

The Women's Centre Programme, Thematic Summary: Issue 1 | October 2017

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INTRODUCING THE WOMEN'S CENTRE PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

The Women's Centre Programme has been developed to demonstrate how a gender specific, community-led, multi-agency approach can support women to achieve positive outcomes at a community, individual and agency level.

The two projects involved will establish a physical centre as a base for activity and to adopt a whole community approach which draws on the existing assets and strengths within the community to support all women, but especially those who are at risk of negative outcomes as a result of the specific social or structural issues they face, such as women at risk of entering, or already in, the criminal justice system.

The Robertson Trust's interest in improving well-being for women and in supporting the development of two Women's Centres was borne out of their involvement in the criminal justice sector. In particular, their interest was prompted by the [2012 Commission on Women Offenders](#).

The Commission recognised that there were a range of interrelated factors which coalesced to have a specific impact on women involved in the criminal justice system. The Commission recommended Women's Centres to be established '*for women offenders to enable them to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change*'.

The Robertson Trust then conducted research into existing women's centres in England, Northern Ireland and Wales to see if there was learning to be taken from there which could inform a possible Programme of Work. They found that, whilst a joined up model of delivery could support women in the criminal justice system, there was a risk of further stigmatising them within their communities by adopting an approach that focussed on their offending. It was suggested that a more holistic approach, which provided support to women experiencing tough times within a wider community setting could provide better results.

From the research, it was proposed that The Trust support the development of two physical "Women's Centres", one in a rural location, and one in an urban location, which would generate learning and provide evidence of the experiences, impacts and effects of community-led, co-productive approaches to engaging and supporting women and girls, including vulnerable women at risk of entering, or already in, the criminal justice system. It is hoped that the findings from this programme will be used to inform policy and practice around support to this target group.

Who's involved?

The Robertson Trust

The Robertson Trust is Scotland's largest independent funder and in 2015-16, The Trust gave £17m to Scottish Charities. The Trust aims to improve the quality of life and realise potential of people and communities in Scotland. In addition to making awards through their "open grants" programme, The Trust's [Innovation and Learning](#) team seeks to test new ways of working, build evidence, and support policy in specific areas of interest. It is within this work that the Trust supports [improving the well-being of women and girls](#) in Scotland.

The University of Strathclyde and the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ)

[The University of Strathclyde](#) is a multi-award winning, public research university, located in Glasgow. Internationally leading and applied research conducted at the [School of Social Work and Social Policy](#) contributes towards responding to challenges in society by shaping policy and practice. The [Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice](#) supports improvements in youth and criminal justice through practice development, research and knowledge exchange.

Two Women's Centres

Heart and Soul, Cumnock

The first of the two Women's Centres was officially launched in Cumnock in July 2017. The Centre, named 'Heart and Soul' by the women involved in its creation, works alongside arts-based third sector organisation, [Centrestage Communities](#).

The Development Worker from Centrestage, initially generated interest from the women in the local community by initiating a "Ladies Day". This included music, make up, alternative therapies and an afternoon tea. Fifty women attended the first 'Ladies Day' and by the third event, this number had risen to 150. The Development Worker also had a very diverse cohort of women engaged in weekly meetings where they tried to resolve local issues affecting them, and planned "Heart and Soul". Valerie facilitated these lively sessions, calling this time 'guided discovery'. Relationships were built, problems were resolved and the women began to believe in themselves and the future of Heart and Soul.

The women opted for a café as one of their social enterprises and this is already beginning to generate income and help the local women grow in confidence as they work in this environment.

Johnstone, Renfrewshire

The research and development phase in Johnstone, Renfrewshire is well underway. The host organisation [Active Communities](#) have employed a Development Worker and held "Ladies that Launch" in November, an interactive day in Johnstone Town Hall. Since then, Active Communities have opened their own hub in Johnstone where the Development Worker has introduced a weekly meeting of the "Leading Ladies" a group of interested, motivated women who attended Ladies that Launch and have stayed involved in order to be part of the co-production of their Centre.

Women's Centre Programme Outcomes

The Women's Centre Programme seeks to achieve the following changes for women, communities and the agencies working with them.

Women, girls and **families** are happier, healthier, safer and more achieving. Specifically in the short term, that they:

- are supported around the challenges they face in their life
- receive targeted support for their needs
- feel more included and involved in their local community
- have improved networks of support
- achieve better outcomes relating to offending, domestic abuse, education, employment and skills, physical health and mental health and wellbeing.

