

Women's networking forum

23rd June 2016

Lancashire Women's Centres, Preston branch

Clinks, Women's Breakout, Women's Resource Centre and Agenda have hosted the first networking forum for voluntary sector organisations working with women in contact with the Criminal Justice System. The event was hosted and chaired by Sarah Swindley, Chief Executive of Lancashire Women's Centres.

Fourteen voluntary sector organisations were represented at the meeting, including the partner organisations. This note aims to give a brief overview of some of the key issues that were discussed by both partners and attendees.

Transforming Rehabilitation

Attendees raised a range of issues in relation to the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) reforms, and the impact this has had on their services and service users. Below are some of the key themes.

- *Contracts from Community Rehabilitation Companies*

Organisations in the women's sector are getting contracts from Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) but the detail of those contracts, and how this compares to what was commissioned pre-TR, isn't always clear. However, staff at the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) say that TR has increased the geographical coverage of provision in some areas, but the level of funding offered by CRCs has remained broadly the same. Therefore the same level of funding is being used to cover a greater area – which means less funding per woman.

Several frontline organisations confirmed that this was the case. They reported that although the value of contracts had remained broadly the same as what was offered by probation trusts, organisations were being required to work with more women. Indeed, many organisations funded through CRCs are growing to enable them to respond to increasing referral rates. One organisation was cited as receiving three times their previous referral rates, and another was receiving six times the number of women they had previously worked with.

In general, organisations noted that CRCs often prefer to work with one organisation rather than multiple smaller ones. Some CRCs are offering organisations contracts for three years, but the terms and conditions are only fixed for the first year. This has led to uncertainty for those organisations, which they find challenging.

Although evidence suggests that working to meet the complex needs of women in contact with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) costs about £1,000 per client, organisations report that they were being offered from £140 - £400 per client to work with women referred to them by the CRCs. Organisations said that CRCs were quite prescriptive in terms of the

services they wanted to commission, with many commissioning group work, mentoring and sign-posting services rather than the 'key-worker' model which is evidenced to be particularly effective when supporting women. Frontline organisations also said that they felt their voice was largely missing in TR.

- *Payment by results (PbR)*

An organisation said they had experienced a reduction in referral rates due to referral pathways for the new contracts commissioned by the CRCs taking some time to embed. This meant that they were unable to achieve the targets they had initially agreed with the CRC and 'clawback' had been applied. PbR clawback is where organisations receive an upfront payment from the CRC but if they have not achieved their agreed targets, the CRC can take (or clawback) a proportion of that initial funding.¹

Further to this, organisations who were delivering contracts stated that they felt a huge pressure to deliver them and they questioned what would happen to their service if they did not achieve results. Evaluations can be challenging for organisations as they often rely on the collection of quantitative or numerical data that organisations may not routinely collect; they can take up limited staff time and capacity. As a result, they said that they find them daunting.

- *Purchasing services through the rate card*

The National Probation Service (NPS) is required to purchase services through the 'rate card' which is produced by CRCs.² This essentially limits the NPS to purchasing services that are listed by individual CRCs, including services that CRC staff run themselves, as well as services delivered by sub-contracted providers from the voluntary sector. There were different practices taking place across the country. In some areas the NPS only purchased services through the rate card. However, in other areas the NPS sought to purchase services through the rate card in the first instance, but afterwards they could go directly to service delivery organisations.

CRCs charge transaction fees on services purchased through the rate card, which led attendees to question whether the NPS are getting value for money. Services on the rate card are likely designed to support people who are low to medium risk, but the NPS are responsible for managing those who are high risk, which may mean services are inappropriately costed.

¹ NCVO give a definition of PbR clawback that you can read here: <http://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2013/09/26/payment-by-results-emerging-variations-in-payment-models/> (last accessed 9.08.2016).

² The 'rate card' is produced by the CRCs and is a list of services available for the NPS to purchase. It includes services that CRC staff run themselves as well as services delivered by sub-contracted providers from the voluntary sector. More information about the 'rate card' can be found here: <http://www.clinks.org/resources-reports/change-challenge-voluntary-sector-role-transforming-rehabilitation> (last accessed 09.08.2016).

