

Women's Support Network

Atlas Women's Centre

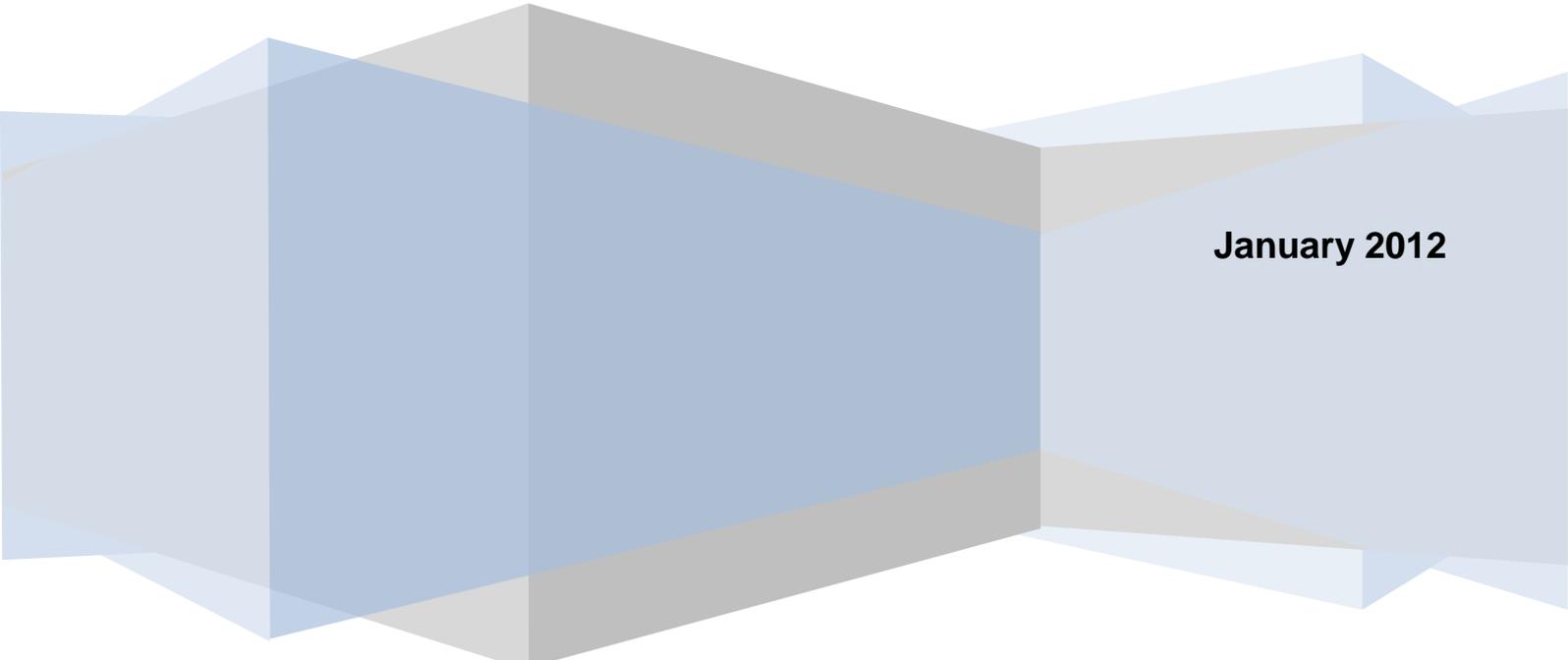
Windsor Women's Centre

First Steps Women's Centre

**Community Service or Service in
the Community: the experience of
women offenders and women's
centres in Northern Ireland”**

Caroline McCord

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1.0 Introduction

This report is based on a small research study of women's experiences of community service placements in three women's centres in Northern Ireland carried out by the Women's Support Network (WSN) (Appendix 1a). The women's centres play a pivotal role in the support of women across Northern Ireland and are crucial to the work of the Women's Community Support Project (WCSP appendix1b) (a partnership between WSN Probation and NIACRO). This project provides a supported process for women offenders to engage in resources available primarily within women's centres based in the community. Within this context the Atlas and Windsor Women's Centres highlighted the needs of women on community service placements and suggested that the WSN carry out a small study outlining the experience of their work with offenders in the centres. First Steps Women's Centre were also invited to participate. The resulting research project was supported by the Pilgrim Trust and VSB Small Grants Programme.

