

Evaluation of the Inspire Women's Project



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Women offenders in Northern Ireland have similar experiences and needs to those of their counterparts in England and Wales and Scotland, that is, they face a range of vulnerabilities in relation to their health and wellbeing, family relationships, children and addictions. A significant proportion have also experienced serious and sustained violence or sexual violence either as adults or as children. While the number of women offenders in Northern Ireland is relatively small compared to the number of men, it is recognised that responding to women's offending will have an impact on targets to reduce reoffending both now and in the future. The Inspire Women's Project was established in Belfast on 27 October 2008. It aimed to ensure that gender specific provision was available for women offenders in Northern Ireland following increasing awareness that the needs of women and men in the criminal justice system are different and that equality of outcomes is not necessarily achieved by equality of treatment (Corston, 2007). This report presents the findings of the Evaluation of the Pilot Inspire Women's Project.

The Inspire Women's Project

The Inspire Women's Project was created *'to develop and deliver in the community a new, enhanced range of women-specific services which directly contribute to reducing women's offending through targeted community based interventions'* (DOJ, 2010)¹. The ongoing strategic aims in relation to Inspire are to review the current assessment tools and establish the need for a gender-specific approach; to evaluate the Inspire Women's Project; to place the Inspire Women's Project on a permanent footing; and to roll out the programmes and processes pioneered at Inspire to other areas across Northern Ireland (DOJ, 2010)².

At the Inspire Women's Project a core team of four probation officers, an APAC NIACRO worker³, a manager and a receptionist work with adult women offenders on probation supervision, those awaiting pre-sentence reports and a small number of day release prisoners. Inspire provides probation supervision, probation-led

¹ DOJ (2010a) Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013, Belfast: Department of Justice.

² Ibid.

³ Assisting People and Communities Worker

programmes and coordinates provision by a number of external partner agencies delivering support to women offenders at the Belfast premises of the Inspire Women's Project. Inspire extends its services to women offenders across the Greater Belfast area. According to PBNi caseload figures at the end of July 2010 there were 135 women offenders in contact with the Inspire Women's Project subject to 142 community sentences⁴.

Aims and Methods

The key aim of the evaluation is to assess the Inspire Women's Project in relation to its key objectives: to provide a woman-centred approach; to provide women offenders with a framework within which they can address their offending behaviour and complex needs; to establish a network of agencies that can provide a holistic multi-agency response for women offenders; and to enable women offenders to desist from crime and reintegrate into society. It was also intended that an examination of cost benefits of the service would be undertaken and examples of good practice be identified that could facilitate the roll out of a gender specific approach to women offenders across Northern Ireland.

Results

Referrals to Inspire

A total of 309 women offenders were referred to Inspire between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010. They ranged in age from 19 to 68 with the majority younger than 50 years old. There was a relatively even distribution of women offenders between 20 and 49 years of age. Over half (56%) of the offenders attending Inspire lived in Belfast and most were on community sentences (89%). While information on the background needs of the entire 309 women offenders was not gathered for the evaluation, details provided for the 37 women offenders interviewed suggested that their background experiences and underlying needs were similar to those of the entire population of women offenders in Northern Ireland. In relation to offending histories, women offenders referred to Inspire were most likely to have committed an acquisitive offence (37%).

⁴ Offenders may be subject to more than one community sentence.

Engagement

For women offenders not serving a custodial sentence engagement with Inspire is determined by the requirements specified by the courts in the community sentence. Offenders are required to meet with their probation officer and comply with the conditions of their sentence; however, patterns of engagement may vary depending upon an assessment of the woman offender's risk of future offending. Women offenders may also be ordered by the courts to undertake particular provision as part of their order⁵. In other cases, the woman offender's probation officer will recommend that they undertake activities or are referred for support with a partner organisation external to the Inspire Women's Project. In cases such as these, appointments at external projects may replace the requirement to attend a probation appointment, although regular feedback about attendance is provided by the partner organisation and the woman offender remains under regular supervision by her probation officer. If not a part of the woman offender's community sentence, referrals to external agencies are voluntary but are encouraged by probation officers.

Referrals for external support

A wide range of external partner agencies accept referrals from Inspire, these include: FASA, NIACRO, NI Women's Centres and WSN, Women's Aid, Barnardo's, Prison Arts Foundation, NICAS, Community Addiction Team, React, and a number of others. Data about the nature and number of external referrals made for the 309 women offenders were referred to Inspire between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010 shows that a total of 421 referrals for support from a number of different agencies were made.

Compliance

The majority (72%) of the 309 women offenders involved with Inspire between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010 were compliant with their community sentence. The most common reason for non-compliance was not attending appointments (81%). Non compliance is subject to standard probation enforcement procedures where probation officers contact each woman offender and make a decision about the reason for non-compliance. If the probation officer deems it necessary a woman offender may be given a formal warning in the first instance or have formal breach

⁵ For example, probation led programmes such as Think First, Anger Management, Alcohol Management, and RATSDAM (Rapid Assessment and Treatment Service for Drug and Alcohol Misusers) which is run by NICAS.

proceedings initiated against her if her non compliance is deemed serious or frequent enough. Of the 309 women offenders, a total of 69 (22%) breached their community sentence.

Strengths of Inspire

Inspire Women's Project has taken significant positive and innovative steps towards the recommendations of Baroness Corston (2007) and the strategic objectives outlined in the *Northern Ireland Strategy to Manage Women Offenders* (DOJ, 2010)⁶. The Project has developed and grown significantly since its inception on 27 October 2008 and has drawn on existing evidence about women offenders to begin tailoring programmes and practices to meet their complex needs.

The Inspire Women's Project was viewed highly by both women offenders and key stakeholders. Women offenders were positive about the provision available to them at Inspire, both in relation to the quality of supervision and the variety of options available, however, apart from women offenders referred from prison, most would have liked further information about Inspire at the point of referral. Having limited information about the Project had left some women offenders feeling apprehensive about attending although their fears were usually allayed after their first visit. Women offenders were grateful for the women-only provision and physical space; the non-judgemental attitude of their probation officers; the flexible but bounded approach at Inspire; the opportunity for support from their peers; the support provided around specific issues such as debt, housing, attending court etc; the links that they were making in the community and the range of meaningful activities and interventions provided.

Inspire was viewed by key stakeholders as a unique and much needed service that has been highly effective in the short time it has been running. The staff team are highly regarded by both women offenders and stakeholders alike. Central to the Project's success has been its women-centred approach which involves women in identifying their own needs and objectives and the wide and varied links with community based organisations, particularly the Northern Ireland Women's Centres. Such links with support in the community have meant that Inspire can provide a 'joined up', rapid and cost effective response to a wide range of women offender's

⁶ DOJ (2010a) Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013, Belfast: Department of Justice.

needs. There are positive relationships between key agencies and agreements have been developed to ensure smooth and consistent delivery. Particularly strong links have been developed between Inspire, NIACRO and WSN. A continuity of provision has also been established for women offenders moving between custody and the community which is supporting resettlement and improving outcomes for this group.

Areas for improvement

The Inspire Women's Project should continue this good work while focussing on the following areas: establishing stronger links with key agencies such as the police, mental health services and housing; developing robust monitoring and evaluation of outcomes (especially re-offending); improving the engagement of women offenders with non-mandatory services and programmes, particularly through greater support for women offenders with histories of domestic or sexual abuse of substance misuse issues; developing a range of meaningful education and employment opportunities for women offenders; the wider promotion of Inspire, particularly for women offenders at court; and developing and extending provision for women offenders outside the city area, younger offenders and low risk offenders. Inspire should also continue to document its women-centred approach, develop gender specific assessment tools and evaluate its impact in order that others can learn from the experience in Northern Ireland.

Benefits and costs of Inspire Women's Project

While it was not possible to establish quantitative outcomes for the Inspire Women's Project for a number of reasons, there were a number of promising findings in relation to qualitative outcomes for women offenders. Interviews with women offenders found that 78% (29) had not committed any further offences since engaging with Inspire; 70% (26) reported changes in their attitudes towards their offending; 76% (28) reported improvements to their self esteem; and a number reported a range of other benefits including improvements to physical and mental health; substance use; relationships; self control; education and training; and employment.

ACE Scores were used to measure the change in risk of reoffending for the cohort of 309 women offenders between their first and their most recent assessment. The average ACE Score reduced by three points, a statistically significant reduction. It was not possible, however, to compare this change with a matched group of women

offenders who received mainstream supervision due to problems constructing a suitable comparison group. It was also not possible to examine changes in rates of re-offending as this data was not available at the time of the evaluation.

The total cost of running the project between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010 was approximately £187,250, which equates to approximately £606 per woman offender in addition to mainstream probation provision.

Further research

As it was not possible to establish clearly the quantitative outcomes for women offenders attending Inspire or indeed the cost benefit of establishing provision such as that available at Inspire, this should become the focus of further research. To do this would require a) the development of a robust comparison group to establish differences in the rates of breach, non-compliance, ACE Scores and re-offending between women offenders attending Inspire and those who receive regular probation supervision; b) an agreement between PBNI and DOJ in relation to the sharing and analysis of this data and c) development and testing of gender specific assessment tools.

Key recommendations

1. It is recommended that data about outcomes (particularly re-offending) be identified and analysed as matter of priority. To support this process it is recommended that an evaluation steering group including members of PBNI and DOJ be established. This group should identify the data required; establish a comparison cohort; make formal information sharing arrangements; and establish responsibility for data analysis.

2. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project formally document the key principles of a woman centred approach in order that others working with women offenders benefit from the expertise that has been developed within the project.

3. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project works towards the development of gender-specific assessment tools that are better able to capture changes in the criminogenic needs of women offenders. Such tools should then be used to more accurately measure the impact of Inspire on women offenders.

4. It is recommended that the resources and approach developed at Inspire are extended to other groups of women offenders and women offenders whose community sentences have expired through the creation of a new non PBNI post based at Inspire.

5. It is recommended that Inspire work towards improving provision for women offenders outside the pilot area.

6. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project Working Group works towards establishing formal links with providers of accommodation and housing and meaningful education and training opportunities for women offenders.

7. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project Working Group establishes formal links with services supporting women with complex mental health needs, past or present experiences of violence, substance misuse or combinations of these needs.

8. It is recommended that voluntary sector staff delivering programmes and support who are not experienced in working with substance misusing women offenders are given training and support in order that they are able to effectively identify and manage such issues.

9. It is recommended that an assessment of the likely impacts of funding cuts is made to ensure continuity of provision for women offenders involved with Inspire.

10. It is recommended that Inspire continue development of its women-centered approach to women's offending and that where possible, ongoing evaluation and documentation of this approach is undertaken.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Inspire Women's Project which works with women in the Greater Belfast area. The aim of the research has been to examine the effectiveness of the Inspire Women's Project in meeting its objectives, to meeting the changing needs of the criminal justice system, and to make a difference for the women for whom it was designed. The evaluation also aimed to establish elements of good practice which may be useful to other services working with women offenders in Northern Ireland and to assess the cost benefits of Inspire provision.

1.1 Background

Over the last 15 years there has been growing acknowledgement that the causes of women's offending and the needs of women offenders are different to those of their male counterparts. A number of recent studies in this area have shown that many women are imprisoned on short sentences for non-violent crimes; that the causes of women's offending are not addressed by the criminal justice system; and that fairness of treatment does not necessarily mean equality of treatment between women and men in the criminal justice system (NIO, 2009⁷; Fawcett Society, 2009; Corston, 2007). In her 2007 report *Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System* (2007) Baroness Corston made 43 key recommendations advocating the greater use of diversionary measures for low level women offenders based on the premise that women's needs, motivation, experiences and patterns of offending are distinctly different to men's. She called for an integrated and holistic approach that recognises gender differences and which is able to develop a more equitable and effective response. In order to break the cycle of repeat offending and custody Baroness Corston advocated the greater use of women's centres that are able to respond constructively to women's offending and provide a way out of disadvantage, dependence, isolation and exclusion. She called for a women-centred approach based on the promising work of centres such as the 218 Service in Glasgow.

Similarly, the Fawcett Society Report *Engendering Justice* (2009) reports that there is a '*persistent gap between strong policy development and consistent implementation*'

⁷ NIO (2009a) *Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Northern Ireland Office

for women offenders and that as a consequence the criminal justice system does not address the causes of women's offending and that too many women are imprisoned on short sentences for non-violent crimes. The report was also critical of the failure to provide women victims of violence with support, safety and justice. Central to this gap between policy and practice is thought to be a misunderstanding of the concepts of gender and equality and a failure to implement practical and cultural changes at every stage of the policy making cycle to ensure outcomes are achieved. The report recommended that women offenders with identified mental health needs should be diverted away from the criminal justice system, that adequate and robust alternatives to remand must be made available to the judiciary, that comprehensive pre sentence reports must be prepared for each female offender (which include an assessment of the impact of incarceration on dependants), prison staff should be provided with suitable training about women offender's needs, that long term funding should be provided to develop gender specific community provision for women offenders and their children across the country and that custodial provision for women should provide small units in each county to aid the transition of women offenders into community provision (Fawcett Society, 2009).

With a growing awareness of the complex and differential needs of women offenders a number of innovative projects which attempt to develop a gender specific response to women offenders have developed across the United Kingdom. These include the provision of women-only support services such as the Together Women projects in England (Hedderman et al 2008) and the 218 Service in Scotland (Loucks et al, 2006; Easton and Matthews, 2010) as well as strategies within the criminal justice system which are used to divert women offenders from court or custody into such services.

The use of the criminal justice system as a means of diverting women offenders into necessary support and away from further contact with either the courts or prisons is increasingly common. In England and Wales, for example, a women-specific condition (WSC) for use with conditional cautions has been piloted. The WSC aims to divert low-level women offenders from court into the Together Women centres for an assessment of their underlying needs. The evaluation of the WSC showed that women offenders felt the WSC had made a positive impact on their offending by providing a useful route into women specific support services (Easton et al, 2010).

1.2 Women's offending in Northern Ireland

As in many jurisdictions, the number of women offenders in Northern Ireland is relatively small compared to the number of men⁸, however, it is recognised that responding to women's offending may have an impact on overall targets to reduce reoffending both now and in the future. Research suggests that the needs of women offenders in Northern Ireland are similar to those of women offenders in England and Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Women offenders therefore face a range of vulnerabilities in relation to their health and well being, family relationships, children and addictions. A significant proportion have experienced serious and sustained sexual or violent abuse either as children or adults⁹.

According to the most recent data compiled by the Department of Justice, 13% (3428) of those who passed through Northern Irish courts in 2006 were women. The most commonly committed offence type among women was 'theft' with 11% of women offenders committing this offence compared to only 6% of men. The proportion of women sentenced to immediate custody for 'theft' has dropped significantly in recent years from 21% in 2006 to 3% in 2009 (DOJ, 2010)¹⁰. In 2009/10 women offenders made up 12% of the orders made by the courts for probation supervision.

In 2009 there was an average of 48 women offenders in prison in Northern Ireland which represents 3% of the total overall prison population (DOJ, 2010)¹¹. This is a comparatively low rate compared to the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and most of Western Europe¹². Women in Northern Ireland were more likely than men to be imprisoned on remand (48% compared to 34%). While the number of prison receptions for men drop after 28 years of age, the same is not true of women with a high percentage of receptions into immediate custody among women aged 40-49

⁸ At the time of the evaluation the PBNI caseload split was 91% male and 9% female.

⁹ Further information about the particular needs and experiences of women offenders is available in DOJ (2010a) and Corston (2007).

¹⁰ DOJ (2010b) *The Northern Ireland Prison Population in 2009*, Research and Statistics Bulletin 2/2010, Belfast: Department of Justice.

¹¹ DOJ (2010a) *Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013*, Belfast: Department of Justice.

¹² <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/law/research/icps/worldbrief/> accessed 15/2/11.

years. Women who receive a custodial sentence are imprisoned in Ash House at Hydebank Wood, sharing services and facilities with young offenders (DOJ, 2010)¹³.

1.3 Strategic responses to women's offending in Northern Ireland

In February 2009 the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) published its *Draft Strategy for the Management of Women offenders in Northern Ireland* with the overall aim of developing a coordinated, long-term, sustainable approach to addressing the needs of women offenders in Northern Ireland. This document advocated the need to develop more creative and constructive ways of dealing with women's offending and to reduce the use of imprisonment wherever possible. The strategy has five key strands: to provide alternatives to prosecution and custody; to reduce the number of women coming through the criminal justice system; to ensure that, when women are sentenced, their needs wherever possible are met in the community; to develop a tailored approach to the management of women in custody; and to take forward the options for developing a new purpose built facility for women prisoners.

In line with a policy statement issued by the PBNI in 2007 the strategy acknowledges that there were few interventions in Northern Ireland developed specifically for women offenders. In response to the issues identified and as part of the draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders, the Pilot Inspire Women's Project was established in 2008 for women offenders residing within the Greater Belfast area.

In 2010 following consultation on the draft strategy the DOJ published the full strategy titled *Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013*. The ministerial forward of this strategy recognises that in order to '*meet the specific needs of women offenders, the criminal justice system must provide a different response to that targeted at men.*'

The strategy outlines a number of specific actions being undertaken to gather accurate, gender specific information about women offenders in Northern Ireland and

¹³ DOJ (2010a) *Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013*, Belfast: Department of Justice.

to develop gender specific strategies to address women's offending. Strategic Strand Three of the strategy outlines how gender specific community supervision and intervention will be provided in Northern Ireland at the Inspire Women's Project.

According to the strategy the aim of the Inspire Women's Project is *'to develop and deliver in the community a new, enhanced range of women-specific services which directly contribute to reducing women's offending through targeted community based interventions.'* (p.49). The pilot which ran until March 2011 was established as a testing ground for the development and refining of a range of women specific services to meet women offender's needs. The project, once fully developed, should be influential in shaping future community-based provision, and will provide a model for a managed roll-out of women-focused services beyond Belfast. Three key actions were identified in relation to Inspire in the strategy: 1) to review the current assessment tools to establish a need for a gender-specific approach; 2) to evaluate the Inspire Women's Project Pilot and subject to the findings of the evaluation establish a permanent dedicated Inspire Women's Project in Belfast; and 3) subject to the findings of the evaluation and availability of resources roll out the programmes and practices pioneered at Inspire to areas across Northern Ireland.

1.4 Inspire Women's Project

The Pilot Women's Project known as Inspire was established on 27 October 2008. It initially operated from PBNI premises until a suitable alternative location was found and the Inspire Women's Project was opened in December 2009 in newly renovated premises in North Street, Belfast¹⁴. At the Inspire Women's Project a core team of four probation officers, an APAC NIACRO worker, a manager and a receptionist cater for women offenders on supervision orders, those awaiting pre-sentence reports, and a small number of day release prisoners. It aims to support women offenders to address their complex needs and to reduce levels of reoffending and does this by adopting a holistic and 'women centred' approach to dealing with the issues that lead to offending. The Inspire Women's Project provides a women-only space for women offenders to attend probation appointments, attend a number of programmes delivered by external organisations and access a wide range of support offered by both probation and a number of partner organisations. While the 'woman

¹⁴ Prior to the opening of the Inspire Women's Project, staff were based at PBNI Programme Delivery Unit and women offenders either attended this unit for particular programmes or reported to their local probation offices.

centred' approach is difficult to define, the Inspire Operations Manager explained that the approach tries to address:

'...the levels of shame they felt, the lack of self esteem, the difficulties they had coming into probation offices, into the courts, and the struggle internally about reconciling their offending with themselves as women.' (Inspire Operations Manager)

Since its inception in 2008, the Inspire Women's Project has developed links beyond Belfast City and with a wide range of service providers across the voluntary sector. A Working Group and a Reference Group have also been established to support the ongoing development of the work of the Project¹⁵.

¹⁵ Please see Appendix 2 for further information about the Working and Reference Groups and about how the Inspire Women's Project has developed since its inception in 2008.

2. Evaluation

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Pilot Inspire Women's Project in Belfast. The central aim of this evaluation is to examine the effectiveness of the Inspire Women's Project Pilot in relation to its key objectives:

- To provide a woman-centred approach for women offenders;
- To provide a framework in which women offenders can address offending behaviour;
- To provide a framework in which women offenders can address their complex needs;
- To establish a network of agencies that can provide a holistic multi-agency response for women offenders;
- To enable women offenders to desist from crime and reintegrate into society.

The evaluation was overseen by a steering group which included members of the Justice Policy Directorate of the Department of Justice.

2.1 Research Questions

The types of research questions that the evaluation aims to explore include:

- What have been the routes of referral to the Project?
- How does the Inspire Women's Project work with offenders referred from different sources, with different backgrounds or underlying needs?
- What strengths and good practice can be observed in the operation of the Inspire Women's Project?
- What barriers exist in the effective operation of the Inspire Women's Project?
- How could the effectiveness of the Inspire Women's Project be improved?
- What have been the impacts of the Inspire Women's Project service on the intensity and frequency of reoffending?
- What impact has involvement in the Inspire Women's Project had on the attitudes to offending amongst women offenders?
- What are the outcomes for women who engage compared to those who haven't engaged in terms of:
 - Rates of reoffending?
 - Degree of resettlement, stabilisation, employment, education and so on?
 - Engagement with mainstream services?

- Other outcomes e.g. motivation, self-responsibility, confidence, improved relationships with family and local support networks, use of mainstream services?
- How has the Inspire Women's Project contributed to these outcomes and worked to tackle the underlying causes of offending behaviour?
- What are the costs incurred by the Inspire Women's Project and the value of the benefits attributable to the service?
- Does the provision of the Inspire Women's Project represent good value for money?
- What elements of good practice could be disseminated to other areas?

2.2 Methodology

A mixed methodological approach was adopted which combined an analysis of quantitative data and semi-structured qualitative interviews with women offenders and stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the Inspire Women's Project.

The quantitative data examined included:

- PBNi data was provided for the entire sample of 309 women who accessed the service between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010.
- This data included demographic data, assessment and ACE scores, information about underlying needs and offending histories.
- Further detail about women offenders' living arrangements, dependent children, mental health and substance misuse was provided for 34 of the 37 interviewees.

The qualitative elements of the evaluation involved:

- In-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample of 37 women offenders – 36 were recruited directly from Inspire and one through support services in the wider community.
- In-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 key stakeholders including members of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, Department of Justice, Northern Ireland Prison Service and a range of voluntary and community organisations such as the Women's Support Network, FASA, Northern Ireland Women's Centres, the Prison Arts Foundation, NIACRO, and a number of others.

A more detailed methodology and copies of the research tools are attached in Appendices 1 and 3.

3. Results

3.1 The Inspire Women's Project

Probation provision at Inspire

The Inspire Women's Project provides probation supervision and a number of offence-focussed programmes delivered by probation staff. These services are extended to women offenders across Greater Belfast. According to PBNI caseload figures at the end of July 2010 there were 135 women offenders in contact with the Inspire Women's Project subject to 142 community sentences¹⁶.

