



supporting voluntary organisations that  
work with offenders and their families

# **Women, girls and criminal justice:**

## **A report on a consultation with the Voluntary and Community Sector**

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September 2013**

## Women, girls and criminal justice: A report on a consultation with the Voluntary and Community Sector

### 1. Introduction

This report summarises the main findings from a qualitative study commissioned by Clinks and carried out between March and June 2012, with some additional funding from the Corston Independent Funders' Coalition (CIFC).<sup>1</sup> The study wanted to hear the views of a range of relevant Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations about next steps in progressing the agenda for women and girls in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and those at risk of entering it. The broad aims of the study were to:

- reaffirm / reinforce the vision for women set out in Baroness Jean Corston's 2007 report on women offenders' needs (the Corston Report), and documents such as the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group's (RR3) paper *Breaking the cycle of women's offending: A system re-design*, and identify those aspects where it may need to be refreshed or reframed;<sup>2,3</sup>
- identify what needs to be in place to enable the realisation of that renewed vision;
- hear the views of Clinks members and key partners working with women and girls, both about future work to deliver a shared vision and the role they would like Clinks to play in supporting the process; and
- inform thinking about the need for a strategic focus on women and girls at risk of entering the CJS.

### 2. Background

In December 2012, Clinks worked with partners to hold a national conference, *Breaking the cycle of women's offending: where next?*<sup>4</sup> The aims of the conference were to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to debate and discuss how to move forwards and achieve substantive change for women service users. The conference also contributed to the continuing dialogue within the VCS concerning what a refreshed agenda for women and girls might look like, taking account of changes in the policy and delivery context since publication of the Corston Report.

As a next step, this research sought to deepen the dialogue started with the Sector and to build on the conference findings. The definition of the 'Sector' was intentionally kept broad so as to ensure that the needs of women at risk as well as those already in the CJS were considered, and to connect with wider issues relevant to the lived experiences of women and girls with vulnerabilities. Similarly, as many women's trajectories into the CJS start in childhood, VCS organisations working with girls and young women at risk of entering or in the youth justice system were included.

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1 The Corston Independent Funders Coalition (CIFC) is a group of endowed trusts and foundations which, inspired by the 2007 Corston Report, work together to enhance understanding of the particular vulnerabilities faced by many women and girls, with the aim of ending a spiral of decline which may include contact with our criminal justice system.

2 J. Corston. 2007. *A report by Baroness Jean Corston of a review of women with particular vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice system*. London: Home Office. Online: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf> [Last accessed 1.9.2013]

3 RR3 Task & Finish Group / Clinks. 2012. *Breaking the Cycle of Women's Offending: A System Re-design*. Online: <http://www.clinks.org/rr3-women-tfg> [Last accessed 1.9.2013]

4 Clinks. 2013. *Breaking the cycle of women's offending: where next?* Online: <http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/null/Clinks%20Women%27s%20Conference%20report%20FINAL.pdf> [Last accessed 1.9.2013]

Concurrently, CIFIC was considering the need to develop a coherent new programme of work that sought to reconnect the two areas of focus of Baroness Corston's report: women in the CJS; and those with complex problems which increase the likelihood that they may enter the CJS. CIFIC's concern was that much of the work ensuing from publication of the Corston Report recommendations has focused on women as offenders and how the CJS responds to them. As a result the agenda had become 'overbadged' as a criminal justice issue.

As part of its thinking, CIFIC was exploring the need to convene and support development of a women's social justice alliance. In partnership with Women's Breakout and the Prison Reform Trust (PRT), two meetings were convened with partners whose work was relevant to women at risk in September and November 2012. These identified the connections between different strands of work, the policy and commissioning vacuum around this issue, and an appetite for working together.

Recognising the overlap between its concerns and those of Clinks, CIFIC therefore saw merit in providing some additional funding to increase the sample of organisations interviewed in this study, and to include a sub-set of wider questions focused on women and girls at risk.

### 3. Method

The study consisted of two main stages:

#### 3.1 One-to-one and small group semi-structured interviews

An Appreciative Inquiry approach was used to explore the following five themes in interviews with 38 VCS organisations and key partners:

- what is working well;
- a vision for the future and how to bring this about;
- gaps, barriers and challenges;
- prevention: women and girls at risk; and
- revisiting the Corston Report recommendations.

Appreciative Inquiry is an enabling and visioning process that seeks to identify and build on what is working, whilst also identifying and drawing out the barriers and challenges to achieving change. The interview structure is not fixed and, in shifting the focus away from what is not working, it aims to help participants explore new possibilities and to contribute to developing solutions.

Interviews were generally held with the Chief Executive or a senior member of staff and the majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face, with a small number carried out by telephone.