Communities are stronger, more resilient and better able to meet their own needs and achieve their own goals. Specifically in the short term, that:

- More women from the community (and particularly women experiencing tough times) are engaged in dialogue around appropriate support and services
- Increased number of positive opportunities available for women in their community
- Participating women feel more engaged and empowered within their community

Enhanced agency/service provision and support is available for women experiencing tough times within the community. Specifically in the short term that agencies:

- have a better understanding of how women currently engage or not with services
- have a better shared understanding of local women's needs
- have increased partnership working between agencies and communities to respond to need
- redesign services to better meet the needs of women

Critical Factors of Women's Centres

The Robertson Trust's initial research into existing Women's Centres and services suggested some critical factors which should be built in to increase the likelihood of success. The [Process Evaluation](#), on which this thematic summary reports, and the current *Process and Outcome Evaluation* of the Programme will include investigation into how these critical factors may have influenced outcomes:

Primary (factors that must be demonstrated within the project):

- **Gender Specific:** shall work primarily with women and girls and that women and girls should lead on development
- **Target Groups:** Whilst adopting a whole community approach (women only) work should be done to ensure that women from key target groups are identified, engaged and supported. Recognising the variety of approaches required to deliver outcomes for vulnerable individuals vs wider community
- **Geographical focus:** Be located within communities with a defined boundary to enable a sense of community ownership over the centre and the services it offers

- **Physical Centre:** the projects shall set up a physical centre as the base for delivery of their support and services
- **Community Led:** participants will be encouraged to lead the process of building on their strengths and aspirations to address challenges that affect their day to day lives
- **Multi-agency partnership working:** women are able to access the holistic, wrap-around support they need and bring public and third sector partners together to develop appropriate services and support pathways that are accessible to all women

Secondary (factors that should be considered by projects when developing their work)

- **Peer to peer support:** approaches which enable peer to peer support between participants
- **Barriers to access:** being aware of, and addressing, physical and psychological barriers which may prevent engagement
- **Flexible programming and support:** recognising that a range of approaches, interventions and supports may need to be identified and employed to deliver the different outcomes

Project Management Expectations

- **Robust, planning, monitoring and evaluation:** being clear on the changes that are intended (and for whom) and how these will be measured
- **Third Sector Agency Lead:** should be led by an appropriate local third sector agency with experience of community development and multi-agency working
- **Strategic Group:** Establish a multi-agency strategic group which will meet throughout the duration of the project (i.e. Advisory Group, see below)
- **Clear Ethos and Values:** should be established between participants and partners at the outset and remain prominent throughout the programme. Participants should know what they are getting involved with
- **Transparency and clear expectations and roles:** the need to ensure that all participating agencies and individuals are aware of any external drivers or agendas from the outset and that there is clarity on who is responsible for what
- **Skills, experience and personal attributes of key staff are crucial:** ensuring that staff have the right experience and attributes and have appropriate skills for the job
- **Exit strategy and sustainability:** Projects should consider from the start how the services/approaches may be mainstreamed or made sustainable within their own community. This may include the development of social enterprise activities
- **Willingness to Learn:** that partners agencies understand the desire to know “what works and why”
- **Clear decision making structures:** clear mechanism for making decisions and for communicating decisions once they are made.

Timeline: The journey so far

- 2004** The Trust begins to support developments within Scotland’s criminal justice sector, including specific support for women with convictions and their families.
- 2012** The [2012 Commission on Women Offenders](#) recognised the range of interrelated factors that coalesce to have a specific impact on women involved in the criminal justice system. The Commission recommended the establishment of Women's Centres ‘to enable [women] to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change’.
- 2013** Trust staff visited existing Women’s Centres in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. They learnt that a more holistic approach to providing support to women within a wider community setting may have better results than focussing on vulnerability or offending alone, and could avoid further stigmatising individuals within their communities.
- 2015** The Trust undertook activities to identify two sites. This resulted in identifying Cumnock, a rural area, as a site for a centre. A second potential site was not taken forward after a period of consultation.
- A process [evaluation](#) was undertaken by Weaver and Lightowler (2017), which focused on the development and design phases of the Women’s Centres. It employed an action research methodology and resulted in lessons for The Robertson Trust about what a project of this nature requires in the early stages of development.
- 2016** Renfrewshire was identified as the second site, this time in an urban area. This centre is now in the very early stages of development.
- 2017** Cumnock’s [‘Heart and Soul’](#) Women’s Centre opened in July.

Learning from the Development Phase

The learning from the development phase has been captured in an evaluation by the University of Strathclyde (available [here](#) on The Trust’s website). The key findings, below, are being used to inform the ongoing early development phases of both Centres.

