

Brighton Women's Centre
has been supporting women in
Brighton and Sussex
for over 45 years.

We help women from all
backgrounds, facing all kinds of
issues, to live happier, safer lives.

Women's needs are at the centre
of what we do. We recognise that
each woman is an individual,
with her own history, her own
challenges, her own strengths
and hopes.

For more information, please
contact Stephanie at
stephaniebillin-
inspire@womenscentre.org.uk

Brighton Women's Centre
Empowering women since 1974

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BWC

From Court to Support

A bespoke women's service
for women at Breach Court
and at breach threshold

Working in partnership with:



HM Prison &
Probation Service

Evaluation of Brighton Women's Centre From Court to Support project

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Introduction

The Commission

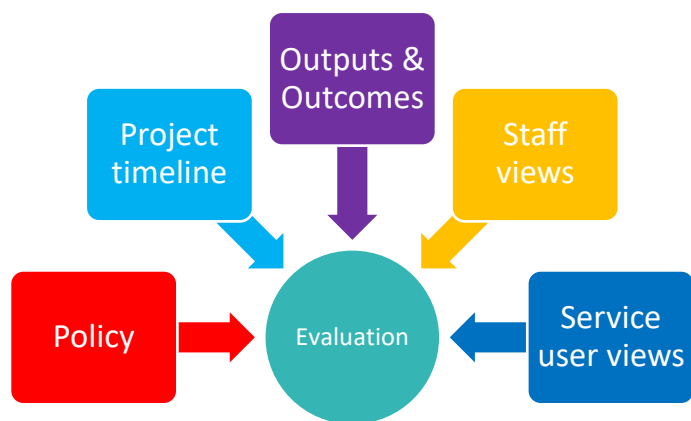
Brighton Women’s Centre (BWC) commissioned an independent external consultant, Russell Webster, to undertake an evaluation of the “From Court to Support” (FC2S) project which provided support to women across Sussex who were either in breach of community orders or at risk of breaching them with the twin objectives of:

1. Giving women support with the issues that matter to them and supporting them to build confidence in order to move towards the future they want, and
2. Avoiding breach and possible re-sentencing and incarceration.

The project ran from April 2021 to March 2023.

The evaluation

The evaluation includes five key components. These are: a short summary of the policy context of women’s experiences of the prison and probation systems; a description of the project’s development during its two-year lifetime; an analysis of the project’s main activities including the number of women engaged; the views of stakeholders and the views of women engaged in this service.



The structure of this report

This report is organised in a straightforward fashion. Chapter 1 provides an overview of women in the criminal justice system and includes the most up-to-date facts and figures relating to women on probation and in prison and an overview of the female offender strategy. Chapter 2 traces the development of the project in detail, including key barriers and how these were tackled. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the project’s activities in terms of the number of women who were referred to and who engaged with the service provided. Chapter 4 provides views on the project from project staff, other stakeholders including probation staff and magistrates, and service users; it concludes with an anonymised case study. Finally, Chapter 5 sets out the conclusions of the evaluation.

Chapter 1: Women in the justice system

Women in prison

Women comprise a small minority of people in the criminal justice system. On 4 August 2023, there were 86,763 people in prison in England and Wales, of whom just 3,482 were women¹. Women comprised just one in 25 (4.0%) of the prison population on this date, the latest for which data are available. However, this figure conceals the fact that there are proportionally more prison receptions of women than this one in 25 figure. In the 12 month period from April 2022 to March 2023, women comprised 5,164 of 65,321 prison first receptions or 7.9%². The reason for this discrepancy is that women tend to commit less serious offences with 53% serving sentences of six months or less, compared to 37% men³.

Women who are sent to prison also tend to have more complex needs than men. Three-quarters of women surveyed in prison (76%) reported that they had mental health issues compared with around half of men (51%)⁴. Less than half of women (47%) left prison with settled accommodation in 2021–22⁵. Almost 60% of women in custody and supervised in the community have experienced domestic violence⁶.

Women under probation supervision

In the year to March 2023, 154,433 people started a court order or pre-released supervision by the probation service, of whom 18,367 or 11.9% were women⁷.