The sample was drawn from VCS organisations taking women / girl-centred approaches to working with women and girls in the CJS or with women and girls at risk of entering the CJS. It was compiled with reference to the invitation and delegate list for the Clinks conference in 2012 and the list of those organisations present at the CIFIC-convened meeting in November 2012, through consulting key partners, and by cross-checking against the known pathways into offending for women and girls. A sampling framework was also used to ensure the study covered the range of VCS organisations by size, geographical location, and focus of work. It should be noted, however, that given the purposive approach to compiling the sample, it is not claimed that the sample is fully representative of VCS organisations working with women and girls. A list of those consulted is attached as Appendix 1.

### **3.2 A facilitated, full-day 'futures workshop'**

This brought together those interviewed and key partners to explore in more detail the themes of collaboration, capacity building, influencing and lobbying, how to strengthen user voice and ensure a stronger voice for minority groups. These themes had emerged from a first synthesis of the interview data as being key to enabling the realisation of a renewed vision. A full report on the workshop and its findings is attached as Appendix 2.

## **4. Findings and recommendations**

The following findings and recommendations are based on a thematic analysis of interview data and the themes developed by stakeholders during the futures workshop. They therefore reflect the views of the participants.

### **4.1 Vision**

The vision expressed by participants in many senses reinforced the findings of the Corston Report and extended it to newly recognised areas of concern including gang-affiliation and girls at risk of entering the youth justice system.

Participants envisioned a future scenario where:

- women and girls feel empowered with a sense of control and choice in their lives and are able to realise their potential and fully participate in society;
- a decreased number of women are in prison (from approximately 4000 to 100);
- there is real political will, supported by an interdepartmental strategy that covers women and girls in the CJS and those at risk, and seeks to bring about systems change;
- sustainable women and girl-centred services are available for any woman or girl who wants to access them;
- public sector services are willing and confident to intervene in joined-up, integrated, gender-specific ways that take a strengths-based, future orientated approach to engagement;
- the statutory sector recognises and values the skills and expertise of women and girl-centred VCS agencies and works in equal partnership with them;
- an early intervention and prevention outlook and approach are embedded across services such that the root causes of abuse and offending are effectively addressed, and further victimisation and harm are avoided;
- workforce development programmes and structures of accountability are in place to support this work and ensure that it is delivered;
- as a result of improved early intervention, diversion to appropriate support, and improved provision in the community, sentencers no longer use custodial sentences as a route to securing support for women;
- similarly women do not seek a return to custody as a way of coping or to escape violence and abuse;
- there is more realistic public understanding of the trauma and complex experiences of women and girls at risk and a more compassionate media;
- women and girls at risk are seen within the wider social context of gender inequality and discrimination; and
- women and girls work alongside policy-makers, strategic planners, commissioners and service providers to inform policy, service design and delivery.

## 4.2 Local and national activity

Participants voiced considerable passion for, commitment to and confidence in the central role of the VCS and a gender-specific approach to achieving better outcomes for women and girls. The Sector has a wealth of assets, strengths and resources to draw upon. These include pockets of joined-up, cross-sector partnership working, and some very supportive statutory agencies including some police, probation and youth offending services. There are real champions from across sectors, including a number of police and crime commissioners, examples of innovative practice including approaches to engaging communities, and creative solutions being developed to tackle housing-related challenges. Similarly, there are good examples of women's organisations developing and delivering successful gender-specific training to the statutory sector, of courts taking up community alternatives to custody, and of effective court liaison and diversion services. Finally, a small number of supportive formal and informal networks exist at local and regional levels. These include the East Midlands regional girls at risk network, which has recently evolved into the National Forum for Youth Justice Practitioners.

At national level, Women's Breakout, the umbrella organisation that represents VCS organisations working in the community with women offenders and women at risk of involvement in the CJS, has been established, and the Prison Reform Trust is delivering a three year programme to reduce women's imprisonment. This includes an innovative partnership with Soroptomist International's UK Programme Action Committee.

## 4.3 Challenges

Unsurprisingly, participants highlighted the very difficult context in which they were working. There is fear about the future, a concern about feeling powerless in an uncertain commissioning environment, an expectation that large, generic service providers, whether from the private sector or the VCS, will displace the work of gender-specific agencies, and real anxiety that welfare reform will see growing numbers of women pushed into offending and the CJS.

Numerous case studies were cited that evidence the continued failure of statutory sector services to meet the needs of women and girls because of a siloed approach to working.

There is disappointment that, given the Corston Report's emphasis on diverting women with vulnerabilities away from the CJS, there has been no comparable focus or funding for similar work with girls and young women. It was also disappointing that, despite expectations that the revised version of ASSET, the youth justice system's risk assessment tool, would better reflect the specific needs of girls and young women, this has not happened, with the strand on diversity focusing on speech and language. There is excellent, award-winning practice happening at the local level but its success is currently dependent on the support of individual managers and it therefore remains vulnerable.

