

YWCA response to NOMS Cymru commissioning and business plan 2008 - 09



YWCA is the leading charity working with disadvantaged young women. Young women are at the centre of all that we do. They face unique problems in today's society, are largely unheard and lack influence: young women come to YWCA for support, guidance and learning opportunities which are designed with their specific needs in mind and we campaign with them to combat the discrimination and disadvantage they face. Through our help and support we want them to:

- be inspired and determined
- be healthy and safe
- be in control
- speak out and be listened to
- gain opportunities, and
- give back.

While YWCA works in particular with girls and young women aged 11-30, we recognise that in order to exercise the greatest impact and influence on their lives we need to be creative and pragmatic in our approach to our work. This may mean, for example:

- working with older women whose direct influence on younger women will lead the latter to seek our services
- needing to work with men to challenge their perceptions of young women and influence their treatment of them
- working with younger girls so that when they become teenagers they have greater aspirations

However, we will always work in the ways that deliver the best outcomes for young women, directly or indirectly. We recognise the importance that they place on being able to focus on their issues in an environment that is women-only and safe, and all our centres will ensure that they can deliver help and services in ways that make them feel comfortable and are conducive to progress/personal growth. We are absolutely committed to meeting the diverse needs of all young women who come to us for help, guidance and support.

Summary

- YWCA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NOMS Cymru commissioning and business plan.
- YWCA is concerned that vulnerable young women are ending up in the criminal justice system.
- We believe that an appropriate outcome measure could focus on how agencies and services work together to reduce the risk and occurrence of family breakdowns.
- YWCA is pleased that women offenders are one of the priority groupings in Wales. Within this group we are particularly keen on work which helps vulnerable young women.
- We would like to see the commissioning priorities influenced by the evaluation of the UK Government's demonstration projects (this includes an evaluation of the Together Women Project).
- YWCA would like to see custodial sentences as a last resort and more emphasis on women-only probation and support services in the community. We believe that for this to be effective it is important to undertake a mapping of existing local services.
- We are pleased to see partnership and consortia working highlighted. We believe that collaborative commissioning arrangements would need clear guidelines and frameworks so as to be truly collaborative.
- We believe that the key enabler of building a more comprehensive and informative picture of offending needs to be informed by further research into the interventions which work for women and for young women in particular.

- YWCA believes young women who have been at risk of offending, or who have been in the criminal justice system, are well placed to share their experiences.
- YWCA would like the service review which focuses on short-term custodial sentences to look at the role of the third sector in providing services on release.
- We believe that interventions should be client-led, needs based and non-judgemental, all of which are important in supporting the personal development of vulnerable women.

YWCA's response

Introduction

YWCA is concerned that vulnerable young women are ending up in the criminal justice system. Young women's offending behaviour is often linked to poverty, disengagement from education, mental health problems, violence and abuse and social exclusion. Young women need preventative measures and support before punishment and sanctions are considered.

Facts

- A survey of mothers in prison found that just over half (54%) said they had offended because they had no money. 38 per cent said it was because they needed to support their children and 33 per cent said it was because they had no job.
- 66 per cent of women prisoners are mothers with dependent children under 18. (Fawcett)
- 33 per cent of female sentenced prisoners were excluded from school.
- 71 per cent of women in prisons have no qualifications.

Response to Questions

Q1. Can you suggest any outcome measures that could be considered for our commissioning plan for each of the six offender groupings to support collaboration of service delivery?

The Together Women Project (see below) aims to reduce the amount of family breakdowns through prevention, rehabilitation and resettlement. We suggest that an outcome measure for work with women offenders could focus on how prevention and rehabilitation services reduce the risk and occurrence of family breakdowns. This would involve a number of agencies working together, including third sector organisations, health visitors and social workers.

We also believe there should be consideration of how to measure the social investment of services which work to reduce family breakdown. This would help provide robust evidence of how these services benefit young women and their families.

We wish to make the point that interventions which work can allow failure. Being non-judgemental in approach and allowing failure means that women are more likely to return to the intervention and try again. Outcomes measures should reflect this.

Q2. Do you agree with prioritising these offender groupings?

Q3. Are there any other offender groupings that should be included?

YWCA is pleased that women offenders are one of the priority groupings in Wales. Within this group we are particularly keen on work which helps vulnerable young women as they often have many complex problems and end up in the criminal justice system. Young women tell us that having nothing to do and nowhere to go leads them into offending behaviour. We also believe that any approach to working with young women may include working with older women who could act as influencers, working with men to challenge their perceptions about women and working with younger girls to increase their aspirations.

YWCA is one of five voluntary sector partners in the Yorkshire and Humberside Together Women Programme; a one-stop shop based in the community for women. This programme works with women who are already in the criminal justice system or who are at risk of offending or re-offending. Currently we are working with 170 women per year.

The aims of the programme are to support prevention, rehabilitation and resettlement work, reduce the number of women in custody and increase the amount of women offenders who are accessing community provision.