Within Inspire, offence focused programmes such as Think First¹⁷, GOALS UK¹⁸, Alcohol Awareness, and Anger Management are provided. Links are also available for women offenders attending Inspire to the PBNI Duke of Edinburgh Endeavour Awards Scheme. While the majority of the work of the Project is focused on one-to-one work with women offenders at Inspire, women offenders living outside of Belfast can travel to Belfast to participate in the programmes on offer. In addition to probation supervision and support, the team also co-ordinate provision by external partner agencies at the Inspire Women's Project and make referrals to other partner agencies outside the Project and beyond Belfast City.

External provision within the Inspire Women's Project

A number of partner agencies deliver services and support within Inspire. These include the Prison Arts Foundation (PAF) who deliver a creative arts programme with a focus on creative writing; the Forum for Action on Substance Abuse (FASA) who provide a six week course of holistic therapies (reflexology, massage and acupuncture); the Northern Ireland Women's Centres who provide monthly 'taster' sessions which are often activity bases (e.g. group cycling); Barnardo's who provide a parenting programme and family support¹⁹; and NIACRO who have one worker permanently based at Inspire²⁰. Childcare is also available and if appropriate, can be sourced locally through a range of providers.

¹⁶ Offenders may be subject to more than one community sentence.

¹⁷ Think First is an intensive home office accredited cognitive behaviour programme aimed at women who have at least 3 previous convictions.

¹⁸ The GOALS UK programme supports offenders to develop independence, self-esteem, personal awareness, self motivation and other key skills with the aim of assisting people to move on into the work or life that they want.

¹⁹ Barnardo's also deliver this provision in Hydebank which allows for women a link between prison and resettlement in the community.

²⁰ Assisting People and Communities (APAC) worker

Links to external support for women offenders

The Inspire Women's Project also has strong links with a number of external statutory, voluntary and community organisations that provide a range of support services to women offenders beyond the Inspire Women's Project. Links exist with statutory health provision such as Community Addiction Teams (CAT) and psychiatrists; NIACRO who provide a wide range of support including the Jobtrack programme, support with debt management, funding for educational courses, ECDL, Driving Theory, Basic Computer Courses, help with CVs and in dealing with criminal record disclosures; FASA who provide support with drug use, self-harm, suicide and parenting as well as offering holistic therapies; and a number of other organisations including Family Links, Victim Support, Women's Aid, EXTERN, Alcoholics Anonymous, Alternatives, REACT and New Horizons. Counselling support is available from a number of organisations including RELATE, Lifeline, Nexus, Samaritans, Holy Trinity, and Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service (NICAS). One of the strongest links is with the Women's Support Network (WSN) and Northern Ireland Women's Centres (NIWC).

3.2 Referrals to Inspire

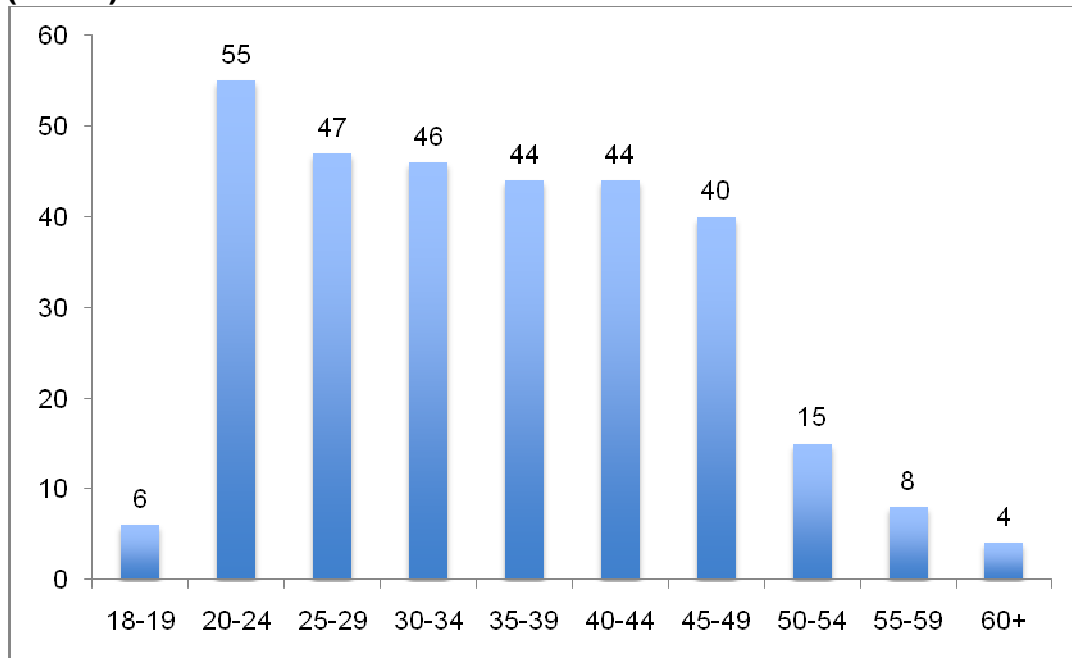
Criteria for referral

Any adult woman offender from Greater Belfast is eligible to attend Inspire if they are on a statutory supervision order or are awaiting a pre-sentence report. Since January 2010 a small number of women held in custody have been referred to the Project under the Ash-Inspire Resettlement Initiative. This initiative allows suitable prisoners to attend Inspire on a day release basis to attend courses and in order to develop relationships and links which will support them in their resettlement post release.

Women referred to Inspire Women's Project

A total of 309 women offenders were in contact with Inspire between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010. Of these five began their programme in 2006; 16 in 2007; 101 in 2008 and 125 in 2009. Sixty two women offenders began their programme between 1 January 2010 and 31 July 2010. The women offenders in contact with the service ranged in age from 19 to 68. The majority were younger than 50 years old with the distribution between 20 and 49 years relatively even across age categories (see figure 3.1).

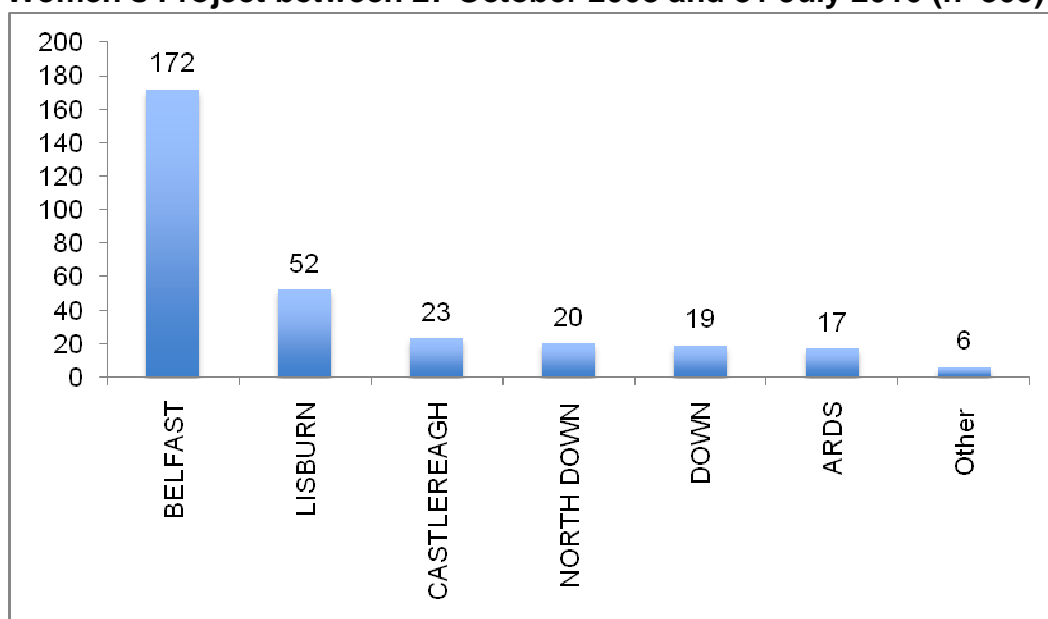
Figure 3.1 Age of women referred to Inspire Women’s Project between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010 (n=309)



Source: PBNI

The majority of women offenders referred to Inspire lived in Belfast (172, 56%) although women from other areas were also in contact with the Project, including 52 women offenders from Lisburn, 23 from Castlereagh, 20 from North Down, 19 from Down, 17 from Ards and a small number from other areas (6).

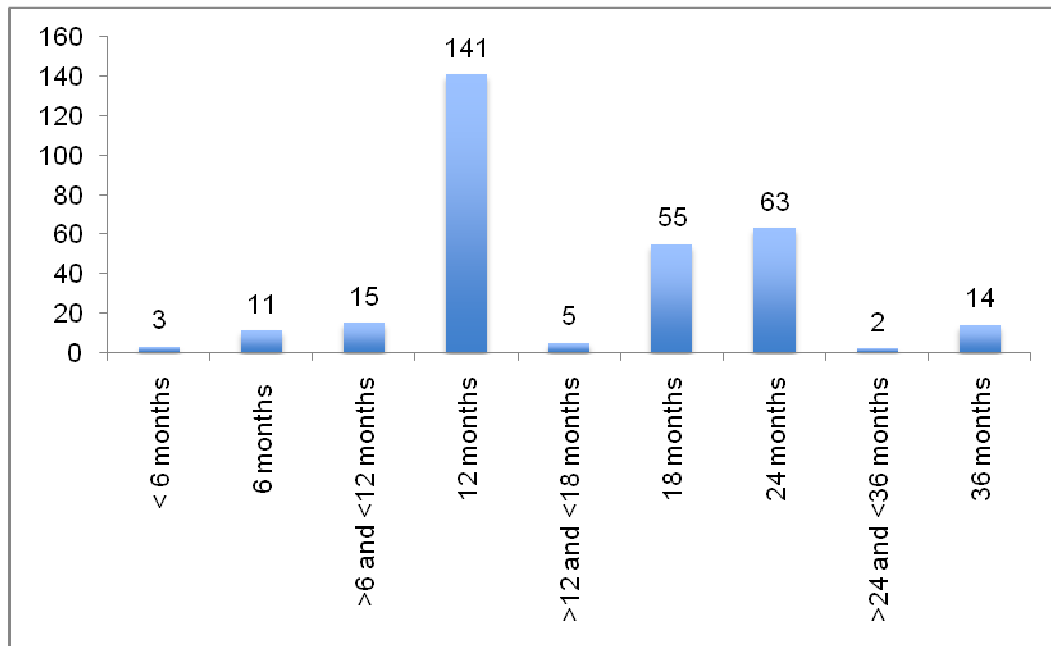
Figure 3.2 Local Government District of women referred to Inspire Women’s Project between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010 (n=309)



Source: PBNI

Most of the women referred to Inspire were on community sentences (89%), with smaller numbers on custody community sentences (5%), combination orders (4%) and other types of orders including inescapable voluntaries (1%). The majority were on orders of 12 months or over (91%). A small proportion (5%) were on orders over 2 years, with the longest order received being 36 months.

Figure 3.3 Order lengths of women referred to Inspire Women’s Project between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010 (n=309)



Source: PBNI

Of the 309 women in contact with the service, 16 had been imprisoned for periods between six and sixty months. A further woman offender had received a custodial sentence; however this had been suspended for 24 months. Of the 37 women offenders interviewed, three had received custodial sentences. Fourteen of the 309 women offenders had been given periods of community service as part of a combination order²¹ ranging in duration from 40 hours to 100 hours.

Underlying needs²²

Physical and mental health issues

Information about women offender’s physical and mental health was available for the sample of 37 women offenders interviewed. In relation to physical health the

²¹ Combination Orders involve probation supervision and community service.

²² Information was not gathered about the underlying needs of the entire cohort of 309 women offenders but has been drawn from the self-reports of the 37 women offenders interviewed.

conditions reported included diabetes, asthma, epilepsy, heart disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The mental health issues reported were most commonly depression and anxiety, although women offenders in the sample also reported having schizophrenia, personality disorder, learning disabilities, brain injury, bipolar disorder, and a number of other mental health concerns such as post traumatic stress disorder.

Substance misuse

Information about women offender's substance misuse was available only for the sample of women offenders interviewed. The interviews with women offenders revealed that of the 37 women offenders interviewed, 21 reported no current or past illegal drug or alcohol use. Twenty three of the 37 women were currently on prescription medication for physical or mental health or addiction issues.

Five women offenders reported past problems with alcohol which they had now resolved. Six women offenders reported having used illicit drugs (including prescription drugs) in the past with four of these reporting significant recreational drug use as young women.

Of the 37 women offenders interviewed, five indicated that they were current drug users - four of these were poly drug users using a combination of substances including heroin, cocaine, methadone, cannabis, ecstasy and prescription medication (both prescribed to them and illegal).

Experiences of violence

During the interviews a number of women offenders reported having had experiences of domestic violence as adult women (13). A number had also experienced either physical (12), emotional (14), verbal (13) or sexual abuse or violence (18) as children or young women. For many of these women offenders, these experiences were something they were not permitted to discuss with their families and had to deal with on their own. As two women offenders reported:

"I was raped when I was nine... two fifteen year olds...it took me fourteen years to tell my mum...My uncle said it was shameful and I wasn't to tell anybody about it cause it was dirty and things like that. I said 'I didn't do anything wrong' and he says it was dirty, you're never to speak of it again. He says 'I sorted it out. Just let it go.' And it was between me and him."
(Interview 27, 28 years old)

"Because of the rape and the abuse I didn't deal with it because my mummy was sick so you weren't allowed to talk about it. I used to call it my Pandora's

Box. I put it in a box in my head and locked it with a key and I didn't let on to anyone what had happened.” (Interview 5, 48 years old)

Several women offenders had also been witness to considerable violence such as the murder of relatives or partners.

Dependent children

Information was available about the number of dependent children for 34 of the 37 women offenders interviewed. Most had no dependent children (24), although three of these women offenders had children who were no longer in their care. Six women offenders had one child, three had two children and one had three children.

Offending histories

There was a significant range of offending histories among the 309 women offenders who were in contact with the Inspire Women's Project. Table 3.1 presents the type and number of previous offences²³ committed by the 309 women offenders in contact with the Inspire Women's Project between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010.

Table 3.1 Offences committed by women offenders in contact with the Inspire Women's Project (n=309)²⁴

Offence type	n	%
Theft	99	25
Violence	63	16
Deception, fraud or forgery	46	12
Motoring	42	11
Criminal damage / arson	28	7
Drugs	21	5
Robbery / aggravated burglary	6	2
Other ²⁵	94	24
Total	399	100

Source: PBNI

The women offenders interviewed had also committed a wide range of offences and were broadly representative of the entire cohort of women offenders. The most commonly self-reported offence was shoplifting or theft (15) followed by violent

²³ This data only includes offences up to the creation of the woman offenders Pre Sentence Report, therefore there may be a small number of offences not included within this table.

²⁴ An offender can commit more than one offence and therefore the total number of offences may be more than the total number of offenders.

²⁵ This table is constructed using PBNI offence categories, however, in this case the 'other' category also includes a small number of burglary, sexual and firearms / explosives offences.

offences (12) and fraud or forgery (11)²⁶. Acquisitive crime was much more commonly reported than other types of crime with half of all the crimes reported by interviewees being of an acquisitive nature. Four of the women interviewed were first time offenders, four had several previous convictions – one with a gap of five years between her past and current offending and one a total of 74 previous convictions. Three had been under the supervision of probation in the past and had been in prison for several short sentences.

3.3 Engagement with Inspire

Inspire takes on a wide range of adult women offenders including both first time and more serious offenders. Initial engagement with Inspire is either court or probation directed but women are also referred to Inspire from prison via the Ash-Inspire resettlement initiative. For women offenders who are not serving a custodial sentence, engagement at Inspire is determined by the requirements specified by the courts in the community sentence. Engagement with Inspire is therefore usually on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis as required by probation standards of supervision. Offenders are required to meet as required with their probation officer and to comply with the conditions of their community sentence. As community sentences are structured according to the assessed risk of further re-offending, patterns of engagement vary. In some cases, women offenders are ordered to attend particular provision by the courts as part of their order and in other cases, their probation officer will recommend that they undertake activities or are referred for support outside the Inspire Women's Project.

Engaging in support with a partner agency in addition to that formally required within the community sentence may replace the requirement to attend a probation appointment, although each woman offender remains under regular supervision by her probation officer. A joint feedback process has been developed where partner agencies provide formal feedback to probation about a woman offender's engagement following each appointment. Should a woman offender fail to attend an agreed appointment with a partner agency probation follow this up as per probation supervision requirements.

²⁶ Five of the cases of fraud and forgery were instances of benefit fraud with one woman punished for an overpayment of under £7.00.

Data was requested from PBNI about women offender's participation in key programmes and about referrals made to outside organisations. A broad examination of the data about probation led programmes attended by the 309 women offenders in contact with Inspire showed that the programmes women were most commonly involved in were Goals (25), Anger Management (20), Think First (10), Alcohol Management (16) and RATSDAM²⁷²⁸ (8)

Inspire has developed links with a vast number of organisations in order to provide wide ranging support for women offenders and their underlying support needs. The following table shows that 421 referrals for external support from a number of different agencies had been made by 31 July 2010.

Table 3.2 Referrals made for external support by probation officers at the Inspire Women's Project²⁹

Referral type	Number of referrals
NIACRO ³⁰	132
FASA	43
Counselling	34
Social Services	18
Community Addiction Team	14
Women's Support Network	13
Falls Women's Centre	11
Floating Support	9
Shankill Women's Centre	8
Women's Aid	8
NICAS	7
Belfast Gems	7
Other Women's Centres	7
React	6
PBNI Psych / Psychiatrist	6
Relate	5
Barnardo's	4
Other	89
Total	421

Source: PBNI

²⁷ Rapid Assessment and Treatment Service for Drug and Alcohol Misusers run by NICAS.

²⁸ Anger Management, Think First, Alcohol Management and RATSDAM are programmes usually agreed prior court and form part of the additional requirements to the order.

²⁹ As this data was created manually by probation officers it includes both services (e.g. Barnardo's, Women's Aid etc) and types of support (e.g. Floating Support, Counselling) however it still provides a useful illustration of the range of external support women attending Inspire are offered.

³⁰ Including the APAC worker based at the Inspire Women's Project.

Engagement with internal provision at the Inspire Women's Project

The majority of women offenders were content and positive about the range of individual and group programmes that could be accessed and felt that this had motivated their engagement to a certain extent. As two women offenders explained:

'[INSPIRE worker] and [probation officer] just sat down and explained that it offers a wide range of things for women that would interest women. And I was very interested in seeing what it was about'. (Interview 8, 53 years old)

"I'm ready to take advantage of something now...if you've got in your head what you wanna do and the supports there for you, somebody's gonna email the animal sanctuary for me and see if I can get my training...I'm there!" (Interview 11, 37 years old)

For some women offenders, however, attending appointments at Inspire were a constant reminder of the crime they had committed and that this had an ongoing impact on their self-esteem:

"I don't class myself as a bad person, but coming here makes me feel as if I am a bad person. I find it hard to move on while I'm coming here and I really can't wait until my 12 months is over so I can move on and put it behind me and forget about it. It's sorta just shut the door and forget about it. I think that for myself, that's the best thing for me. You might get other ones there who still want to come back and still want to, but I wouldn't, once the 12 months is over, that's it. I don't want to come back". (Interview 11, 46 years old)

"Probation is like a stigma. Probation you get a black cloud hanging over you and you keep thinking to yourself that people know you're on probation. And when you mention it, probation, to anybody you feel like as if 'God they think I'm a murderer' or they think I've done something big. But as I said to [TV interviewer] probation isn't like that. Probation is for anybody and it does help. It's up to you to work for it". (Interview 5, 48 years old)

First time women offenders in particular expressed their initial fear about engagement with Inspire as limited or no information was provided on the Inspire probation process and the range of services which were available. For these women, the only guidance had been a general leaflet given at court which detailed the ordinary probation guidelines:

"It was just telling you about that you had to go to your probation dates, be there and if you didn't turn up, or you couldn't turn up, you need a sick line or something, if you're sick or you can't make that date you have to have a good reason why you didn't turn up. It was just explaining what probation was a wee bit, it wasn't in great detail cause there was a lot that I didn't understand until later". (Interview 11, 46 years old)

The amount of information provided to women offenders when they began attending Inspire varied and depended on their probation officer or if the manager of Inspire Women's Project had directly discussed the service with them on an individual basis:

“I would have liked my probation officer to tell me about it cause she didn’t. She just told me about the GOALS course and nothing else”. (Interview 24, 52 years old)

“The first day I came in I met [Manager of Inspire] and she basically just did a quick review of what would happen, what I would need, explained that I would get a probation officer, had said that if I needed any advice with drink, drugs, whatever [...] She told me about all the different activities that goes on and to speak to your probation officer if there’s anything, which I’ve done loads of things through it. If you ever need any bit of advice or anything to do with a job or financial, anything, to contact them, so”. (Interview 37, 25 years old)

While many of the women were satisfied with the information they received, others believed that more information about the range of available services would have been beneficial. When asked what type of information they would have liked, women offenders responded:

“You know, what was Inspire, the other women’s groups and stuff like, that surrounds the place. I didn’t get any of that it was just the girls [service users] who told me about them”. (Interview 24, 52 years old)

“I would have liked to have known from the start of coming to my probation officer what sort of help they can give out, from finance to counselling. I only realised a few weeks ago that there was counselling services here. I think at the start if I had of had a list of things of what your probation officer can do for you and what things, even a programme which you take part in would be helpful at the start”. (Interview 11, 46 years old)

Women attending Inspire on day release from prison felt they had been provided sufficient information about the project and were therefore more comfortable with what to expect than women who had been referred to Inspire from the courts:

“I was told it was a women’s only probation centre. They did courses to help people on probation. It wasn’t just a centre that you walked in and you’ve gone to your probation appointment and then you tick your boxes and walk away, that there was different courses round and they also link in with the different women’s community groups in the community and I know that the women’s community groups want to, like to disengage themselves from actual probation. They don’t want to be known as probation as they’re not probation, they are just women community groups. There’s one in the [Area1] and one in the [Area2] and there’s one in [Area 3]. I was told just to go down and see if there was anything that I would be interested in and if there was anything that I was interested in then they would more or likely help me out”. (Interview 19, 32 years old)

Engagement with external agencies

In terms of engagement with other external agencies, for some women this was part of their community sentence (e.g. NICAS, FASA, Community Addiction Team), for others the need for additional support was identified by their probation officer or

NIACRO worker and then a referral was established. It was emphasised by women offenders offered these referrals that staff did not coerce them to participate in additional programmes, but rather that it had been their choice to engage:

“That’s the thing too, when she [probation officer] phones up too, the first thing she always says is ‘You don’t have to do it but this is what I’m phoning you up to ask you about’. She doesn’t pressure you into anything but she offers it to you”. (Interview 20, 34 years old)

Engagement with the external agencies was offered to all women and was similarly dependent on the wishes of the women. Referrals were made directly from probation to both NIACRO and the WSN, and other external agencies but again, this participation was a choice and did not affect their community sentence. As the manager of Inspire explained, women are given a choice, and are encouraged to consider the benefits of having external support:

“It’s a personal choice. Perhaps some don’t fancy it [referral to an external organisation] and that’s OK. They would be maintained to probation standards ... but it’s not something I encourage... I often say to women when they first come to probation ‘Use this period as an opportunity. This is an opportunity for you to look at your life and see what changes you’d like to make.” (Inspire Operations Manager)

Some women welcomed the opportunity to engage with the provided services:

“I just accepted it because I thought it’s a good idea...like they linked me in with other people, like NIACRO and stuff, [Area1] Women’s Centre, I’ve done an anger management programme voluntarily and I’ve had like driving lessons from NIACRO, I’m doing a sociology course, GCSE, and driving theory course for 10 weeks so they’ve really, there’s been a lot going on. Plus they’ve had like days out and stuff, canoeing and stuff”. (Interview 12, 21 years old)

“I’d been wanting to get back into education and I’d tried myself but I just, I couldn’t do it myself. I think I needed further advice and [probation officer] helped me get in with [NIACRO worker who does the JobTrack programme] she’s been really brilliant...she [probation officer] got [NIACRO worker] to phone me and stuff and I met [NIACRO worker] here and I spoke to her a couple of times and then she took me places, the [Area1] Women’s Centre this morning to meet the tutor and stuff so she’s been brilliant”. (Interview 12, 21 years old)

Other women offenders did not wish to participate in such programmes. For one woman offender this was about her reservations about meeting new people. She explained:

“Just the courses and the women’s groups and...but I haven’t been interested in any of them...it’s a new people thing, getting to know people, I’m not really a people person...I keep myself to myself. I don’t like being introduced to new people. Just getting to know people really”. (Interview 15, 24 years old)

For other women offenders, it was not a matter of feeling reluctant but rather that their current circumstances may prevent them taking up such opportunities. For one woman offender this was related to the fact that she had children which kept her busy. She said:

“She said there was a lot of things I could go and do if I wanted to. She said there is some stuff in Downpatrick like the Arts and Crafts centre place and she said that, see I’m not really into, especially having babies and that there and she said it’s there if you want it” (Interview 6, 25 years old)

Case studies of engagement with Inspire Women’s Project

The following two case studies provide examples of two women offenders who have been involved with Inspire in relation to their offending. The first example provides details of a woman offender who feels she has significantly benefitted from her involvement and is illustrative of the way in which the Inspire Women’s Project can support women offenders to desist from offending behaviour and reintegrate in society. This case study is representative of the experiences of the majority of the women offenders interviewed during the evaluation process. The first case study also highlights how links with a range of community services have supported this process.