In 2021/22 (the most recent year for which this dataset is available), just over one quarter (27%) of women were breached at least once in their community order or suspended sentence order compared to just under one third (32%) of men⁸.

The female offender strategy

The female offender strategy⁹ published by the Ministry of Justice in June 2018 is the overarching policy document setting the Government's main principles and priorities for women in the criminal justice system. The strategy set out three key objectives:

1. Fewer women coming into the criminal justice system
2. Fewer women in custody (especially on short-term sentences) and a greater proportion of women managed in the community successfully
3. Better conditions for those in custody.

¹ MoJ (2023) Population bulletin: weekly 4 August 2023

² MoJ (2023) Offender Management Statistics January to March 2023, accompanying table Prison receptions 2.3

³ MoJ (2023) Offender Management Statistics January to March 2023

⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2022) Annual Report 2021–22, London: The Stationery Office

⁵ Table 11, Ministry of Justice (2022) Community performance quarterly MI, update to March 2022, London: Ministry of Justice

⁶ MoJ (2018) Female Offender Strategy

⁷ MoJ (2023) Offender Management Statistics January to March 2023, accompanying table 6.1

⁸ MoJ (2022) Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report

⁹ MoJ (2018) Female offender strategy. Cm 9642

It is the second of these objectives which the FC2S project was established to tackle. In the section on community solutions, the female offender strategy provides a number of commitments to develop a more gender-informed probation service, including a more trauma-informed approach. The strategy also specifically endorses a whole system approach to female offenders to which it states women's centres (such as BWC) are "often central"¹⁰. Women's centres are also highlighted by the strategy as being a resource that the MoJ "*knows can be effective at reducing reoffending*"¹¹. Indeed a 2015 Justice Data Lab analysis found a reduction in the one year proven reoffending rate of between 1 and 9 percentage points for female offenders who received support provided by 32 women's centres throughout England compared with a matched group of similar offenders¹². A subsequent 2017 Justice Data Lab analysis¹³ looked specifically at the impact on reoffending of 44 women who were supported by the BWC Inspire programme after receiving a community sentence and concluded that those who received support had a lower frequency of re-offending than those who did not.

The key principles of women-centred working which are shared by BWC are:

- Services which are safe, supportive, community based and accessible
- A holistic, individually tailored, multi-agency approach
- A trauma-informed response
- A focus on empowerment and co-production
- An effective and outcome focused approach, rooted in the evidence base¹⁴.

¹⁰ Ibid. paragraph 144

¹¹ Ibid. paragraph 35

¹² MOJ (2015). Justice Data Lab Re-offending Analysis: Women's Centres throughout England. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/427388/womens-centres-report.pdf

¹³ MoJ (2017) Justice Data Lab analysis: Re-offending behaviour after participation in the Brighton Women's Centre Inspire programme

¹⁴ Women Centred Working Initiative (204) Showcasing women centred solutions

Chapter 2: The project's development

Overview

This chapter provides a short overview of the project's development over time, charting barriers and successes over the course of the two-year period from April 2021 to March 2023.

The Project Brief

The 'From Court to Support' (FC2S) initiative was designed specifically to support women at Breach Court or in danger of being breached, with the aim of diverting women away from custodial sentences. This approach was based on the evidence that prison sentences do not deliver the best outcomes for the individual or society. The project was conceived as a partnership between BWC and the National Probation Service.

FC2S was part of the Inspire service led by Brighton Women's Centre whose remit is to support women with multiple vulnerabilities at all stages of involvement in the criminal justice system. Inspire includes a prison link (Through-The-Gate) service and access to a Women's Accommodation Support Service. Inspire is characterised by a number of key principles:

- A trauma-informed approach
- Staff and clients working together to support each woman to find the freedom, strength and power to change her life
- A partnership approach to develop safe, supportive women-only spaces enhancing the number of women who can access support

The FC2S project team comprised three members of staff:

- One Senior Practitioner (28 hours per week) responsible for project management and providing the FC2S service in East Sussex
- One Caseworker (28 hours per week providing the FC2S service in West Sussex
- One Caseworker (28 hours per week providing the FC2S service in Brighton and Hove

Project Timeline

April – June 2021 (Quarter 1)

This phase of the project was dedicated to project planning and staff recruitment. All three project staff started work on 1 June 2021. The project team also developed a project presentation to share with probation staff, focused in particular at front-line workers who would be referring women in breach of their orders to the project. This period coincided with a number of lockdowns related to the pandemic and courts were closed, making engagement with both sentencers and probation staff much more problematic. The project presentation was developed in an electronic format so that it could be shared with probation staff who were working remotely from home.

