in reducing or managing their debts and 33 have been assisted in increasing their income.

5.39 Key Workers have worked with 50 Safeguarding Children cases over the last year (no stats for previous year) 9 cases have been removed from the Child Protection Registered or returned to families. The women developed their skills in parenting through attending courses and through the support of the crèche. One woman said:

“The children are (living) with their dad, but talking to people helps and at the end of the year I plan to get them back. I will have a certificate from the parenting courses and that will help in the courts”.

5.40 Housing was another important aspect of improving life chances. 30 per cent were supported in sustaining tenancies, managing rent arrears, debt, neighbour disputes and liaison with specialist agencies. Key workers were able to offer housing related support and 68 women were assisted to gain housing and a further 95 to sustain their accommodation. Without that support, the women would be in danger of further crisis, and without stable housing, employment is not a realistic goal.

5.41. 30 per cent of the women who attended the Centre were supported in either accessing new accommodation, or moved from unsafe to safe accommodation in a crisis or urgent situation. There have been 296 housing related one to one support sessions offered so far this financial year (10 months) these sessions were relating to crisis and urgent issues.

5.42 Education and training

There was evidence that women found the training courses held at the Centre extremely useful (980 training sessions have been held). For some, they were gaining qualifications they had never had which significantly raised their self-esteem. 11 women accessed mainstream training. Improved numeracy and literacy was valued as a route into work.

5.43 Employment

45 women who have accessed TWP had entered employment. The Reach ETE Programme, by the Salford Foundation and housed in the same building as the Centre, was seen as a key service in helping the women find employment. There was help with developing CVs, using the internet to do job searches, finding employment opportunities and preparing the women for interview. It needs to be remembered that whilst these services can be provided elsewhere, this group of vulnerable women have a history of isolation and not using mainstream services. The REACH service is provided in-house, provides a women-only space and maintains the trust and positive attitudes that is so important in building the women's confidence to apply for work.

5.44 CASE STUDY

Pat had been to court for injuring her abusive partner, and the Judge had referred her to TWP. She spoke of having been very alone without friends or extended family. She had been visiting the Centre for 6 months and had had help to sort out her housing benefits and rent arrears. She went on to do the confidence course, which had helped her feel more positive about herself. Pat said she had not done well at school *“everyone learns in a different way, and it didn't do it for me”*. She had completed the college course in English and Maths, and learnt to use computers. She had not worked for many years, but through the Reach ETE programme, she had the opportunity to gain skills to improve her chances of employability. She then went on to complete a course, which led to 12 weeks employment at Marks and Spencer. She said how she felt so proud to have a job: *“Getting up in the morning,*

putting on that uniform, taking Nathan to school, picking my wage slip up – I had not done that before. It gives you a good all round feeling within yourself”.

Due to cut backs at the store, Pat was not offered permanent employment but through support from her key worker and new friends, she felt optimistic for the future. She had an interview at the Job Centre the following week, and she was having help preparing for that. She also spoke of how much easier it was to manage her money when she was working, and she did not want to stay on benefits for long.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1. The Salford Together Women Project offers a unique and positive experience to women whose lives have been severely affected by a range of inter-related issues. The skills, dedication and commitment of the staff and volunteers create an empowering environment in which the most vulnerable of women are able to rebuild their lives.

6.2. The Salford project was successful in meeting its original objectives of the NOMS demonstration site, with evidence of reductions in offending and re-offending and reducing family breakdown.

6.3 The project also demonstrated its ability to respond to women at risk or vulnerable in other ways, and identified the need to develop its service to meet these needs. There was evidence of reduced self harming, women leaving abusive partners, reductions in alcohol and drug dependencies and children leaving care to be re-united with their mothers. Some of the explanation for this lay in the women being able to learn coping strategies at the Centre which they could then take forward into their everyday lives.

6.4. The project has been successful in achieving a number of outcomes. The evaluation revealed that the project had enabled women who had become completely isolated from their family, friends and community, to become active citizens again through friendships, volunteering and using mainstream services.

6.5. There was also evidence of women moving on and improving their life chances through education and training, improved literacy and numeracy skills, employment and better accommodation and financial management. They were able to move forward and not remain dependent on the Centre.

6.6 The Centre provides an initial assessment encompassing the seven pathways¹² identified by NOMS as contributing factors to offending behaviour; one to one key work support; a structured programme of courses; therapies and a crèche. These factors, combined with multi agency involvement, are clearly important to its

¹² The seven pathways are: Housing and homelessness, Education, training and employment, Mental and physical health, Drugs and alcohol, Finance, benefit and debt, Children, families and support networks, Attitudes, thinking and behaviour

success. However, the effectiveness of the project also appeared to lie in three key features:

- A positive women-only environment where the women learnt to feel safe, to trust again and re-build their damaged self esteem
- An individual, holistic approach where interventions and support are tailored to the individual women's needs and are wholly there to support her
- Clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour and rights and responsibilities, shared between staff, volunteers and clients

6.7. The women who use the Centre come from a range of different backgrounds and experiences, but it was evident in the evaluation that these women shared a common identity of vulnerability through loss of trust, low self-esteem and self-worth and lack of friendship. Peer support was a vital component of the success, and this led to positive relationships developing outside the Centre.