Case Study 1: Engaging with Inspire – ‘It was like a new lifeline’ (Michele³¹)

General details:	Widower, in her 50s, with adult children and grandchildren.
Personal Details	Close family members recently deceased, had trouble coping, became depressed, left her job and turned to alcohol. After recognising she was feeling suicidal she visited her GP who prescribed her anti-depressants.
Offending details:	First offences – driving offences and benefit fraud (less than £10).
Substance misuse:	None but had turned to alcohol at a difficult time.
Experience of Inspire:	Feels the biggest impact on her was attending the two day GOALS course which lifted her self-esteem and encouraged and supported her to make plans for her future. She said: <i>‘I enjoyed it so much and I have never got so much out of something. I still have my book with my goals in it.’</i> One to one support from her probation officer and links with NIACRO and her local Women’s Centre had helped her attend court and sort out problems she was having with her benefits. She explained that she would not have accessed these services

³¹ Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the women offenders involved in this study.

on her own as she did not know what they did. She liked that her probation officer did not talk down to her but that their positive relationship had been crucial to her *'getting back on her feet'*.

She is now employed part time in a low stress job which she enjoys. Of Inspire she said: *'I just can't explain what coming here does. It's unbelievable. I couldn't believe it and it took me out of my shell as well...It was like a new lifeline. It closed the door on all the stress... I couldn't have done it on my own.'*

Michele feels that having somewhere to talk about her situation had been one of the most important factors as she was unable to discuss such issues in the past. She enjoyed the creative writing course and was disappointed that her work kept her from attending more often.

Key changes: Michele now has more social contact with others, improved confidence and mood, improved financial and employment situation, feels less stressed, and is learning to say no to lending money to others which she felt contributed to her being unable to cope. She hasn't reoffended and knows that she will not offend again in future.

The second case study provides an example of a woman offender who has been compliant with her order but for whom referrals to external provision have not proven fruitful. This woman offender connects her offending to her ongoing poverty and reports that while she has received practical support from the project that her attitude to her offending behaviour has not changed. This case was less representative of the women offenders interviewed³².

Case Study 2: Compliant but not engaging with external provision - (Jane³³)

General details:	Mother of adult children, in her 40s and living in rental accommodation. In long term relationship but partner is in prison on remand.
Personal Details	Childhood experience of sexual abuse for which she has had extensive counselling. Living in poverty, had borrowed money from high-interest, short term lenders.
Offending details:	Began offending in the last two years. Shoplifting and fraud related offences. She said: <i>'I've never done anything prior to that. I've always tried to get by as best I could, but things just got to the stage where there was no way out.'</i>

³² While several attempts were made to access women offenders who had not engaged with the Inspire Women's Project, none of these were successful. It has therefore not been possible to include a case study of non-engagement in this report.

³³ As above.

Substance misuse:	None
Experience of Inspire:	Has attended regularly and received a significant amount of practical support but feels she would continue to offend if she needed to as her offending behaviour was motivated by her poverty. She finds the availability of alternative therapies as part of her punishment 'ironic' and feels that the programmes on offer through Inspire and the Women's Centres are not sufficiently challenging for her. She does not trust the Women's Centres as her experience has been that information was not kept confidential. She was also reluctant to attend due to the perception that community organisations such as these were politically affiliated or selfishly motivated. She felt that while she respected her probation officer she also felt that she had no true understanding or empathy for her position and life experiences as a result of this she feels she can't be truly honest without a negative report being made.

Failure to comply

Any failure to comply with a community sentence at Inspire is subject to standard probation enforcement procedures where probation officers follow up each failure to comply by letter or telephone. Women offenders are required to provide evidence for missed appointments and probation officers then assess whether the reason provided for missing an appointment is considered acceptable. Of the 309 women offenders in the cohort, 86 (28%) had failed to comply with their community sentence. Reasons for non-compliance included non-attendance or missing appointments (70, 81%); mental or physical health reasons (5, 6%) and a number of other reasons including having moved from the area, having a chaotic lifestyle, behaving in an unacceptable manner on probation premises, failing to attend an external appointment (for example, with mental health services) or a decision by the offender to not engage with probation – general non-compliance (11, 13%)³⁴. If the reasons provided by a woman offender for their non-compliance are unacceptable the offender will in the first instance receive a formal warning. However, if a probation officer deems the failure to comply serious or frequent enough formal breach proceedings will be initiated through the courts.

³⁴ Women offenders must consent at court to being given a community sentence. In some of these cases, women offenders had simply withdrawn their consent and were taken back to court to have their community sentence revoked and another sentence imposed. In a small number of other cases, women offenders simply refused to engage with probation supervision in any way.

Breaches

Of the 309 women offenders referred to Inspire 69 (22%) had failed to comply to degree that breach proceedings were considered. In the majority of these cases (65, 94%) the offender was returned to court. In the remaining four cases the offenders re-engaged without the need for formal breach proceedings to be initiated.

A core element of the women centred approach adopted at Inspire is to clearly explain to women offenders why they were being returned to court and to encourage and support women offenders to attend their court hearing. A number of women offenders reported that the setting and negotiation of such boundaries was important to their ongoing process of desistance. A total of 73 women offenders were returned to court by Inspire. Of these, 51 (70%) attended their hearing. A further 2 (3%) are yet to attend court, and 4 (5%) attended at least one of their hearings. Only 16 (22%) did not attend any of their court hearings, six of whom have had bench warrants issued. This suggests that the policy of encouraging women to engage with and take responsibility for their non-compliance has to a certain extent been successful.

Of the 73 women returned to court, 65 were returned for breach proceedings. For 23 women breach proceedings were still ongoing and a court outcome was not yet known. Eleven women re-engaged with PBNI; for eight women this was the result of PBNI withdrawing the breach and for three this was the decision of the court. The remaining 31 women had their community sentence revoked at court. In cases where community sentences are revoked an alternative punishment or strategy for the management of that woman offender is usually put in place. The main reason for revocation was non-attendance (17), followed by non-compliance (11). For a small number of women offenders community sentences were revoked for reasons of physical or mental health leading to non-compliance (3).

Women offenders may be returned to court in relation to non-compliance or breaches but in some cases women offenders may also be returned to court when they have significantly progressed and probation feel that further engagement is unnecessary. Only when the court agrees a woman offender has been fully compliant and has progressed as far as possible under probation supervision will a community sentence be revoked for good progress. A small number of women offenders (8) had their community sentence revoked for good progress by the courts.

It would be useful to compare the rates of compliance and breach for women offenders attending Inspire with a comparison sample of women offenders who did not have access to Inspire. However, it has proven difficult for this evaluation to construct a suitable comparison group. This is discussed further within the methodology in Appendix 1.

3.4 Effectiveness of the operation of Inspire

Key elements of provision at Inspire

Inspire building

The Inspire building was specifically designed by the Inspire team to foster a calm and safe environment and the majority of women offenders interviewed commented on the welcoming and homely atmosphere that had been created. When clients attended for their probation appointments magazines, books, leaflets were available to read and free tea, coffee, water and biscuits were provided which contributed towards the perception of a warm, friendly and approachable service. Two women offenders commented particularly on the décor and the comfortable setting:

“I just thought that it was dead comfortable and there’s magazines and all out there for you to read while you’re waiting but you don’t really wait that long. And they offer you tea and all that”. (Interview 30, 43 years old)

“Brilliant, brilliant. Love, love everything. Love the way they’ve it decorated, love the thought behind the comfy sofas, you know, lovely”. (Interview 8, 53 years old)

Contrast with mainstream probation provision

Both women offenders and stakeholders commented on the positive contrast with mainstream probation provision. The Communications Officer at FASA, for example explained:

“I think it makes it unique in that women are probably handled a little bit differently to men in that there seems to be an air of, I don’t mean leniency but an air of, a more human aspect to it [Inspire]. And I think whenever you meet a probation officer as such you feel that they are harsh where as I suppose I’m looking at [probation officer at Inspire] and I’m thinking she seems to be a rare breed of probation officer... she reaches out more... she’s fair with them. I think she can be as tough as she needs to be at times with them, but she has a real empathy and she really does seem to harness where they’re at and what their needs are and try to support them where you don’t get that in all situations. I think that’s what makes the difference.” (Communications Officer, FASA)

Women offenders who had attended other probation offices also commented positively about the differences, for example:

"I couldn't get over the place. I thought it was lovely...It was lovely and bright and clean and it was far, far better [than other probation office]". (Interview 27, 38 years old)

While many of the women were first time offenders, those who had prior experiences with mainstream probation noted a number of differences to the provision available at Inspire. Women offenders were critical of how mainstream provision had been organised, the inapproachability of staff, the lack of discretion due to the location of probation premises, the presence of male offenders and the lack of gender appropriate services and programmes which they considered essential in understanding and preventing their offending. As several women offenders commented:

"I felt a lot better that I didn't have to go into the [place in Belfast] office cause it's really run down and where it is as well cause a lot of them are from [place in Belfast] and I'm from that area and I didn't want people going in and seeing me there either so coming here felt a lot more private for me so that everybody didn't know my business if you know what I mean? So it was a lot better". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

"The difference in the staff and the difference in the people who come and use the place. I mean in the [place in Belfast] one like if you were sitting beside someone they wouldn't try and talk to you where in here if you came in and sat down, somebody would always, if someone was here they would come out and speak to you and ask how you've been doing and stuff. It makes you feel that you've got that whole support network with you as well". (Interview 10, 30 years old)

"When I went in it was before that women's centre [Inspire]. It was just really stuffy and everybody doing their own little thing. Didn't seem like it was an open environment where there was little classes going on or nothing like that, it just seemed like it was in somebody's office and if you were to shout loud or something you would scare everybody in the building. It just seemed like that, really close and everybody typing away and you only had the one thing to do and that was it, come in for an hour, talk about your past and then that was it, you went away again. So most of the time you were feeling worse than when you went in. It just seemed really stand-offish and unapproachable." (Interview 21, 38 years old)

Women offenders were particularly positive about the time that was spent with them at Inspire and the way they were spoken to by the staff. As one woman offender explained:

"They just seem to listen to you more. Just instead of breezing you out the door they sort of go out of their way to help you and stuff. Instead of probation in [probation office outside Belfast] when given, allocated like 20 minutes and they're basically telling you 'you're a wee bugger, you should be doing this, doing that'. Instead they're [Inspire] are sitting down and listening to you, asking you what's what and what can we do to help you, you know, stuff like that there...instead of being barked at. That's how I felt with the

ones from there [probation office outside Belfast], barking at you". (Interview 9, 24 years old)

Women offenders also appreciated the flexibility with which both Inspire and partner agency staff approached their work. For example, women offenders appreciated being able to have input into their work plans, negotiate about their appointment times and in being supported to attend initial appointments with new services. One woman offender particularly valued that a worker from a partner agency had supported her in attending court. She said:

"I have an exclusion order and a non molestation order out against my partner and [drug prevention service] has been brilliant with me there. If I, if I want her to go to court she'll go to court with me, the service has just been brilliant that way". (Interview 2, 43 years old)

Another woman offender commented about the support she had received to attend the service even when it was not possible for her to attend on her own. In her words:

"If I can't make it down, or basically if I'm broke and can't afford it she comes up and picks me up and brings me down. They're brilliant, that's what I mean, I can't fault the girls in here". (Interview 2, 43 years old)

A women-only service

Both women offenders and practitioners identified the benefits of having a women only service. As the manager of Inspire explained, a specific women focus is important as it allows the development of gender specific programmes which respond to the unique and complex needs of women offenders. A number of women offenders reported that being a service for women only made them feel more comfortable and able to open up and discuss key elements of their offending behaviour and personal circumstances. As one woman offender explained:

"I think it's quite a good idea whenever it's just females especially when you're having a class or stuff cause it's easier to talk when there's just females here". (Interview 37, 25 years old)

This aspect of provision at Inspire was considered by those interviewed as particularly important for women offenders who had experienced domestic and sexual violence. One of the women offenders interviewed said:

"And I thought thank god it's just women, there's nobody judging me. And they don't judge so it's brilliant...and women feel more comfortable in a room full of women rather than men because, not myself personally but women I've come in contact with, have been abused and all sorts so it's very important for them too. It was interesting for me to watch on the sidelines how important it was for them type of women". (Interview 8, 53 years old)

Although many women reported initially feeling intimidated by needing to attend, the environment and the staff usually allayed their fears within a very short space of time:

“The third week I felt daunted and everything but I thought I’ve gotta do this because, all these strangers and I didn’t know what they were like or anything, but then I felt comfortable as well because I felt like nobody was judging nobody, cause we’re all in the same boat. When they mentioned writing poems I thought ‘flip me, I’ve been writing poems for years’...so I thought this is great...after six weeks I felt comfortable”. (Interview 7, 45 years old)

“When I went into that building the other day they was ever so friendly. When I went in there I was a bit early and ‘do you want a cup of tea? Make yourself a cup of tea’. They’re very nice, very, very nice people in there. And especially lunchtimes and stuff like that, with the probation women they come and sit out with you and talk to you, not like just leave you there. They’re very nice”. (Interview 6, 25 years old)

“That’s what you need, when you come up the stairs and you come into this room you just feel like you can put your feet up, kick your shoes off and that’s you...you meet everybody and they don’t judge you because everybody is in the same place that you are. They might be further on than you but they’re in the same predicament that you are”. (Interview 5, 48 years old)

Inspire staff

According to both stakeholders and women offenders, one of the most important aspects of provision at Inspire was the attitude and behaviour of the Inspire staff. For the most part, the probation officers and Inspire staff were seen to be non judgemental, supportive and empathetic all of which were instrumental in building positive rapport, encouraging women to accept being on probation and facilitating their engagement with the project. The manager of Inspire explained this approach in the following way:

“The women we work with are adult women, intelligent women and they understand that it’s about ‘You’ve ended up here and we don’t judge what you’ve done...Whatever you’ve done, you need to know what was going on in your life to make you act in that way and now you need to know what you need to do to stop to help you make that change.’... We cannot change, I cannot change anybody but what I can do is to get you to look at the perception of yourself and that sort of thinking...There’s so many examples where women have learnt to react in a certain way, to shout, to demand...we, you know, actually challenge that and bring them back and challenge and challenge and make clear that we will never do that to [them].” (Inspire Operations Manger)

For many of the women offenders interviewed, this was the most important aspect of the Inspire staff’s approach as they felt it allowed them to be open, to talk more about their situation, to seek appropriate support and to move on with their lives. As one woman offender explained:

“...but I just think it’s a great facility [Inspire], the support that you get with it and they’re non judgemental as well. I could phone my probation officer tomorrow and say, you know, ‘I’ve relapsed, I’m sitting here drunk’ and she

wouldn't, she wouldn't criticise and look down her nose at me she say 'right well how can we fix this? How can we get this back on track?' and I know that I could just come down here and press that buzzer and there'd be somebody available for me. It's just, for me personally, it's been fantastic...Just the support and the non-judgementalness, if that's the word. Even at the GOAL's project, I was able to sit there in front of, I went in with the intention 'I'm saying nothing...I'll be there but I'm saying nothing' but you couldn't have shut me up, I started telling them about how one drink was too many and ten was never near enough." (Interview 13, 48 years old)

For another woman offender, this non-judgemental approach was crucial in her overcoming the shame she felt about her offending and helping her to 'get back on her feet'. She said:

"[Probation officer] and all here, they would sit and talk with you one-to one, they don't talk down to you, they don't talk at ya, you know you're not like a naughty child. They would sit and yarn and explain that everybody makes mistakes, people do wrong things and all, so I was never made to feel [bad] the only I ever did was when I made myself feel [bad] at the very beginning. But only for them I don't know if I would be back on my feet at all, but I am and I feel brilliant. Only for them". (Interview 25, 56 years old)

In addition to the non-judgemental approach, many women were grateful to Inspire staff for providing a place where they could be heard, particularly when life became difficult. As one woman explained:

"Just always knowing that there's somebody there, just somebody to talk to and you know it's confidential. You know no matter what you say you know you're not being judged in any way...but just the fact that there is an ear there to listen to. That would be the biggest thing for me". (Interview 2, 43 years old)

Some women also commented that they appreciated knowing that someone was available to talk to them and would check up on them if they were having a hard time.

"Just knowing that there's somebody at the end of the phone if you're having a hard day then you can just phone [probation officer] blow off to her on the phone and then you feel, 'Oh this is great' because she phones you up the next day to see how you are, so there's a great follow-up with her". (Interview 37, 25 years old)

Many women offenders reported having good relationships with their probation officers, indicating that open and honest communication and a strong working relationship had been developed. A number of women offenders reported that while they had a positive, friendly relationship this did not involve a lenient approach but rather one that set clear boundaries and negotiated them in a respectful and kind manner. As they said:

"They don't judge...unlike the social workers! They're [Social Workers] a bit terrifying...they have a knack of talking to you like you're a bit of dirt... They [Inspire staff] helped, being pointed in the right direction and...just...being able to come in and talk to somebody who's very understanding...[probation

officer] is very good, she's firm but friendly. She lets you know what you need to know in a nice way". (Interview 14, 40 years old)

"I think maybe the most important thing is to be treated like you're not stupid, you know, equal. She's always been really, you know, she never made me feel ashamed or, you know, obviously we did have to discuss my crime and my feeling towards it and stuff like that and I was able to chat to her and she was understanding and empathetic". (Interview 3, 30 years old)

"When I say great, when I first met her [probation officer] she wasn't soft. 'This is what you're on probation for, this is our rules and this is what you do', you know, she's very upfront but brilliant. She couldn't have been better...there's really nothing I can say bad. Really. I'm actually indebted to them". (Interview 8, 53 years old)

On the other hand, some women offenders reported that while they had a good relationship with their probation officer, open and truthful communication was constrained due to individual personality clashes, time constraints on appointments and due to the power of probation officers to revoke orders:

"You see I don't want to take away from her and I don't know if she's not getting the context or if she doesn't understand that I can't be 100% honest with her because of the reports that she's writing that go to the judge. [...] So she has to do what she has to do to keep herself right and I have to do what I have to do to keep myself right, do you know what I mean? So I mean I'm hardly going to say, '[probation officer], I know that you're writing this report into the jail that this project has completely changed my life around, it hasn't". (Interview 31, 42 years old)

"I don't really like her [...] because I don't really feel like I can talk to her. She doesn't stay around long enough, it's just a quick 'Hello' and 'Sign this and sign that' [...] I want to talk to her but I feel as if she hasn't got time to talk which makes me feel like I'm talking a lot of nonsense". (Interview 24, 52 years old)

"You could talk to her and all but I don't know, there was just something about her that I just couldn't really take to her 100%. You know the way whenever you're talking to somebody and it was as if you were sitting talking to her and she was just like, 'Yes, yes, uh-huh' and it wasn't like it was a great interest to her, she didn't really have the same interest". (Interview 22, 42 years old)

Referrals for external support

Referrals were made to a diverse range of organisations depending upon the needs of women offenders, the availability of provision in their area and upon the type of support that they wanted. The greatest number of referrals were made to NIACRO and both women offenders and key stakeholders were highly positive about the strategic partnership and range of services provided. The holistic range of services provided was complemented by the approachability and needs-led approach of individual workers. Women offenders reported that NIACRO had assisted them with

financial and housing issues, debt management, individual support, employment and training, liaison with probation officers, mental and physical health and substance use issues. For example:

“...with NIACRO, anything that you’re stuck with, your benefits or anything like that, there’s a women who’s just there to deal with benefits if you’re stuck with anything like that, you just have to go to her and ask her and she’s there to help you out and then if you need to talk or anything, they’ll listen to you as well”. (Interview 20, 34 years old)

“[NIACRO worker] helped me with filling in forms to get my sickness benefit, she helped me with housing. She actually took me out to look at houses and things that were frightening me which were wee tiny things and she calls at my house, she’s on the other end of a phone if I need her and I’ve never had that support before. She’s incredible”. (Interview 32, 58 years old)

Women offenders reported that working closely with NIACRO workers had increased their motivation and confidence and helped them change their lives. As one woman offender explained:

“[NIACRO worker], I think that without her I don’t think that I would have come as far as what I have come. So I met her at Christmas and when I first met her I was, as I call myself, one of the pyjama brigade and she used to always go on at me and say “You know this is no way to live”, you know and made me realise the way I was living wasn’t really appropriate especially having a child as well. So my life’s completely changed now, so without her I don’t think I could have done half of what I’ve done”. (Interview 18, 30 years old)

Other women offenders valued the support they had received from NIACRO in identifying support needs and arranging and attending appointments in order to support women to progress. Two women offenders explained how NIACRO had assisted them with their mental health issues:

“Well [NIACRO worker] and all has phoned for [GP and psychiatrist] appointments and all for me when she thought I wasn’t coming along well enough and all and she said to me ‘You’re still not lifting’ and she’s phoned and got me an appointment and she says, ‘If you want me to I’ll come and take you’. They’re unbelievable, honest to god. My family wouldn’t have done what they’ve done. It just makes me so grateful, grateful in the sense that it’s such small world like but it’s not even grateful, it’s just everything, I owe them everything”. (Interview 25, 56 years old)

“I was going one place [for help with mental health] and they were, I was just basically going around in circles with them all cause that was doing it on my own and through my doctor. But with [NIACRO worker], she knew what proper places to get in to so that is helping. (Interview 34, 30 years old)

Yet another woman offender reported how she had discussed her reoffending with her NIACRO worker who had then helped her broach the topic with her probation officer. As she explained:

“The good thing with [NIACRO worker] if there is something that I really can’t [do], she would either come with me or she’ll help break the barriers with her, you know coming and to [probation officer] and speaking about it and then breaking the ice for me. Like whenever I was caught offending the last time I couldn’t tell [probation officer] at all, so [NIACRO worker] actually told her for me. Made my life a wee bit easier”. (Interview 18, 30 years old)

This case highlights particularly, the potential strengths of the partnership working between Inspire and voluntary sector providers, in this case, NIACRO. Such relationships provided women offenders a trusting relationship within which they can discuss key issues and obtain advice and support without feeling they are making a formal disclosure to probation. Such an approach supports women to feel in control of their situation and provides support to make difficult disclosures.

