

Evaluation of the Prison Reform Trust's Transforming Lives Programme

Northumbria PCC Response 08.08.18

About you

1. Please give a brief overview of your role and responsibilities

- In general, and
- Specifically in relation to women in the criminal justice system and reducing women's imprisonment

The role of Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria is to bring the police and public closer together by finding out what people want from the police and making sure the Chief Constable delivers it. PCCs have a statutory duty to develop a Police and Crime Plan, ensuring that we consult with the public so the priorities it contains for the police to deliver are those of concern to local people. I hold to account the Chief Constable on the public's behalf.

Led by Northumbria PCC, in the North East region the 3 PCCs came together to develop a Violence against Women and Girls Strategy. At a time when we continue to face Government cuts to funding, both to police and local partners PCCs can use their powers and responsibilities to enhance and supplement their work in a number of ways. As mentioned, we can set police priorities to ensure VAWG is taken seriously and policed properly, we can work with Community Safety Partnerships with whom we share priorities with and we can commission services to further our aims to end Violence against Women and Girls. In addition to the above, as visible, elected public representatives we have a profile which we can use to draw other agencies, businesses and social capital into support this work.

PCCs also have a vital role to play in leading the work of Local Criminal Justice Boards to ensure an effective and efficient criminal justice system for their area. Not only putting victims at the heart of the CJS but also encouraging a focus on reducing re-offending and promoting rehabilitation. The recently reshaped LCJB has a specific Rehabilitation and Re-offending sub-group that have prioritised:

- Restorative Justice and Community Resolution: A partnership approach to reducing re-offending
- Integrated Offender Management (IOM) Governance: oversight of a revised approach to IOM

Neither are solely focussed on female offending however female offenders will have a focus within these strands of work.

As PCCs we can also attract money from the Government for specific projects. Last year in Northumbria we secured funding from the Home Office VAWG Transformation Fund which has allowed us to introduce a 'Women's Pathway' as a disposal option when a women is suitable and eligible to be subject to Conditional Caution. You can read more about this later in the document.

2. How long have you held this role?

Dame Vera Baird QC is in her second elected term. In total she has held the role for almost 6 years.

3. Does your work focus on any particular groups of women (such as women who are BME, women with mental health issues, women who have learning disabilities, women with dependent children, women who have experienced domestic violence, or women who have been trafficked)? Please note which group if so.

The work of the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner encompasses all women through the holding to account the Chief Constable on behalf of the people of Northumbria and through the provision of victim services.

<p>Perspectives on reducing women's imprisonment for victims/survivors of domestic abuse.</p>
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1. What do you think are the key opportunities and barriers to reducing the number of women sent to prison who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse?

Female offending behaviour is generally a reactive response to a set of circumstances. Those who impose sentences should, when appropriate, consider alternatives to prison when the offending behaviour is non-violent. When a woman is sent to prison socio-economic factors that impact on pro social behaviour create a negative response and the risk of reoffending increases. Using community disposals could reduce reoffending and aid the path to desistance.

In-depth pre-sentencing assessment and analysis of circumstances resulting in offending behaviour should be completed to further understand why offending behaviour has occurred, prior to sentence being passed. Exploring alternatives to custody would enable women to maintain family support, retain their accommodation, and reduce incurred financial difficulties- rent arrears, benefit sanctions and access appropriate support from specialist services to address factors contributing to offending behaviour.

Only too frequently women are sentenced to custody with short term sentences for minor offences such as shop theft. The long term impact of short term sentences are rarely considered by the Magistracy, 75% of the female's custodial sentences originate from magistrates courts in Northumbria, and the magistrates' court is potentially the place that could create a platform for diversion from offending and therefore custody.

It must be remembered that domestic abuse can leave long-term and widespread effects on some women who may have endured years of being repeatedly assaulted, threatened, ridiculed, starved of money and isolated from their friends - all done by someone they thought loved them. Not surprisingly some women are pushed into chaotic lives by this and break the criminal law to support their children or to pay the cost of self-medicating on drink or drugs. Putting them in prison seems like a double failure since we didn't tackle the abuse and blame them for its consequences. It is time for a radical rethink and the people attending this seminar are the people who can provide it.

The experience of physical, emotional and sexual abuse is a common underlying factor in offending behaviour by women and girls and contributes to other drivers of women's offending such as problematic substance use, mental health needs, poverty, debt and the removal of children to the care system.

Ministry of Justice statistics show that women in prison in England and Wales have often been victims of much more serious offences than the ones they are accused of committing. More than half (53%) report having experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse as a child compared to 27% of men. Fifty-seven per cent of women in prison report having been victims of domestic violence.