1.1 Structure of the report

In the first instance the report gives a brief outline of women in the criminal justice system and the Northern Ireland context followed by an overview of women and community service. Secondly, the report offers a summary of women's centres in Northern Ireland focusing on the work of the Windsor, Atlas and First Steps Women's Centres with women on community service placements. Lastly drawing on material from interviews with the centre staff and women serving orders, the findings of the report discusses the experience of community service in women's centres under recurring themes including: 'labelling' of offenders, self worth, women's needs and women 'moving on' – life after community service. Throughout the analysis the importance of women-only space and the holistic approach adopted by the centres is highlighted. Conclusions and key recommendations are offered to add to the knowledge base of women and community sentences, to compliment and validate existing research, and to support the view that the use of women's centres for placements can make community service a positive and effective experience for women.

2.0 Methodology

This short report draws on interviews conducted with women subject to Community Service Orders and the women's centre staff. The material is drawn from a small study exploring experiences of women under supervision whilst on placements in women's centres in Northern Ireland and includes the perspectives of the women on Community Service Orders and centre staff who carried out a supervisory role. A total of 11 interviews were conducted between June and November 2011. The researcher conducted face to face interviews with 6 women on community service orders, Windsor Women's Centre (3), Atlas Women's Centre (2) and First Steps Women's Centre (1). The women were aged 24-42 years and were sentenced to between 40 and 240 hours of community service. Interviews were also conducted with 5 staff members (2 Atlas, 2 Windsor & 1 First Steps Women's Centres) from the women's centres responsible for the supervision and support of the women on community service placements.

All participants were recruited by the managers of the women's centres. Formal consent was sought from the participants and they were informed that the research data would be anonymous and confidential and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The semi-structured interviews took place in the women's centres conducted by female researchers who recorded the responses through note taking.

3.0 Women and Criminal Justice System

Research consistently shows that women commit less crime than men and there are significant differences between men and women's offending. Criminal justice approaches to dealing with crime has focussed on male offending which has led to women being 'shoe-horned' into a male orientated system (Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts, 2007). Gender plays a major role in shaping criminality, and whilst men and women in the criminal justice system can experience similar problems, women offenders have specific needs that are distinctly different to those of men (Corston 2007). Indeed, women's routes into offending and the reasons for offending are also different from men (Gelsthorpe et al 2007) as illustrated in research, women's offending is often related to the wider circumstances of their lives which are

frequently characterised by abuse, poverty, social exclusion, mental health and issues related to debt and benefit dependency (Bloom et al., 2003 in Malloch and McIvor, 2011, Byrne and Trew 2008, O'Neill 2011). Therefore to address offending behaviour, these potentially contributory factors should also be addressed.

As the majority of women sentenced through the courts are subject to disposals in the community, it follows that the other factors that contribute to offending behaviour should be considered in the design and provision of community penalties as applied to women (Howe, 1994). Corston (2007) suggested that work with women offenders should be based in community centres offering a holistic, woman centred approach. She viewed community penalties as more appropriate than prison for women because of their backgrounds and circumstances that led to their offending.

Worrall and Gelsthorpe (2009) highlighted evidence to support the case for greater use of community sentences to address the specific needs of women offenders, a view supported by the Scottish Office (1998:2 in Malloch and McIvor, 2011) who suggested that almost all women offenders could be safely punished in the community without major risk of harm to the general population. The Department of Justice in Northern Ireland also assert that *“where women are sentenced, their needs, wherever possible are met in the community”* (DOJ 2010:47). However, it is recognised that community penalties alone are not capable of addressing the wider issues that bring women into and keep them in the criminal justice system, they can only be effective for women if gender relevant provisions exist and are taken into account when women receive community penalties (Malloch and McIvor, 2011). Although there has been an increase in the number of women given community sentences across the UK in the last number of years there has been little research into women’s experiences of these disposals (ibid.).

3.1 Women’s Offenders in Northern Ireland

As in other jurisdictions women represent a small percentage (13%) of those brought before the courts in Northern Ireland; they account for 3% of the prison population and 9% of those under the supervision of the Probation Board (Department of Justice 2009).

Following publication of the Corston Report (2007) in the UK, there were a number of significant developments in Northern Ireland to manage women who offend. After a pre-consultation process in 2008, the *Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders in Northern Ireland* was published by the Department Of Justice in 2009 which had the following key objectives:

- to provide alternatives to prosecution and custody;
- to reduce the number of women coming through the criminal justice system;
- to ensure that, where women are sentenced their needs, wherever possible, are met in the community;
- and to develop a tailored approach to the management of women in custody;
- to take forward the options for developing a new purpose-built facility for women prisoners.