The strategic partnership between Inspire and the Women’s Support Network was also viewed as beneficial by both stakeholders and women offenders. As the manager of Inspire explained, the range and type of provision available through the network is vast and is a valuable resource for women attending Inspire. She said:

“Each of the [Women’s] centres will provide a range of different programmes, anything from computer programmes to driving license, to cooking, to joinery and plumbing and numeracy, everything, holistic therapy. I mean they will provide a range of services in their local communities – financial services, legal services, everything like that...[the centres] are based in the community and they’re open to all women, you don’t have to be on probation and for me its about [women offenders] getting the confidence of going onto a programme.” (Inspire Operations Manager)

The range of services available, coupled with the approachability of staff and the offer of support beyond the duration of their community sentence were viewed as providing women offenders with support for their key needs (e.g. employment, health, financial advice) both immediately and in the longer term. For example:

“I mean I walk past my women’s centre every day, I wouldn’t have dreamt of walking in through the doors, never in a million years. And [NIACRO worker] always said to me, but I kept saying, ‘I couldn’t go there. There’s no way. The ones that go there are all rough’ and all this. I actually went it was so, so different to what I imagined it would be. And now I’ve actually got a lot of really good friends”. (Interview 18, 30 years old)

“I thought the women’s centre was for rape victims, that’s what I thought it was and they were saying to me, [Area 2] Women’s Centre’ and I thought, ‘I don’t need that’, but they do everything. They go with you and all, if you want somebody to go to court with you, they’ll go to court and down there it was a girl that I knew from [place in Belfast] from when we were kids and she says to me, ‘Look, it doesn’t have to be me’. And I says, ‘No, same name and all so I may as well’. And it was great and she was able to take me to see how much they were taking off for this money for the DHSS”. (Interview 25, 56 years old)

The creative writing course provided by the Prison Arts Foundation was viewed highly by both women offenders and key stakeholders as it provided women offenders a regular opportunity for social engagement, supported increases in self-esteem and taught women offenders alternative coping strategies for dealing with emotional issues such as anger and bereavement. As one woman offender explained, the creative writing course meant that she could instead of managing her feelings with drugs or alcohol she could write about them instead. She explained:

“The creative art class has kind of taught me, I never thought I could write a poem in my life and I’ve actually written loads of them now and other people have said that they were all really good and stuff. So for me it’s a way of releasing my feelings whereas before I would have took drugs or drank or things like that to get the feelings out of me where now I put pen to paper and it makes a big difference then for me”. (Interview 18, 30 years old)

The Inspire Operations Manager reported how the programme had been so successful that a collection of poems had been published and that this had provided many women offenders with a sense of achievement and involvement and evidence of their self worth. One woman offender explained her involvement in the creative writing:

“It’s just like a group of women and there before it broke up there in the summer it was like doing like poetry, you know poems and stuff and it was like writing it all down and then putting as little words in as possible to make it into this whole big story and stuff, you know? So we were doing that there for a good few months and that there and we actually got a booklet with all our names in it, a book of poems that we’d done, we got a booklet and all and it was all printed out for us”. (Interview 5, 37 years old)

While linkages with Barnardo’s were less developed than those with other strategic partner agencies, the practical advice on parenting was enhancing the relationship between relevant service users and their children. A mother of three explained how the advice she was given was helping to re-establish her relationship with her teenage daughters:

“Well, I think that it is really, really helping me because I was going through a bad patch at the minute with my 18 year old, my 14 year old, she’s at that stage where she’s noticing boys and she’s going out and going to wee discos and stuff. And I find it really helpful because I can actually set her down and explain things to her and she listens. She takes things on board and we actually have a better relationship now. We would sit and talk more about things...I think that just sitting talking to them is better than shouting and squealing, know what I mean [...] Teenagers just, you know yourself when you were one you ignore everything and your mummy and daddy’s just trying to ruin your life and all this here carry-on. So it’s helping me out. It’s helping me to talk to my 14 year old.” (Interview 27, 38 years old)

Many women offenders reported no prior knowledge of such services before their involvement with Inspire. As one young woman offender reported:

“I didn’t know about any of them, I didn’t know about NIACRO but when I obviously got in touch with them everybody said ‘oh yeah we know’. Whenever it’s actually happening to you everybody’s like ‘yeah we know, we’ve heard of that’ but I never would have...had the confidence really to do what I’ve done through the project”. (Interview 12, 21 years old)

For some women the key issue in relation to their accessing such community based provision was not only a lack of knowledge about their availability but also low levels of self esteem and confidence which meant that they were unlikely to take the first steps to walk through the door on their own. Women offenders appreciated the support and encouragement they had received to make first contact with these services as this had assisted them in building their confidence and helped them to do other things on their own. As two women offenders explained:

“When I came down I came down with [probation officer]. And...it was very nerve wracking cuz it was, you don’t know who you’re going to or who you’re getting but when I met [probation officer] and had a talk with her and then she took me to meet [NIACRO worker], she came with me to meet [NIACRO worker] and [NIACRO worker] came with me to New Life and she came with me to Women’s Aid and then I went to Citizen’s Advice on my own. So it’s given me a lot of confidence to do things on my own and I’ve now got to a place where I’ve done an interview”! (on TV) (Interview 5, 48 years old)

“I think she [INSPIRE manager] helped me a lot to get, you know by getting me to speak to people, you know like important people and that. And getting me to do other wee bits and pieces and she would sort of talk to me like I was her friend sort of way...and she’s, I love [INSPIRE manager]. I love her to pieces, I really do, I think she’s great. She’s just inspired me in a lot of ways you know. She’s encouraged me...She just doesn’t say ‘oh great’ and that’s it. She’ll praise you and let you know you’ve done it. And I need that because all my life I’ve been dragged down and called stupid and thick. So I had low, low self esteem so I need that sort of thing”. (Interview 7, 45 years old)

Self-esteem and confidence

A fundamental underlying need of the majority of the women engaged with the Inspire Women’s Project was low self-esteem and confidence and a core aim of the service is to work with women offenders to support them to develop in these areas. A number of women explained the importance of their relationships with their probation officers in assisting this process and in encouraging them to access support for their underlying needs.

“They’re not over the top of you [probation officers] and when there’s things going on like that, that assertiveness course and by Christ I really needed it. I couldn’t talk about anything, I would go to talk and then it was crying and then I couldn’t get a word out and then I couldn’t talk about that and then this

shakiness would start and if somebody asked me a question I'd start crying again. I was a wreck, an absolute wreck. But only for this place I don't know where I would have been and I doubt that I could have done it on my own". (Interview 1, 56 years old)

"Self esteem, not always trying to put yourself down where the way I was before, I would have always put myself down all the time whereas I've got most of my confidence all back again. I can speak to my probation officer about anything really". (Interview 5, 37 years old)

"...it's built up my confidence, to know that when I'm doing something there is a way out of it, there's no, you don't need to look down and think, 'God, there's no way out'. Here has taught me that there is a way out, there is light at the end of the tunnel". (Interview 37, 25 years old)

One woman who was currently experiencing domestic violence reported that while she was not ready to participate in groups, the individual work she had completed with her probation officer had helped her to begin to rebuild her confidence:

"My confidence has grown a lot since being able to come down here and speak to [probation officer] about things and I'm more determined to go out and do things more compared to a couple of years ago when I would have just gone and buried my head in the sand and that was it. Now I'm more determined to get out and do things". (Interview 27, 38 years old)

Another woman who had previously been addicted to alcohol and frequently self harmed, directly attributed her engagement with Inspire as the key factor which enabled her to develop her self esteem and confidence:

"...it's just a lifeline for me it really is. Before, I told you about the incident of me self harming and not going into groups and stuff, and I feel comfortable here so that's helped me that way. It's brought me out a wee bit more, I've sort of dropped my guard a wee bit so I have and I've settled in really well. And that's all been through here and I think that's how I cope sort of thing". (Interview 22, 42 years old)

The GOALS course was also pivotal in developing women offenders' self esteem and confidence. The GOALS course provided women offenders with the tools necessary to deal with these issues and as such, an overwhelmingly positive appraisal was presented by the interviewees.

"...it just kinda made me realise that I had to give myself more self esteem and more self confidence and set goals for myself and actually do them [...] I think that I was one of the only ones that done the course that actually kept doing it. But my wee book is completely filled like and I would still to this day go back and look at my goals book if I'm having a bad day or if I don't know how to handle something and it just gives me that confidence back again to pick up where I'd left off with them". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

"Well the GOALS course taught me to be more confident and how to think more positive and how to look at opportunities, broaden my horizons". (Interview 33, 38 years old)

“...it makes me feel or I could go home at night and be assertive so I can and be positive. And they learn you these wee things, like close your eyes and take a deep breath and put all your negatives into this wee box or into a wee bag and forget about it and don’t take it out until you really want to take it out. Well that’s what I’ve been practicing. And the mirror one, you look at yourself in the mirror in the morning, your mirror exercise and say something like, “I am a good person. I’m very positive. Nobody’s gonna get me down today” and it does help, so it does”. (Interview 24, 52 years old)

“... it’s for your self-assertiveness for your own self-esteem and all the rest of it and it was a 2 day course and I thought “I’m going to do this just to see”. But when I went into it I thought, “This has not hope of bringing me up”. It was like climbing a hill and I just couldn’t. I knew I was back sorta on my feet but I didn’t know where I was going and then I started on this GOALS thing and it was unbelievable. The goals were set out.” (Interview 25, 56 years old)

Support with specific issues

In addition to general support many women offenders also highlighted their appreciation for the level of practical and emotional in-depth individual work provided on specific issues such as domestic violence, dealing with childhood sexual and domestic violence, mental health problems, personal relationships, relationships with children, debt management, housing issues, benefit queries, anger management issues, substance use, advice on disclosure of criminal convictions and appropriate referrals to external agencies. Women offenders were supported by Inspire, its partner agencies and other voluntary sector organisations with a wide range of issues. The following quotes from women offenders provide some examples:

“If you’re stuck for anything like all you have to do is speak to your probation officer and she knows and if she doesn’t know, she’ll know someone who does know. And it’s the same round in NIACRO, anything that you’re stuck with, your benefits or anything like that, there’s a women who’s just there to deal with benefits. You just have to go to her and ask her and she’s there to help you out and then if you need to talk or anything, they’ll listen to you as well”. (Interview 20, 34 years old)

“So we have focused on sort of, me using my degree, I’ve been trying to find an environmental health job. You know, different ways of looking at jobs, recruitment agencies and disclosing [her criminal record] so that’s very much what I’ve focused on with [probation officer] and she has been very helpful towards that and different things, you know building up a CV. So that would be a lot of help that way”. (Interview 3, 30 years old)

For a number of women offenders this practical support was important in creating a sense of progression and hope about their lives. For some this experience contrasted sharply with their other experiences of probation. As one woman offender said:

“When they start actually doing things [mimics surprise] ‘wow, why’s she doing that for me?’ before it was all talk you know what I mean, all talk no

action. Here you can see they were actually doing something. Because they done a good few things for me like, got me somewhere to live and all that there, making sure you've got points [for council housing] and just stuff like that. Small but important". (Interview 9, 24 years old)

Emotional support

Stakeholders and women offenders agreed that an important factor at Inspire was the potential for emotional support for women offenders. Women offenders were positive about the emotional support they received from their probation officers and workers from other organisations to whom they were referred. In some instances this emotional support, and the belief that someone would help them, allowed women to feel reassured and able to reduce their levels of anxiety and stress. As one woman offender explained:

"You get like the emotional support. I mean there's days I've come in here and I've been ready to tear my hair out and by the time the hours up, I walk out of here thinking, "God this is great". It just gives me the space that I need to relax and if I need anything, I just have reach out and ring somebody in the centre or else [secretary] and they would go, 'Well here, we'll get it sorted for you or we'll help you out'. So it's definitely emotional support that they give you. (Interview 37, 25 years old)

Stakeholders and women offenders also reported the value of emotional support available through contact with other women offenders. As the Deputy Director of Criminal Justice Services at DOJ explained:

"The other thing in this sort of model, you know, its about the mutual support and I recognise that that's a two edged sword sometimes...quite often these women are quite vulnerable and actually if they are vulnerable and isolated they are more amenable to abuse and getting involved with drugs and alcohol again. So to some degree, certainly when I've visited there, I got a strong sense of community, where there is some mutual aid, support and encouragement. The atmosphere in [Inspire] is actually very good." (Deputy Director of Criminal Justice Services, Department of Justice)

The women offenders interviewed reported that they felt other women offenders better understood their situation and could be more empathic than their probation officer. Women offenders reported that as a group they took care of one another and kept one another out of trouble. For example:

"They understand what you're going through, they've been through the same things and if you do reoffend, they're there to care and lift you back up again and kinda say, 'Right, come on. You've done it, dust yourself off and try again so to speak'. Where your probation officer is more, not as understanding I suppose". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

"I'd probably say that they've [other women service users] been very, very helpful to the extent of they have all been really, really understanding and very supportive and if you're having a bad day and you're like, 'God, I could just go back to the way I was before' and they're like, 'No, come on' and

they'd all kinda push you and give you that wee shove back up again". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

"We all sort of look out each other now and we keep together so that we don't get into trouble sort of thing. That's the way it works with us. It's just a nice wee group now. We all sort of look after each other". (Interview 22, 42 years old)

More formal emotional support was also available through the many links to counselling services available through Inspire. For example, one-to-one counselling sessions were available with FASA, NICAS, Holy Trinity, EXTERN, Nexus, and the Women's Support Network. As one woman offender reported, counselling had been crucial in her being able to deal with her emotional issues without resorting to drugs, alcohol or antidepressants. She said:

"...the counselling has helped me to sort of get to the root of my problems even though it was only 6 weeks and they have also offered me more counselling if I feel like I want to come back or I'm having a sort of a relapse or backslide [...] I'd already stopped before I went to court to try and sort myself out. FASA gave me the tools to keep me going [...] It's like how to cope when I'm stressed and realising what my problems are and dealing with it instead of just taking tablets to chase them away". (Interview 33, 38 years old)

Strengths of Inspire

All of the practitioners interviewed felt that Inspire had been extremely effective in the short time that it had been running. It was seen to provide a unique and much needed service for women offenders in Northern Ireland. One practitioner in a related agency described the probation officers working at Inspire as a 'fantastic team' and it was widely recognised that the team demonstrate a high level of commitment, professionalism and expertise. The aim of involving women in the process and encouraging them to identify their own needs and objectives was widely seen as a positive aspect of the approach adopted by Inspire as was their capacity to move beyond a probation only approach.

Amongst Inspire's major strengths are the links that have been established with other organisations and particularly women's groups. The diversity of links and the level of inter-agency working which has been established in a relatively short period is also impressive. The range of agencies and organisations that women can be referred to is comprehensive and able to cater for a diverse set of needs. Extracts from interviews with women offenders illustrates the diversity of opportunity that has been created at Inspire:

“When I first came I was given like a massage course with FASA in here. I was given the course in here, they come here for 6 weeks...now I’m doing my driving theory in NIACRO”. (Interview 4, 32 years old)

“...but aye like they have information days. I got involved with NIACRO and the Women’s Tech and all doing GCSEs and everything again...I’m doing my driving theory and ECDL with them [NIACRO]... I done a wee course and all down here and got a qualification for it and when they have an open days and like women’s centres and different stuff like that I always come down to it and if they have any wee courses that are going on I always put my name down for them”. (Interview 10, 19 years old)

A number of practitioners felt that Inspire and related agencies are now able to provide a quicker and more effective response to women offender’s needs. It was also felt that by providing a range of skills and activities that women offenders were able to build up their confidence and stabilise their lives and that this helped them to reduce their level of offending. As one probation officer stated:

“What I do see are changes in confidence levels. The women get a lot of support, not only from us but from each other and for some of them social isolation is a big factor.” (Inspire Probation Officer)

Inspire is seen to provide a unique, ‘joined up’ service offering a range of support for women with diverse needs. Inspire offers women the chance to rethink and engage in social interaction which is seen as a vital lifeline for some women offenders. Inspire was seen by both women offenders and key stakeholders as providing a valuable space for women offenders to discuss their concerns and aspirations. As one probation officer put it: *‘Maybe for the first time in their lives they have been offered a chance to meet someone who will listen to them.’*

Significantly there is a good working relationship between the key agencies. The relationships with the voluntary sector in particular have flourished. A major strength in this respect is that Inspire is seen to be building on what exists and rather than try to develop separate provision it is seen to be maximising existing resources and provision. As the Deputy Director of the Criminal Justice Services in DOJ put it: *‘The strength is adding value, while not pushing others out of the way.’*

A good example of this is the joint work that has developed between the Inspire Women’s Project, NIACRO and WSN. The WSN is an infrastructural umbrella organisation that provides a range of support and services to community based women’s centres, projects and infrastructure groups across Northern Ireland. In 2009 Lankelly Chase Trust Foundation provided funding for a seven month pilot project (September 2009 – March 2010) to support women offenders in the community in

order to tackle and reduce reoffending. The pilot project, known as the Women's Community Support Project, involves a partnership between PBNI, WSN and NIACRO. The project involved capacity building, coordination and cooperation between the three organisations in order to develop a model of working in partnership for the benefit of women offenders and to develop capacity within the women's sector in relation to working with women offenders.

The pilot project worked with three women's centres in Belfast – the Falls; Shankill and Windsor – and provided funding for a part time staff member (1.5 days / week). During the pilot period staff from the centres attended capacity building training in order to develop knowledge and expertise in working with women offenders. Staff from the three women's centres researched community based programmes and support mechanisms that were accessible to women offenders and thus contributed to the development of a working model for the project. Through their attendance at the Inspire Women's Project, the women's centre staff also promoted the range of services available to women offenders in their community. A report evaluating the work of the Women's Community Support Project has been published. It recommended the work of the project be consolidated and continued due to its success in developing relationships and dialogue between key partners and identifying gaps and solutions in relation to provision for women offenders in the community (WSN, 2010).

The Ash-Inspire Resettlement Initiative (a collaboration between the Inspire Project, the Prison Service, the Women's Community Support Project and NIACRO) now plays a central role in providing information, support and access to community resources for women prisoners, as they move towards release and resettlement within the community. The initiative is helping women to take responsibility for their own lives by working with them on an individual basis to ensure that interventions, both within prison and after release, are co-ordinated with, and inclusive of, the network of support that already exists within the local communities to which they are returning. The women involved have valued the opportunities provided to build relationships, prior to release, with other women who can help them to access the support they need whilst in prison, and who can continue to support them to move on with their lives in a positive way, once they have returned to live within the community. Inspire has been highly successful in engaging women prisoners and preparing them for their release, for example, as the Governor responsible for women offenders in Hydebank Prison explained:

“Up until recently, we were looking after them [women prisoners] while they were inside and giving them their brown bag and saying ‘all the best and I hope you don’t come back’ knowing that they were going to come back in two or three weeks or two or three months...Up until Inspire I didn’t have contact with what happened to those women only when they came back and said ‘I got no support when I got out’... With Inspire I get a lot of feedback about what’s happening with all our clients. I know we’ve had a few success stories...Some of the ones who are engaging with Inspire are ones that I would have said, you know, are not really the takers all the time...we’ve had a few who have not been interested initially and we’ve sent them down there and they’ve said ‘I really like this.’, you know so its not the ones that are the normal engagers. Some of the ones who are engaging now I would have felt would have never engaged.” (Governor, Women’s Wing, Hydebank Prison)

In many respects Inspire is a hub, a point of contact and referral that aims to provide a relatively comprehensive range of services through a system of referral, as well as providing their own services. Thus there are a wide range of services that have been made more readily available including education, work skills, family support, community support, physical activities, counselling and therapies, the opportunity to address dependencies and ultimately to address the basis of their offending. The referrals provided by Inspire probation officers were identified as hugely beneficial to the relevant women. The range and nature of referrals depended on the individual needs of the women, but no service user reported negative experiences with such agencies. Rather they were viewed as part of an increasing and beneficial support network.

A major strength of these diverse programmes and support is their flexibility and the continuity of provision between prison, probation and the community. Although there is an agreed structure to the individual programmes there is considerable choice on offer and women are able to select from a relatively wide range of programmes depending on their needs and objectives. Significantly, many of the agencies and organisations that Inspire is linked to have been keen to participate in the women focussed initiative. There is a widespread belief that such a women centred approach is long overdue and they have made considerable effort to provide the required services and to work closely with Inspire. In general the strength of Inspire is that its very existence brings attention to the nature of women’s offending and raises questions about the difference in motivation between men and women offenders and this in turn raises questions about the provision of an appropriate response for women. This development contributes to a wider discussion in the UK about gender, crime and punishment.