Participants reported swingeing reductions in the availability of supported women-only housing. There is real concern across provider organisations that successful outcomes for women and girls are being compromised by the lack of such suitable accommodation for women and girls with complex needs.

The erosion of the 'gender architecture' and of women's rights under the current administration was also raised in interviews. There has been a de-gendering of services, with gender-specific services often being the first to go in the climate of austerity, and organisations such as the Women's National Consortium have been de-funded.

### 4.3.1 Black, Asian and minority ethnic and foreign national women

Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) women experience disproportionality in the CJS but there is limited understanding of the specific pathways and needs of BAME women and girls, including those from Roma and Eastern European communities, in both policy and practice. The researcher also heard how services for BAME women and girls have been particularly badly hit by cuts. Participants were clear that women's service providers, in both the public and VCS sectors, need to be more proactive in reaching and engaging BAME women and girls and in working with the raft of small, local, specialist BAME organisations that do exist.

Despite the Corston Report having identified foreign national women as having distinct needs and requiring a distinct strategy, little progress has been made and support remains under-developed. A distinct strategy is still needed and there was concern that community-based VCS services are deterred from engaging with this group. This is firstly, because they assume foreign national women will shortly be returned to their country of origin and are uncertain of the value of investing scarce resources to support them and, secondly, because they are uncertain about the legality of providing services to this group.

### 4.3.2 Women and girls at risk

Interviewees identified particular groups of girls and women at risk that need to be targeted. These include girls on child protection registers or in care, those in particular geographical areas that display certain 'toxic' characteristics, gang affiliated girls and female relatives of males involved in gangs, girls showing early conduct disorder (identifiable from as early as two years old), those whose family circumstances, histories or current relationships are characterised by experiences of victimisation, abuse, coercion and/or sexual exploitation, and those with parents, relatives or partners in the CJS. Descriptions therefore spanned the social and structural as well as familial, personal and psychological. However, the factors common to the majority of accounts were gender inequality and discrimination, violence and abuse, the absence of choice, control and self-determination, and being in coercive relationships with men.

However, there are also hidden populations, unknown to services. They are believed to be falling through the gaps because of high eligibility thresholds for access to services, agencies' stereotypical and pejorative attitudes, and/or because services are not equipped with the understanding, skills, confidence or responsibility to identify those at risk and intervene in trauma-informed and gender-specific ways. Consequently, the data as to profile and extent of need do not exist, and a catalogue of missed opportunities and further damage accrues. Accounts also highlighted the limited awareness among women and girls themselves as to what services are available, and a failure by women and girls to engage with services because of the fear that engagement could result in further victimisation, stigmatisation, or punitive responses by services, including having children taken into care.

For those who are able to access statutory sector services, the ongoing problem identified by interviewees is that these are blind to the specific needs of women or girls. As a consequence, support is either inadequate or, worse, has the potential to expose women and girls to further victimisation or renewed trauma. Participants therefore argued that education, housing, substance misuse, health and mental health agencies need to have clearer referral routes to female-centred services. There is real concern, however, about the limited gender-specific guidance and thinking in these sectors.

Interviewees identified critical points of transition and life stages at which interventions should be targeted and interventions are needed from pre-birth onwards. At the same time, participants asserted, there should also be services that are universally available and accessible to women and girls when they choose to access them.

Many expressed frustration at the low aspirations girls had for themselves, which were too often defined through their relationships to men and boys, or based on stereotypical understandings of gender roles and unrealistic media representations of women. The value of education services that raise expectations and provide opportunities for learning was highlighted in this context. The challenge, however, is that such opportunities are frequently unavailable in those geographical areas that are most toxic for women and girls. In this context, the value of women's VCS organisations working in primary and secondary schools and supporting girls to understand and develop positive, healthy relationships was also highlighted. There was therefore disappointment that Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education will not become part of the National Curriculum.

## 5 Going forward: a re-connected and collective approach

### 5.1 Broadening the focus

There is unanimous support among participants for a renewed strategic focus on women and girls at risk. However, a point emphasised in interviews and at the workshop was that the issue needs to be re-framed. Rather than starting from the point of women and girls being at risk of entering the CJS, it needs to be recognised that risk includes a range of negative outcomes, of which entry into the CJS is just one. Reframing and broadening the agenda in such a way would start from considering the whole woman or girl, her needs and lived experience, and represent a shift away from understanding her through the lens of an individual service or particular negative outcome. It would also serve to re-connect the two aspects of the Corston Report agenda: women in the CJS; and those at risk of entering it.

**Recommendation:** The Sector should develop a programme of work focused on women and girls with complex needs that put them at risk of experiencing a range of negative outcomes, including engagement with the CJS. This should include specific strands focused on BAME women and girls, and foreign national women.