As well as the development of the draft strategy the Probation Board for Northern Ireland established the Inspire Women's Project in October 2008 which was set up to “*develop and deliver in the community, a new range of women-specific services for women offenders which would directly impact on reducing women's offending through targeting community based interventions*” (Department of Justice, 2010).

In tandem with this the Northern Ireland Prison Service were tasked with introducing gender-specific standards within Ash House, the Women's Unit housed within HMP Hydebank Wood. The full strategy '*Women's Offending behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013*' was published in 2010 and this has laid the foundation for criminal justice agencies to think differently about how to support women in the criminal justice system, and to consider viable options for interventions within the community.

As a result new initiatives and partnerships have been established between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors to support women who offend. An example of this is the strategic partnership between Inspire (PBNI) NIACRO and the Women's Support Network which established the *Women's Community Support*

Project. This project provides a range of services for women both in the community and in custody. One of the key benefits of this award winning project is that it continues to offer support to women beyond the duration of their probation order (O'Neill, 2011) through women's centres across Northern Ireland.

3.2 Women and Community Service in Northern Ireland

The Community Service Order (CSO) was introduced to Northern Ireland in 1972 and is used as an alternative to a prison sentence. Community Service is managed by the Probation service and as a court sentence, it is both retributive and restorative and carries a maximum sentence of 240 hours.

Currently the PBNI have approximately two hundred and fifty placements in community, voluntary and church organisations and charity shops. Offenders can work in a variety of jobs such as gardening and general maintenance, redecoration of community facilities, clean up schemes, care taking and cleaning duties and so on (PBNI Strategy for Community Service 2010).

Probation Officers take a range of key issues into consideration when setting up a woman's community service placement for example, proximity to her home area, flexibility to meet child care needs, her interests, skills, offending and personal needs. PBNI also conduct an exit survey from Community Service clients in order to have feedback about their placement.

The most recent figures from the Probation Board (2011) demonstrate that as in other jurisdictions there has been an increase of women on community sentences including women on Community Service Orders as indicated in the table below:

Community Order	2009			2010			2011			% increase 2009 - 2011
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	
Combination Order	17	196	213	11	243	254	27	286	313	47%
Community Service Order	53	560	613	81	667	748	87	723	810	32%
Probation Order	247	1296	1543	247	1403	1650	261	1499	1760	14%
Total	317	2052	2369	339	2313	2652	375	2508	2883	22%

(PBNI 2012)

Despite the increase in the numbers of women sentenced to community penalties in Northern Ireland, the statistics indicate that the proportion of women is significantly lower than their male counterparts. The data suggests that a trend is now emerging in the greater use of community sentences for women.

4.0 Women's Centres in Northern Ireland

Women's Centres across Northern Ireland are recognised by government and statutory agencies as key organisations working with women and communities in disadvantaged areas. The centres provide a range of services, facilities and activities in safe, women-only space. Women's centres' core values focus on service users, they provide specialist support services such as holistic therapies and counselling, debt and money management, childcare, health promotion including stress management, education and training and social and recreational facilities for women, delivered by women. They also offer opportunities for volunteering and work experience. The Centres take a 'women-centred' approach to their work offering 'wrap around services' to women from all backgrounds, age groups and abilities that may otherwise be isolated and marginalised from each other and their communities.

The centres 'work with' women as opposed to 'doing to' them, giving them a 'hand up' not a 'hand out' thus recognising their strengths and aspirations. Such measures build confidence and empower women, which can have a significant impact on their life choices. Women's Centres provide a 'hub' where women have the chance to meet, share experiences, socialise and learn together. Within the wider context the Women's Centres are involved in extensive partnership working with statutory, voluntary and community organisations to target disadvantage thus contributing to the physical, social and economic regeneration of areas. The centres actively work and campaign on a range of issues which impact on areas such as poverty, health, community safety, community development and community cohesion.

It should be noted that women's centres in Northern Ireland are open to all women and should not to be confused with some of the women's centres in England, Scotland and Wales who work exclusively with women offenders for example the 218 Centre in Glasgow.

4.1 Windsor, Atlas and First Steps Women's Centres

There is a growing recognition that woman only provision and a holistic approach in supportive environments such as women's centres are an effective way of working with women offenders (Gelsthorpe et al 2007). Three of the Women's Centres have been involved with women offenders through the PBNi Community Service Scheme, Windsor Women's Centre in Belfast since 1999, (appendix 2) Atlas Women's Centre in Lisburn, since 2009 (appendix 3) and more recently the First Steps Women's Centre, Dungannon (appendix 4) providing community service placements. The centres also support the work of WSN through the Women's Community Support Project.