Areas for improvement

There is little doubt that in the minds of the people working in Inspire and related agencies that the strengths of the service far outweigh the weaknesses. However, in every service there are always certain limitations and room for improvement and development. One of the central aims of the pilot has been to experiment with different options and to learn from the experience. This has been an important aspect of Inspire's development to date and by and large, it has adapted well to the challenges that have arisen. Most of the 'weaknesses' that were mentioned in interviews with women offenders and stakeholders were not so much omissions and failures as practices that could be developed. A number of areas for improvement and development were suggested during the course of the interviews with practitioners and these are explored further below.

Partnership working

While it was widely recognised that there are good inter-agency links in some cases these were dependant on inter-personal relations rather than institutional agreements. Interviews with stakeholders suggested that while there was a significant commitment from many key agencies and organisations, there were some key agencies such as housing, mental health services, and the police that have not yet been fully engaged in this inter-agency approach. The development of these partnerships would also assist in improving provision at Inspire.

Provision and capacity of voluntary sector partners

There is also a question of regulating the services that are provided by different statutory and voluntary agencies. Since many of these services are provided without charge to the Probation Board there is an issue about how much Inspire can influence the nature of the services provided. As most of these service providers are not accountable to the Probation Board they have limited control over the type and quality of service provision. Interviews with women offenders, for example, showed that while the services provided by the three main Women's Centres were predominately viewed positively, concern was expressed by three women about confidentiality and they consequently failed to engage with the service. As they explained:

"...there's the [Area 2] Women's Centre, the [Area 1] Women's Centre is on the opposite side of where I am, I would be happy to go to that one, but the [Area 2] Women's Centre I wouldn't. It's too close to home, I find them too unprofessional. I have been in their company and heard them talk about people using their first and second names and I have been part of that. Not

being that person myself, but been in it. I went to courses years ago in the [Area 2] Women's Centre and there was a lot of personal stuff which went around where I live and it came from the centres, so any courses that were going there I didn't want to participate. I just don't feel comfortable talking in front of people that I know that I absolutely can't trust". (Interview 31, 42 years old)

"... there was a couple of girls who were coming in I didn't attend because my next door neighbour and the girl two doors up work in the women's centre and I didn't want them knowing that I was here. That was the only reason that I couldn't attend that". (Interview 37, 25 years old)

"I says 'nah I wouldn't go to it'. Cause the girl that runs it is a big mouth, she'd spread stuff about you, you know. I says 'I don't want her knowing that I'm on probation, she'd have a field day, she'd have a field day telling everybody'. Cause I keep myself to myself you know and she would have had a field day cause she doesn't like me, I don't know why but she doesn't like me for some reason." (Interview 16, 28 years old)

Women offenders also expressed concern about levels of confidentiality within their relationships with other partners, for example, one woman described her concerns about opening up to the practitioner providing alternative therapies at Inspire. She said:

"There's a trust issue in here. How much can I tell her? How much is she going to tell [probation officer]?... You can only tell a person so much because you don't know how much they're liaising with each other." (Interview 19, 32 years old)

There were also issues in relation to the capacity of some of the community groups and voluntary organisations in dealing with the criminogenic needs of women offenders. The question arises of whether these agencies possess the specialist skills necessary to address offending behaviour and related issues. While it is the responsibility of probation to supervise women offenders, and in the main the women offenders involved with the service are of low to medium risk of reoffending, such issues became particularly important in relation to how such agencies dealt with women offender's substance misuse during their engagement with programmes and activities independent of probation. Some consideration might therefore be given to providing training about substance misuse for external providers of programmes and activities based at the Inspire Women's Project in order to support them in identifying and dealing with issues which may arise connected to substance misuse or indeed other underlying issues. It may also be useful to develop a clear protocol for such agencies in relation to working with substance misusers who are on probation; and about information sharing and confidentiality between the voluntary and statutory sector.

Substance misusing women offenders

Women offenders with substance issues are referred to appropriate agencies such as NICAS, Drug Arrest Referral team, FASA, React and other support services both prior to their engagement with probation and as part of their overall support plan. While probation guidelines also stipulate that women offenders must not attend appointments under the influence of psychoactive substances, although some of the women interviewed were either active alcoholics or drug users and a number were currently on prescription medication for their addictions. From observations at the Inspire building and an examination of probation data about non-compliance it was clear that probation officers interpreted this guideline in a balanced way, permitting substance misusers to attend sessions at Inspire while not allowing substance misuse or intoxication on the premises. This approach was welcomed by women offenders affected by substance misuse who valued the interaction and connection offered from attending the Project. As one woman offender explained:

“That Tuesday thing that I started to go to I have my people and yeah I would say it has because it’s started to give me a wee bit of social network of people that I wouldn’t normally of met otherwise. Because I’ve been on the drug scene for so many years and trying to get out of that is hard and meeting people out of that is hard. So meeting people here on a Tuesday that share interests like creative arts and stuff like that has been good”. (Interview 19, 32 years old)

However, many other women offenders with histories of substance misuse issues reported feeling uncomfortable participating in programmes and activities with women who were known to be actively using drugs or alcohol. Several women offenders reported that other women offenders had attended Inspire in what they considered an intoxicated state and that they had complained to Inspire staff about this situation. As one woman offender explained:

“The only negative thing would be that there is one girl that does come to here and she is still abusing drugs basically and obviously for the ones of us who have come off it is quite hard sitting with somebody who is off her face and you know that she is. The staff are really only coming to a light about it cause a lot of us have complained about it. No doubt something will be done about it but I think that’s the only negative thing that I can say, the fact that it’s quite hard to sit with someone who isn’t willing to like change and even if she’s willing maybe she finds it hard and it’s understandable but it still is quite hard for us sitting there and we’re sitting there thinking, “Fuck I would love to take something” and you do think like that especially if you have had a problem with drugs”. (Interview 18, 30 years old)

Other women offenders reported that they had been asked for medication by one of the other women attending the Inspire Women’s Project. One woman offender explained that this concerned her as it might jeopardise her hard work or put at risk

her attendance at Inspire which she considered beneficial and positive. For some woman offenders, the presence of substance misusers at Inspire challenged their attempts at abstinence and felt in some way threatening. On the other hand, women offenders who were still misusing substances reported that they felt ostracised from the main group of women who regularly participated in the majority of the programmes provided by Inspire. This may discourage other active substance users from engaging and participating fully in programmes, such as those provided by the Prison Arts Foundation.

Providing a joint service for people who are abstinent and people who are currently still involved in substance misuse is a not uncommon challenge faced by many organisations developing programmes for people at different stages of change or with different support needs (e.g. Pate, 2010). Such difficulties in dealing with women who are current substance misusers suggest that some of the more drug dependant women offenders with deep-seated needs may be excluded from Inspire. Rather than send drug dependant women back to court or send them home it might be more beneficial to work more closely with a local drugs agency so that they can be incorporated more fully into the programme.

Engagement

There are, as has been mentioned elsewhere, difficulties in motivating and engaging some women offenders. It is clear from the interviews that considerable efforts are made to encourage women offenders to engage in the programmes but it is also clear that a number fail to respond. The uptake of non-mandatory services and programmes among women offenders did appear to be an ongoing concern. Despite the continuing dedication of Inspire staff and affiliated agencies, gaining the participation of more than six service users was often problematic:

“I mean I wouldn’t do something like that on my own, at 34 you wouldn’t go and get a bike and cycle round a park, there was about 6 of us, the others were like ones who work in the [place in Belfast] and the [place in Belfast], all the different centres and then there was me and another girl who were in Hydebank. But she’s asked us to try and get more people cause she needs at least 8 people to make it that she’s allowed to do it. So I’m having to rope everyone into doing it so that we can get to do them. It’s good fun and it gives you something to do, it gets you out of the house”. (Interview 20, 34 years old)

“I was supposed to but I done art therapy which was with a girl called [name]. She was doing a class over here about, it was only like the first day when like five of us came in and then the next week it was only me and then she done

one session with me and then she did another seven". (Interview 37, 25 years old)

Explanations for the consistent lack of participation were strongly related to the mental health of participants. Lack of involvement was particularly prevalent for those who had experiences of domestic or sexual abuse or who were substance misusers. Working with women offenders with complex needs such as these requires intensive individual work which may not be possible within the period of their supervision. As several women with complex backgrounds explained, problems of trust or the ability to be open about their experiences often prevented them from participating in activities with other people.

"I'm not good around other people. I've mental health problems and stuff and I'm not good around other people". (Interview 36, 35 years old)

"I just couldn't be annoyed. I don't want people around me either that's what I was talking about to [probation officer] in there about. Used to be that I had loads and loads of friends and all round me but I think it's cause I'm getting older, I just want to be on my own". (Interview 30, 43 years old).

"They've offered me to come down and all to take part in all the wee things, the wee tea things and all that they do here and all. But I'm too set in my ways. I prefer my own company, do you know what I mean? To me, like I'm 38 and I don't think that I'm ever going to change the way I am now. I'm not the type of person, I can't just open up and talk to people. I don't know. I just find it really hard to open up and letting people in. I'd prefer my own company. I'd rather just sit in the house and read a good book". (Interview 27, 38 years old).

"Well, I do distance myself from everything, most things that have gone on down here because I don't really trust people. It seems really catty saying this, but I don't really trust people and I'd prefer just to come down and do what I have to do and then just go home again. I'm not really the type to come down and make friends and get involved in anything like that, do you know what I mean?" (Interview 27, 38 years old)

One woman offender was very frank in admitting she found it difficult to be involved with people as she was fearful that she would be hurt. She explained:

"But the way I look at it right, if I don't get involved with people, if I don't open up to people then I can't get hurt. So I just go into the flat, lock my door, grab the kettle, make tea, read a good book or watch TV and that's me, I'm happy and I can't get hurt, nobody can hurt me". (Interview 27, 38 years old)

For another woman offender with mental health problems, the idea of exposing how she was feeling during creative writing workshops made her feel uncomfortable and as a result she had stopped attending. She said:

[probation officer] suggested a lot to me in here has but I've just wanted to focus on my mental health getting better... I went to creative arts. I went there for about 2 weeks, 2 or 3 sessions, but it wasn't for me cause I had to write down what I was feeling and I knew that I didn't feel comfortable with it". (Interview 34, 30 years old)

Related to the lack of uptake of programmes, particularly among women from domestic, sexual and substance use backgrounds is the need to develop stronger linkages with community or statutory mental health services who could provide the women with more intensive one-to-one work. One woman offender, for example, mentioned that she would like an alcohol group for women set up in Inspire.

Housing and accommodation

The view was expressed by some practitioners that there was a need to tackle the housing issue and that the procedures for allocating accommodation needed reviewing. While it was not felt that Inspire specific accommodation was necessary or indeed cost effective, some stakeholders felt that increased hostel provision was necessary. However, as one probation officer argued any hostel provision needed to be linked to risk assessment and that placing someone with drug issues in a homeless hostel where everyone is using drugs is unlikely to be beneficial. Developing specific links with supporting people accommodation providers was suggested as a possible way of improving access to appropriate housing for some women offenders with specific needs.

Employment and education

While Inspire have developed a high rate of success in working with women offenders to improve their self-confidence and encouraging them to engage in different activities, there is little in the way of formal qualifications and therefore limited help in getting women into work. Some women offenders reported that the reason they did not participate in the existing education and training programmes was because they were already educated to a university standard, had previously completed similar courses or that current programmes were unable to register any more people. These women offenders felt that more intense education and training programmes would be of benefit to them:

"I suppose, this is even something [probation officer] has identified with me...there isn't very much that I can get out of this because I'm probably not in the same position as the majority of women that come in here. I have a good family, I have education, I don't have any anger, I'm not an alcoholic or drug addict...so I think the, it does offer a lot of support for people in that position but for me because I don't have any of those issues, it's quite limited". (Interview 3, 30 years old)

“I think if there was more courses around the individual’s interest rather than just what they’re putting on cause not everybody, there’s ones there who maybe come here and they have no qualifications where the likes of myself have a load of qualifications so you don’t want to be going over things that I’ve already done. I’ve spent more whole time studying and I think I would rather do something where it’s going to be more of a benefit to me”. (Interview 23, 46 years old)

For some women the courses on offer through Inspire were not of interest and therefore they did not feel motivated to participate. As one woman offender explained:

“She told me that there was like an art course but I’m not into art. I’m the type of person who likes to do courses that I’m interested in, that there’s going to be a benefit off rather than just doing some for the sake of it because to me it’s meaningless [...] I think it’s a waste of time just going into things to do them just to pass your time. [...] You don’t put any effort into it if you don’t want it, cause any courses I did in the past I wanted to and I did put a lot of energy into them”. (Interview 23, 46 years old)

A woman-centred way of working

It was felt both amongst the Inspire staff and other practitioners that it would be useful to define precisely what was meant by a ‘woman centred’ approach and to develop training schemes for relevant practitioners in delivering such a service. For example, it was acknowledged by the Inspire Operations Manager that the assessment tools and approaches used across probation have been designed and standardised with the male offender population and that these are perhaps not well equipped for dealing with women offenders who are generally a lower risk but have more complex underlying needs. The development of such tools may assist in improving monitoring and evaluation as it was felt by stakeholders that at present there were some gaps in this area³⁵.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Inspire Women’s Project provide regular monitoring reports in relation to management operations, case management, programmes, health and safety, data requests and so on as part of their day to day operation, however these monitoring processes are focussed specifically on the delivery of probation services. With a diverse range of agencies including the voluntary sector involved in the Inspire Women’s Project there are predictably going to be issues of monitoring and evaluation. While it is the case that certain programmes and activities are routinely

³⁵ This is one aim of the new strategy to deal with Women’s Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland.

monitored there are significant gaps in the effective monitoring and evaluation of women's progress and development apart from their participation in activities and programmes.

Indeed, a limitation of the current evaluation was the availability of detailed information from which the rate of reoffending and other key outcomes, and therefore, the cost benefits of women's involvement could be established.

Limitations of probation provision

While Inspire probation officers work with clients outside Belfast City, it was recognised by both probation officers and women offenders that provision outside the city area was less developed and that fewer services were available. Concerns were also raised by women offenders living outside the city about the cost of travelling to the Inspire premises. As one woman offender who lived outside Belfast City said:

"There's nothing really up our way only probation, so who would you go to? Down here you've everyone really". (Interview 26, 45 years old)

There is a need therefore to improve access to services for women who live outside the city area in order that they can benefit from an appropriate range of support both during and beyond their community sentence.

Another issue that is recognised by the probation staff working in Inspire is that the support and services provided are limited to the duration of the order. Once the order has expired the women have no formal basis of contact with Inspire or related provision. Interestingly, while the majority of women interviewed were satisfied with existing support provision once their community sentence finished, three women reported that they wanted to continue their engagement with Inspire³⁶. These women did not want to use the Women's Centres as they were agreed that they felt more comfortable with the services which Inspire provided:

"I'm not actually on probation at the minute so I'm not, I have a suspended sentence but I still come to Inspire cause I love the classes, I love it". (Interview 22, 42 years old)

"Well in Arts class and stuff there's a girl there who's been off probation for two years now and she still goes, so you can still come in and see everybody, it's not affected by the length of your probation so that you wouldn't be allowed back. So it is good, the fact that you can keep in touch with everyone and still go the wee classes and stuff". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

³⁶ In fact, two women offenders reported that they would reoffend in order to maintain contact with their probation officer.

Given the high caseloads of the staff in Inspire there is little capacity to spend time with women whose community sentence is finished. The issue for Inspire staff is to try to connect women with services during the course of the probation period and encourage women to maintain these links. At the same time there is a commitment to 'closure' and to moving women on once their order has expired. Providing an alternative means of continuing support in other third sector agencies may remedy this issue in some cases. Alternatively, there may be a case for employing a throughcare officer whose role it is to maintain links with women who have come through Inspire.

One of the most frequently suggested developments was extending these programmes both in terms of the range of women offenders that it could cater for and the range of provision. Some stakeholders for example felt that it could be more widely available for women offenders currently in prison.

It was also felt that this type of 'woman centred' programme could be made available to other women offenders apart from those on probation. For example as the Director of Criminal Justice Services in the DOJ explained:

"...because there wasn't a focus on women, we haven't developed the range of services and if we don't have the range of services it makes it more difficult for the judiciary to make choices other than prison... So to some degree, what we have to do is turn the tap off... the fact is if we can redirect these women earlier then we'll get a long term gain... we know that prisons are expensive and the more women we have in prison the greater the expense. The more women that go to prison, the more their relationships and their community links are damaged and weakened and therefore the greater chance they will end up going back to prison, or else be dysfunctional individuals who never really sort of reengage with normal society." (Director, Criminal Justice Services, DOJ).

It was also suggested that some form of conditional cautioning scheme which has been piloted in England and Wales could be developed in Northern Ireland which would require low level women offenders to be assessed in relation to their support needs before their offending behaviour or personal circumstances worsened (Easton et al, 2010). In conjunction with extending forms of diversion and early release for women there could be an extension of provision particularly in relation to housing and mental health services. It was also suggested that similar support for women offenders under 18 years old might also be appropriate.

Interviews with stakeholders noted that the high caseloads and intense work required of probation officers working in Inspire can create strains and tensions. At the same time while it was recognised that the staff at Inspire are very committed, working with women offenders can be very, very emotional and stressful and that appropriate support and space needs to be provided for the staff. While emotional support is available for staff through the 'carecall' system³⁷, the often more complex underlying needs of women offenders, requiring increased levels of contact may provide reason to reduce the individual caseloads of probation officers working at Inspire.

Finally, some women offenders reported that they did not feel they could be open and honest with their probation officer due to a fear that they would inform the courts. While Inspire probation officers are enforcers of the law there is a strong social care ethos which differs from mainstream probation. Further development of this social care role may encourage more open and honest communication with service users which in turn would positively impact on women's propensity to desist from crime and reintegrate into society. As a woman explained:

"I know that probation's hands are tied, they're there strictly to enforce an order and whatever the order says, but I think that they should have more freedom and more input from the social services basis, I really do. There are things that [probation officer] can't help me with cause this is what she's here for? [...] just wee things, like it would be great if her hands weren't tied and she could make statements and she could say yes or no, but because she's a probation officer, it's kind of a very narrow field and NIACRO is there as a back up so that widens your vision, but I think that it would be more helpful if there was more instead of enforcer and defendant, if there was more of a relationship basis there, I think it would be more helpful". (Interview 32, 58 years old)

Promotion of Inspire

Issues of communication were raised by both stakeholders and women offenders. Stakeholders, for example, felt that more information about what Inspire does should be disseminated not only to relevant agencies but more widely through criminal justice agencies and the media in Northern Ireland. Women offenders reported that they would have liked more information about what Inspire has to offer before beginning their community sentences and suggested more detailed information should be made available at all stages of the criminal justice process.

³⁷ PBNI's outsourced employee support arrangement which provides therapeutic support for Probation Officers who deal with high risk or challenging offenders.

3.5 Outcomes for women involved with Inspire

Changes in ACE risk assessment scores

ACE scores are widely used by probation services in England and Wales and Northern Ireland to assess offender risks and underlying criminogenic and non criminogenic needs. Scores are calculated across a range of 11 components to create a score out of 99 and are viewed as an accurate measure of the risk of reconviction (Raynor et al, 2001)^{38, 39}. An examination of ACE scores for the entire cohort of 309 women offenders showed an average three point reduction in ACE scores between a woman's start date with Inspire (21) and the most recent score held by PBNI (18). The average ACE level reduced from Medium to Low over this time. This reduction in ACE scores while statistically significant⁴⁰ does not provide sufficient information on which to base any decision about the cost benefit of the service as there is no appropriate point of comparison from which to determine whether any additional investment in the Inspire Women's Project adds value above and beyond probation supervision alone⁴¹.

Self reported reoffending and attitudes to offending

Self reported reoffending

While it was not possible to access formal data about reoffending for this evaluation, interviews with women offenders showed that self-reported reoffending had substantially decreased due to engagement with Inspire. Of the 37 women offenders interviewed, 29 (78%) reported that they had not committed any further offences since becoming involved with Inspire. Four (11%) women offenders had committed further offences. Information about reoffending was missing in four cases⁴².

³⁸ See Appendix 1 for further detail about the methodology employed to calculate these scores.

³⁹ In Northern Ireland ACE Scores are calculated across 12 components which create a total of 117.

⁴⁰ Significant at $t(308)=7.024$ $p < 0.01$.

⁴¹ Dividing the cohort into two groups, those who had breached and those who hadn't, showed that women offenders who breached had a higher average initial ACE score (25) which reduced by one point to 24 points. Those who didn't breach had an initial score of 20 that reduced by four points to 16. Such findings are to be expected as women offenders who breach their order have higher average ACE scores than those who do not breach their orders.

⁴² In two cases this data was not provided as the interviewee cut the interview short or refused to answer this question. In two further cases the digital recordings of interviews were unavailable due to a technical failure.

For two of the four women, their reoffending was connected to their ongoing alcohol use, although one woman had since stopped drinking and the other had significantly reduced her intake. Another woman, who had a history of shoplifting, acknowledged that she had continued to offend but had originally not admitted this to her probation officer or NIACRO worker. She described how she had attended the GOALs course and as part of an activity had written a letter to her probation officer about her behaviour. Despite being open with her probation officer, she continued to offend until she was caught and realised the risk of going to prison and being without her son. She also attributed her change in attitude to being stabilised on medication for her bipolar disorder which she felt gave her feelings of 'invincibility' and had contributed to her behaviour.

All four women who reoffended reported that they had since stopped offending and that their attitude to their offending had changed significantly. Each of the women felt that their involvement with Inspire was helping them on their pathway to desistance in several ways. As one woman explained:

"I do think that in here stops me reoffending because I've heard the experience of prison, what it's like...Plus there's support here and I don't want to go down that line again, that's why I keep coming here, because I don't want to. I want to keep myself out of trouble and this keeps me out of trouble."
(Interview 22, 42 years old)

Quantitative measures of reoffending would perhaps view these women as 'failures', however, considering that desistance is a process rather than an event and that desisters usually go through a number of reversals as part of this process, this pattern of behaviour suggests that Inspire is effectively supporting women to desist (Maruna, 2000).

Formal data on the rate of reconviction for women offenders on community sentences in Northern Ireland suggests that after 12 months, 20% of women offenders have reoffended (DOJ, 2010)⁴³. While the above calculation (11%) has some limitations, for example, it is based on the self report data of a small sample with some missing data, and for some, 12 months may not have elapsed since the original offence, this finding is still promising. What is perhaps most encouraging is, that despite the self reported reoffending of four women offenders, each of these women offenders had achieved significant changes in their attitude to their offending

⁴³ DOJ (2010a) *Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013*, Belfast: Department of Justice.

and were seeking support for their connected underlying issues and had since desisted completely from reoffending.

Attitudes to offending

Twenty six (70%) of the 37 women offenders reported changes in their attitudes to their offending as a result of attending Inspire. Eight women (22%) felt that Inspire had not helped them change their attitude to offending. Information about women offender's attitudes to their offending was not available in three cases.