July – September 2021 (Quarter 2)

The project team developed two promotional leaflets, one for potential Service Users and one for Probation Staff. A Criminal Justice Secure email (CJSM) address was set up for the FC2S team to receive referrals and additional information from probation staff in a secure manner.

The first referrals to the project were received. The project team continued to promote the project with probation staff using a wide range of approaches. In addition to sharing the project presentation with probation teams across the county, the FC2S staff in East Sussex started to attend a weekly BWC hub at which they were able to meet new and existing service users. FC2S staff in West Sussex also started to attend weekly Breakfast Clubs in Crawley and Worthing, run by the Probation Service to enable face-to-face access with new and existing service users. However, face-to-face work generally was very limited because of continuing pandemic precautions.

There were a healthy number of referrals at the start of the quarter but they dropped substantially towards the end. This was attributed to the numerous upheavals affecting probation staff through the closure of the Community Rehabilitation Company and the reunification of the probation service which took place on 26 June and involved the service moving to a new centralised civil service structure. The scale of the change was substantial with new systems (including new referral processes to all third party providers) as well as the redistribution of staff. The majority of the staff team at the Brighton probation office pre-unification moved to other posts, requiring F2CS staff to start promoting the project from scratch.

Another significant issue became clear during this period with many of the service users referred to the project being already out of contact with the probation service making it impossible for probation staff to secure informed consent to make a referral. The F2CS team sought to overcome this problem by meeting as many service users as possible at Breach Court hearings; seeking to secure their consent and engage them with the project via this venue.

October – December 2021 (Quarter 3)

The fallout from probation unification continued into this quarter with referrals falling to an even lower level (6). The advent of the festive season combined with another pandemic lockdown starting on 21 December also reduced the flow of referrals. However, probation staff did start to refer women who were at risk of breach (as opposed to being already in breach), which improved early contact and engagement rates.

January – March 2022 (Quarter 4)

Referrals started to climb again during this quarter, returning to levels seen in quarter 2. This appeared to be attributable to a range of factors. These included women being referred into the project at an earlier stage of their journey within the Criminal Justice System by probation staff, the lifting of Governmental pandemic restrictions allowing FC2S and probation staff to proceed with face to face work and the increased presence of FC2S staff at hubs and

breakfast clubs, which enabled them to initiate and maintain relationships with probation staff.

One member of the FC2S team left in this quarter requiring the team to be reconfigured.

Year One Summary

In the first year of the FC2S project, 29 women were aware that they were referred into the service (this figure excludes those women who were already in breach and out of contact with their supervising probation officer). All of these women were offered support and 20 (69%) engaged in that support. In addition to the reasons described in the quarterly summaries above, referral rates were also low for the simple reason that there had been less court sittings due to the pandemic and therefore less community sentences passed.

April – June 2022 (Year Two, Quarter 1)

The project had a very low level of referrals this quarter (5), partly caused by Breach courts moving to hold hearings on a monthly rather than weekly or fortnightly basis. This change was precipitated by the focus at all courts on trying to clear the backlog of cases which had accumulated throughout the pandemic. FC2S caseworkers were also finding that they needed to be persistent in engaging women into the services provided by the project with a three month engagement period not being unusual. Project promotion continued and was boosted by a Sentencer Engagement Event facilitated by the probation service and attended by 100 magistrates.

July – September 2022 (Year Two, Quarter 2)

Referrals picked up again this quarter, rising back to 13. One reason for this was that continued liaison with the women's lead for the Sussex division of the probation service which resulted in the service auditing its caseloads to identify women who should have been referred to FC2S who were subsequently referred. Both the probation service and the court system had almost completely returned to "business as usual" with the upheavals of the pandemic and probation unification mainly over, resulting in more community sentences being made and therefore a larger pool of potential referrals.