All of the respective centres offer services and facilities which are available to any woman in the community offering a safe, supportive environment where women feel valued, empowered and encouraged to reach their full potential. In terms of community service placements, the centres offer a range of opportunities including reception and office work, catering, cleaning and DIY. Across the centres women on placements are given induction training and are appointed a staff supervisor/mentor to carry out the statutory requirements (time sheets, liaison with probation) and offer one-one support. The women also have access to the full range of facilities for example crèche, training and education and volunteer opportunities. Specialist provisions for women within the centres such as advice, therapies and life skills programmes, provide the opportunity for women on placements to access additional support to deal with underlying needs and issues that contribute to offending behaviour. The centres are ideally placed to offer community service placements as they also fill a gap in provision as 'gender relevant providers'.

5.0 Research Findings

The responses in this small study support the findings of research carried out across the UK and in other jurisdictions that women on community sentences present with a complex range of issues and problems. Furthermore, women are more likely than men to talk about these issues and seek support to resolve them (Convery , 2009, Gelsthorpe et al 2007). Subsequently, if women's needs and problems are more complex there are implications for the types of services and supervision put in place to support women if they are based on interventions and practices developed for

men (Malloch and McIvor, 2011). Malloch and McIvor's research (2011) regarding the experiences of women on community sentences identified a range of recurring themes such as women's needs and stigma. The evidence from this study highlights that there is a propensity for the same issues to be raised by women on community sentences. Evidence from this study supports the view that women offenders respond positively to women-only provision. Moreover, support and interventions offered in women's centres were seen to play a vital role in the reintegration of vulnerable women offenders both during and beyond the duration of their community sentence. The evidence also adds to the evolving knowledge of women offenders in the community setting and highlights the recurring issues prevalent in resettlement, integration and desistance from offending in existing research and discourse on women offenders.

Women's needs

As indicated above, literature demonstrates that women offenders present with a range of complex needs and that women are more likely to talk about and seek resolution for their problems.

The study found that the women's centres were best placed to maximise women's access to a number of services under one roof, this was important to women struggling with multiple and complex problems for example coping with mental ill health, debt, children in care and domestic violence. Prior to coming to the women's centres the respondents reported getting little or fragmented support and being shifted from one agency to another leading to a spiral of isolation and aggravation. This was one respondent's experience:

"I was going between my Probation Officer, social worker and my doctor who were all trying to get me an appointment with this one and that one.....my head was pickled with it. When they put me on community service in the centre my supervisor got me in with counsellor and brought the girl in from Women's Aid.....the help from these two women has made things a lot better for me.....I got a non-mol (non-molestation) order on him (former partner) and now I'm getting a bit of peace.....my tablets are sorted as well and the depression isn't as bad".

Staff supporting the women also recognised that women offenders were disempowered by life experience for example domestic violence and childhood abuse and that they could be victims as well as offenders:

“All the woman needed was information and a bit of help, she didn’t understand about power relationships and making choices for herself....I got the support worker from Women’s Aid to talk to her, she went on one of their courses and we got her to see a counsellor in the centre, the change in her was remarkable”.

Other respondents talked about help to resolve housing problems and support with handling debt and money management. Some of the respondents spoke of their experiences of broken and fragile relationships as a result of offending and the access to support in the centres that helped them to rebuild relationships:

“I had problems with drink....my family stopped trying to help me a long time ago and I don’t blame them, I was totally out of order....I sobered up when I ended up in court – again, I was lucky to get off with community service and not jail. Working in the centre I talked to the staff there...they helped me to get a plan with social services and do a parenting course...this helped me with my kids and I’m trying to get them off the ‘at risk’ list....it has been a tough time but I’ve learned the hard way...my mum talks to me now...I don’t go around with the old crowd....community service turned out to be a god-send....the centre was and still is a lifeline”.

Evidence shows that women on placements in the centres developed a ‘buy-in’ to the ethos of the centre and were inclined to seek support and use the specialist services provided. The respondents placed the emphasis on the centres as place of trust and safety where they felt able to discuss sensitive personal issues. One respondent who reported being abused by a male relative stated:

“The woman counsellor was brilliant, and we were in a good (safe) place... I used to go to a man up at the hospital but I couldn’t tell him.....you know...about the stuff that happened”.