Because many women fear disclosing abuse, both figures are likely to be an underestimate. The charity Women in Prison report that 79% of the women who use their services have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual abuse.

Reducing the incidences of domestic abuse perpetrated against women and girls, and an improved response by criminal justice agencies to women offenders who are victims of these offences, could significantly reduce the risk of women's involvement in offending and imprisonment.

2. Please describe any particular opportunities relating to specific stages of the criminal justice system pathway (i.e. prevention, point of interest, remand, pre-sentence, sentencing and recall)?

In Northumbria, following funding VAWG Transformation Fund, we developed a 'Women's Pathway' as a disposal option when a woman is suitable and eligible to be subject to Conditional Caution. The specific women's pathway requires the woman to participate in an assessment of offending related needs and motivational intervention to establish what help and support can be provided to stop their involvement with the Criminal Justice System. The assessment takes place in a hub which is a safe women only environment where issues including substance misuse, money and relationships can be explored and a package of support can be created and implemented to break cycles of behaviour and end abuse.

At pre-sentence, the Magistracy could explore the positive impact community sentencing could have on a woman who has committed low-level, non-violent crime. Thinking of the hubs that are commissioned by CRC's and facilitated using specialist services to provide purposeful intervention, magistrates could use court orders to enable women to empower themselves by accessing continued support and intervention from local community based services.

3. Are there any particular barriers relating directly to these decision making points (i.e. prevention, point of arrest, remand, pre-sentencing and recall)?

Barriers to appropriate sentencing are prevalent throughout the CJS. The decriminalisation of women should be a priority for all working within system. Police should use alternatives to charge, where appropriate and courts should use community disposals unless the offence is so serious custody is the only available option because the risk to the public is 'high'. CRC's and National Probation Service should only recall based on escalating risk of serious harm to self or public and prior to recall exploration of specialist community interventions from key partners should be attempted in order to reduce risk prior to incarceration.

4. What change or changes do you think are required to improve support for different groups of women who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse and are at risk of offending or in contact with the criminal justice system (such as women who are BME, women with mental health issues, women who have learning disabilities, women with dependent children, women who have experienced domestic violence, or women who have been trafficked)?

A better understanding within the CJS of the impact domestic abuse can have on women and a greater focus on diversion away from criminalisation at the initial point of contact would reduce the amount of women who become caught up in the 'revolving door'.

Improved consultation with specialist organisations, prior to sentencing could be had allowing for a better insight into factor that could contribute to the offending behaviour of women who are part of minority groups, i.e. women who are BME, women with mental health problems, women with learning disabilities, women with dependent children, women who are victims of domestic violence and women who have been trafficked. This would create an opportunity to establish what level of intervention and what specialist support is required to address offending and provide opportunities to break the cycle of behaviours.

Views and experiences of Transforming Lives

1. Please tell us a bit about your relationship with the Prison Reform Trust. Please comment on

- Roughly when you were first involved with PRT (month and year)
- How and why your contact came about

As PCC in Northumbria working with the Prison Reform Trust has been indirect, actively taking an interest in the work they do and following the releases and responses to relevant legislation they make. The PCCs growing interest in the Transforming Lives programme followed membership with the Soroptimists.

In December 2011 the Soroptimist International UK Programme Action Committee (UKPAC) took the decision to work in partnership with the Prison Reform Trust to reduce women's imprisonment across the UK. The decision reflected concern that women who have committed petty and non-violent offences are unnecessarily and disproportionately imprisoned when community solutions are often more effective and less damaging for children and families.

The project also ties in with Soroptimists flagship project Violence Against Women – Stop It Now, as abusive and coercive relationships are a significant driver to women's offending, and a majority of women in prison report having been abused at some point in their life.

In April 2013 the Soroptimists *Action Pack on Reducing Women's Imprisonment* was launched at Westminster, followed by launches at the Pierhead in Cardiff and Holyrood in Edinburgh, with a call for renewed efforts in each UK nation to improve justice outcomes for women.

This report, based on information gathered by Soroptimists across the UK in 2013-14 about what happens in their local areas to women who offend, or are at risk of offending, highlights progress and good practice whilst identifying constraints, gaps and shortcomings in local service provision. We are grateful to the hundreds of Soroptimists who have done so much to raise awareness of the over-imprisonment of women in the UK and the consequences for children and families, and contribute to progress towards a more effective and humane approach to women's justice.