Engagement

- Agree an inclusive, visible and clear plan for engaging stakeholders
- Engage with all stakeholders in the early stages to assess the need and appetite for a Centre, including with ‘ordinary women’

Communication

- Develop a communication strategy to ensure the flow and regularity of information to all key stakeholders, both formal and informal

Shared vision and mandate

- Enable stakeholders to visualise what the next steps might be, through developing a shared vision in the early stages or providing a sufficient steer
- Ensure a clear and shared understanding of the mandate for the work

Development Worker and lead agency

- Appoint a Development Worker or facilitator and local intermediary agency at an early stage, with sufficient capacity and skills

Relationships

- Support fun, passion, enthusiasm and commitment amongst all those involved
- Develop strong relationships, trust and understanding between the project funders, the intermediary agency, other agency representatives, and women from the community

Clear roles and decision making

- Ensure people feel they know what they can and can't do – as well as what they ought to be doing and when
- Agree the expectations for the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder (or stakeholder group) involved
- Agree clear structures for making decisions and for communicating the decisions once these are made

Project planning and monitoring

Ensure a project development plan is devised, which includes:

- Events across local areas using a range of methods that encourage dialogue (and, ideally, also activities) with and between different groups of women
- Milestones and core tasks that reduce ambiguity surrounding expectations and responsibilities, but remain flexible
- Opportunities to reflect on and raise concerns about progress at an early stage

Sustainability

- Consider sustainability in the early stages, in terms of long-term funding and leadership to continue the work.

Frequently Asked Questions

How are these Centres different to other types of service delivery or Women's Centres?

One of the central tenets of the Programme is that it is co-produced, with women from the respective communities playing a fundamental and lead role in designing, developing and delivering the centres, supported by the host organisation and in partnership with the public and third sector partners that they bring together. For a discussion on co-production, see below.

The Women's Centre Programme represents an innovative approach to the development of women's centres, which are often initiated and led by servicesⁱⁱ. The Centres are designed, developed and delivered *by* women in the community *for* women in the community. This represents a significant departure to the approach taken by other Women's Centres. It also enables the development of culturally relevant and localised Centres. Moreover, existing evaluations of Women's Centres reveal that they vary in the extent to which they enable the integration of women who offend with women who have not offendedⁱⁱⁱ; this Programme differs in that it includes all women and can thus contribute to the establishment of wider social networks as well as, or as part of building community capacities.

What does this mean for wider service provision?

The significance of the Programme can also be viewed in the wider context of the [Christie Commission](#) which, in 2011, emphasised the need for public services to be built around people and communities and for a shift towards preventative approaches. There is also an emerging policy narrative around a 'Scottish approach to the transformation of public services' which expands on the Christie

Commission's recommendations to articulate the need for asset-based approaches, partnership working, innovation and an outcomes focus^{iv} and which implies a co-productive approach. The learning from this Programme so far implies a shift of relationships between agencies and citizens from which an inherently different way of 'doing' services can emerge and which can inform wider endeavours to enable transformational change in service provision.

How will Centres be sustained?

The Centres are always likely to need an element of grant funding but will both develop enterprise activities to assist with running costs. Women taking ownership from the beginning is also a crucial element of helping ensure sustainability. The Trust is committed to supporting each project develop ideas for sustainability and this will continue to be an area of learning in the evaluation for The Trust and others.

Co-production: a discussion

While there is no agreed definition of co-production, in this Programme we take this to mean 'professionals and citizens making better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes and/or improved efficiency'^v. Although this is somewhat operationally vague, it retains an emphasis on reciprocity; it incorporates recognition of the relationships that exist between the various co-producers or stakeholders; it focuses on outcomes and not just services or service provision; and it encompasses an active role for agencies, people who use services/engage in projects and for communities.

Co-production can manifest on a continuum of user and professional collaboration - from user co-delivery of professionally designed services, to full user/professional co-production, to user/community co-delivery of services with professionals with little formal planning or design^{vi}. It is at the latter end of this continuum that The Programme might best be located. One of the central tenets of The Programme is that women from the respective communities need to play a fundamental and lead role in designing, developing and delivering and leading the Centres, supported by the lead third sector delivery agency and in partnership with the public and third sector partners that they bring together.

On this continuum of coproduction, there are typologies of co-production which distinguish between individualistic forms of co-production and group and collective forms^{vii}. Individual co-production produces outcomes that benefit the individual participants and this is presently the dominant co-productive strategy^{viii}. Group forms of co-production typically bring users together to shape or provide services, and collective forms are those strategies that 'benefit the whole community rather than just groups of users'^{ix}. The Programme might be categorised as simultaneously encompassing all three forms of coproduction in terms of both process and the outcomes they intend to contribute to, delineated above.