This evidence shows the high value placed on the centres work by the women and demonstrates the 'one-stop-shop' model advocated by Corston (2007) and others in action, putting the theory into practice. It further highlights that community sentences in themselves cannot address the issues that bring women into and keep them in the criminal justice system, to bring about change in offending we must address women's offending related needs.

'Labelling' and 'stigma' of offending

Studies have revealed that the shame and guilt of offending have a particular impact on women whose activities are often perceived as deviant and are subsequently 'labelled' as offenders. Women who commit crime are stigmatised on the basis of 'rule breaking' and 'role breaking', that is, breaking the gendered codes of behaviour deemed appropriate for women (ibid.). This is evident from the study where the stigma attached to conviction and sentencing through the courts was felt by the majority of the respondents. One respondent explained that:

"When I was convicted my only worry was that my neighbours would find out, I hadn't told anyone I was going to court, never mind that I was shoplifting, I was awful upset and embarrassed".

Another respondent described her experience as 'a nightmare', *"I was never in trouble before you know...I just couldn't handle the drink, the whole thing was desperate, and I was really scared"*.

A number of respondents expressed concerns about the public nature of community service, for example one respondent was worried about how she would be perceived in the women's centre, *"I was terrified that everyone would be looking at me knowing I was a criminal...it never happened and the centre was great, I was another 'volunteer', this really helped me"*

Conversely one young woman completing community service in her local women's centre said,

“I’m a local girl and everybody knows everybody else’s business round here. I feel a bit bad about it (benefit fraud) but everyone knew I was doing community service so I just sucked it up and got on with it.....it didn’t make any difference to the women in the centre, they treated me the same”.

Staff also highlighted the significance of stigma and building of positive relationships. One staff member explained how they deal with the issue of stigma and labelling:

“When we are getting a new woman coming to do community service, a staff member arranges a meeting with the probation officer and the woman concerned, the next step is a one to one meeting with the woman to tell her what happens in the centre, induction and so on. The woman is introduced to the centre as a volunteer so she comes into the centre as a woman.....not an offender.....you need to let the women know you respect them.....we always try at this stage to support the woman a little bit more so that we gain her confidence and trust, then we can support her with the real issues.”

All three centres used a similar approach, with the emphasis on the volunteer status and its importance to these women:

“I was really nervous going to the centre, I got done for theft and was afraid that everyone would look at me and talk behind my back.....being a volunteer was a relief.”

Self-worth

Previous research of women involved in offending has emphasised the importance of building self esteem and taking control over their lives (McIvor and Barry, 1998 in Malloch and McIvor, 2011). Low self image and lack of confidence are indicative of involvement in lifestyles where women see themselves as powerless or having little control (ibid.). It is evident from this study that respondents had issues with self worth as a number of them expressed experiencing feelings of uselessness, failure, worthlessness, stupid and ‘being no good’. This view of self worth is a barrier to many women seeking appropriate help or thinking that they can have a better future. Having one to one support from women’s centre staff gave women the opportunity to

express their feelings about themselves and begin to make changes, as one woman put it:

“I always thought I was stupid, couldn’t do anything right ...but that’s what I was always told”, she further reflected on how she felt after experiencing support and encouragement within the centre:

“ My mentor in the centre didn’t do things for me, she got me to try them for myself, I did a personal development course and things don’t seem as bad, I’m a lot more confident about myself and what I can do”.

Empowerment of the women was a key feature across the centres; women were supported to address the impact of life experiences that shaped their negative feelings about self image and led to positive outcomes. This was outlined by one of the women’s centre staff:

“One of the women on community placement was very vulnerable, she had very low confidence and needed a little bit of motivation, I encouraged her to go to some therapies and supported her to attend a personal development programme.....she made friends with one of the other women in the class and after the third week I only popped my head round the door to say hello.....she got a lot out of the class but I think the most important thing was the friendship.”

This evidence supports Bloom & Covington’s (1998) argument that gender specific interventions must take into account women’s need to feel safe and need to feel empowered.

Women Moving on

Studies of the experiences of women offenders and their characteristics show that poverty, social exclusion and deprivation are significant pathways to offending (O’Neill 2011). Empowering women can and does lead to positive pathways out of offending. Poverty and deprivation are often linked to unemployment, educational underachievement and lack of opportunities. Women’s centres can provide pathways to employment through personal development, education and training

opportunities that provide new experiences and can support women to access a different lifestyle. As a result of these experiences women can take on new roles and responsibilities which help them to develop and achieve their full potential.