October – December 2022 (Year Two, Quarter 3)

This quarter had the highest number of referrals (20) showing that potential referrals and caseloads could have been substantially larger than what was achieved during an unprecedented time of turmoil and disruption. The rate of women being engaged into service was also higher with exactly half of those contacted taking up the offer of the service FC2S provided. The project had also established a rolling programme of assertive outreach work with probation workers and women's leads as probation staff turnover continued at a significant level.

January – March 2023 (Year Two, Quarter 4)

There was just one referral this month as the project closed down its referral pathway on 31 January to leave sufficient time to work with new service users before funding ended on 31 March.

Year 2 Summary

A total of 39 referrals were made during the year with the level of previously unmet need only become clear in the final quarter in which FC2S was able to operate without external constraints.

Challenges

The service was hampered by a range of issues which depressed referral rates, most of which have been alluded to in the overview provided above. These included:

- Many service users who were referred to FC2S were not in contact with probation staff which meant that their consent for referral was not secured and even when it was, made them difficult to engage.
- Numerous appropriate women were referred via the mainstream Community Rehabilitative Services pathway to gain support. BWC had to re-route them to FC2S but inevitably this caused delays and made it less likely for women to engage.
- COVID-19 provided upheaval in FC2S staff being able to attend Breach Courts, attend appointments with service users face to face and to attend probation offices in person. These restrictions lasted for a substantial period of time, with several changes along the way.
- The unification of the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Companies into one centralised probation service caused disruption in referrals into the FC2S service for many months, whilst probation practitioners adjusted to their new roles, areas and systems.

Solutions

The most important factor in resolving many of these issues was the development of an open communication route with the Strategic Women's Lead in the Kent, Surrey & Sussex Probation Service. This enabled both parties to solve problems together and the auditing of caseloads was particularly helpful.

The relatively early decision for probation staff to refer women at risk of breach who were still in contact with their supervising officer resulted in much higher engagement rates.

The realisation that the project needed to be promoted with probation staff throughout its whole life rather than merely in its initial months was important in tackling the fall-out from unification and ongoing staff turnover.