Women offenders reported that change in attitudes towards offending was directly related to the individual work completed with their probation officers about how to avoid situations where they would reoffend. Women offenders felt that Inspire had provided them with a variety of options, opportunities and strategies designed with this particular objective in mind. As two women offenders explained:

"I've got this thing that if I haven't got enough money to go to the shopping centre then I don't go. I don't even go to that shopping centre anymore, I go to one in [place in NI], I would go in and stuff to [shop]. But I've actually been in [shops] after that and haven't been stealing nothing. But I would only go in if I had to go to the Post Office or if I have to get a wee thing, like cigarettes, or I would run in and get butter and ham and stuff like that and would go straight to the counter and get them and get out. I don't even go in with a trolley. I don't even go with a bag, only a handbag cause you can't get nothing into that. So I always carry a wee small handbag with me now so I'm not tempted to throw anything into it. So I've learnt my lesson". (Interview 24, 52 years old)

"I started to do my shopping in Tesco's online so I don't really have to go into any shops. Well there's no temptation for me anyway but just in case and [probation officer] advised me to do that". (Interview 33, 38 years old)

For another woman offender having personal goals and plans meant she was more likely to avoid offending in the future. She said:

"Well I'm not gonna reoffend cause I know what I want now and I know what my goals is and I think if you get goals and set them then you can stay on the right train or road". (Interview 5, 48 years old)

A number of women offenders felt that their attitude to their offending had not changed. For many of these women their experiences of poverty meant that they viewed some offending as a 'needs must' situation. For example, when asked if they would commit the same offence again, several women spoke frankly of their experiences of poverty and about how they felt they could not discuss such thinking with probation. As one woman offender clearly explained:

"Because even though you've stolen and you have a criminal record on paper, it doesn't mean that you've no integrity about yourself...For me

stealing has not put a big dent in my character. It has been a nuisance that I got caught and that I've had to come here. Would I do it again if I had to? Of course I would... It's completely different from stealing for money for drink or stealing for money for drugs or just stealing for money or just stealing for the buzz of stealing... I don't know if she's [Probation Officer] not getting the context or if she doesn't understand that I can't be 100% honest with her...I mean I'm hardly going to say, [Probation Officer], I know that you're writing this report into the jail that this project has completely changed my life around, it hasn't' ...And the fines in themselves are ridiculous. You're out stealing because your living in absolute poverty, you're not doing it for fun, you're not doing it for a kick, it's embarrassing, it's shame, all them things that comes with it. It's humiliating, it's degrading and then on top of that they say 'Well you have to pay £200'...so you have to go out and steal to sell the stuff to get the money to pay the courts and then you get caught.' (Interview 22, 42 years old)

Changes in soft outcomes

Self-esteem and confidence

Twenty eight (76%) of the women offenders interviewed reported that their self esteem and/or self confidence had improved as a direct result of their contact with Inspire. For these women offenders improvements in self esteem and confidence were attributed to their involvement in a number of interventions available at Inspire including the GOALS course, PAF courses, NIACRO, counselling, one to one work with their probation officers and through developing relationships with other women offenders attending the service. One woman explained that prior to attending Inspire she had been frightened and lacking in confidence. When asked how she was before coming to Inspire she responded:

"[I was] a nervous wreck and suffering post-traumatic stress. Frightened of the world, frightened of [spreads hands] and now look at me – I'm soon to be going travelling! Confident and everything. I do owe them so much you know, I do". (Interview 8, 53 years old)

Several other women reported similar increases in their confidence and for most this was linked to an increase in their interest in social activities and their capacity to take care of themselves. Many women offenders reported struggling with leaving the house or undertaking simple personal tasks prior to their involvement with Inspire and that these elements of their lives had changed significantly following their involvement. As one woman offender explained:

"My confidence grown a lot since being able to come down here and speak to [probation officer] about things and I'm more determined to go out and do things more compared to a couple of years ago when I would have just gone and buried my head in the sand and that was it. Now I'm more determined to get out and do things". (Interview 27, 38 years old)

Some women described how contact with other women offenders at the project had supported them through difficult and painful experiences which they otherwise would have had to deal with on their own. The following example from a 37 year old woman offender is illustrative of the experiences of many women offenders interviewed:

"I'm not putting myself down anymore as much as what I would have done. I would have locked myself in the house and I wouldn't have come out of the house and just sit and cry and feel sorry for myself and ones at Inspire seemed to pull me through all that there, you know, mixing with other girls and stuff". (Interview 5, 37 years old)

Support from both probation staff and other women offenders enabled some women to focus on the future in a constructive way rather than dwelling on past, difficult experiences on their own. One of the older women offenders interviewed explained this in the following way:

"Just being positive about everything, just not looking on the negative side of life and go with the good side more and try to leave the back at the backside. I put it into a thing and I lock it away and forget about it and think it's all in the past and look to the future now". (Interview 24, 52 years old)

A common theme among all the women interviewed was the importance of their own space to talk and to be heard. While this was initially difficult for many, over time and with the encouragement of staff and other women offenders and often through accessing the creative writing workshops, women began to be able to express themselves constructively and confidently which they felt was linked to improvements in their self confidence and self esteem. One woman explained how she had been unable to talk as she would shake and cry at every attempt. She went on to explain the value of this opportunity for her in moving forward in her life. She said:

"I couldn't talk about anything, I would go to talk and then it was crying and then I couldn't get a word out and then I couldn't talk about that and then this shakiness would start and if somebody asked me a question I'd start crying again. I was a wreck, an absolute wreck. But only for this place I don't know where I would have been and I doubt that I could have done it on my own". (Interview 25, 56 years old)

"I had [such] low self esteem it was unbelievable. I think I talk so much now because I never did for years, you know what I mean? I just closed myself out and didn't speak to hardly anyone and I never had anyone come in the house to talk to so..." (Interview 7, 45 years old)

Women offenders often measured their changing sense of confidence through their ability to speak in public, either to a group of women offenders during the GOALS programme or in front of an audience for the benefit of the service as one woman explained:

"Then I went and read a poem to David Ford and all these probation people, you know, going on about funds for this place as well. I actually did it without

feeling nervous, you know, six months ago I wouldn't even have done that. I would have just cried". (Interview 7, 45 years old)

Many of the women offenders interviewed reported that this improved confidence and self esteem permitted them to cope better with everyday tasks and struggles and had made them feel 'stronger'. Women who had experiences of prison felt that Inspire was particularly important in helping them regain their self-esteem, confidence and self worth. As one woman offender who had been in prison explained:

"...I came out of jail feeling worthless. And you know they have sort of, well not sort of, they HAVE turned everything around for me and helped me. I came out of jail feeling like nothing." (Interview 2, 43 years old)

When asked how Inspire had supported this process the woman offender replied that she had been supported to view herself not as a 'bad' person without a future but as a normal person who can have hopes and aspirations and a life ahead of her. She explained the support she received in the following terms:

"That you're not a bad person, that you are normal that you know, because you've been in jail doesn't mean it can ruin the rest of your life – you still have a life ahead of you and there's still an awful lot of things left you can do, I thought it was the end of my life whenever I came out of jail, I thought 'that's it'. I've a jail sentence behind me now, I've nothing I can do". (Interview 2, 43 years old)

Another woman expressed her increased confidence in relation to being able to now leave a damaging relationship with her husband. She described this as being 'pointed in the right direction' after having been stripped of her identity in a controlling and dependant relationship. This description reinforces the objective of the support provided by Inspire, that is, to develop a woman's self esteem and confidence sufficiently to allow her to make her own positive decisions rather than creating further dependency. This interviewee described her experiences in the following way:

"Well nine months ago if you'd told me I'd be doing what I'm doing now I couldn't have imagined it. I always thought my husband would come crawling back, he had done in the past and said 'I'm sorry' and he'd come back. I couldn't imagine doing this on my own. I was very dependent on him, I'd become very dependent on him. He controlled everything in my life and I just put out, totally stripped of all my identity and just didn't know where to start and yes probation pointed me in the right direction...I feel me as a person coming back". (Interview 14, 40 years old)

Other women described how interventions at Inspire had encouraged them to develop 'love' for themselves, to take responsibility for their own lives and to find their own 'path' through involvement in social activities away from home with other supportive women.

"You don't believe it yourself, you need to start complimenting and GOALS achievement is that you have to do it yourself because nobody is gonna

come do it for you... the thing about GOALs is that you need to say 'I love me'. If you keep saying to yourself that you love yourself then people will learn to love you cause you love yourself. It's hard now to do, it is hard to do because I'm still learning how to do that and it is hard. But it is a good thing to do". (Interview 5, 48 years old)

"I see me a different person, completely different to what I was. Content as well. And I always look forward going [to Inspire] because it gets me away from the house. I'm meeting some of the girls today". (Interview 7, 45 years old)

When asked if she could see a difference in herself, one woman responded:

"Would I be sitting here now talking to you and doing a TV programme? No! [Laughs]. I'd be sitting in a corner still wondering where the hell I was and how to get out of this black hole I was in, I certainly would not be contemplating to myself that I'd be doing a TV programme tomorrow night... Yeah you can see a big difference; my family can see a big difference, a big, big, change. They can see a real difference of me, I know where I'm going and what I want". (Interview 5, 48 years old)

Six women offenders felt that their self-esteem had not been affected by attending Inspire. This however was not considered by them a failing on the part of Inspire but rather that their self esteem had improved as a result of their own efforts or through support available to them from family and friends. One woman offender felt that as she was very new to probation she had not had sufficient time to make significant changes in this area although she had hope that Inspire would help her with this. Two women offenders felt that they had sufficient self esteem and did not require help with this aspect of their lives. Information about self esteem was not available for three women offenders.

Self control

For many, improved self confidence and self esteem was linked to greater self control with women offenders reporting improvements in their ability to manage their anger and responses to other people following their engagement with Inspire. As two women explained:

"Awk yeah I was mental a few years ago. I was off the rails like, I was crazy but...I'm not that bad anymore. If someone turns round and says something to me I can take it without going boogaloo, wanting to, you know, fight or something but now I just say 'beat it buck eejit'". (Interview 9, 24 years old)

"Just more positive now you know. And see with the anger management I'm able to control my anger a lot better, obviously you still have your moments but I'm able to control it a lot better, I just think about things more differently and I'm just happier, I feel happier". (Interview 12, 21 years old)

Physical and Mental Health

Related to increased self esteem and confidence was the improvement in women offenders' physical and mental health. Several women commented that their physical appearance, for example, their complexion and weight, had improved as they had begun to take better care of their diet. One woman reported that her life had 'turned upside down' as she had begun exercising, returned to cooking for herself, taken up old hobbies, had her haircut and began painting her toenails again. She attributed many of these changes to her self confidence as occurring since her involvement with Inspire. She explained:

"A massive difference, massive, massive difference. A) my clothes fit me again so I've started taking, I know it doesn't look like it today, but I've started taking pride in my appearance again. I've just got a wee dog and I've been running with it in the all day but I went and got my hair all cut, my hair was tied in a ponytail for three years and I went and got it all cut...just my self confidence and looking myself, my self esteem. I'm confident enough to go into the centre for the pensioners and have a laugh and a joke with them. I'd have ran a mile in January. I'd have ran out of there in January...I'm finding it hard to put into words...my whole life's just turned upside down. I've discovered, I've remembered that I enjoyed cooking. I've been making homemade soups and crumbles and stews and things, I've started doing crosswords again, been looking into [inaudible] books about yoga and relaxation and bought meditation CDs and started painting my toenails. Now that'll sound stupid probably to most people but I take the time out to actually sit and paint my toenails now whereas I could have been out the back door and at the off sales...my whole life has turned upside down since February". (Interview 13, 48 years old)

Another woman commented on the positive reinforcement received by her probation officer and how this had further boosted her confidence and encouraged her to continue. As she said:

"...I was eating blackberries and smoked salmon...and then she [Probation Officer] would encourage me and say 'oh you look well' and my complexion was coming back and my old clothes started fitting me again and it was just like, maybe wee silly compliments like 'you're looking really good today' and I was 'see that's because I'm eating well and not drinking' so that was boosting my confidence". (Interview 13, 48 years old)

Importantly, due to her engagement with a NIACRO worker, one woman was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. She had been self-medicating for years but due to the diagnosis she was now receiving appropriate medication which she felt had changed her life. As she explained:

"I'm a completely different person now to what I was even like 3 months ago. I mean my Mum herself has said, "They've misdiagnosed you for 20 years". She said that the last time she'd seen me this normal was when I was about 10. So it's brilliant. It's a brilliant thing for her as well to actually have me back again to a person and not this maniac who's running about going mad all the time not knowing what's going on [laughs]". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

Several other women also reported improvements to their mental health which they attributed to their involvement with Inspire. They explained:

“To be honest when I came here I was suffering from post-traumatic stress, right? And it really helped me with that because I had to get up, get out of the house, stop all these fears and come. It helped me with that. Helped me not have to take medication for post-traumatic stress. I witnessed my husband being murdered so the post-traumatic stress I was going through was fear... Because it’s a very hard thing to do, get over post-traumatic stress, without medication. And I looked round I saw women on all sorts of medication and I thought ‘that’s not for me’. No. So they actually done that...I mean the girls here, [Inspire worker], everyone that runs the place enabled me. You know, ‘you’ve got us, grab it, run with it’ so that’s what I’ve done”. (Interview 8, 53 years old)

“Well there is, I feel happier I don’t feel...like a few months ago I would have got really down and it would have taken me days to get out of it but where now if I’m down, it still takes time, like a couple of hours but I’m getting back out of it a lot quicker. So I think I’m dealing with it a lot better myself than what the tablets could do for me”. (Interview 12, 21 years old)

“It’s really helped [the programmes she has undertaken] you know, even the programmes have helped lift my mood even when the anger management, it shouldn’t really lift your mood but it has. I think cause that was just a bit of me time with it, I never really, I always have the kids so it was nice even two hours you know just to sit and talk with other people who had kids and all as well and who are obviously dealing with the same things as you so that lifted my mood”. (Interview 12, 21 years old)

“I feel I was getting better and we discussed whether it was because of the influence of anti depressants or whatever but talking to [probation officer] we both decided that it was just the whole life change in general, you know”. (Interview 13, 48 years old)

While many women were positive about their experiences at Inspire in relation to improvements in confidence and self-esteem, and many reported follow on benefits of improvements in their physical and mental health, for others, this was not the case. Interviews with women offenders who had histories of domestic and/or sexual abuse or who were substance misusers showed that perhaps more intensive support was required for this group, particularly to keep them motivated and sustaining some of the positive changes they may have made already.

“I can sit here and tell you now this that and the other that I would never go near him and all that there again. But in my heart, I mean maybe in a couple of months time if he was to come rapping the door again I would probably end up taking him back, you know what I mean?” (Interview 27, 38 years old)

“Because, with me anyway I would have some weeks that are good and some weeks that are bad where I can’t be annoyed doing anything. I just want to lie in bed and do nothing”. (Interview 34, 30 years old)

“My self-esteem went downhill. I was very low. I didn’t think much of myself. I had no hopes or any, no feelings for a better life. It brought me down so it did. I don’t know, it’s still even now, I don’t like coming to the place, unless I really have to”. (Interview 23, 46 years old)

Improved relationships

Some women offenders reported a positive change in their relationships with their family. As one woman who had experienced extreme isolation from her family reported:

“There was a time that none of my family spoke to me. Wouldn’t take my calls, it was dreadful, really awful. They are all there now for me and I suppose it’s helping me in ways to appreciate how they might be feeling and how my actions have affected them and it’s mainly my emotions, it’s been an emotional rollercoaster that I can get very overwhelmed with and don’t think rationally, I come off with a load of rubbish I don’t mean and regret but unfortunately it’s imprinted in their lives and their minds...but my family yeah, they’re all very close to me now and relationships there are all good”. (Interview 14, 40 years old)

For those women offenders interviewed who had children, three discussed how engagement with Inspire had helped their relationship with their children and strengthened their position with social services. Indeed one woman was successful in having her child removed from the child protection list, whilst another two had been able to increase the frequency and duration of their contact with their children. Another benefit to one of these women was the practical parenting advice provided by Barnardo’s on how to cope with her teenage daughter.

“...they give you wee leaflets and go over it and they tell you like what would happen and all this here carry on. I just take it on board myself and do what I think is right and to me I think that just sitting talking to them is better than shouting and squealing, know what I mean [...] Teenagers just, you know yourself when you were one you ignore everything and your mummy and daddy’s just trying to ruin your life and all this here carry-on. So it’s helping me out. It’s helping me to talk to my 14 year old”. (Interview 27, 38 years old)

Education and Training

Referrals to NIACRO and the Women’s Centres had increased the education and training of some of the women offenders interviewed. Such advancements were viewed positively and included computer courses, driving theory, Duke of Edinburgh, and EU programmes:

“I got [a certificate] for the GOALs course and then for the one, “Moving ON” and the EU programmes. That’s three at the minute and that computer one as well from NIACRO [...] I mean I couldn’t have switched a computer on, I was terrible with computers and then [NIACRO worker] got me into the computer programme and stuff and I started doing that and I own a laptop

now and I can actually go on it and work the thing". (Interview 18, 30 years old)

Employment

Three of the 37 women interviewed had gained employment while on their community sentences. While the women also related this change to their own motivation and determination, they believed that Inspire and NIACRO had provided them with the confidence and guidance to get work:

"And they got me back into full-time employment. They've helped me out an awful lot [...] I'm doing private nannying at the moment and then I have a part-time job, I went for an interview last Friday and I got it, that's just part-time nannying again and then I have a job interview again on this Wednesday at half 3 at Sainsbury's for Christmas, so I'll have 3 jobs coming up Christmas". (Interview 37, 25 years old)

"No, I went and done it myself [got job] but I think I got the confidence because of the GOALS course". (Interview 33, 38 years old)

Through their involvement with Inspire some women were now confident of a career path they would like to pursue. Two women offenders for example expressed an interest in counselling which is not an uncommon career choice for ex-offenders who want to give something back or protect others from following in their path (Maruna, 2000). They said:

"Yeah thinking of my future. They inspired me, you know, cause I want to drive and I'm determined but it's the financial bit that's I'm getting stuck with and I'm worried about the theory test. But apparently NIACRO can help you with the theory test. And I want to, I'll probably not get a job but even if it's voluntary, counselling teenagers. Cause that's where the problems always start. The age of 13 upwards...I just feel that there's not enough help for teenagers really out there". (Interview 7, 45 years old)

"Believe it or not, counselling. A few other people had said to me about it because of my experiences and all the rest, I've been through so much. I would like to do that, I'd like to help, if I could help or even stop one person from going down, or help them from the life that I've lived, the road I've went down it would be one in a million, it would be fantastic". (Interview 2, 43 years old)

Substance use

Many of the women offenders interviewed with histories of prescription drugs and alcohol use had ceased their substance use during their engagement with Inspire. Several of these women offenders explained their drug or alcohol use in relation to traumatic past experiences, early entry into substance misuse or as a way of coping with recent difficult experiences such as domestic violence, the breakdown of a relationship or the loss of a close friend or family member. For some, attending

Inspire provided them an outlet for their feelings or an opportunity to reflect on the impact of their behaviour. As two women explained:

“Well I was binge drinking and now I’m not even drinking, they helped that side too [...] it was just whenever I was talking about the impact that it has and what I’m doing whenever I was drinking cause I wasn’t. [...] I only drank like once, twice a week, twice a week probably, this was about 6 months ago and I was just drinking until I dropped”. (Interview 34, 30 years old)

“And since the day and hour I came here I haven’t had a problem with alcohol. I would drink once a month socially but not outside a home. With a friend, once a month... I taught myself to drink socially. If I’ve a problem I could have come here and wrote about it, I didn’t have to bury it in the bottle”. (Interview 8, 53 years old)

For some, the opportunity to get out of the house, meet with other people provided them a way out of their problematic drinking or drug use:

“It’s just learnt me an awful lot you know and the alcohol before I was on probation was really, really bad, I could be drinking maybe up to a litre bottle of vodka a day but now that I’ve been on probation I’m getting out more, I’ve cut down a hell of a lot so I have”. (Interview 5, 37 years old)

For others, learning about their triggers and alternative strategies for dealing with problems had helped the most. As one woman offender explained, Inspire had given her the strength and support to remain abstinent:

“I’ve no desire to drink but I know that something, something could happen to me one day and it could just hit me, come out of blue and it’s just all about keeping myself strong and doing those things that’ll help me stay strong to prevent that. And to identify when it could happen, to know situations that I would be most vulnerable”. (Interview 14, 40 years old)

Two women had relapsed while on their community sentences - one reported that the imprisonment of her abusive partner and his lack of contact with her had caused her to start drinking again:

“I don’t know why I drink in the first place cause you know the way people say they drink to help them forget about their problems? Drink doesn’t help me forget. It makes me think about them even more, so I don’t know why I’m drinking for but it makes me even more depressed and stuff. And I think, I don’t know, I used to say to [probation officer] that it was to do with boredom, why I drunk, but I don’t think that’s the reason. I don’t know why”. (Interview 36, 35 years old)

Another woman who had been stabilised on methadone had been increasingly using heroin again:

“At the minute I’m at a point that there’s too much to lose if I continue on doing what I’m doing so I really have to pull in the reins here and if I don’t I will suffer and it’ll be nobody to blame but myself”. (Interview 19, 32 years old)

Probation officers working with these kinds of offenders really need to be able to engage with more substance abuse agencies in order to improve delivery of lapse and relapse prevention work.

3.5 Assessing the cost benefit of Inspire

In general Inspire was seen as giving very good value for money, particularly compared to the funding given to similar projects in England and Scotland. For example, some stakeholders referred to the considerable expense spared in sending women to prison, but such comparisons are limited by the fact that only a small percentage of women offenders involved in Inspire would receive a custodial sentence. The issue of cost effectiveness is therefore conditioned by choosing appropriate points of comparison on one hand and by developing meaningful measures of outcomes on the other.

The most frequently used point of reference is the rate of reoffending and calculations of cost-benefit can be based on projected savings from desistance from crime. However, there are also a number of 'softer' outcomes that are significant outcomes and which may also impact on reoffending. That is increasing levels of self-confidence and reintegrating women with their families and communities may play a critical role in affecting levels of reoffending. As the Women's Aid worker explained:

"Value isn't always on a strict monetary basis. I certainly think that if you stop women going down the road of re-offending that is priceless. And what Inspire is doing is changing the lives not only of the women, but those women are not on their own. There is a knock on effect down the line...If they don't reoffend, if they get settled in the community and they can build links with their families, you know, that's the value of it, that is the price of it and it's certainly not just of monetary value." (Women's Aid Worker)

This quotation suggests that the cost-benefit of an intervention like Inspire extends far beyond reoffending and has implications for the families of the women concerned as well as the members of the community in which they live.