The study demonstrates that the work and time invested in the women by the centres' staff has supported women to 'move on' for example to other services, programmes and pathways such as education and training or volunteering and employment.

Two of the respondents were supported to prepare for and secure employment:

"I was able to work through a lot of issues, you know... cut down on the drink and that...I liked working in the kitchen and staff helped me to get my food hygiene course and get a CV and that...I got a job in the town but when a job come up in the centre I applied and got it...everything has changed".

"I was a bit messed up and didn't know what I wanted to do...staff got me to try different tasters like beauty classes and that but I really loved the gym, they (staff) helped me to get into college where I done all the personal trainer qualifications and am now working in a gym".

One respondent had her community service hours suspended temporarily so that she could complete a 10 week Step Ahead government work scheme for under 25's:

"It's fantastic to get this chance...I can stay in the centre and work away....I really love it, I get to attend meetings and I'm part of the staff team and they (staff) listen to my ideas...I'm going to be responsible for organising a fundraising event for Sands"

Another respondent talked about using the new skills she learned on community service to continue volunteering in the centre:

"I did a computer course in the centre when I was on community service, I wanted to keep learning so I volunteer in the office (women's centre) and go to classes"

Centre staff however highlighted a major drawback for women on community service placements:

“Conditions of the order doesn’t allow them (women on placements) to go to classes during working hours, this is a problem because if you want to train women up, raise their confidence and keep them out of trouble then they need to develop skills”.

Another staff member suggested that for some women attending classes was a problem if they were not on the same day the women were working, one woman told her that although she would love to come to the class: *“it is simply a choice between paying another four bus fares to do the course at the centre or buying mince for the dinner”.* In this instance the centre arranged transport for the woman and she attended the course.

One respondent talked about going back to education:

“I’ve been in and out of the system since I was thirteen, in an out of prison, some of my kids were born there....I want to get out of this cycle for myself, for my kids and give them a better life....education in the centre is a start”.

Of the six offenders who participated in the study, none have re-offended, all of the respondents identified women’s centres as supportive environments where they were able to give something back to the community whilst getting support with their own issues, all without the stigma of “offender”. The importance of relationships was highlighted as mutually beneficial and all of the respondents emphasised that they were supported to access services, resources and opportunities to improve their personal circumstances. All respondents have reported that their community sentence in the women’s centre was a constructive experience based on trust and respect and have subsequently made significant, positive changes to their lives.

Key Findings

The study highlights:

- that community penalties do not have the capacity in themselves to address the wider issues that bring women into and keep them in the criminal justice system;
- Women on community service placements in the women's centres presented with a range of complex issues;
- Women offenders feel 'safe' in a women only environment;
- The women's centres holistic way of working with women on community service placements encouraged women to take up services that provided realistic support in dealing with and resolving issues connected to their offending behaviour;
- Integration with other women (non-offenders) normalised women offenders experiences in a positive environment where they could work, develop, learn and share experiences;
- Work practices within the centres de-stigmatised the experience of community service, women felt valued and supported which motivated them to work and comply with their orders;
- Mentoring and personal support from centre staff and access to a range of specialist services (one-stop-shop) supported women to make positive, informed and responsible choices for more positive lifestyles;
- Long term commitment from the centres had a sustained impact on the women who stayed involved with the centres and accessed services beyond the period of their community service placements;
- Empowering women to take control and responsibility of their lives provided positive pathways out of offending such as education, volunteering and employment;
- 'Gender relative' women's centres are ideally placed to offer reparative work opportunities to women offenders on community service orders;
- None of the women offenders who participated in the study re-offended and they were optimistic about their futures;
- Women's centres interventions make an enormous contribution to diverting women away from reoffending.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is recognised that women commit less crime than men and that women are disadvantaged in a criminal justice system targeted at men. Women's needs are complex and different to those of men and are best met by a holistic approach. There is limited research on women and community sentences, however available literature indicates that community penalties do not have the capacity in themselves to address the wider issues that bring women into and keep them in the criminal justice system, nonetheless women appear to do well on community sentences.