### 5.2 A collaborative alliance for systems change

There is a strong desire for action. Participants wanted the Sector to be more proactive, take hold of the agenda, and to move from a sense of being powerless in the face of the Government's current Transforming Rehabilitation policy and limited political support. The majority of interviewees therefore saw working more effectively together and developing 'strength in numbers' as the route to achieving this and bringing about systems change.

However, the picture that emerged was one where opportunities for such collective working are few. This is due not only to external forces such as commissioning regimes that increase the pressure towards competition but also to factors internal to 'the Sector' itself. Inverted commas are used here because it could be argued that there is no coherent Sector. The landscape appears to be one where there is a diverse range of VCS agencies delivering women or girl-centred work to bring about better outcomes for women and girls. There is excellent work focusing on homeless women and girls, women and girls with substance misuse problems, women involved in sex work, sexually exploited children (the majority of whom are girls), and gang-affiliation. There are also many examples of positive partnership working, and mutual support and positive regard for others' work. However, while in many instances we are talking about the same women and girls, there are few processes in place to pull together the diverse range of agencies involved, to support communication, to generate clearer understandings of different organisations' work, and to negotiate the tensions that inevitably exist and arise. The picture is consequently one of fragmentation with respect to collaboration and Sector identity.

Participants identified that, with little in place to foster cohesion and develop a united and thereby strengthened voice, the whole wealth of assets, strengths and resources highlighted in interviews are currently dissipated rather than marshalled to bring about change. As such there seems little to act as a counterbalance to the divisive forces of competition and marketisation that are perceived as having huge potential to amplify the current situation and further fragment the Sector.

Interviewees also communicated the sense that a top-down approach has driven developments, and that this has contributed to the picture of fragmentation. While many of Baroness Corston's recommendations came from a developed understanding of and consultation with the women's Sector, they have largely been taken forward through decisions made at the national level, that have failed to adequately engage women's service providers. The sense is of things having been done to the Sector, and not with it. As a result, while not necessarily intended, some feel the voice of the women's VCS organisations working in the criminal justice arena has been silenced. This failure to work in partnership has meant the knowledge, skills and expertise of the Sector, including its ability to innovate and to find creative solutions, have not been sufficiently drawn upon in finding ways to progress.

Looking at the national level, the landscape of organisations leading on women in criminal justice is well populated. The work of these is valued by many in the Sector but here too there was a desire among participants to see more joined-up working so as to maximise strategic impact and streamline communication and engagement with the wider Sector.

Building on these points, the large majority saw the need for a broad, inclusive alliance based on this idea of enhanced collaborative working. This would connect the national with the local, and bring together practitioners, service providers, academics, infrastructure bodies and lobbying and policy organisations. The emphasis was on being all-encompassing so as to include the breadth of organisations relevant to women's and girls' lives (not confining inclusion solely to those from the VCS). Based on the principle of a power-sharing approach, such an alliance would carve out a space removed from the immediate pressures of the commissioning market place that would enable organisations to work together.

**Recommendation:** Establish an alliance that enables greater collaboration and collective working based on equal partnership. Networks of connection and communication that work at multiple levels – local, national, bottom-up, top-down - need to be developed, and a climate of trust and mutual support needs to be fostered that allows organisations to participate, regardless of size and influence.

**Recommendation:** Bring together an independently chaired working group to begin the process of developing a collaborative alliance. There was consensus at the workshop that this should be the next step. As agreed, in the first instance Clinks should act as the point of coordination for bringing together this working group.

**Recommendation:** The working group should reflect the diversity of stakeholders relevant to addressing the broadened focus of women and girls with complex needs.

**Recommendation:** Ensure women and girls themselves are included and that they have the opportunity to inform and influence the work of any alliance.

## 6. Priorities for a programme of work

Participants emphasised that the working group would need to develop a strategy that identifies and addresses immediate priorities as well as longer term objectives.

### 6.1 Developing the foundations for cohesion

In discussing development of a collaborative alliance that draws together a broadened constituency, many acknowledged there will undoubtedly be tensions to negotiate. There will be varying political and analytical starting points, different ambitions and different definitions of success. It was therefore emphasised, in both the interviews and the workshop, that any alliance will need to be founded on a set of shared values and principles to which all can sign up. Contextualised within a broader gendered/feminist analysis of women's and girls' experiences, such a framework would provide the point around which the diverse range of relevant agencies and partners could agree and cohere.

**Recommendation:** Develop and test a manifesto of shared values and core principles together with an underpinning gendered/feminist analysis.

**Recommendation:** Allow sufficient time for the actual process of forming the alliance. This will involve developing a shared language, agreeing the strategic focus and aims and objectives, and defining the mechanisms for representation and decision-making.

### 6.2 Capacity building, strengthening the case and improving influencing and lobbying

Enhancing the capacity of the Sector is seen as a critical priority. There was some call for guidance and training to enhance knowledge, skills and expertise, particularly in relation to Payment by Results and negotiating with primes. In the main, however, collaboration was seen as the key route to capacity building and growing the Sector's ability to find creative solutions, to compete in tendering processes, and to influence and lobby.