Many of the best examples of community development are also good examples of co-production^x. There are many synergies between coproduction and community development, although coproduction is broader in aims and scope than community development, as the above makes clear. Coproduction as a concept can be used to understand the collective approach to the development of the centres, but also its activities and outcomes, which are also co-produced. Critically, collective forms of co-production are rare in practice and 'there has been relatively little work done on the

components of co-production practice in communities... this is important in so far as co-production may well be one of the most positive routes towards the vision in the Community Empowerment Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2009) of community empowerment as a 'process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them'^{xi}.

Plans for evaluation 2017-2019

Over the next two years, we will be evaluating the Women's Centre Programme to identify whether and how this specific approach can generate its intended impact. We will ask questions to understand more about:

- The **design, governance, cost, and broad activities** adopted by each project
- The **nature of participation** by women, groups and agencies. For example, how women may experience the Centre differently to accessing support through 'traditional services'
- Any '**critical factors**' of a Women's Centre demonstrated within projects. For example, the value of having a physical centre
- The **impact** for women, communities and the agencies involved
- The **factors that influence** positive outcomes, and any surprises (positive or negative)
- **Lessons learned** for future delivery or replication
- Challenges and opportunities for **sustainability**
- The **role or value of the independent funder**

The evaluation will take a participatory action-research approach, using mixed methods. It will involve the researchers having interviews with key people and agencies, observations of activities, key staff will keep project diaries, and women involved in the Centres will be invited to capture their experiences using mobile diaries and photo voice methods. Evidence will also draw on information gathered or produced by the Trust or Centre staff.

Participatory 'Reflect and Learn workshops' will provide opportunities for all involved to share and engage with learning at key stages of the projects development. Rather than a final evaluation report at the end of two years, we will share written learning from the evaluation through a series of short thematic summaries along the way.

The Trust will engage with partners and stakeholders as the Women's Centre Programme develops, to raise awareness of the programme. The Trust will also share learning from the evaluation and regular updates from the programme across all of their digital channels.

Find out more

Find out more about the programme on the Trust's [website](#), or follow The Robertson Trust on Twitter [@RobertsonTrust](#) or [LinkedIn](#) for updates.

Acknowledgements

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ⁱ To cite: Weaver, B., Lightowler, C and Gillon, F (2017) *Introducing the Women's Centre Programme*, The Women's Centre Programme, Thematic Summary: Issue, 1. www.cycj.org.uk

ⁱⁱ see for example Burgess C, Malloch M & Mclvor G (2011) *Women in Focus: An evaluation*. South West Scotland Community Justice Authority. Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research; Corcoran, M., Fox, C., & Worrall, A. (2010; 2011). *Chepstow House Community Project for Women Offenders*, Hanley Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire, Process Evaluation. Interim Report and Final Report. University of Keele; Dryden, R. and Souness, C. (2015) *Evaluation of Sixteen Women's Community Justice Services in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government; Easton, H., & Matthews, R. (2011). *Evaluation of the Inspire Women's Project*. London: London South Bank University; Hedderman, C., Gunby C., and Shelton, N (2011) What Women Want: The Importance of Qualitative Approaches in Evaluating Work with Women Offenders. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 11 (1) 3-19; Radcliffe, P., Hunter G., and Vass, R (2013) *The Development and Impact of Community Services for Women Offenders: An Evaluation*. The Institute for Criminal Policy Research, School of Law, Birkbeck College, London.

ⁱⁱⁱ Radcliffe, P. and Hunter, G. (2013) *The development and impact of community services for women offenders. An evaluation*. London: Institute for Criminal Policy Research.

^{iv} Social Work Services Strategic Forum, (2015: 14) *Social Services in Scotland: A Shared Vision and Strategy 2015-2020* <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00473374.pdf>

^v Bovaird, T and Loeffler, E (2013: 4), The Role of Co-production for Better Health and Wellbeing in Loeffler, E., Power, G., Bovaird, T and Hine-Hughes, F., (2013) *Co-production of Health and Wellbeing in Scotland*. Governance International.

^{vi} Bovaird, T. (2007) 'Beyond engagement and participation: user and community co-production of public services' *Public Administration Review* Sept/ Oct: 846-860

^{vii} Brudney. J.L. and R.E. England (1983) 'Towards a Definition of the Coproduction Concept' *Public Administration Review*, 43 (1): 59-65

^{viii} Bovaird, T. and Loeffler, E. (2008) 'User and community co-production of public services: Fad or fact, nuisance or necessity', Briefing Paper 12, Third Sector Research Centre

^{ix} Needham, C. (2008). Realising the Potential of Co-production: Negotiating Improvements in Public Services. *Social Policy and Society*, 7(02), 221-231

^x Scottish Community Development Centre,(2011): *Community development and coproduction* <http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/policy-and-practice/Community%20development%20and%20co-production.pdf>

^{xi} The Scottish Community Development Centre, *ibid*, (2011: 5).