Key findings:

- Leadership is needed to bridge the disconnection between policy and implementation.
- Gender-specific approaches are the exception but should be the rule
- Uncertain funding of services working with women in trouble is counter-productive
- Attitudes to women in trouble are perceived as barriers to progress
- There are clear opportunities to reduce the women's prison population

- Sharing learning across jurisdictions is important

Several recommendations were made, including that the MoJ should promote a gender-informed approach to women in the criminal justice system and lead a cross-government strategy for reform of women's justice – this has just been published. This report and the pursuant event has informed key organisations about the links between DA and offending has played a big role in the government strategy and Dame Vera has been on the MoJ advisory group on women's offending ever since.

Dame Vera chaired the event on the Prison Reform Trust report on links between DA and women in the Criminal Justice System, this report found there are strong links between women's experience of domestic and sexual abuse and coercive relationships, and their offending. Women can become trapped in a vicious cycle of victimisation and criminal activity.

2. What do you understand to be the purpose of Transforming Lives in relation to women offenders who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse?

To reduce the number of women being sent to prison, consider alternatives to custody and develop consistency across the UK.

3. How does Transforming Lives work to achieve these goals, to your knowledge?

A three year strategy has been developed with a strong emphasis on local practice and engaging with women who have first-hand experience of the CJS. Tackling particular drivers to imprisonment, consulting with stakeholders and seizing opportunities for reform.

4. Please comment on how you see Transforming Lives fits with/alongside other organisations working to reduce women's imprisonment.

Transforming Lives state that in order to achieve their objectives they will work with partners and supporters to build momentum for change and the approach appears robust:-

Advocacy	Work with national and local governments, criminal justice agencies and decision makers to promote effective community responses to women involved in offending
Research	Inform policy and practice, and prosecution and sentencing guidelines and data analysis, research on good practice and thematic briefings for those working with women in the CJS
Advice and support	Promote practical advice, resources and guidance, encourage exchange of good practice across the UK and strengthen links between local practice and national policy
Collaboration	Bring together a range of policy-makers, practitioners and experts by experience to develop and support effective early intervention for women in trouble

5. Please list the Transforming Lives activities you have been involved with, including when they were and was involved. (Please include all activities, including any direct contact, collaboration/participation in networks, contributing or receiving information and date etc.).

The PCC is not directly involved with delivery of services.

Programme audiences

1. Which audiences are being targeted by Transforming Lives? Do you feel these are appropriate?

It is clear from the recommendation made within the research report that the target audience are:-

Key partners within the CJS, Local Authorities, Local Government, Central Government, Criminal Justice Inspectorate, Voluntary and Community Sector services, The Magistracy, The Judiciary, Health.

Yes we feel these are appropriate.

2. Are any audiences missing? Please describe them and why this matters if so.

The target audience appears comprehensive and encompassing. Making recommendations to Central Government with a focus to influence and implement change locally to promote the use of community sentencing to reduce the number of women being sent to custody for low level non-violent offending.

3. Is Transforming Lives engaging with audiences whose views are at odds with those of the programme?

It appears so, by consulting at this stage in the programme it is clear indication that the thoughts and opinions of wider audiences are important. Not everyone will be as open to change and reform as others.

Outcomes of Transforming Lives activity
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4. Has your knowledge of women in the criminal justice system (specifically in relation to domestic violence as a driver of offending) changed as a result of Transforming Lives?

My knowledge of women in the CJS is already enhanced as in my role as Police and Crime Commissioner it is imperative that I am aware of current legislation and changes within all aspects of the CJS. This document will most likely have strengthened others understanding of women in the CJS.

5. Has your commitment and support for the agenda to reduce women's imprisonment changed as a result of Transforming Lives?

No, my commitment to supporting the agenda to reduce women's imprisonment has always been a high priority.

6. Do you do anything differently as a result of Transforming Lives?

Not specifically but the work of Transforming Lives is in line with the innovation we promote locally in Northumbria.

7. Do you have a sense of whether there has been change among others in the sector as a result of Transforming Lives in terms of changes to knowledge, commitment and support, or activity relating to women's imprisonment? Please note which stakeholders and how if so.

The Corston report commenced the change in the way services are delivered to women who are in contact with the CJS.

The then local probation trusts appointed 'Women's Champion's' who became specialists in working with women subjected to community supervision, the way in which women were supervised changed to women only reporting and the front line delivery of services change in response.

Following the commencement of the Transforming Lives programme we have seen significant change within the CJS and the most poignant change is the release of the national Female Offender Strategy. Although we can't say for sure if there is a correlation between the work of Transforming Lives and the new government focus on female offending it is very likely.

The new strategy clearly marks out the pathway to reduce the number of women imprisoned and sets guidance for implementation that is directed to:-

- Police
- Guidance on the development of whole system approaches
- Continue to develop work on the importance of family ties for offenders
- Replace prison service order with a women's policy framework
- Work nationally and locally to develop a Concordat on Female Offenders.