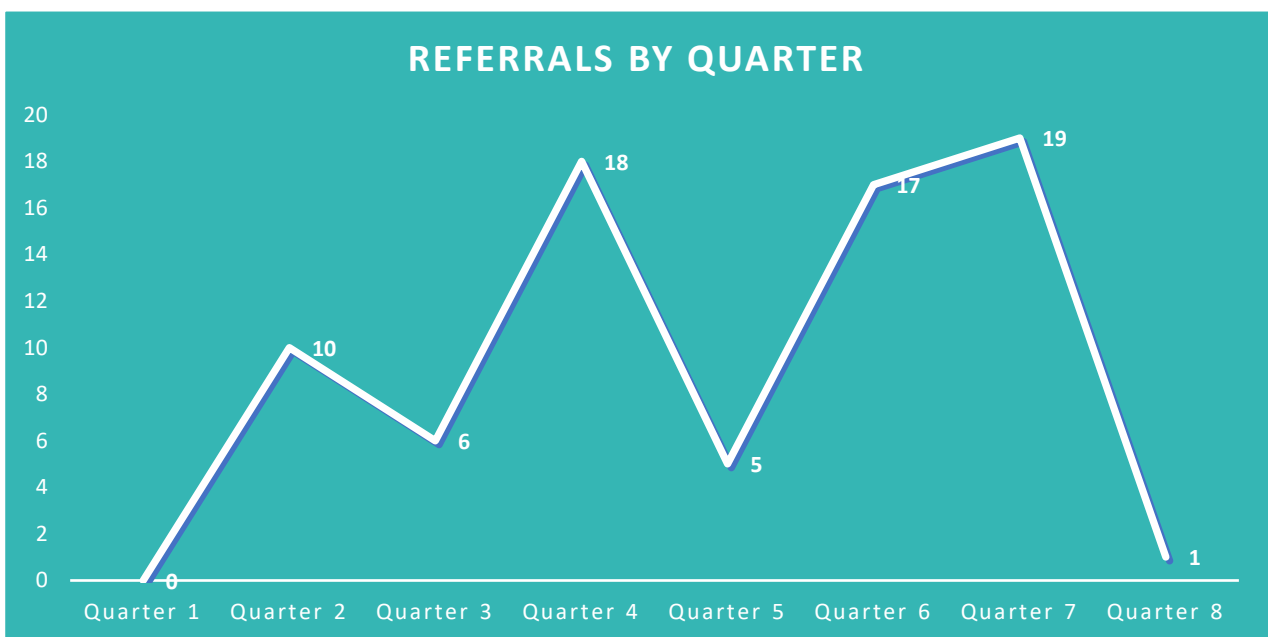
Chapter 3: FC2S Activities

Introduction

This chapter provides statistical information from the project. It first sets out the number of referrals in every quarter of the project before presenting detailed demographical information about the women referred. A total of 69 women were referred to FC2S throughout the project's life with 21 receiving a formal evaluation from project staff. A formal evaluation involves a woman being seen by project staff to create a full co-produced assessment that sets written life goals that a woman wishes to achieve with the support of FC2S.

Referrals

As we have seen, referrals fluctuated throughout the project, affected by the pandemic and its related lockdowns and the pressures on probation staff deriving from the new staffing and policy and practice arrangements implemented following the reunification of the service in June 2021. The chart below shows that the full potential of the possible levels of need was only demonstrated in quarters six and seven of the project, falling away immediately as project referrals were stopped early in the final quarter to ensure that those women referred had time to receive a proper service.



Demographics

The project was able to provide information about age, area of residence, ethnicity and sexual orientation as well as data about a number of areas of need including: health, poverty and parental status.

Age

The project recorded the age of all referrals in three age bands: 18-24, 25-54 and 55 or older. Data were available for 61 of the 69 referrals. A large majority of referrals (54 = 89%) were in the middle age band with four individuals older and three younger.

Ethnicity

The project recorded ethnicity for 44 of the 69 women referred. The overwhelming majority (40 = 91%) were White British (including English, Northern Irish, Scottish or Welsh), two were from Gypsy or Irish Traveller backgrounds one was recorded as Black Caribbean and White, and one from a non-British white heritage.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation information was recorded for only a minority (31) of the women referred. Almost nine out of ten (27 = 87%) of these women were heterosexual with three recorded as bisexual and one as lesbian.

Parental status

The parental status of the women referred to FC2S was recorded for 46 people. Almost three quarters (74%) were parents. Further information was available for 39 of these 46 women with almost two fifths (15 = 38%) recorded as being lone parents.

Location

The project recorded the area of residence for 53 out of 69 referrals. More than two out of five (24 = 45%) were from East Sussex and three out of ten (16 = 30%) from West Sussex. Almost one out of five (19%) were from Brighton – defined as BN1 and BN2 postcodes - with the remaining three women from other BN postcodes.

Poverty

Women referrals were asked if they were in receipt of benefits and this information was recorded for 43 individuals. More than nine out of ten (40 = 93%) were in receipt of benefits.

Housing

Women were also asked about their housing situation. Information was available for 45 referrals with more than seven out of ten (34 = 73%) homeless or in insecure or temporary accommodation.

