

## LANCASHIRE WOMEN'S CENTRES

A case study of women in contact with the Criminal Justice System

November 2016





'We believe that every woman matters'

## Introduction

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Women in contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) need gender-specific, holistic and personalised support so they can rebuild their lives and begin their journey to desistance from crime. This is outlined in the Corston Report<sup>1</sup> and the Justice Select Committee report 'Women Offenders: after the Corston Report'.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this recognition, barriers still remain that prevent both the provision of and access to gender-specific support for many women. As Clinks seeks to highlight the specific and often neglected needs of women in contact with the CJS and to support the organisations that work with them, we are publishing a series of in-depth case studies of services supporting women in contact with the CJS.

This series aims to highlight the impact of current policy and funding arrangements on both the clients and the organisations themselves.

For this case study we spoke to Karen Carter, Criminal Justice Project Manager at Lancashire Women's Centres, a network of five women's centres located in Accrington, Blackburn, Blackpool, Burnley and Preston.

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<sup>1</sup> Corston, J. (2007) *The Corston Report: A review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System*. Online: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf> (last accessed 10.02.2016)

<sup>2</sup> Justice Select Committee (2013) *Women Offenders: after the Corston Report*. Online: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/women-offenders2/> (last accessed 10.02.2016)

## Section 1: the women's needs

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### Could you tell us about the needs of the women who come to the women's centres?

*"We see a wide range [of needs] including drug and alcohol issues; relationship issues; experiences of domestic abuse; children being removed; historic abuse; learning difficulties and sex working. Accommodation is a massive issue, as are financial issues and debt. We also work with women who have experienced a redundancy, have been working all their lives and just don't know how to deal with it. Some of the women we work with are high-risk, not necessarily in terms of offending, but in terms of their risk-taking behaviours. So, a wide spectrum, really."*

### Have you seen any changes in those needs recently?

*"I think it's difficult to say because the needs of the women are quite diverse across the different women's centres. In Blackpool, the issues are very different to what they are, say, in Accrington."*

*But I would say that housing issues and being sanctioned from benefits are on the increase. Lack of housing has always been an issue, but it probably has increased. For women, it's not about a lack of accommodation, it is a lack of appropriate accommodation, because a lot of the hostels aren't suitable for women. Many hostels are male-dominated and we know that there are lots of issues with drug-taking in them."*

*Just recently, we were supporting one woman who'd worked all her life but I think she'd been made redundant. She started having relationship issues with her husband, who she'd been married to for 40 years. Basically, due to her violence towards him (because she'd started abusing alcohol and had become violent and aggressive) she wasn't able to go back to the family home. She was looking at being homeless and came to us literally within two hours of having to sleep on the streets of Preston. And this is a woman who's around the age of 60. We managed to find her hostel accommodation, albeit temporary, but far more appropriate than the street! There were still people misusing drugs and alcohol there but at least she could lock her door and be safe."*

*There is a lack of women-only accommodation. Women's homelessness seems to be a little bit more hidden and temporary than male homelessness, because they generally have support from family or friends. But equally, people don't want to take women on a 'sofa-surfing' basis for any length of time, because women don't just come with homelessness. And I know men don't, but they're more likely to come and sleep on your couch, and go out for the day, come back, sleep on your couch, go out for the day. Whereas women come, and they've got kids, maybe, issues, an ex-partner who's causing problems. So, they're generally not as welcome as a male would be to just come, sleep and leave."*

## **Section 2: Services provided**

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### **How have your services developed?**

*"It would have been January 2010 we started the project in Blackburn and that was just me and one other staff member who got that up and running. We developed a programme called the Vision Project that included some offence-focused work, as well as support with health and wellbeing, lifestyle, family and relationships. We were funded by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), but that came through the women's centre in Calderdale and Kirklees and was based on some of the findings from the Corston Report.*

*About 18 months, two years later we received some extra funding and that came directly from the MoJ, which meant we could expand the service across to Accrington. During that time, we also began building relationships with local probation officers and other stakeholders and explained where we're coming from, what we're doing and why we're doing it. Over time we received funding from the then Probation Trust and were able to be classed as National Standards Appointments.<sup>3</sup>*

*We were then able to expand the service into Burnley, and Blackpool, and since then we've gone even wider, so we have services in Preston, Chorley West, Skelmersdale,*