Evidence from the study indicates that women offenders respond positively to safe, women only environments where a women-centred approach is paramount to empowering and developing women to reach their full potential. It is arguable that there are a number of options available for placements on community services that will actively support women in implementing lifestyle changes for example pathways to employment. However, as demonstrated in the study, the experience within a gender specific environment focuses on the woman's specific needs which will greatly enhance desistance from future offending. The empowering and enabling culture in the centres, the wrap around services, the safe environment where women are supported through intensive personal intervention, clearly shows that the women's centres 'tick all the boxes' in engaging vulnerable and marginalised women offenders. Working with women 'where they are at' and more importantly investing long term commitment and maintaining their engagement after the community sentences ends, demonstrates that women's centres provide a positive and empowering experience to women on community sentences.

As evidenced in the study, women's centres can and do provide appropriate 'gender relevant' support and interventions for women offenders, however in the current economic climate the centres need support to continue providing quality services. The commissioning of women's centres as providers would be a step in the right direction to providing enhanced integrated services, which, in turn, could have a huge impact on the lives of women offenders, thus reducing the likelihood of their re-offending and creating safer communities for all.

The findings give rise to a number of recommendations for future policy and practice:

- The Department of Justice and Criminal justice Agencies should adequately resource Women's Centres to provide 'gender appropriate' interventions to support the complex needs of vulnerable women offenders;
- The Department of Justice should consider how provision in women centres could be integrated into core services for women offenders;
- In-depth research is required to evaluate and assess the impact of community sentences on women offenders in Northern Ireland;
- Community sentences should take cognisance of the criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs of women offenders;
- Community service placements where appropriate should be 'gender relative' and properly address the needs of the offender;
- Current legislation dictates that offenders on community service placements cannot access training or educational courses as part of their community service hours, PBNi should consider implementing the enhanced community service strategy;
- Sentencers should take cognisance of the evidence that women do well on community sentences and that these community disposals should be used as alternatives to custody (particularly short prison sentences) for the majority of women offenders.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1a



Women's Support Network
109-113 Royal Avenue
Belfast BT1 1FF
Tele:028 9023 6923
Email: info@wsn.org.uk
Website www.wsn.org.uk

Established in 1989, **Women's Support Network** (WSN) is a regional infrastructure organisation that provides support services to, and represents 63 community based Women's Centres; women's groups and projects; and 22 associated members across Northern Ireland. The network provides training, information, resources and one to one support to members on organisational development. WSN works to strengthen the collective voice of women's groups enabling collective action which can impact upon policy and decision making, particularly in the fields of community based education and training, childcare, employment and specialist advice. WSN also play an integral role in campaigning for the advancement of women and funding for the women's sector.

APPENDIX 1b

Women's Community Support Project

WSN has been working with women offenders since September 2009 through the unique *Women's Community Support Project* (WCSP) a partnership of WSN, Probation Board NI (PBNI) and Northern Ireland Association for the Care and resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO). Staff from across the partnership have worked together to provide a model of intervention that offers women offenders to chance to access services that they really need and support their reintegration into the community. To date the project has worked with over 150 women on probation, in custody and on release from prison, connecting them to services and resources in women's centres and the wider community sector across Northern Ireland.

The tailor made support packages and interventions address the many and diverse needs of these vulnerable women supporting them to develop confidence and make life choices that reduces their offending behaviour. The project has also been instrumental in supporting greater involvement with women offenders within the community by increasing knowledge and understanding of women and offending behaviour and their experience of the criminal justice system. The project has recently won two major commendation awards from the Department of Justice Northern Ireland and the Butler Trust, London.

APPENDIX 2



Windsor Women's Centre

136-144 Broadway

BT12 6HY

Tel: 028 9023 5451

Fax: 028 9023 0684

Email: info@windsorwomanscentre.co.uk

Since its establishment in 1990, Windsor Women's Centre has been committed to providing vital services for the diverse needs of women within the local community. Situated in the 'Village' area of South Belfast, the centre currently has 23 staff working with a management committee of 18 people, 15 of whom are women from the community itself.

Within an area of major social and economic deprivation, the needs of the local community include provisions for education, training, childcare, advice and information capacity building, developing confidence and addressing issues of health and the environment.

As the only Women's Centre in South Belfast, the organisation works closely with the Women's Support Network and has been involved with many other women's groups across Northern Ireland in bringing the sector together in agreement towards a comprehensible structure of Greater Belfast, Rural and Northeast.

Together with the voluntary and community sectors, the centre also endeavours to bring services to the area that are capable of supporting the women in the community towards building a better life for themselves and their families. Through these various programmes and services, the centre contributes significantly to community cohesion and social inclusion, in empowering women to become proactive and vocal members of the community.

Through its educational and training programmes, the centre offers women opportunities to gain vital skills and qualifications in increasing the prospects available for meaningful employment in posing a challenge to decades of poverty.