6.8. In terms of the evaluation process, when the issues being explored are sensitive and personal, face-to-face discussions in a safe environment are more effective than surveys in drawing out the issues. The women, through their learning at the project, felt empowered to talk appropriately about their experiences.

6.9. When high quality data is captured in this way, consistent and plausible patterns emerged which alongside good quality monitoring data provide a strong evidence base to assess outcomes.

7 THE WAY FORWARD

7.1. The Salford Together Women Project has an established structure and during its two-year demonstration phase it has created a number of successful local partnerships and relationships with other organisations. One example of this is the probation services commitment to provide a full-time equivalent seconded probation officer. The project has also established an active volunteer network, and its reputation is high. Therefore, the project has a firm base on which to move forward and develop in the future.

7.2. Currently, it is not mandatory for women in the Criminal Justice System to attend TWP in place of other sentences. There is no evidence to support either way whether mandatory attendance would damage the ethos of the project, which aims to treat the women 'as women' and not as 'offenders' and build their trust and confidence. However, it may increase the attendance of offending women if the courts took that approach. This area would benefit from further research in order that recommendations could be made in the future.

7.3. Salford Together Women project has demonstrated a high need for its service and serves a large number of vulnerable women who share a common set of experiences. The project needs to continue monitoring its referral criteria in order to maximise the inclusion of women who are at risk. This will ensure the focus stays on reaching those women who have most to gain from its service.

7.4. The gender-specific nature of the project is essential and should continue. Women were aware that they needed to 're-enter' a society that includes men and some wanted relationships with men, but for many their experiences have meant they needed to rebuild trust and self-esteem before that could happen. From the evidence in the evaluation, there appeared to be no other service in the area that catered for this group of women in this way.

7.5. Accommodation and housing issues are an important aspect in supporting the women that use the Centre. This is an area where further development would be beneficial as this is a complex area with multiple providers. A dedicated TWP housing worker, who combines specialist knowledge of the needs of TWP clients with housing advice, could act as an essential link with the housing sector across the city.

7.6. Mentoring needs to be developed further with the introduction of a formal Together Women Peer Mentor scheme, as well as increased utilisation of volunteer mentors by the project key workers. Mentoring through peers and volunteers offers positive role models and can provide a crucial hand holding process for those women who are towards the end of key worker intervention and ready for integration into the community. It would also enable the key workers to focus their skills on where they are most needed, that is with women entering the service.

7.7. Women who attend the Centre are often those with the greatest inequalities in health; they do not readily access health services and are not easily reached by health professionals. A 10-week pilot project has started at TWP (March 2009) with a Senior Practice nurse delivering workshops on health related matters. This is to be supplemented by a drop-in service on Fridays where women can access primary care advice. There will be an option for them to be referred to an outreach GP practice, based near the Centre, and this will provide the opportunity for women who are unhappy with their current practice to register with the onsite GP. The outcome from this pilot work should inform how health services can be developed both within the Centre and in mainstream health systems so that services are better designed to meet the needs of this vulnerable group. A partnership between the PCT and the TWP would fulfil the commitment of the NHS to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of the local population.

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APPENDIX: A THE NINE LESSONS

The nine lessons to be taken into account in providing for women in the community (Gelsthorpe, L, Sharpe, G and Roberts, J (2007), *Provision for Women Offenders in the Community*, London: Fawcett Society:

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 of 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 of 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 offender-related programme, since personal support is likely to be as important as any direct input addressing offender behaviour
9. Provide women with practical help with transport and childcare so they can maintain their involvement in the centre or programme

APPENDIX: B MONITORING OUTCOME DATA SCHEDULE

Ref	Outcome Area	Definition	Cumulative Total	Monthly Total
1	Alcohol/Drugs	Abstinence		
		Reduced frequency		
		Reduced seriousness (drug class)		
		Management ? Not impeding functioning? Inc engaging with services (this is correct)		
2	Money Management	Reduced/ managing debt (setting up payment plans etc)		
		Increased income		
3	Empl'mnt/Edu/Training	Gained employment or improved employment prospects		
		Employment sustained 4 weeks		
		Increased capacity to work (80% attendance on courses)		
4	Life Skills	Increased self esteem / confidence		
		Attended any life skills classes		
5	Mental Health	Accepting support (80% attendance)		
6	Physical Health	Registered with GP / dentist		
		Reduced incapacity benefit		
7	Domestic violence	Reduction in frequency		
		Move to independent living		
8	Accommodation	Moved to settled accommodation		
		Moved unsafe to safe accommodation		
		Homeless to accommodated		
		Sustained existing accommodation		
9	Motivation/Engagement	Attendance / engagement 80% of plan		
10	*Preventing family breakdown *where this is an appropriate outcome for the child	Custody prevention –stopped children going into care.		
		Children moved from care to return to mother		
11	Diversion from custody	Influence on sentencers = diversion from custody (or given community sentence as an alterbative)		
12	At risk of offending	Maintaining non offending status		
13	Offending	Offending during TWP		
		Reduction in offending		
		Reduction in seriousness of offending		