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<sup>3</sup> These standards have been developed by the Ministry of Justice and are issued by the Secretary of State under section 7(1) of the Offender Management Act 2007. They apply to all providers of probation services managing people in contact with the CJS, and those delivering the sentence of the court. More information about them can be found at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/405590/National\\_Standards\\_Jan\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/405590/National_Standards_Jan_2015.pdf) (last accessed 10.02.2016)

*and we subcontract to partners in Cumbria. The subcontracting to Cumbria is a result of the development of Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), so we would fall under the same geographical footprint as Cumbria and Lancashire CRC.”*

Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) was the name given to the coalition government's reform programme for changing the way we manage people with criminal convictions in the community and those being resettled from prison in England and Wales. It replaced 35 individual Probation Trusts with a single National Probation Service, responsible for the management of people deemed high risk of harm to the public, and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) responsible for the management of those who are assessed as low- to medium-risk across England and Wales. These 21 areas are sometimes referred to as Contract Package Areas. The CRCs also have a new responsibility for supervising short-sentence prisoners (those sentenced to fewer than 12 months in prison) after release.

The CRC responsible for the management of low- to medium-risk offenders in Cumbria and Lancashire is Sodexo. This CRC subcontracts Lancashire Women's Centres to deliver services.

### **What services do you provide?**

*“We're contracted to deliver a 'core offer' to women referred to us by the CRC, which is a rolling programme of case management. Although funded through different streams, the women are also able to access the other services that we offer, depending on their needs.*

*We have a one stop shop approach and offer a wide range of services. These include housing advice and support, debt advice and guidance, counselling and therapies. We offer low-level mental health courses that we call the wellbeing programmes and we have three different levels of that.<sup>4</sup> We also provide employment support including CV writing, mock interviews and disclosure letters for employers if they have a criminal record.*

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<sup>4</sup> Lancashire Women's Centres also deliver NHS-commissioned mental health services to improve health outcomes for the women they work with. More information about this can be found at: <http://www.clinks.org/health-case-studies> (last accessed 10.02.2016)

*We've got other courses, such as art courses and body fit programmes, which are about getting women active and into sport. The art programmes that we run, although they are centred on art, also support women with confidence-building. We have a mentoring service and offer mentoring specifically to women in the CJS. We also run the Avert Project, which is a diversion project working with women who have been arrested and have conditional cautions.*

*The women can access all the same programmes. If they need additional support, such as one-to-one support with form-filling, someone to accompany them to court or to the GP, we offer that too. If we can't provide the support that the women need we signpost to other services.*

*We have a worker that goes into HMP Styal, which is our local prison, even though it's not really that local, which we know is an issue. She goes in there once a fortnight to pick up cases that have been referred to us, which includes women who are 12 weeks prior to release. So, we've that link with the prison and the community and the women know what we can offer them but what is also required of them, from our point of view. A high percentage of these women are chaotic and the ones that are more likely to be homeless and experience problems with benefits, for example."*

### **Where do you deliver your services?**

*"We have our main centres where we operate from: Burnley, Accrington, Preston and Blackpool. And then we have outreach locations in the smaller areas: Styal, Skelmersdale, Lancaster and Chorley. They're our outreach locations because the caseloads are smaller, and we don't have centres there. The women there can access the 'core offer', which is the rolling programme specifically for women in criminal justice and includes housing, employment and debt advice, and mentoring support. The offer is obviously a lot less however in terms of counselling, therapies and other courses.*

*But they don't have to access what's in that area. Say, if they live in Chorley, they can access the main provision in Preston. They can access any of the centres at any point."*



## Section 2b: providing a women-only space

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### Why is it important to have a women-only space?