Interviewees saw the value of having standardised, cross-sector approaches to data gathering about what works, and the workshop participants agreed that the core principles developed by the alliance could provide the framework against which to gather and share such data. Similarly, there is a need for data sharing about profile and extent of need with which to influence commissioning plans and make the case for a strategic focus on women and girls with complex needs.

Participants also saw the need for a clearer, more rigorous, well-articulated and evidenced model that communicates the essence and rationale for the approach to working with women and girls. This would inform development of service standards, provide indicators of success against which to evaluate practice, and provide the Sector with a better articulated and strengthened case with which to influence. Only a very small number of those interviewed spoke of the theoretical underpinning to their work but in the absence of a theory informed case and language, arguments are weak and vague and easily dismissed. Theories that were referenced included desistance, attachment and trauma theory.

**Recommendation:** Develop a programme of work focused on making the case, influencing and lobbying.

**Recommendation:** Develop a knowledge hub. A proposal developed at the workshop, such a hub could serve as a first port of call for anyone in the Sector seeking data and evidence on girls and women at risk, support cross-sector engagement and the sharing of resources, and could create a space for user voice. There was strong support for the idea and as such it would be a key component of any alliance.

**Recommendation:** Develop support for collaborative tendering in the near future so as to enable women's service providers to survive in the new commissioning climate and to maintain the quality of the approach.

There are a range of arguments that can be used to make the case. These include economic arguments - invest to save, justice reinvestment and social return on investment arguments - and those that start from social justice, human rights and gender equality, moral or ethical standpoints. Other arguments emphasise the positive impact on social capital and community cohesion derived from supporting women and girls with complex needs, and also the value of breaking intergenerational cycles of victimisation and offending. Outlining the pragmatic value of upstream, gender-specific, diversionary interventions and policies was seen as particularly relevant to the police as well as police and crime commissioners (PCCs).

**Recommendation:** Develop a clearer analysis as to which of these arguments are most effective for different audiences. This will require improved intelligence about local authority, health commissioners' and police and crime commissioner's priorities, and understanding of how any case aligns with broader political agendas.

Participants were concerned that the prevailing discourse in government serves to blame those with complex needs, locating problems in the individual rather than considering deeper social and structural factors such as poverty and gender discrimination and inequality. As a consequence, the needs of women and girls in the CJS and those at risk of entry remain marginal and separated from the rest of society. No party appears to be providing alternatives to these discourses. Women's and girls' voices and their stories are a powerful force for influencing. They capture the reality of their lives and demonstrate the current failure of mainstream services. As such, they could form the basis for new gendered/feminist narratives that serve as alternatives to the prevailing, individualising discourses. Women's and girls' stories would also provide the basis for a systems analysis from which to develop models for more effective services; identifying the points across a woman's life course where opportunities have been missed or detrimental decisions made. The Women's Sector, with its trusted, empowering, relational approach to working with women and girls, has access to these stories and a wealth of evidence that bears witness to the current system's failure. This evidence has not been sufficiently marshalled or used in a strategic way.

**Recommendation:** Develop new, alternative gendered/feminist narratives based on the life stories of women and girls to counter prevailing, individualising discourses from government.

## 7. Conclusion

Strengthening the case and improving influencing and lobbying can only be achieved through collaboration that develops consensus and secures buy-in from the breadth of partners involved. It needs to be recognised that there will be debate about:

- which arguments are most effective;
- what underpinning analysis and theory are most appropriate;
- what data should and can be collected;
- how the issues need to be framed;
- what is the shared language and what are the key messages; and
- what success would look like.

Just as it will take time to develop the alliance, it also needs to be accepted that working through these tensions will take time, that this will be a critical part of any work programme going forward, and that work on this will most likely form part of the process of developing the alliance itself. It also needs to be recognised there will never be complete consensus among organisations. Partners involved will continue to have their own independent positions and the purpose of the alliance and a programme of work going forward will be to identify the points at which there is consensus and the strongest opportunities for joint working.

This research has generated a useful and detailed body of knowledge that reinforces and builds on the findings from the *Breaking the cycle of women's offending: where next?* conference. Although partnership working is always challenging and takes time, the study has demonstrated that there is a real appetite and need for it. Therefore, just as important as the body of intelligence that the research has produced is the process by which it has been gathered. Working with the Sector to identify solutions and next steps has in itself been a valuable step towards strengthening collaboration, and sets the tone for future working.

There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to the research. Many participants saw the study as a real opportunity to catalyse a new, more proactive phase for change and - with this renewed impetus - legitimacy as to what the Sector's next steps should be has also been secured.