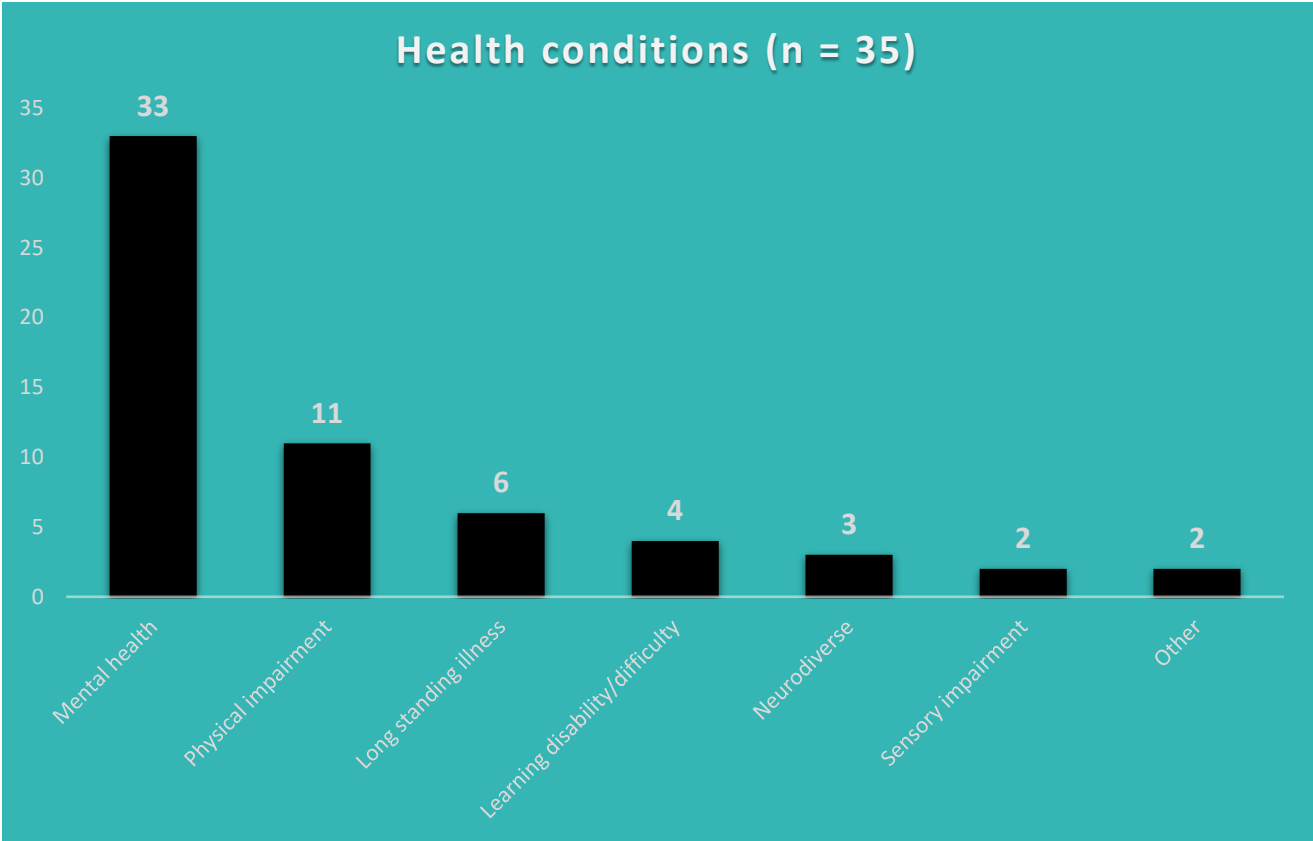
Health needs

Health information was also recorded for 40 out of the 69 women referred via this question:

“Are your day to day activities limited by a disability or long-term health condition?”

Three quarters (30 = 75%) of the women for whom this information was available answered yes with half of these (15) saying their day to day activities were limited a lot and the other half (15) saying they were limited a little.

The type of health impairment was recorded for 35 of these individuals with several women affected by a range of conditions. Almost all (33/35 = 94%) were affected by mental health conditions. The chart below shows all the health information recorded:



Chapter 4: Stakeholder and service user views

Introduction

The fact that the evaluation was undertaken some months after the project had ended imposed limits on the number of stakeholders and service users who could be interviewed. The evaluator succeeded in interviewing the senior practitioner responsible for FC2S and her manager via individual online video interviews. The views of another FC2S caseworker in addition to two probation officers who worked with the project were gathered via email and stakeholder comments about the service in the case records were shared with the evaluator.

Since the evaluator was already familiar with the primary challenges faced by FC2S over its two years' duration, in particular the restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the disruptions to the probation service resulting from the reunification process, all these interviews focused on how best to learn from the project to inform future work with women being (or at risk of being) breached on community orders. Interviewees were specifically requested to focus on those factors which had been particularly beneficial to the operation of FC2S and those challenges which future interventions would also need to address.