*“Historically, we are women-only, and we still are, between the hours of 10 until 3 mainly. Having the women-only space means women can come in and they feel safe, feel able to open up. And if there’s people here that have experienced similar issues, they don’t have to be wary of what they say. I think, certainly, when you’re looking at the CJS, it’s a male-dominated environment in terms of the offender group. When you look at offender managers, it’s a sort of female-dominated environment. But it’s quite daunting for a woman to walk into a probation office, and there’ll be say three men sitting there, whereas they can walk in here and feel more comfortable.*

*In some cases, male partners will loiter outside or try to come in with the women where there’s controlling behaviours. And we can say, “Actually, you’re going to need to leave. This is a women-only environment.” Which sort of removes that element of control that they can have. Because we’ve got ‘Women’s Centre’ above the door, we can use that.*

*We have had women say, “Actually, I don’t like women and I don’t want to come.” And we go, “That’s fine.” They may have had experiences where they don’t feel comfortable in that environment, and it’s part of respecting that as well. But the feedback that we get from women is that they feel confident and safe. Obviously, in some of our areas, we have Muslim women accessing the service, and some of the women cover up. When they come in, they don’t have to, and they feel comfortable to uncover their face and feel confident.*

*We have had some women react quite unexpectedly when they see a male in the building and have become quite worried about it. We do pre-warn them when this is going to happen, where possible, but that just demonstrates as well that they feel safe in here. Which is important because they aren’t going to engage if they don’t feel safe.*

*We do offer counselling services to men, and we have got community wellbeing centres, which are a mixed venue. As well as having a women-only space, we feel it is equally important to provide, where possible and suitable, a positive male role model*

*for women. Sometimes we invite speakers in and they don't necessarily have to be female, whereas historically, I think we used to be like, "No, we want a woman to come in and do it." Whereas now, we're a bit more open, considering that the women do need to see that there are positive male role models out there."*

### **Section 3: funding and the impact of Transforming Rehabilitation**

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The women's centres receive funding from many sources and many of the centres are directly funded by the local authority. As the women's centres operate across Lancashire and Cumbria they receive different levels of funding in each area, as Karen explained:

*"We wouldn't be sustainable on just one funding stream but we don't have the same funding position in every area. We work across Lancashire and Cumbria but Lancashire is a separate council to Cumbria, so we've got those two to work with. And in Lancashire itself, we've got two independent boroughs, Blackburn with Darwen, which are a unitary authority. Each borough council funds us, but they do so to match their own priorities and/or needs. So, you will notice that in Blackburn, for instance, there's quite a lot more activity around homelessness. Whereas, that might not be reflected in the rest of Lancashire.*

*Then, we've also got Blackpool, which is a unitary authority as well. So, the funding there is very different. We haven't got the same level of counselling service available in Blackpool, which means the waiting list is a lot longer. Although people have access to counselling in each of our centres, we can't keep it level across the board."*

Karen went on to talk about changes in the funding environment:

*"The way it used to work is at the end of the financial year many local authorities and funders would encourage people to apply for funding but you don't see that anymore. Funds are more restrictive, and a lot of funders are just funding specific projects to achieve certain outcomes, rather than funding core services.*

*So, we're having to look outside of local authorities at other sources such as banks, for example, that will fund particular projects such as building works, or your IT, or*



*training. So, we've got to be looking constantly. It is out there. You've just got to look really hard. But the opportunities are a lot less than they used to be, definitely. And the restrictions on where people want you to spend it are probably tighter, as well."*

### **What impact has delivering a contract for the CRC had on your caseloads?**

*"The caseload has increased quite significantly but when we first went over onto the new contract, there was a drop in referrals. And I think that was down to a variety of reasons, as the offender managers were being expected to work in a different way, and they may not have had a level of trust in us and organisations in the supply chain that we're as able to do the work with the women. Also, some of the processes such as the new computer systems and electronic processes took a lot longer than anticipated to even out. And I suppose when you're dealing with landlords and premises and things like that then unexpected things do come up.*

*All those factors played into us getting a drop in referrals. However, since then, things have settled down quite a bit. We've seen quite a big increase in referrals, and we're expecting that to just continue over the next few months."*

### **What was the impact of having an initial drop in referrals?**

*"As we are delivering the contract on a Payment by Results basis, we experienced some clawback for the financial year 2016/17, which is quite tough, when you've done your best, and the referrals aren't there.<sup>5</sup> It's a processes that we had no control over that's impacted on that.*

*However, the CRC did take the lack of initial referrals into account and we were able to put together a mitigation statement so the clawback wasn't as much as it could have been."*

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<sup>5</sup> Payment by Results clawback is where organisations receive an upfront payment from the CRC but if they do not achieve their agreed targets, the CRC can take (or claw back) a proportion of that initial funding. More information about Payment by Results clawback can be found at: <http://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2013/09/26/payment-by-results-emerging-variations-in-payment-models/> (last accessed 22.08.2016).