The process of assessing the cost benefit of Inspire is also complicated by the fact that many of the services that are linked into Inspire and that women access are not paid for by the Probation Board. In many cases these services are provided free of charge and their costs are covered by other statutory or voluntary bodies. In a sense this serves to make Inspire very cost-effective because it is drawing upon existing

provision, but at the same time it makes it difficult to calculate with any precision the overall costs of the services provided.

There is also an issue about future and projected costs. As the Deputy Director of Criminal Justice Services in DOJ pointed out, if Inspire is able to help women reduce or desist from crime and stabilise their lives then there may be considerable savings in the long term. Therefore calculations of costs and benefits must consider both short term costs and long term gains. As he put it:

“To some degree what we have to do is to turn the tap off. Now to me actually, Inspire is picking up women at an early stage of offending, just on the fringes of offending. The fact is if we can redirect these women earlier then we can get a long term gain.” (Deputy Director of Criminal Justice Services, Department of Justice)

Any savings, he suggests, can be redirected towards developing positive and constructive interventions.

It is of course more difficult to measure ‘softer’ outcomes such as increased confidence and personal well-being and while reoffending remains a major criteria of success there is also a recognition that there are gains to be made in terms of personal and emotional development. As the Inspire Operations Manager stated:

‘I’ve seen women’s lives change. I’ve seen women smile. One woman in particular had such a panic attack at the thought of coming into the Inspire room and then got up in front of the Minister of Justice and was able to have a joke...the confidence that has given her has been amazing.’ (Inspire Operations Manager)

Calculating the costs of Inspire

The Inspire Women’s Project is provided a grant of approximately £80,000 per year from the DOJ to cover the cost of premises rental, upkeep and overheads of the Inspire building. PBNI meets current staffing costs for the operations manager, four probation officers, a receptionist, and other probation related costs such as travel reimbursements which amounted to £228,257 in 2010/11. Through its Community Development fund PBNI also funds a number of the services to which women are referred including the NIACRO APAC worker based full time at Inspire (£25,000), the Prison Arts Foundation (£10,000) and a number of other projects, such as restorative justice and addiction services, which are available to both men and women offenders. Lankelly Chase currently funds the work of the Women’s Community Support Network, however PBNI will part fund this provision once external funding is withdrawn. PBNI also meets any budgetary shortfall that is accrued by the project in

relation to the general running costs associated with the project premises. In 2010/11 this amounted to a deficit of £27,000.

As has been identified, it is difficult to estimate the cost of delivering the Inspire Women's Project in full as many of the costs of the project have been met by PBNI as part of its mainstream delivery and a number of other organisations provide support for women offenders as part of their mainstream provision. As all women offenders who attend Inspire would be supervised by probation should the Inspire Women's Project not exist, there is an argument that the only true cost is the additional funding of £80,000 provided by the DOJ and the £27,000 budget deficit incurred by PBNI – a total of £107,000 per year. Using this as a basis for an examination of cost, the total additional cost of running the service between 27 October 2008 and July 2010 was approximately £187,250. Based on data provided by PBNI, a total of 309 women offenders were in contact with the service during this time. This means that Inspire costs approximately £606 per women offender in addition to mainstream probation provision.

Calculating the benefits of Inspire

The evaluation intended to use both PBNI ACE Scores and PSNI recorded crime data to establish the outcomes for women offenders and therefore the benefits of the provision of the service. However, at the time of the evaluation, PSNI data was not available and the findings from the examination of PBNI ACE Scores were not able to be compared to a control group⁴⁴. It was not possible therefore to provide a complete examination of the cost benefits of the project in this report.

⁴⁴ Further information is provided in Appendix 1.

In order that such a calculation could be completed more detail about the outcomes for individual women offenders is required. As ACE Scores may not be sufficiently sensitive for this purpose it is recommended that an examination of reoffending data is used as a proxy measure that can provide fairly rapid results. For example, a recent evaluation of the cost-benefits of the 218 Service in Glasgow conducted by the authors (Easton and Matthews, 2010) utilised recorded crime data to establish changes in the rates of offending for a cohort of women who accessed the 218 Service.

Alternatively, Inspire could develop their own outcome measures which are sensitive enough to track important changes for women offenders and which would therefore aid the effective monitoring and evaluation of progress for each of the women engaged with the service. This approach however, is unlikely to yield results in the immediate future as tools would need to be designed, tested and implemented and data gathered over a sufficient period.

While it has not been possible to base an examination of the cost benefits of the service on the outcomes for women offenders who have accessed the service, this does not mean that the service is without benefit for women offenders, their families and children or indeed the wider community. These suggestions are supported by a recent report by the new economic foundation titled 'Unlocking Value' which was published in 2008. The report indicated that for every £1 spent on community programmes for women offenders £14 was saved over a ten year period when the wider impact of women's offending was taken into consideration (New Economics Foundation, 2008). As the authors argue, community focussed intervention such as that provided by Inspire have a broader and more sustainable impact than is often acknowledged.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The pilot of the Inspire Women's Project in Belfast has provided an opportunity to develop and test a number of different approaches for women offenders in Northern Ireland. The Project has developed an innovative and dynamic model of provision for women offenders and has made significant progress towards achieving its core aims. It has been particularly successful in the creation of a diverse and growing network of partner organisations through which a range of excellent support is provided at low cost to the statutory sector. The Inspire Women's Project is viewed highly by women offenders, probation officers, partner organisations and policy makers. However, as the Project remains in its early stages, a number of limitations and areas for development have also been identified. These are discussed in further detail below and suggestions are made for the further development of community based work with women offenders in Northern Ireland.

4.1 Limitations of the evaluation

Two fundamental aims of the women's offending strategy (DOJ, 2010)⁴⁵ are providing alternatives to prosecution and custody and providing gender specific community supervision and interventions. Formal evaluation is essential in providing evidence to sentencers that Inspire is a robust community alternative for women offenders and therefore encourage a reduction in the use of custodial sentences which are known to be expensive and detrimental for many women. In order to effectively measure the impact of Inspire on women's offending there is a need to improve data sharing arrangements between PBNI and PSNI to allow for the regular provision of data from which reoffending can be monitored effectively. While this information may be shared routinely between PBNI and PSNI for other reasons it was not available to this evaluation which suggests arrangements need to be put in place to ensure future evaluation efforts obtain robust results. Measures of reoffending should adopt a methodology similar to that used for the evaluation of the 218 Service in Glasgow (Easton and Matthews, 2010) and one which can measure changes in the frequency and gravity of reoffending to establish degrees of change among women offenders.

⁴⁵ DOJ (2010a) *Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour 2010-2013*, Belfast: Department of Justice.

As has been identified (see section 4.2 and recommendation three below), there is also a need to improve the assessment and data collection process within Inspire in order to effectively measure individual change. It would also be useful for PBNI to construct a suitable comparison group of women offenders who were not in contact with Inspire from which comparisons of ACE Scores and rates of compliance and breach can be drawn.

Recommendation

1. It is recommended that data about outcomes (particularly re-offending) be identified and analysed as matter of priority. To support this process it is recommended that an evaluation steering group including members of PBNI and DOJ be established. This group should identify the data required; establish a comparison cohort; make formal information sharing arrangements; and establish responsibility for data analysis.

4.2 A woman-centred approach

The Inspire Women's Project has taken significant, positive and innovative steps towards the recommendations of Baroness Corston (2007) and to the delivery of the strategic objectives outlined in the Northern Ireland Strategy to Manage Women Offenders (DOJ, 2010). The design and delivery of the service shows clearly that there is co-ordinated and sustainable commitment within Northern Ireland to the recommendation made by Corston that differential provision may be required to achieve equality of outcomes for women offenders.

Since opening on 27 October 2008 the Inspire Women's Project has drawn on the existing evidence about women offenders and begun tailoring programmes and practices to meet their unique and complex needs. A focus of this work, and where it has perhaps made the most impact, has been on developing the confidence and self-esteem of women offenders to encourage them to create their own supportive networks within the wide range of community provision that is available in Northern Ireland. Women who attend the Inspire Women's Project are treated with a non-judgemental and respectful attitude; workers demonstrate flexibility in their approach to women offenders' needs; a wide range of gender specific and relevant programmes and support has been sourced and co-ordinated; and women offenders are encouraged to participate in the development of their own workplans and are given choice and control over voluntary referrals. Central to the approach at Inspire is

the need to encourage women offenders to develop self-sufficiency and take responsibility for their lives in order to empower them and prevent dependence on the ongoing support of the Project. This approach involves clear communication with women offenders about the conditions of their order, the requirements in relation to engagement and if necessary, the reasons for their return to court. The findings from the evaluation provide evidence that elements such as these are viewed positively and are integral in securing women's trust and ongoing engagement with the service.

While the Inspire Women's Project has made significant progress in relation to probation practice with women offenders, there is a need to establish more explicitly what this 'woman-centred' approach involves, including the skills and knowledge required to effectively work with women offenders in the community and how this principle is translated into practice. For example, while a positive woman-centred approach exists within Inspire, the key elements of this practice need to be identified in order that good practice can be extended to women offenders across Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, as has been identified in the women's offending strategy (DOJa, 2010) there is a need to develop gender specific assessment processes and monitoring and evaluation frameworks in order to gather information about women offenders as the current methods have been developed and tested on predominantly male offenders and are not considered sufficient in identifying change among women (see Appendix 1 for further detail).

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project formally document the key principles of a woman centred approach in order that others working with women offenders benefit from the expertise that has been developed within the project.

3. It is recommended that Inspire Women's Project work towards the development of gender-specific assessment tools that are better able to capture changes in the criminogenic needs of women offenders. Such tools should then be used to more accurately measure the impact of Inspire on women offenders.

4.3 Addressing offending behaviour

The women-specific approach adopted at Inspire has encouraged the participation and engagement of many women offenders. Interviews with women offenders found that the women-centred approach had encouraged women offenders to open up to their probation officer and other workers and discuss issues relating to their underlying needs and offending behaviour. While there was a significant reduction in the risk of reoffending of the 309 women offenders in contact with the service up to 31 July 2010, the ACE Scores on which this finding is based may not be a sufficiently sensitive tool when working with women offenders. It was also not possible to establish how this reduction differed from women offenders not in contact with Inspire as the equivalent data for a suitable control group was not available at the time of writing. A more accurate comparison may have been possible using PSNI reoffending data for the cohort and comparison group, however this data was not provided in sufficient time for the evaluation to report on these findings.

The evaluation did however, highlight a number of positive outcomes of engagement with Inspire among a sample of women offenders who were interviewed. There were improvements for example in relation to self reported reoffending and attitudes towards offending behaviour. The majority of women offenders interviewed also experienced significant improvements to their self-esteem and confidence which enabled them to engage constructively in the social world and prevented their returning to the conditions which contributed to their offending in the first place. A number of other improvements were observed, for example, improvements to women offenders' relationships, their substance misuse, levels of self control and emotional management.

A key element of the approach taken by the Inspire Women's Project is one that ensures continuity of programmes and support between prison, probation and the community. This is essential in the development of sustainable links for women offenders to support them in the resettlement and rehabilitation and then as they reintegrate into the community. As women offenders often experience a lack of confidence in accessing support services such links are important in developing familiarity with available support in order that women offenders feel able to access this without probation involvement.

While Inspire is providing a comprehensive service to many women offenders there are several groups who are not benefitting fully from the work of the project. Consideration could be given to extending the project's remit to provide support and links for young women, those at risk of offending, and first time or low level offenders who are not required to engage with probation, without encouraging the 'up-tariffing' offenders at court in order to obtain appropriate support (Easton et al, 2010). Some women offenders may also benefit from the ongoing intensive support provided by Inspire beyond the duration of their community sentence. There is also a need to improve links into support for women offenders who live outside Belfast and do not have access to the vast network of support services that have been created.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that the resources and approach developed at Inspire are extended to other groups of women offenders and women offenders whose community sentences have expired through the creation of a new non PBNI post based at Inspire.

5. It is recommended that Inspire work towards improving provision for women offenders outside the pilot area.

4.4 Addressing complex needs

The Inspire Women's Project has managed to develop a wide network of partner agencies to provide ongoing support for women offenders within the community around specific support needs. There are however a number of specific areas where further attention could be focused. These include improving access to meaningful education and employment opportunities, creating a pathway to rapidly access appropriate accommodation and housing, and developing improved responses for substance misusing women offenders, including for example, gender specific provision, where women involved with substance misusing or controlling partners can access support.

There have also been some difficulties identified in engaging women with complex needs, particularly those with mental health problems, past or current experiences of violence, substance misuse issues or any combination of these. Developing stronger links with statutory and voluntary provision for these groups might be useful in

deepening engagement and securing improved outcomes for those with complex needs.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project Working Group works towards establishing formal links with providers of accommodation and housing and meaningful education and training opportunities for women offenders.

7. It is recommended that the Inspire Women's Project Working Group works towards establishing formal links with services supporting women with complex mental health needs, past or present experiences of violence, substance misuse or combinations of these needs.

4.5 Provision of a holistic multi-agency response utilising a network of support agencies

A key strength of the Inspire Women's Project is the wide range of agencies and support networks which have been developed to meet the needs of women offenders. Such a diverse and extensive network maximises the opportunities and provision available to women offenders and supports value for money delivery that meets both the needs of women offenders and the criminal justice system, particularly during a period of reduced public spending. This model of provision is vastly different to that available in England and Wales and benefits significantly from the strength of women's and community services in Northern Ireland.

Since the outset of the project a total of 421 referrals for external support have been made to a wide range of services. Women offenders reported that the range of individual and group programmes to which they could be referred had a positive impact on their motivation to engage with Inspire, although some women felt uncomfortable engaging with voluntary sector organisations for a number of reasons and did not take up referrals when they were offered.

Arguably, such partnerships between the voluntary and statutory sector prove beneficial to both parties, with the statutory sector benefitting from the independent status, experience and community based delivery of the voluntary sector, while the voluntary sector benefits from capacity building in relation to the skills, knowledge and practices that are well-established within the statutory sector. Several examples

of such mutual benefits have been seen during the evaluation of Inspire and there has been significant cooperation within key partnerships.

There is however, a need to develop links for women offenders living outside the Greater Belfast area and for improved links with substance misuse, housing and accommodation and education and training providers to ensure rapid access to meaningful support for women offenders. There is also a need to formalise relationships with organisations such as Barnardo's, FASA, and the Prison Arts Foundation who were not part of the original network in order that clear arrangements for information sharing, delivery, processes and practices can be established. There is some concern that the significant cuts to funding being experienced by the voluntary sector might pose a risk to the model of delivery that has been successfully established through Inspire.

Recommendations

8. It is recommended that voluntary sector staff delivering programmes and support who are not experienced in working with substance misusing women offenders are given training and support in order that they are able to effectively identify and manage such issues.

9. It is recommended that an assessment of the likely impacts of funding cuts is made to ensure continuity of provision for women offenders involved with Inspire.

4.6 Supporting women offender's desistance and reintegration

The Inspire Women's Project has made important impacts on women offenders across a number of areas such as working with women offender's shame, self confidence and self esteem, levels of empowerment, self responsibility and independence from statutory interventions. While there is significant evidence from interviews with women offenders and stakeholders about the support being given to women offenders in relation to their desistance and reintegration it has proven difficult during this evaluation to establish in quantitative terms the degree of improvement in comparison to other provision. This is unsurprising as while there has been an increase in awareness of the distinctive and complex vulnerability and underlying needs of women offenders as they enter and progress through the criminal justice system (Eaton, 1993; Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Corston, 2007;

Worrall and Gough, 2008), surprisingly little is known about ‘what works’ in relation to this group. In a recent review of interventions aimed at reducing the reoffending of female offenders Lart et al (2008) suggest that this is for two reasons, firstly the research has not been undertaken and secondly ‘*because what research has been done is not of sufficient quality to yield robust data for policy*’ often due to the low numbers of women offenders to which each intervention applies.

Even with a sufficient number of women offenders within a cohort, problems arise within evaluations for a number of reasons. Recent evaluations of ‘women specific’ programmes in England and Wales and Scotland have further highlighted some of the difficulties in examining gender specific interventions. For example, the evaluation of the 218 Service in Glasgow experienced problems obtaining access to data from which outcomes could be accurately measured (Loucks et al, 2006; Easton and Matthews, 2010) and the ongoing evaluation of Together Women in England (Hedderman, 2008) faced challenges in developing an appropriate model of change.

Recommendations

10. It is recommended that Inspire continue development of its women-centered approach to women’s offending and that where possible ongoing evaluation and documentation of this approach is undertaken.

4.7 Promising practice with women offenders in Northern Ireland

Two recent reports have been published by NIO which document effective approaches to reduce crime in general and to address women’s offending in particular (NIO, 2009⁴⁶; NIO, 2010). In addition to these documents, the evaluation of the Inspire Women’s Project has established a number of areas of promising practice in relation to women offenders in Northern Ireland⁴⁷:

- Women-only provision and facilities.
- Links with a wide range of community provision with which women offenders can establish short, medium and long term support.
- Non-judgemental and respectful staff attitudes.

⁴⁶ NIO (2009b) Reducing Offending: A Critical Review of the International Research Evidence, Belfast: Northern Ireland Office.

⁴⁷ Although further evaluation of the cost benefits of such approaches is necessary to establish value for money.

- Providing time and space for women offenders to be able to open up and discuss often complex and emotional matters.
- Clear communication about the requirements of engagement, consequences of non-compliance and expectations from probation officers and other workers.
- Flexibility in negotiating appointments to take into consideration factors such as childcare and other caring responsibilities; work, education and training commitments; other appointments with support agencies; and women's mental and physical health.
- Support in attending key appointments e.g. benefits and housing appointments, court hearings.
- Support in attending new services for the first time.
- Support negotiating with key agencies about provision e.g. mental health teams, doctors, social workers.
- Work focussing on self-esteem, confidence and the management of shame.
- Support with travel and other expenses that might prevent attendance or engagement.
- Continuity in support between prison, probation and the community.
- Provision of a structured programme of creative and other activities.
- Effective partnerships to allow continuity of delivery, clarity around information sharing, and standardised processes and procedures that are clear to women offenders.
- Development of women-specific assessment tools and outcome evaluation framework

4.8 Future research

Future research should centre on establishing outcomes for women offenders attending Inspire from which a more robust calculation of the cost / benefits of the project could be established. Research should focus on five key strands:

- Measurement of formal rates of reoffending through the examination of PSNI reoffending (recorded crime) data using a methodology similar to that used to evaluate the 218 Service in Glasgow (Easton and Matthews, 2010).
- Measurement of non-reoffending outcomes through the development of appropriate tools and outcome measures and the collection of data over a two year (or longer) period.

- The use of reoffending and non-reoffending outcome data to develop a robust estimate of the cost benefits of delivery.
- The development of a robust comparison group to establish differences in the rates of breach, non-compliance, ACE Scores and re-offending between women offenders attending Inspire and those who receive regular probation supervision.
- Longitudinal research which examines the impact of engaging with gender specific services such as Inspire over the course of a woman offender's life and the way in which this supports desistance for women.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

A1.1 Research aims

The central aim of the evaluation was to examine the effectiveness of the Inspire Women's Project Pilot in relation to its key objectives:

- To provide a woman-centred approach for women offenders;
- To provide a framework in which women offenders can address offending behaviour;
- To provide a framework in which women offenders can address their complex needs;
- To establish a network of agencies that can provide a holistic multi-agency response for women offenders;
- To enable women offenders to desist from crime and reintegrate into society.

A1.2 Research questions

To examine these issues a number of research questions were explored:

- What have been the routes of referral to the Project?
- How does the Inspire Women's Project work with offenders referred from different sources, with different underlying needs and backgrounds?
- What strengths and good practice can be observed in the operation of the Inspire Women's Project?
- What barriers exist in the effective operation of the Inspire Women's Project?
- How could the effectiveness of the Inspire Women's Project be improved?
- What have been the impacts of the Inspire Women's Project service on the intensity and frequency of reoffending?
- What impact has involvement in the Inspire Women's Project had on the attitudes to offending amongst women offenders?
- What are the outcomes for women who engage compared to those who haven't engaged in terms of:
 - Rates of reoffending?
 - Degree of resettlement, stabilisation, employment, education and so on?
 - Engagement with mainstream services?
 - Other outcomes e.g. motivation, self-responsibility, confidence, improved relationships with family and local support networks, use of mainstream services?

- How has the Inspire Women’s Project contributed to these outcomes and worked to tackle the underlying causes of offending behaviour?
- What are the costs incurred by the Inspire Women’s Project and the value of the benefits attributable to the service?
- Does the provision of the Inspire Women’s Project represent good value for money?
- What are the key areas of good practice which could be disseminated to other areas?

A1.3 Research strategy

The evaluation involved elements of process and outcome evaluation, therefore a mixed methodological approach was adopted which combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The data used for each element of the evaluation is explained further below.

Process evaluation

Quantitative data

PBNI data was provided for the entire sample of 309 women who accessed the service between 27 October 2008 and 31 July 2010. This data included demographic data, assessment and ACE scores, information about underlying needs and offending histories. Further detail about women offenders’ living arrangements, dependent children, mental health and substance misuse was provided for 34 of the 37 interviewees. Of the three missing cases, two of the interviews with women offenders were lost as the result of a technical failure, and were therefore unable to be identified within the records, and one woman offender had been on probation but was not in contact with Inspire.

Qualitative data

Thirty seven in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with women offenders in contact with the Inspire Women’s Project. Of the 37 women offenders interviewed, 36 were accessed directly through Inspire. One interview was conducted with a women offender who had been on probation but had not attended Inspire⁴⁸. Each of the interviews was conducted face to face using an interview schedule agreed in advance with DOJ⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ This woman offender was accessed through support services in the wider community.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 2 for research instruments.

Women offenders in the interview sample were broadly representative of the entire cohort of women offenders in contact with Inspire. Further information about the women offenders interviewed including mental health or substance misuse issues and the number of dependent children was provided by PBNI.

In-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 16 key stakeholders from the following organisations:

- PBNI
- Ash House Women's Prison
- NIACRO
- Department of Justice
- Prison Arts Foundation
- Women's Support Network
- Northern Ireland Prison Service
- PBNI, Duke of Edinburgh Endeavour Award Scheme
- FASA
- CJINI
- Restorative Adult Practitioner
- Women's Aid
- Barnardo's.

Outcome evaluation

ACE Scores

ACE (Assessment, Case Recording, and Evaluation) Scores were used to evaluate changes in outcomes for women offenders. ACE is an assessment instrument widely used by probation services to gather information about a range of 11 criminogenic and non-criminogenic needs including: accommodation, employment and education, family, finances, drug abuse and attitudes towards crime. Scores are calculated across these components to create a score out of 99 (Raynor et al, 2001)⁵⁰. ACE was designed to facilitate the tracking of an offender's progress through repeated administration (McIvor, 2006).

⁵⁰ Following a review of ACE in Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland ACE scores are based on 12 components and a score out of 117.