Again, the belated timing of the evaluation meant that it was not possible to secure the consent of the project's service users to gain their views and although BWC combed the case records to identify comments about the project, only eight such comments could be identified and these were all basic expressions of gratitude for the help provided by FC2S without highlighting any specific aspects of the project.

Success factors

The three FC2S staff interviewed (two caseworkers and a manager) identified key critical success factors for the project including:

- Ownership of the joint project by the probation service. Once the initial disruption caused by reunification had settled down, the championing of the project by the probation area's lead for women led to much higher levels of referrals with the audit of cases proving particularly important.
- The very positive attitude of court probation staff was praised with both FC2S caseworkers and women service users welcomed and probation staff being proactive in referring potential clients of FC2S, even when the caseworkers were elsewhere. An excellent working relationship developed which meant that referrals were often made informally, without making demands for paperwork on referrers which, of course, encouraged further referrals.
- The holistic, trauma-informed approach adopted by the FC2S caseworkers was seen as being vital to the successful engagement of women who mainly had multiple needs. Caseworkers also had the time to deliver a more extensive and intensive casework, approach addressing all of a woman's needs in partnership with her, co-ordinating the access to and delivery of other specialist services and providing an advocacy service when needed. Essentially, FC2S had more time to provide an individualised service to women attending the project than probation staff.

- The FC2S model was also a good fit with the probation approach. Caseworkers also developed working contracts with service users which set boundaries, encouraged them to keep in touch and were careful to emphasise that they were working alongside the probation service and did not cast probation officers as the “bad cop”. The opportunity to work alongside probation staff at the Breakfast Clubs in Crawley, Worthing and Brighton was seen as an excellent way of making contact with potential project users.
- There was a consensus that perhaps the most valuable feature of the project was its open-ended model which meant no limits were placed on how long it took a woman to engage nor how long they could access help and support. This enabled caseworkers to adopt an assertive outreach approach, repeatedly making contact with initially reluctant women to offer help, sometimes over weeks and months which resulted in many women eventually engaging. It was acknowledged that this is a resource-intensive model.

The probation officers who provided their views via email, combined with comments from their colleagues sourced from FC2S case records praised the collaboration between probation staff and FC2S caseworkers and reported that the referral process was very easy and straightforward and feedback from women indicated they valued the range of support by the project. Several probation staff also shared that they appreciated the opportunity to discuss complex cases with FC2S caseworkers and found this process valuable both in planning their work with the women on probation and coping with work stresses, no longer having to take sole responsibility for some distressed individuals often at risk of serious self-harm. Probation staff who provided views also felt the service was needed and regretted that it was a time-limited pilot project. Specifically probation practitioners valued the opportunity provided by FC2S to engage women in support services:

“From my experience of working with women, disengagement and falling into breach is so much more complex than it seems on the surface and its rarely about ‘not being bothered to attend’. I feel that FC2S is a stepping stone for those women who feel overwhelmed and feel like it’s all too late and that a conversation with their probation officer will now be too confronting. Breach action can so easily be avoided with the right support and we probation practitioners don’t always have the capacity to spend so much time on each individual.”

Learning points

It is clear that FC2S caseworkers and probation officers quickly learnt that referral before a woman had actually been breached was much more likely to be successful in terms of engaging her in support. This led FC2S staff to question whether future such projects should be modelled on an assertive outreach basis from the start and the evaluator to speculate that an even more effective approach might be to refer every woman on probation with complex needs to a local Women's Centre.

Two other learning points from the project were raised. The first of these was the importance of probation staff sharing risk information; FC2S caseworkers would have preferred to receive fully Offender Assessment System (OASys) information, not primarily for risk management but to see the range of an individual woman's needs and any history of trauma. The second was the need to try to deliver ongoing information and education to magistrates based on the lived experience of women and including the often counter-productive impact of imposing financial penalties on women with complex needs surviving on benefits.

We conclude this chapter by providing an example of a real life (but anonymised) FC2S case. Although, obviously, every case is different, the level of complexity in this case was not untypical for the FC2S caseload.