This model means that women get all the support they need from one place. We address all the issues which affect them; physical and mental health and substance misuse. The young women have access to advice and support about education and skills and receive help with their housing and finance. They can access this support in a safe women-only environment which helps them explore their experiences.

Q4. Are there any other factors that could influence our commissioning that should be taken into account?

YWCA would like to see the commissioning priorities influenced by the evaluation of the UK Government's demonstration projects which were set up to see if preventative methods were effective in reducing women's offending (this includes an evaluation of the Together Women Project). The full evaluation should include a cost analysis of community based interventions which are felt by practitioners and professionals to be more likely to prevent re-offending.

Q5. Do you agree with our commissioning priorities for Wales?

Q6. Are there any other areas that should be considered for inclusion?

YWCA particularly welcomes the priority focussing on addressing domestic abuse related offending. We were pleased to see the recent Assembly Committee inquiry into domestic abuse and welcome opportunities to work collaboratively in this area.

YWCA is pleased to see priorities which focus on reducing the numbers of Welsh prisoners who serve their sentences in England. Although we are concerned about the lack of custodial provision for women offenders in Wales we are far more concerned that we should be providing alternatives to custody for women offenders, particularly given the fact that 30% of women sentenced from Wales are serving a sentence of less than 12 months.

We support developing options for courts to consider for women offenders as an alternative to short-term prison sentences. We would like to see custodial sentences as a last resort and more emphasis on women-only probation and support services in the community. These services should include multi-agency support for women and their families. Again, it is important that we provide women-only spaces, but that we also work with men to change perceptions and behaviours.

Linked to this we support local commissioning for local services to meet local need. We believe that for appropriate non-custodial options to be effective it is important to undertake a mapping of existing local services. This would need to include those which play a vital role in prevention of offending by offering holistic support.

Local commissioning should recognise the services and skills which already exist and be informed by good practice.

Access to opportunities at YWCA St Helens

A20 is alternative education for young women in school years 10 and 11 who are not accessing mainstream education for numerous reasons. Many of the young women had very difficult times at school and needed support to deal with numerous issues. The young women were excluded from school and regularly engaged in risk-taking behaviour. The programme works alongside the pupil referral service.

The young women participate in a programme of personal development. They learn about the facts surrounding their behaviour such as the physical effects of drug and alcohol use, and learn about the underpinning reasons why they behave in this way.

They benefit from being in a single-sex environment as it encourages them to explore their own issues and take responsibility for their actions and choices.

Q7. Are there any other enablers that should be taken into account to support our commissioning?

If so, please say what and why.

The Ministry of Justice has found that there is little evidence for the effectiveness of work on women's victimisation and self-esteem. It also found that we are less advanced than other countries at acquiring hard evidence on what works to keep women offenders, and those at risk of offending, out of the criminal justice system. However, both this and the Corston report found that interventions which targeted attitude, anger and self-control as well as family processes are effective.

We believe that the key enabler of building a more comprehensive and informative picture of offending needs to be informed by further research into the interventions which work for women and for young women in particular.

YWCA is pleased to see mention of collaborative commissioning arrangements between agencies and to see mention of the third sector. We believe that such arrangements would need clear guidelines and frameworks so as to be truly collaborative.

There are a number of commissioning frameworks in existence, created by Voluntary Sector Compacts in local authority areas. There are also layers of partnerships working locally. The effectiveness of these frameworks and partnerships varies tremendously from area to area. It would be good to see the proposed collaborative arrangements mentioned in this consultation being informed by best practice which already exists.

We are particularly pleased that the Commissioning and Business Plan sends clear signals about the benefits of partnership and consortia working.

YWCA places great emphasis on the participation of girls and young women in our service delivery, our policy and our campaigns work. Those who have been at risk of offending or who have been in the criminal justice system are well placed to share their experiences and their views on what preventative measures would have helped prevent them from offending.

YWCA and young women offenders

Some of the young mums we work with had been arrested more than once in their younger teens. One of them said that every time she went to a police station she was told not to be naughty and then let go. This happened again and again. She feels they should have kept hold of her and found out what was going on and what was happening to her. She kept going through the same process again and again and nobody noticed.

Q8. If there are any issues that you wish to be taken into account in the service reviews please provide details.

Service review into offenders serving short term custodial sentences and who are not eligible for probation supervision on release from custody.

YWCA would like this service review to look at the role of the third sector in providing services on release. Third sector organisations provide a range of services often with short-term funding and consistency of service can only be achieved by longer-term funding streams.

We would also like this service review to look at which type of services are most effective in helping to reunite and support women who have been separated from their children whilst in custody.

Q9. If you consider there are any other offender intervention programmes that should be considered for future service reviews please provide details.

We believe that any interventions should be client led, needs based and non-judgemental, all of which are important in supporting the personal development of vulnerable women.

The A2O programme at YWCA St Helens has been recognised as a model of good practice by an Ofsted inspection of voluntary sector provision. We would be very happy to provide more details if you wish.

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