Two ACE Scores were employed to monitor women offender's change – the score closest to their start date with probation and their most recent score. The average difference between the two scores was calculated and used as a measure of the impact of Inspire on women offenders. Although this measure of change is available it was not possible to compare this with the same outcomes for a similar cohort of women offenders as the majority of women offenders in the Belfast area have been referred to Inspire.

While attempts were made to construct a suitable comparison group, this proved difficult as the low number of women offenders in Northern Ireland meant that the only possible comparison groups were either a retrospective sample from Belfast or a contemporaneous group drawn from rural areas in Northern Ireland. It was agreed that a contemporaneous sample was preferable; however, examination of the risk and offending profiles of women from rural areas showed that they were a lower risk than those in Belfast and hence did not provide a suitable match. As extensive work would have been required by PBNI to construct a stratified or weighted sample, it was not possible within the timeframe of the evaluation to produce a suitable comparison sample.

ACE Scores were chosen as a method of evaluating the outcomes of involvement in Inspire as they were a readily available source of information about change; however, there are a number of limitations in their application. An evaluation of ACE conducted by Peter Raynor and colleagues in 2000 showed that ACE was a reliable tool which successfully predicted the likelihood of reconviction (Raynor et al, 2000). The tools however, were also acknowledged to be sensitive to effects of 'disclosure' where subsequent repeat assessments and increased contact with an offender may have the effect of looking like a lack of progress rather than an adjusted assessment of risk. Concerns have been raised about the suitability of such assessment tools in relation to particular groups of offenders (Gibbs,1999; Aye Maung and Hammond, 2002). One study in particular suggested that generic tools were less useful for women offenders (McIvor and Kemshall, 2002). As Shaw and Hannah-Moffatt (2000; 2004) have argued, assessment tools are highly gendered due to the fact that the factors they incorporate are based mainly on studies of men and haven't yet developed sufficiently to take into consideration the different 'criminogenic needs' of women (Hedderman, 2004).

In order to counter some of these limitations, it was intended that the outcome evaluation using ACE Scores be complemented with an examination of the nature and extent of reoffending based on police recorded crime data (Easton and Matthews, 2010). This data was to be compared with the same data for the rural comparison group, however, at the time of the evaluation neither recorded crime data from PSNI or a suitable comparison group from PBNI were available. It is suggested that access to such data be secured in time for any future evaluations of the service.

The outcome evaluation is therefore weakened by three factors a) the limitations of ACE data; b) the lack of a comparison group and c) the lack of police recorded crime data from which a stronger assessment of outcomes may have been established. Other researchers evaluating interventions for women offenders have faced similar difficulties in determining outcomes (Hedderman et al, forthcoming; Hedderman et al, 2008; Loucks et al, 2006). Recommendations have therefore been made to improve future outcome evaluation of Inspire in the body of the report.

Appendix 2: Further information about Inspire Women's Project

A2.1 Inspire Women's Project Working Group

The Inspire Working Group was established in 2008 to develop the pilot women's project. The Working Group continues to meet and enables the DOJ, and its partners PBNI and NIPS to discuss policy issues such as the "Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland: A Strategy to Manage Women Offenders and Those Vulnerable to Offending Behaviour", of which Inspire is an element. Any operational issues relating to Inspire are also discussed. The Inspire Women's Project Manager prepares a monthly "Manager's Report" which includes details of any presentations or meetings that have taken place in relation to Inspire; updates on staffing levels and how partnerships, such as the Women's Community Support Programme are developing; and notes the programmes currently available for Inspire clients. A breakdown of clients by age and area is also provided including information about how many women are in hostel accommodation and the number or breaches to court. A finance update, including a breakdown or expenditure for the financial year, is also provided monthly.

A2.2 Inspire Women's Project Reference Group

In order to enhance the expertise of the Inspire Women's Project Working Group's a Reference Group was formed. This group included around six representatives from Women's Centres in other parts of the UK and Ireland and meets with the Working Group two or three times a year. The Reference Group was intended to:

- Provide advice based on experience from Women's Centres in other parts of the UK and Ireland which will be considered by the Inspire Women's Project Working Group;
- Focus on the development needs of the Inspire Women's Project
- Provide an opportunity to freely exchange views based on different experiences and expertise.
- Meet two or three times each year for the duration of the pilot project.

A2.3 Timeline of the development of the Inspire Women's Project

July 2008

Inspire Manager transferred to PBNI Women's Centre project part-time

July 2008- Oct 2008

Site visits to potential premises for Inspire Women's Project
Discussion with Prison Arts Foundation re Creative Arts Programme
Appointment of three Probation Officers
Transfer of orders within Greater Belfast teams agreed

October 2008

PBNI Women's Centre became operational based at the Programme Delivery Unit in Great Patrick Street.

December 2008

Transfer of probation supervision orders for women offenders to the Women's Centre completed

January 2009

First meeting Pilot Women's Project Reference Group
First meeting of Pilot Women's Project and Women's Support Network (WSN)

February 2009

Launch of the consultation: 'Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders in Northern Ireland'
Inspire Women's Project name agreed

April 2009

Consultation events held re: Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders
Presentations to PBNI staff
PBNI agreed funding for NIACRO APAC worker

March 2009

Discussions commenced between WSN/NIACRO regarding partnership project between three agencies

May 2009

Role of Executive Officer agreed

June 2009

Meeting held with North and West Social Services, Early Year's team Re: Registration of Child care provision facilities

Second meeting of the Reference Group
PBNI draft Programme options paper including a scoping exercise of appropriate programmes

July 2009

APAC worker in post
Consultation event held re Draft Strategy for the Management of Women Offenders

Volunteer placement commenced
Staffing increased to four Probation Officers – new officer transfers to team
Funding application to Lankelly Chase Foundation completed
Ongoing discussion with women's centres

August 2009

Probation staff attend ASSIST (suicide awareness) training

September 2009

Lease agreements signed for 72 North Street
Ongoing and continued discussions within PBNI as to layout and refurbishment of premises
Refurbishments commenced due to be completed in December 2009
Lankelly Chase Foundations funding agreed – partnership between PBNI, NIACRO, and Women's Support Network agreed with three women's centres, Windsor, Falls and Shankill involved in pilot.
Probation Service Officer took up post (6 month contract)
Second volunteer clearance secured and commenced training

October 2009

PBNI Programme Options paper completed and present to Inspire Working Group
Think first Programme commenced
Introduction of Art therapy Programme - staff trained and work commenced with individual women
Anger Management programme delivered by Inspire staff commenced in Ash house, Hydebank Prison.

November 2009

Anger Management programme commenced
Stakeholder days for reviewing and planning – included members from NIO, NIPS, PBNI
Ongoing discussions and planning with PBNI regarding refurbishment
Second programme commenced in Downpatrick –pilot project to run till March 2010.

December 2009

Move to Inspire premises
Staff training - Assist
Presentations to key organisations

January 2010

Official opening of the Inspire Women's Project
Assessments for Pre-Sentence Reports for women offenders completed within Inspire offices
Third meeting of the Inspire Reference Group
Ongoing discussion regarding the inclusion of Newtownabbey, Carrick Fergus and Larne areas
Meeting with Criminal Justice Department Northern Ireland Office re Pilot Conditional Cautions Scheme
Meeting with NIPS regarding Pilot for Resettlement of Women offenders – pilot to commence in February 2010
Meeting with Goals UK re training
Meeting with Community Restorative Justice NI and Alternatives re provision of programmes

Finance Management Programme —Department of Trade and Industry funded NIACRO post commenced within Inspire – programme provision for 3 months.

February 2010

Visit by Baroness Scotland, Attorney General
Pilot for Resettlement of Women Offenders commenced
Goals UK training ongoing for Inspire staff

March 2010

Meeting with local accommodation services
Visit by Prison Ombudsman
Visit by Equality Commissioner for Northern Ireland

April 2010

Visit by Minister of Justice
Anger management programme completed
Barnardo's Parenting programme commenced
Duke of Edinburgh programme – ongoing links with PBNI
LankellyChase Foundation confirm funding for 2010/11 for Women's Community Support Project
PBNI confirm funding for 2010/11 Prison Arts Foundation programme – SLA completed
PBNI confirm funding for 2010/11 NIACRO APAC worker – SLA completed
FASA / React / New Life Counselling / Roghanna / NICAS CRJNI / Alternatives 2010/11 programme – SLA completed

May 2010

Goals UK training completed for staff
Volunteer placement completed

June 2010

Meeting with Downpatrick Regeneration Programme regarding accessing services for women offenders in Downpatrick
Registration for Crèche provision approved by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
Presentation to Women's Policy Team, Ministry of Justice
Meeting with Lankelly Chase Foundation and presentation of report on the Women Community Support Project
Individual Anger management programme commenced

July 2010

Presentation to PBNI Corporate Planning Event
Participation in BBC documentary about the work of PBNI
Summer Art Workshop commenced funded by the Prison Arts Foundation
Management Group commenced
Anger Management programme commenced

August 2010

PBNI *Admissions Procedures for Children* revised
Meeting with PBNI communications team re Communication strategy
Women's Support Network continues with Out and About Taster Programme, Building Good Relations and Team Building Through Sport and Physical Activity. Sponsored by Women in Sport and Physical Activity (WISPA)

September 2010

Attendance at domestic violence and employability workshops and Women's Aid conference
Think First programme commenced
Women's Community Support Network visit to Dochas Prison, Dublin

Appendix 3: Research instruments

Service user information sheet

Research about the INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast

What is the research about?

London South Bank University are doing some research for the Statistics and Research Branch of the Department of Justice. The research aims to examine the effectiveness of the INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast. Part of the research is to interview women who have had experience of working with the INSPIRE Project either now or in the past.

What we want to know?

We would like to give you a chance to offer us your views about the Project. We would like to know:

- How you think INSPIRE currently works?
- About your experience of INSPIRE?
- How INSPIRE has had an influence on your offending; behaviour; attitude; substance use; personal, social or family circumstances?
- What you think the strengths of INSPIRE are?
- What you think the weaknesses of INSPIRE are?

We would like to talk to you about your experiences and to look at data and information held about you by INSPIRE, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Police.

Before we begin the research there are a few things that we would like to explain to you.

- Anything you say to us during the research will be completely anonymous (you will not be able to be identified and your name will not be attached to any of your information).

- Nothing you say personally will be shown to INSPIRE or the police. The only exception would be if we thought you or someone else was at immediate risk of harm, although, we would discuss this with you before we shared any information with anyone else.
- We will make sure you cannot be identified in any way by your involvement in this research.
- You can stop the interview at any time, you don't have to answer a question if you don't want to and you can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.
- The information you give us will only be used for the research and will not be used to punish anyone.
- You can ask us any questions at any time but we are not trained to offer you counselling. If you would like any help we will need to find a member of staff for you.

Today I have spoken to:

INSERT RESEARCHER DETAILS

For general enquiries about the research I can contact:

Helen Easton

Senior Research Fellow

Crime Reduction and Community Safety Research Group

London South Bank University

Statement of Understanding for women participating in research to examine the effectiveness of the INSPIRE Women's Project

DATE:

INTERVIEWER:

INTERVIEW NUMBER:

[All statements are to be read out loud by the researcher. Additional explanations will be given if needed. The researcher may ask the interviewee questions to make sure that he or she understands the nature and purpose of the research, the confidentiality of the information, and the right of the interviewee to withdraw at any time. A full signature and printed name is required at the end to indicate full and informed consent to participate. The form will then be kept by London South Bank University for one year. The interviewee's name will not be recorded on the questionnaire or computer by the researcher and will be kept separate from any other information on each participant.]

- I have just read / been read the information sheet and understand that this research project is to examine the effectiveness of the INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast.
- I understand that I am not being given any advice, counselling or treatment during this interview.
- I understand that nothing I say will be shown to the women's centre, the police or the Probation Board. The only exception would be if someone was at risk of immediate harm and then the interviewer would discuss this with me first.
- I am aware that the researchers will make sure I cannot be identified in any way by my involvement in the research.
- I understand that I can stop the interview at any point for any reason if I do not want to continue.

- I can also choose not to answer any questions or to ask for the recording device to be switched off at any time.
- I understand that the researchers would like to look at data held about me by INSPIRE, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Police. I give the researchers permission to do this provided the information used remains anonymous and confidential.

I give my full consent to participate in this study.

Full signature

.....

Print name

.....

Would you be prepared to participate in a follow up interview in the future? YES/NO.

Service User Interview Schedule

Evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project

Interview Date

Interviewer

Interview Number

Just to remind you, I'm working for London South Bank University who are doing some research on the INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast. Because you've been involved with the project we'd like to ask you about your experiences.

I would like to ask your permission to record the interview so that I can listen to your comments again and maybe use some of them in a report. Your name will never be attached to the recording or interview and any quotes we use will not contain any information that will identify you. Nothing you say will be shown to the INSPIRE women's project, the police or the Probation Board. The university will make sure you cannot be identified in any way by your involvement in the research.

Do you have any questions?

About You

Age last birthday		
Current postcode		
What type of accommodation do you currently live in?	Hostel Temporary accommodation Rented from the council Privately rented My own home	Someone else's home – partner Someone else's home – parent Someone else's home – friend Someone else's home – other (please specify) Other (please specify)
Ethnicity	White Irish traveller Mixed Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Other Asian	Black Caribbean Black African Other Black Chinese Other Not stated
Are you...?	Single In a long term relationship - living together In a long term relationship - not living together	Married Separated Divorced Widowed

Do you have children?	Yes / No Yes – How many are living with you? Yes – How many are living with someone else?	
How many and what are their ages and gender?	Number of boys Number of girls	Age(s) Age(s)
Do your children currently live with you or with someone else?	With me In care With someone else	Comments
If someone else who do they live with?		
How often do you use alcohol?	Never Occasionally Once a week More than once a week Daily	
Which drugs do you currently use?	No drugs Heroin – smoked / injected Crack cocaine Powdered cocaine Amphetamines Ecstasy Cannabis Methadone (prescribed) Methadone (un-prescribed) Benzodiazepines (prescribed) Benzodiazepines (un-prescribed) Other (please list):	Comments
How often / how much do you use?		
At what age did you begin to use illicit drugs?		
How would you describe your family history?	Very good Good Reasonable Difficult Traumatic	Comments
Have you ever experienced the following?	Physical abuse Emotional abuse Verbal abuse Sexual abuse All of these	If you experienced any of these who was the perpetrator?

Background

- Can you tell me a little about your offending history?
- How did that lead to your becoming involved with INSPIRE? (PROBE: What sort of offences (i.e. theft/violence/drugs), when, what sort of orders and interventions, any periods of imprisonment etc).
- How were you referred? Through court or prison?

Information

- What information was given to you about INSPIRE before you came here?
- Who gave you that information?
- Did you understand the information you were being given? Why / why not?
- Did you receive any explanation of the information? If so from whom?
- What was your understanding of the project at that stage?
- Did you have any questions about it? If so can you remember what they were?
- How accurate do you think that information was?
- What else would you have liked to know?

Opinion about INSPIRE

- How did you feel about your initial referral to INSPIRE before you had come to the project? Why?
- What were your first impressions of the INSPIRE project when you arrived?
- How has your opinion towards INSPIRE changed?
- How is the project different from your initial expectations?
- How has INSPIRE compared to any previous experiences of probation?

Support offered within the project

- What sort of support are you given at INSPIRE?
- What sort of issues have the project provided help with?
- What forms support do you most value? Why?
- What has been most helpful about INSPIRE? Why? How have they helped you?
- What do you most dislike about INSPIRE? Why?
- What do you think could be done to improve the Project?
- Have you ever experienced any problems at INSPIRE? What were they and how were they resolved?
- How would you describe your relationship with your Probation Officer?
- How would you describe your relationship with other staff at INSPIRE?

Support offered outside the project

- What external support have you been offered through INSPIRE?
- Have you accessed all the services suggested to you?
- Which ones have you accessed? Why?
- Which ones haven't you accessed? Why?
- What do you think of the services you have used so far?
- Would you have accessed these services without INSPIRE? If not why not? If yes, how did you know about them?
- Do you have access to similar services elsewhere?
- If yes, where? And how do they compare?

Making changes

- How do you think coming to INSPIRE has affected the following aspects of your life?

Area of Need	Potential Outcomes (prompts)
Housing / Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your living accommodation like? • In settled and safe accommodation? • Has it changed? • Moved from unsafe to safe accommodation • Homeless to accommodated
Education, training & employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gained employment • Increased capacity to work (80% attendance at courses) • Entry/completion of education or training
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced debt • Management of debt (i.e. setting up of plan to reduce debt) • Increased income (including accessing of benefits)
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered with GP • Referral to and maintenance of contact with another agency • Improvement in mental health
Parenting and relationships/ preventing family breakdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of children received into and out of care • Child not on child protection register • Relationship with partner / family improved?
Physical health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered with GP/dentist • Reduced incapacity benefit
Substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-report re: frequency and level of use • Reduced seriousness (drug class) • Management of problem • Referral to and maintenance of contact with another agency • Drug testing
Domestic and sexual violence/ personal safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-report re frequency and severity • Move to independent living

Life skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-esteem • Increased confidence
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For all of these probe:

- How has this aspect of your life changed?
- What do you think was the main factor that led to this change?
- How did INSPIRE support or initiate this change? (PROBE)
- Perhaps other factors in their experience motivated these changes, if so what were these? Maybe it was something that happened outside of the project? If so what were these factors?
- Do you think you could have got this sort of help anywhere else?

Changes in offending attitudes and behaviour

- Have you continued to offend since you have been involved with INSPIRE?
- Do you think it is likely that you will commit the same offence again? Y/N? Why?
- Do you think it is likely that you will commit another different offence? Y/N? Why?
- Has INSPIRE helped you change your views about offending? In what ways?
(*PROBE: What is different since your involvement with INSPIRE? How did that happen? etc*)
- Which parts of the process have been most helpful to you? Why?
- Which parts have been least helpful? Why?

Conclusion

- Overall, what do you think of the INSPIRE Project?
- How has it helped make a difference in your life?
- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me about the research?

Mapping future aspirations

[A short visual mapping exercise will be undertaken to explore life plans, skills, interests, aspirations etc. Based on NTA ITEP Free Mapping Free maps: draw-as-you-go diagrams where workers / researchers and clients create maps together that relate to the problem or issue under discussion. Use blank page 4 overleaf for mapping.]

Thank you for taking the time to help us with our research

Key Stakeholder Interview Schedule

Evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project

Interview Date

Name

Agency

Job Title

Responsibilities

Interviewer

Interview No

Just to remind you, I'm working for London South Bank University. We have been commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the INSPIRE Women's Project in Belfast. Because of your role in relation to INSPIRE we would like to ask you a few questions.

I would like to record the interview so that I can listen to your comments again and maybe use some of them in a report. Is that OK?

Do you have any questions before we start?

Your Role

- What is your role in relation to INSPIRE?
- What are your key responsibilities in relation to the Project?
- To whom are you accountable?
- What are your key objectives?
- How is your performance monitored?

INSPIRE Project

- How did the INSPIRE Project begin?
- What are the project's key aims and objectives?

- How does the INSPIRE Project currently work? How is this different from the original aims and objectives? Why does this differ?
- To whom is the project accountable?
- What targets and indicators exist to measure the performance of the project?

Funding

- Where does the funding for the project come from? How much funding is provided?
- What other funding is available to the project and to women offenders?
- How secure is the funding of the project?

Strategic Partnerships and Partnership Working

- What strategic partnerships and multi-agency arrangements are in place?
- What external agencies and services does INSPIRE have close relationships with?
- Which relationships need developing? Why? What benefits would there be in developing these relationships?
- Is there a multi-agency steering group or advisory group?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of these groups?
- Where is membership drawn from?
- Are there any gaps in terms of membership of these groups? What are the impacts of these gaps?

Underlying needs and offending behaviour

- What sorts of women offenders are using the project?
- What underlying needs do the women offenders who are referred experience?

Working with women offenders

- What operating guidelines, policies and practices are adhered to in work with women offenders in INSPIRE?
- How do these differ from the operational principles of probation in general?
- How is a 'woman centred' approach maintained?
- What do you understand by the notion of a 'woman centred' approach?
- How is a framework provided in which women offenders can address their offending behaviour and complex needs?

- How does INSPIRE work differently with women from different backgrounds, with different underlying needs and with different offending behaviours?
- What makes the INSPIRE project unique?
- How has a holistic multi-agency response for women offenders been created?
- How does the project support women to address their complex underlying needs?
- Which women seem to benefit most from the project? Why?
- Which women benefit the least? Why?
- Are there particular groups of women that the project is unable to support effectively? Why?

Strengths, weaknesses and barriers

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach?
- What gaps exist in provision for women offenders within the project? In Northern Ireland more generally?
- What could be done to improve the provision?
- What barriers have been experienced in starting up and developing the project? What could be learnt from these experiences?
- What barriers exist in the effective operation of the INSPIRE Women's Project? What could be done to overcome these problems?
- How could the project be developed in future?

Benefits of involvement in INSPIRE

- What benefits are there for women offenders who are involved with INSPIRE?
- How does INSPIRE enable women offenders to desist from crime and reintegrate into society?
- How does INSPIRE assist women offenders to reduce their propensity to reoffend?
- To what extent has this approach been successful?
- What are some of the outcomes for women offenders who have been involved with the INSPIRE Project? (*PROBE: Please provide examples of women who have engaged with INSPIRE and their outcomes compared to women who may have been non-compliant.*)
- What have been the impacts of the INSPIRE Women's Project service on the intensity and frequency of women's reoffending? How does this compare to

rates from before the commencement of the project? (*PROBE: Please provide examples*)

- What are the outcomes for women who engage compared to those who haven't engaged in terms of:
 - Rates of re-offending?
 - Degree of resettlement, stabilisation, employment, education and so on?
 - Engagement with mainstream services?
 - Other outcomes e.g. motivation, self-responsibility, confidence, improved relationships with family and local support networks, use of mainstream services?
- What impact has involvement in the INSPIRE Women's Project had on attitudes to offending amongst women offenders?
- How has the INSPIRE Women's Project contributed to these outcomes and worked to tackle the underlying causes of offending behaviour?
-

Cost benefits

- How could the effectiveness of the INSPIRE Women's Project be improved?
- What are the costs incurred by the INSPIRE Women's Project?
- What value could be attributed to the benefits of the service?
- Do you think the provision of the INSPIRE Women's Project represents good value for money? Why?

Good practice

- What strengths and good practice can be observed in the operation of the INSPIRE Women's Project?
- What lessons have been learnt in terms of policy and practice from the piloting of INSPIRE?

Conclusion

- Do you have any other comments to make about any aspects of INSPIRE?

Thank you for your involvement in this research.

If you would like to discuss this questionnaire or any comments do not hesitate to contact Helen Easton at London South Bank University