- *Speedy justice*

Cases are being progressed through the courts quicker in some areas. This so-called ‘speedy justice’ is preventing women’s centres from being able to contribute to pre-sentence reports (PSR) for their service users. PSRs are intended to provide sentencers with information to assist them in determining the most suitable sentences for individuals.³ If women’s centres are unable to contribute to PSRs then women’s needs may go undocumented, and this could prevent them from receiving the most appropriate disposal according to their needs.

Commissioning and increased competition between the women’s sector

One organisation said that they have never been in competition with other organisations about the work they do, but they have been in competition about where they deliver that work.

Commissioning is becoming more competitive and ruthless, which is in part due to the changes under TR. This has led organisations to ask how they can continue to collaborate, work together and celebrate each other’s success when they are increasingly working in competition with each other.

There remains a lack of understanding amongst commissioners generally about the value of women-specific interventions. Organisations raised concern that the Public Services (Social Value) Act is not being properly implemented in many areas.⁴

- *The Justice Data Lab*

The Justice Data Lab was set up by the Ministry of Justice to help organisations working with offenders to access re-offending data. It measures the impact of organisations working in criminal justice.⁵ In May 2015, 39 women’s centres throughout England submitted their data to the Justice Data Lab. They found that the women’s centres achieved a reduction in reoffending of between one and nine percentage points compared to the control group - a statistically significant result.

The expectation from the sector was that commissioners would use this evidence to inform their work, but evidence suggests that this is not necessarily taking place.

³ Ministry of Justice (2016) *04/2016-Determining Pre Sentence Reports*, Online: <https://www.justice.gov.uk/offenders/probation-instructions> (last accessed 09.08.2016).

⁴ Cabinet Office (2016) *Social Value Act: information and resources*, Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources> (last accessed 9.08.2016)

⁵ Ministry of Justice (2014) *Accessing the Justice Data Lab service*, Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/justice-data-lab> (last accessed 09.08.2016).

- *Impact on the women's sector*

Across the women's sector, many small specialist women's organisations are not successfully winning contracts and, in many cases, these contracts are being awarded to larger non-specialist organisations. There is concern that this is particularly impacting specialist organisations working with Black, Asian and minority ethnic women.

Needs of services users

Organisations said that their service users are experiencing more issues with housing, and street homelessness is becoming more of a problem. They also noted that for many women there is a lack of support around how to maintain successful tenancies.

Further to this, organisations noted that they are seeing increasing numbers of migrant women, including those from Eastern Europe. At the forum organisations discussed how they could work to ensure that they meet their needs.

Organisation's support needs

Organisations appreciated the opportunity to come together during the meeting and reflect on their recent experiences. Some of the key issues that emerged during the discussions are listed below.

- *Retaining values*

Organisations noted that they often seek to change the way the CJS operates, but the CJS is the same system from which they require funding to enable them to deliver their work. They noted that organisations need to be able to work with integrity, but there is a danger that this can be lost. Organisations suggested that those situated and delivering work outside of the CJS could help service delivery organisations to maintain a close focus on their core values.

- *Working in collaboration*

Organisations questioned, due to the increasing competition that they are experiencing, how they can continue to work well in collaboration with each other whilst also competing for the same funding opportunities. Many felt that it would be useful for organisations to reflect on what they seek to achieve by working together, and what lessons they can learn from previous experiences of collaborating.

Opportunities for engagement

Women's Resource Centre are updating their 'Why Women' publication, which highlights the need for women-only services. They are also working on a project about supporting partnership development. You can visit their website for more information and to get involved at <http://www.wrc.org.uk/>

What next?

Kate Aldous, Clinks' Head of Strategic Development, will feedback the key issues raised during the Advisory Board for Female Offenders meeting on the 30th June 2016, and Sarah Swindley will use the feedback to ensure they represent the sector at meetings of the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3).⁶

The next meeting of the women's networking forum will take place on 19th September 2016.

⁶ More information about the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group can be accessed here: <http://www.clinks.org/rr3> (last accessed 09.08.2016)