The building itself seems to symbolise the centre's positive impact within its community, having been designed by the local participants and founders of the centre, who also carried out much of the building work. In an area where issues of deprivation and poor housing conditions are crucial concerns, the creation of a colourful, welcoming and lively environment adds a constructive and vital energy to its surroundings.

APPENDIX 3



Atlas Women's Centre

81 Sloan Street Lisburn
BT27 5AG
Phone: 028 92605806
Fax: 028 92664152

Lisburn women's Centre was established in November 1994. For the first time women in Lisburn had their own resource and information centre to provide; information, support, a drop-in centre, access to courses and health and community safety awareness. The centre based in Bridge Street a neutral location, opened part time and was staffed by volunteers to offer taster sessions to all sections of the community. Within the first 2 years of opening funding was secured to employ staff and offer a wide range of courses supporting over 250 women. Since then the centre has flourished and gone from strength to strength with many changes, all for the better. By 2002 the name changed to ATLAS Women's Centre, Adult Training Learning And Support and the centre moved to bigger premises in Sloan Street benefiting up to 1000 people each year.

ATLAS aims to:

- increase people's confidence and self-esteem
- promote mental and physical health and wellbeing
- improve the quality of people's lives
- increasing aspiration and ambition
- empower people to change

In 2009 ATLAS won the *Pride of Place*, Co-operation Ireland Awards for Enterprise in the Community and SERC Community group of the Year Award; continuing success this year with a highly commended project at The Star Awards in Dublin.

ATLAS strives to encourage and support ordinary, disadvantaged and vulnerable people to believe in their own abilities and to achieve and encourage positive change. The provision of educational, health, leisure workshops/courses and volunteering opportunities build self-confidence and self-esteem, create friendships, develop skills, and promote good physical and mental health and happiness.

Activities are available morning, afternoon and evenings with crèche facility available for babies and preschool children. Parents/carers can use the crèche if they are attending ATLAS, a health appointment, interview or a healthy activity such as a walk.

When our door is open you are welcome.

APPENDIX 4



First Steps Women's Centre

21a William Street
Dungannon
County Tyrone
BT70 1DX
N.Ireland
thewomenscentre@gmail.com
Tele: 028 87727648

Mission Statement:

"To improve the quality of life for women through education and personal development, supporting women to make choices for the future"

A Centre of Education, Community Development and Health Promotion exclusively for women, First Steps Women's Centre (FSWC) has been a beacon of hope, support, training and Childcare for women in the Dungannon and South Tyrone Area.

FSWC began in humble settings in 1998 as a place for women from both sides of the community to come together to socialise, talk and to take part in different types of activities. Since then FSWC has developed into a Centre providing 300-350 course placements per year with 110 childcare places per week in a newly refurbished, state-of-the-art Childcare facility!

We provide training and education in many subjects including Beginners IT, Essential Skills Literacy (Basic English) & Numeracy (Basic Maths), Digital Photography, Clait Certificate, ECDL, Sage accounts, Text Processing and Digital Imaging. Our pass rates are between 75% & 100%. Since November 2009 we have been offering Health Promotion programmes which includes an introduction to Holistic Therapies, Understanding Your Eating and Stress Management. There is a new innovative project - Menopause 4 Thought - which will be offering various activities in Stress Management, Eat to Beat the Menopause, Alternative Therapy taster sessions and Exercise and Yoga. There are also information sessions on Homeopathic Therapies and HRT and Conventional Medicines. A one-to-one Counselling service is available. An additional range of new programmes are available for 2012. Check website for further information www.firststepswomenscentre.org

Awards

- 2009 FSWC was the first Women's Centre in Northern Ireland to attain *Investors in People* accreditation
- 2009 All Ireland *Aontas Awards for Adult Learning Organizations*.
- 2009 & 2010 short listed for Irish News *Best Place to Work – Innovative Employer Award*,
- 2010 runner up in CO3 Awards - *Leading on Learning & Development* in two categories - *Leading people* and *Leading a smaller organisation*.
- 2011 FSWC attained *Silver Iip Status* – putting them in the top one percent of recognized Investors in People companies in the UK.
- 2011 FSWC student Wilma Graham won the *Tyrone Essential Skills Award* recognising outstanding achievements in literacy, numeracy and ICT learning.
- 2011 Winner Mid Ulster Business Awards – Excellence in People Development

Funded by the Pilgrim Trust and VSB Small Grants Programme