APPENDIX: C EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Data collection and sampling

Method	Rationale	Sample
Documentation review	To assess background of TWP and Salford context	Range of reports, assessment forms, promotional material, DVD
Review of monitoring data	To use as quantitative data	See appendix C
Observations and conversations at the Centre This took place on a Friday which is the busiest day at the Centre and includes the lunch club	To observe the interactions at the Centre and exchange conversations with service users, staff and volunteers	Approximately 15 conversations were held with women using the Centre, crèche staff and volunteers, Centre Manager, key workers and administrators.
Focus group	To guide a discussion with a group of women about the services offered at the Centre, Appendix D	4 women took part (9 had been approached but by its nature, the users of the project can be distracted by urgent issues).
One-to-one narrative-style interviews	To hear the experiences of the women told in their own words. Patterns and themes can emerge. Appendix: E	5 women were interviewed. It was a purposive sample in order to capture the experiences of a cross section of service users
Unstructured questionnaire	To add breadth to the evaluation and underpin the intense interviewing work	18 questionnaires were returned
Stakeholder Telephone interviews	To give context to the project and allow triangulation of the data	4 interviews were carried out with representatives from the Criminal Justice Service, the Local Authority domestic abuse service, housing and Salford PCT.

The sample size was necessarily small because of the complexity of the data and because the data aims to provide rich insights in order to understand social phenomena rather than statistical information (Bowling A 2006). Statistical evidence was collected from the monitoring data

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by the evaluator.

APPENDIX: D FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Salford Foundation: Together Women's Project

Focus Group Discussion Guide

One focus group of 8 to 10 women to be held at Salford Foundation TWP

Approximate time 1 hour

The groups will be moderated at a medium level to allow discussion and interactions to occur within the group

Introduction and welcome:

- My name, thanks etc
- Reminder about tape recorder and photos (consent should already be signed) *BRING EXTRA COPIES*
- Confidentiality of data in and outside the group
- Everyone's view important – helps if we try to speak one at a time
- Leave at any time
- Timings of group

Why have we asked you to be here?

- About the project – Lottery bid to continue
- Should already have received project information sheet, but reiterate key points
- Hear about your experiences and what could be different. Run through an outline of areas to be discussed.

Starter discussion question

Everyone to answer individually, name and:

1. "What brings you along to the WTP today?"

Is it specific to today? Does it mean different things to different women? Would it be different if it were compulsory to attend?

Guiding Discussion Questions

2. "What does it feel like to come to a 'women-only' centre?"

What would be different if men were allowed here? Is there anywhere else you go that is 'women-only'? Does it help you find friends? How?

3. "What are the benefits in meeting a range of women here, not just those who have been in trouble with the courts?"

Are there any disadvantages? If so, what are they?

4. “How does the Centre encourages you to solve your problems? In what ways have you felt more confident?”

*Does it help you to feel better about yourself? Has it helped you get a job? How do the staff here support you to feel better about yourself and what you can do?
Examples*

5. “Can anyone give an example of something new they have learnt from coming along to the Centre?”

Learning styles, tailored approaches, role of key worker to support change?

6. “What are the advantages of having a lot of services all under one roof? Are there any disadvantages?”

If so, what are they? Which services are the most useful? Which ones would you want more of?

7. “How has coming to the Centre helped you go along to other services?”

For example, going to the doctor or nurse? Finding a doctor if you didn't have one? Going to CAB to help with debts? Finding a job through the job centre.

What else would help you to do this?

8. “Do you feel you can still come along to the Centre for help even when your support plan is finished?”

What circumstances would bring you back? How can the Centre help?

9. “Can you tell me about the types of support on offer here? What is special about the support?”

Volunteers, mentors, individual key workers

10. “What are the advantages in having a crèche here?”

Why is it important, what would be different without it? What difference does help with transport make?

Final summary question

11. What would you like to see at the Centre in the future?

Any changes, stay the same, what's missing, what could be different, health services.

APPENDIX: E ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Salford Foundation: Together Women's Project

Unstructured Interview Schedule

Narrative interview with 4 to 5 women from WPT to capture their experiences

Introductions

- My name, thanks etc
- Reminder about tape recorder and photos (consent should already be signed) *BRING EXTRA COPIES*
- Confidentiality of data
- Leave at any time
- Timings

Why have we asked you to be here?

- About the project – Lottery bid to continue
- Should already have received project information sheet, but reiterate key points
- Hear about your experiences and what could be different. Run through an outline of areas to be discussed.

Questions

1. Would you mind telling me how you first got involved with the Together Women Project?

Referral, past experiences, children etc

2. Looking back over the last month what do you think has been the most significant change in your life?

Why was this important to you? What area of your life did it affect most?

3. How did the TWP contribute to this?

Women only, what aspects, volunteering etc, what could have been different, accessing mainstream services

4. What would you like to see happen in the future, a) for yourself and b) for the Centre?

Physical and mental health

In conclusion

Anything else to add? Give my contact details for follow up. Reminder of what happens to the information they have given.....Thanks etc

gilliangranville
associates