## 8. List of recommendations arising from the consultation

**Recommendation 1:** The Sector should develop a programme of work focused on women and girls with complex needs that put them at risk of experiencing a range of negative outcomes, including engagement with the Criminal Justice System. This should include specific strands focused on BAME women and girls, and foreign national women.

**Recommendation 2:** Establish an alliance that enables greater collaboration and collective working based on equal partnership. Networks of connection and communication that work at multiple levels – local, national, bottom-up, top-down - need to be developed, and a climate of trust and mutual support needs to be fostered that allows organisations to participate, regardless of size and influence.

**Recommendation 3:** Bring together an independently chaired working group to begin the process of developing a collaborative alliance. There was consensus at the workshop that this should be the next step. As agreed, in the first instance Clinks should act as the point of coordination for bringing together this working group.

**Recommendation 4:** The working group should reflect the diversity of stakeholders relevant to addressing the broadened focus of women and girls with complex needs.

**Recommendation 5:** Ensure women and girls themselves are included and that they have the opportunity to inform and influence the work of any alliance.

**Recommendation 6:** Develop and test a manifesto of shared values and core principles together with an underpinning gendered/feminist analysis.

**Recommendation 7:** Allow sufficient time for the actual process of forming the alliance. This will involve developing a shared language, agreeing the strategic focus and aims and objectives, and defining the mechanisms for representation and decision-making.

**Recommendation 8:** Develop a programme of work focused on making the case, influencing and lobbying.

**Recommendation 9:** Develop a knowledge hub. A proposal developed at the workshop, such a hub could serve as a first port of call for anyone in the Sector seeking data and evidence on girls and women at risk, support cross-sector engagement and the sharing of resources, and could create a space for user voice. There was strong support for the idea and as such it would be a key component of any alliance.

**Recommendation 10:** Develop support for collaborative tendering in the near future so as to enable women's service providers to survive in the new commissioning climate and to maintain the quality of the approach.

**Recommendation 11:** Develop a clearer analysis as to which arguments are most effective for different audiences. This will require improved intelligence about local authority, health commissioners' and police and crime commissioners' priorities, and understanding of how any case aligns with broader political agendas.

**Recommendation 12:** Develop new, alternative gendered/feminist narratives based on the life stories of women and girls.

**Liz Cadogan**  
September 2013

## Appendix 1: Interview sample

Action for Prisoners' Families	Pecan
Adelaide House	Penrose
Anawim	Prison Reform Trust
Birth Companions	Race on the Agenda
Brighton Oasis Women Centre	Revolving Doors Agency
Black Training and Enterprise Group	St Giles Trust
Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse	St Mungo's
Catch 22	St Vincent de Paul Society
Centre for Mental Health	Pink Project/Nottingham City YOT
Clean Break	Thames Valley Partnership
Commonweal Housing Limited	Together: working for well-being
Criminal Justice Alliance	University of Bedfordshire
End Violence Against Women Coalition	WISH - A Voice for Women's Mental Health
Foundation for Families	Women at the Well
Female Prisoners Welfare Project (FPWP), Hibiscus	Women's Aid
Housing for Women	Women's Breakout
The Howard League for Penal Reform	WomenCentre Ltd
ISIS Women's Centre, The Nelson Trust	Women in Prison Ltd
National Council for Voluntary Youth Services	Women's Resource Centre

## Appendix 2: Futures workshop report, June 2013

### 1. Workshop programme

1.1 Introduction from Clinks outlining the purposes of the day. These were to:

- explore the desire for and options for collaboration;
- explore areas which would benefit from collaboration;
- explore what we could bring to collaboration and what we might need from it; and
- develop recommendations, which will go into the final report on the research being undertaken on behalf of Clinks by Liz Cadogan.

1.2 Presentation by Liz Cadogan of key emergent findings from a first analysis of interview data.

1.3 The emergent interview themes formed the basis for group discussions. These were:

- Group 1: Collaboration – women and girls in the criminal justice system
- Group 2: Collaboration – women and girls at risk of entry into the system
- Group 3: Capacity building
- Group 4: Influencing and lobbying

1.4 Each group, in considering its selected theme, was asked to answer the questions:

- what could we do better together;
- what would need to be in place to make it work;
- how do we strengthen the user voice; and
- how do we ensure a stronger voice for minority groups?

1.5 Presentation of conclusions from each group discussion.

1.6 Whole group voting exercise (using a rough voting system of sticky dots) to capture the extent of support for the ideas and suggestions emerging from group discussions.

1.7 Whole group discussion: What picture is emerging? Where are the gaps? What questions haven't we answered? What are our next steps?

### 2. Findings from group discussions

The following summaries capture each group's discussion. The numbers next to each idea or suggestion indicate the extent of support from all the workshop participants, when they subsequently reviewed the findings from all four groups.