**Now that your caseloads have increased, have you had to increase staff numbers to be able to meet some of those needs?**

*"We have increased capacity, not by a massive amount really, but we've certainly increased the numbers of mentors that we've got, including some of the more skilled mentors. The mentors are volunteers and some of them have used the services before. Without having mentors, it would probably be almost unachievable to run our services in some areas because of the numbers of women we work with.*

*The mentors get training and we're seeing some of them already go on to get employment in the field that they want to work in, which for many is obviously criminal justice. And we've actually employed a couple of the mentors ourselves."*

**What relationship do you have with the CRC staff?**

*"We've got co-location of the responsible officers [from the CRC] in each of our centres which has helped us with the relationship-building side of things. But we've always communicated and worked quite closely with them, although there have been some changes in staff. We have also run some training events together and been in their team meetings, which has all helped us develop relationships.*

*And the feedback from the offender managers [from the CRC] is that the systems we've got in place work. They trust us. They get the feedback on time and they know if women aren't attending or if there's any increase in risk. And they're quite happy, now, just to get that feedback from us on a daily or weekly basis, and trust that it's correct.*

*We developed a spreadsheet in 2010 which records whether a woman has attended our services or not and if there are any specific concerns or issues raised during their attendance. It's very simple, but it's always worked – so why change something that works, that everybody understands and likes? And it's not a time-consuming task, from our and their point of view."*

Although Lancashire Women's Centres are subcontracted by the CRC, the National Probation Service is able to spot purchase their services through the 'rate card', which is

produced by the CRC. To date, this has happened once, which Karen told us about in detail:

*"We were working with her [a client] under the CRC contract, but due to her reoffending, her level of risk increased and she became 'high-risk'. This meant that she had to be supervised by the NPS.*

*When we saw that her risk had increased, we put together an email to the NPS saying what support she needed, what support she'd had, and how much it was going to cost. It's quite a complex case and we've been doing quite a lot of work with her.*

*The fact that she went from being supervised by the CRC to the NPS shouldn't really have an impact on the level of support that she receives from us, which we said. Now, I did anticipate that potentially they wouldn't agree with us, because what we were offering was quite costly, but they 100% agreed with us.*

*They made the purchase through the rate card, and agreed that she should have continuity of support, so it was really good that we were able to continue working with her."*

### **Has Transforming Rehabilitation had an impact on the women you are supporting?**

*"The women that are newish to the CJS, or those who may have been in prison for quite some time and are just being released, don't really notice that there has been any change, because they don't know otherwise. Women who have been round the system several times over the last several years are finding it more difficult to adapt.*

*For some of them, I think some of their attitude is that, "If I'm not being seen by an offender manager, then what are people doing for me?" So it takes them a while to get used to using the service and seeing the benefits of it. But like I say, with the new ones, they don't know any different, so it's fairly straightforward to get them engaging."*

Karen summed up Lancashire Women's Centres' experiences, saying:

*"It's not easy, but you've got to work with what you've got, and it's the women who are important, at the end of it. In terms of working with the CRC, from our point of view, bar the funding being extremely tight, it's been quite positive."*

Karen felt that having a network of women's centres across the county has made it a lot easier to *"negotiate contracts and manage what's going on"*. However, this is not the case in other areas of the country as there are often different specialist organisations, delivering different services and support. This can lead to increased competition between organisations, especially as the funding environment becomes challenging. This is supported by Clinks' 'Change and Challenge' report, which shows that organisations reported they were experiencing increasing competition.<sup>6</sup>

Clinks will continue to track voluntary sector organisations' experiences of Transforming Rehabilitation and highlight the unique experiences of organisations working to support women in contact with the CJS. If you would like your service to be featured as a case study, please contact Nicola Drinkwater on [nicola.drinkwater@clinks.org](mailto:nicola.drinkwater@clinks.org).

More information about Lancashire Women's Centres can be found on their website <http://womenscentre.org>

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<sup>6</sup> Clinks (2016) *Change and Challenge: the voluntary sector's role in transforming rehabilitation*. Online: <http://www.clinks.org/resources-reports/change-challenge-voluntary-sector-role-transforming-rehabilitation> (last accessed 02.08.2016)

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