Successes and limitations

8. What in your view have been the key successes of Transforming Lives?

Recognising that Transforming Lives has a single aim to reduce the number of women sent to prison we believe that key successes are:

- Improved oversight of women's justice across the UK
- Strengthened pathways into mental health and social care services for vulnerable women caught in the criminal justice system – one stop shop type models.
- Increased awareness of the links between women's experience of domestic abuse and their offending
- Promoted non-custodial options for mothers of dependent children
- Worked intensively in selected local areas to foster greater use of early intervention and community orders for women.

It is evident from the shift in the political agenda that decriminalising and supporting women who have become embroiled in offending behaviour within their communities is now a priority locally and nationally. This shift has been influenced by the Transforming Lives project.

9. Please say what you think has facilitated change, including factors relating to PRT/ Transforming Lives (e.g. the programme's goals, activities or delivery, skills of the programme team, the organisation's reputation) or contextual factors (such as the political climate, economic conditions, or others).

The organisational reputations of both the Soroptimists and the Prison Reform Trust have been the most influential factors in terms of facilitating change and the 70 recommendations made within the Transforming Lives report are well evidenced adding further weight to the rationale for reform.

10. Are there any areas where Transforming Lives has made less progress in relation to reducing women's imprisonment?

Not specifically in relation to reducing women's imprisonment but one of the key areas with less demonstrable impact is in relation to children and the interventions available to them when their mother is serving sentences. Approximately 31% of women in custody have children. It is estimated that 17,000 children every year are affected by maternal imprisonment in England and Wales. 95% (16,000) of these children are forced to leave their homes as their mother's imprisonment leaves them without an adult to take care of them.

11. Please say what you think has inhibited change, including factors relating to PRT/ Transforming Lives (e.g. the programme's goals, activities or delivery, skills of the programme team, the organisation's reputation) or contextual factors (such as the political climate, economic conditions, or others).

Two key factors here are the lack of joined up cross-government commitment to the Transforming Lives programme aims and the lack of financial support to implement measures such as community based interventions to support community sentencing.

Overall views on progress towards reducing women's imprisonment
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12. Based on your knowledge of PRT's activities, how well positioned is Transforming Lives to achieve a reduction in women's imprisonment?

Prison Reform Trust working with groups as committed and influential as the Soroptimists are well placed to evoke and maintain change that will result in the reduction of women being sent to custody.

13. Do you think PRT is influencing distinct approaches for different groups of women who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse? To what extent if so?

The innovative and dynamic way the PRT work to engage and promote their work is distinct in itself. The Transforming lives recommendations are dynamic and simple to apply and very achievable.

The release of the Female Offender Strategy in June 2018 provides us with evidence that PRT have influenced national policy. The strategy tells us that:-

- Criminalising vulnerable individuals has broader negative social impacts
- Short custodial sentences do not deliver the best results for female offenders
- Good community management works

The Government want:-

- Few women entering the CJS
- Fewer women in custody
- Better conditions for those in custody

In addition they have committed too:-

- Invest 5 million of cross-Government funding over 2 years in community provision for women
- Work with local and national partners to develop a pilot for 'residential women's centres' in at least five sites across England and Wales.
- We are committed to reducing the number of women serving short custodial sentences.

PRT have played their part in ensuring this strategy was published.

14. Do you feel PRT is influencing distinct approaches at different stages of the criminal justice system journey? To what extent?

It has clearly influenced the CJS approach to housing. The recommendation that housing needs should be considered and an extension of the period for which housing benefit should be made is an approach that would reduce the impact for women sentenced to short term custody.

15. What other important factors are contributing to reducing imprisonment?

Funding is of course a massive contributing to reducing imprisonment. Using Community resources and specialist services all require funding and this is not accessible in today's economic climate.

16. Which factors are most important to achieving a reduction in imprisonment and why?

All factors within the programme are important. Actively working to induce change within a system that has historically believed that women are doubly deviant and therefore doubly dammed is no challenge that can be faced lightly and collective partnership working to bring change nationally and locally.

Next steps and reflections

1. Will you continue to work with PRT and/or Transforming Lives in the future? Please describe your reasons for this.

Yes we will. The Prison Reform Trust campaign passionately for reform within the CJS to make the system fair and acceptable for perpetrators, victims and witness.

2. What would be your one recommendation to PRT to help them to deliver a reduction in the number of women sent to prison?

More work should be completed with the Magistracy to raise awareness of the provisions available within the community to rehabilitate and support women offenders. The recommendation that a Champion could be appointed to each bench to ensure magistrates are aware of available intervention will work to assist this however, organisations should be encouraged to promote and keep the Magistracy informed.