#### 2.1 Group 1: Collaboration around women and girls in the criminal justice system

2.1.1 Collaboration is needed to win contracts: **(17)**

- Clinks was asked to take a role in submitting bids which include several organisations; and
- A consortium should be established with support and investment from independent funders.

2.1.2 Increase collaboration for learning. Sharing good practice is under threat but there is plenty of

willingness to do this, and to collect data from all organisations to evidence need and impact.

2.1.3 There would be value in developing an online forum. **(2)**

2.1.4 Develop a manifesto of shared values.

2.1.5 There is a need for an agreed, identifiable lead/point of contact to which government and external stakeholders can go. Presently, it is not clear for government and policy makers who this is.

2.1.6 A working group needs to be formed to get work started. It needs to develop processes so that everyone can have their voice heard, regardless of size and influence. **(48)**

2.1.7 It is too easy to forget girls in the criminal justice system. Our thinking often focuses only on women.

2.1.8 Share resources / staff for work in prisons. **(2)**

## **2.2 Group 2: Collaboration around Woman and Girls at Risk**

2.2.1 What do we mean by women and girls at risk? **(7)**

- Rather than starting with being at risk of entering the criminal justice system we need to take a needs-based approach and understand that risk includes a range of negative outcomes not just entry into the criminal justice system.
- We are therefore talking about women and girls with complex needs. This, however, might not be the language that women and girls use to describe themselves and the language we use needs to be based on how women and girls describe themselves.

2.2.2 This reframing needs to be contextualised within a broader feminist/gendered analysis that underpins all our approaches and is shared within the Sector. Such an analysis doesn't necessarily need to be explicit in our approach to government and external stakeholders. **(14)**

2.2.3 We need to use different tactics for different audiences; joining the dots between economic, social, personal independence. **(2)**

2.2.4 We need a systems analysis that identifies the points in the course of a woman's life at which decisions have been made. From this we can identify the points in the systems and structures that need to be influenced and changed. **(7)**

2.2.5 We should learn how to use strategic litigation as a lever for change.

2.2.6 There is a need to see shared principles embedded in wider practice. For example, statutory services need to start with the principle of believing, trusting and listening to women and girls. There is connection here with the work of Keir Starmer, coming out of the child sexual exploitation and abuse cases, that is addressing the fundamental problem that the girls weren't believed.

2.2.7 Interventions need to start in school to reduce the probability of further damage and of needs becoming more complex down the line that then require more specialist and expensive interventions.

- 2.2.8 We need to agree a shared framework, built on a foundational gendered analysis, for women's and girls' organisations, providers and female service-users. **(38)**
- 2.2.9 We need to create a shift in the language used. Using narratives and authentic stories of the lives of women and girls would achieve this shift. New feminist languages are emerging, e.g. 'liberated relationships'. **(27)**
- 2.2.10 There are a range of very practical things that can be done that would have significant impact, including changing the system that criminalises women working in prostitution.
- 2.2.11 Reclaim/revisit the Corston Report: framing the agenda as women and girls with complex needs takes us back to the original principles of the Corston Report; locating women in the criminal justice system within a broader analysis of their lives and needs. **(10)**
- 2.2.12 There are opportunities and spaces to influence. These include:
- the NHS restructure and guidance, although currently this is gender blind;
  - the Mayor of London is committed to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG), and although the analysis is too narrow it does provide a space to which the arguments can be taken and within which to challenge; and
  - connecting with the work of the Crown Prosecution Service and its work on the child sexual exploitation and abuse cases.
- 2.2.13 Going forward, there is need for a working group to develop and test the needs-based gendered (and trauma-informed) analysis and framework. **(18)**
- 2.2.14 We need to reframe current narratives and develop new ways of communicating the lived experiences and issues faced by women and girls. Approaches such as story-telling and developing case studies using feminist narratives based on women's voices and stories, and a holistic picture of women and girls lives. There is interesting work being done at the University of Huddersfield on new feminist narratives that we could usefully connect with. (Similar work has been done with survivors of torture). Developing this qualitative evidence puts the woman/girl in charge and is empowering. We also need to recognise the dialectical relationship between storyteller and listener. **(16)**
- 2.2.15 We need better quantitative data about the scale of the problem; how many women and girls are at risk and what are their needs?

## **2.3 Group 3: Capacity Building**

- 2.3.1 An empowerment approach to capacity building, based on improved collaboration, alongside more traditional approaches, is needed.
- 2.3.2 We could identify a set of agreed core principles against which the Sector can collect data to measure progress and hold the state and private sector (if that is possible) to account. **(27)**
- 2.3.3 Examples of principles include:
- services need to be available at key points of transition for girls and women; and
  - women with school-aged children or a caring responsibility should never be sent to prison unless it is a public protection issue.

- 2.3.3 Establish a central 'knowledge hub' to collect, pool and share data and build capacity. This would serve as a first port of call for anyone in the Sector and be an empowering resource that allows for creative engagement and enables lobbying. It could also provide a space for capturing user voice and experience. **(31)**
- 2.3.4 We need to remember the central issue of disproportionality.
- 2.3.5 Is there the possibility of a Transition to Adulthood-style model for women and girls?
- 2.3.6 To make this work we need to work collaboratively to identify core principles, resources and mechanisms. **(11)**
- 2.3.7 We need to develop a structure beyond what is currently available.
- 2.3.8 We need a longer term strategy that looks beyond the current government (the Transitions to Adulthood (T2A) work is an example of this).
- 2.3.9 Expert input on specialist areas e.g. law, mental health, sexual health, is needed to build Sector capacity.

## **2.4 Group 4: Lobbying and Influencing**

- 2.4.1 There are examples of good practice in joint working in this area. These include Race on the Agenda's girls and gangs work, and the work of Women at the Well to influence the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) committee.
- 2.4.2 Lobbying techniques include identifying the right moment for influence, drawing in and valuing peer research, knowing who your partners are, what the key message is, and which arguments to use and when.
- 2.4.4 We need to share information about what each of us is doing to inform and avoid duplication and we need to pool all our different contacts.
- 2.4.5 There is debate around where the messages should come from. Should they come through one point or is it good that they are coming from many places that convey the different nuances?
- 2.4.6 We need to be better at coordinating our approach and need mechanisms to follow up on actions promised by external stakeholders.
- 2.4.7 We need to do better at making a joined up challenge to government for a cross-departmental strategy.
- 2.4.8 We need to address how to lobby and influence at the local level in light of the localism agenda.
- 2.4.9 Are issues related to BAME service users being reflected in everyone's messages? Statements about BAME women and girl shouldn't be an add-on.
- 2.4.10 We need to lobby for a better understanding of pathways for BAME women and girls into the

criminal justice system, and highlight the problems of access to suitable, culturally sensitive services. **(12)**

2.4.11 Draw on international conventions, human rights and equalities legislation such as CEDAW.

2.4.12 Going forward, there is a real appetite for working together. To do this we need to develop an alliance/coalition: **(13)**

- This would enable joint working which includes organisations and service users and could act as a central resource for key messages.
- It should be light touch and facilitative.
- Its focus needs to be broader than women and girls in the criminal justice system and amongst other things should include a focus on abuse.
- Membership should be broader than just the voluntary sector and there should be discussion with the big five children's charities.

2.4.13 Social Return on Investment; there is a strong economic argument to be made. **(18)**

2.4.14 Develop tip sheets on change, e.g. on health sector reform.

2.4.15 Develop a more engaged, strategic approach with better sharing of policy and influencing intelligence, and key messages. **(9)**

2.4.16 We need to raise awareness about the impact of disadvantage on women and girls and why some populations are over-represented in the system as a result of this

2.4.17 Develop user involvement, including establishing a user advisory group and peer research. This needs to be done sensitively; there is learning from other sectors that have done this, and existing organisations such as User Voice to connect with. **(15)**

2.4.18 There needs to be a two stage strategy: a short term one, addressing immediate pragmatic issues, and one for the longer term. **(15)**

### **3. What picture is emerging? Where are the gaps? What questions haven't we answered?**

3.1 Increasing need for services and decreasing pot of money.

3.2 What will the changes to the benefits system mean for the Sector?

3.3 What are we going to do about so few tenders around for women's services?

3.4 We need more intelligence in the Sector about funding opportunities.

3.5 We need to make sure that we are always aware of 'minority communities' – the 'little voices' – not just ethnic minorities but also other women who have particular needs, e.g. pregnant women.

3.6 We would like a plan and a timeframe for some of these ideas which include what we can do in the short term and what we can do in the longer term, what we can do within current resources and what we might need more funding for.

- 3.7 We could get some of this in place quite quickly, including measures and principles.
- 3.8 BAME concerns need to be central to the work of all organisations and not just taken forward by specialist organisations.
- 3.9 We need to keep an eye on the progress in Scotland.
- 3.10 We need to keep making the connections with wider societal issues e.g. sexual abuse, attitudes to women generally, inequality and discrimination, poverty.
- 3.11 We need to recognise that good collaboration is difficult and we should be willing to spend the time that will be needed to build this strong foundation.
- 3.12 Glad to see that we are less fixated on government these days.

## **4. Next steps**

- 4.1 Clinks will share a report on key findings and recommendations with the group.
- 4.2 Clinks is then willing to act as the point of coordination for bringing together a working group to develop the ideas generated during the day into a plan for the way forward.

## **5. Final comments on the day**

*I was reluctant to attend but really glad I did – made really useful contacts and good to re-examine the Sector and plan for the future.*

*Very good.*

*It's like we've been waiting for this moment. Everything has been leading up to this point and been development for it. And at last all the right people are being brought together to speak to each other. Thank you.*