FC2S Case Study

A referral was made for S*, by the probation service in September 2021, after appearing in Breach Court for non-compliance of her 18 month Suspended Sentence order. Our FC2S Caseworker was also present in court, and informed the Magistrate of the FC2S project. As a result, the Magistrate gave S* three weeks to work with FC2S and the probation service, with the potential of avoiding a custodial sentence.

S*'s presenting needs into the service were complex: accommodation, complex finance, debt and benefits, alcohol and drug misuse, complex mental health including past and current trauma, and physical health needs as well as complex social wellbeing needs.

The FC2S Caseworker met S* in a face-to-face capacity once a week, with remote contact via telephone and text in between time, for intensive support. This allowed the FC2S Caseworker to build rapport with S* and resulted in S* committing to attending appointments, on time and appropriately. S* was often met by the FC2S Caseworker in a library where they prioritised S*'s needs according to a co-produced action plan agreed upon entry to the service, as well as on an ad-hoc basis, as they arose.

The FC2S Caseworker also accompanied S* face to face or remotely to her Probation appointments, her health appointments, her DWP (finance and debt) appointments, as well as supporting her in Court.

S* experienced domestic abuse in October 2021 and was subsequently referred and heard at MARAC.

A neighbour dispute resulted in police involvement and S*'s subsequent arrest and imprisonment. As a consequence S* lost her 14-year secure tenancy on the two-bedroom flat she had shared with her autistic son, who went into foster care. After several months in

temporary accommodation on release, S* was re-housed in a one-bedroom flat. S*'s possessions were removed from her original flat and stored in a garage by her social landlord. All her possessions were disposed of by the Council during her stay at a Psychiatric Unit. S* did not have the resource to replace any furniture, and many possessions were personal and therefore irreplaceable.

S* started using alcohol and drugs. The FC2S Caseworker referred her to Change Grow Live (CGL) and supported S* to engage by encouraging S* to attend, communicating with the CGL staff and attending with S* to support her through the appointments. CGL subsequently offered a report to the Magistrates confirming S*'s attendance to all their scheduled appointments, where S* was breathalysed, returning negative results throughout her support.

S* had a Universal Credit income of £250, after deduction for rent, housing arrears and court fines, which took her below the poverty line. S* also had utility and council tax bills to pay for which she had accumulated to thousands of pounds of debt, causing S* constant worry of legal action and significant negative impact on her mental well-being. The FC2S Caseworker referred S* to Breathing Space, a government scheme to help those struggling with debt because of poor mental health, resulting in an accompanied phone call from a dedicated Debt Adviser every week, who Supported S* to prioritise her debts and put together a mutually acceptable plan for the future. The FC2S Caseworker shared in the telephone calls to help S* understand the sometimes complicated information and procedures regarding debt management.

S*'s dire financial situation and fear of imprisonment continued to negatively affect her mental health and well-being. She reported feeling depressed and anxious and presented as paranoid, sleeping outside rather than returning to her flat and disengaging with the food bank which was her main source of food. S*'s Probation Officer had already arranged for an assessment with the local Personality Disorder Unit. However, S* was later sectioned, and a mental health assessment was arranged for S* in June 2022, where she subsequently continued residing in the Psychiatric hospital for 28 days.

After S*'s release from hospital, she acquired further psychiatric support in the community, which the FC2S Caseworker continued to Support her to engage with and attend appointments.

The FC2S Caseworker continued to support S* until the end of the project (end March 2023), when she held a series of handover meetings with other professional to ensure that S*'s support package was continuous.

Before S*'s hospitalisation, she attended Magistrates' Court for a review of her engagement, at the beginning of June 2022. S* explained that the FC2S project was the only constant throughout her Criminal Justice journey, for the last 11 months. Since the FC2S Caseworker started their work with S*, she* had had five different allocated Probation Officers, two different allocated Housing Officers and two different Caseworkers with CGL. The constancy of support from the FC2S Caseworker, the intensity of casework given and the trauma informed way of working were greatly appreciated by S*. She also paid testimony to the fact

that she was encouraged to play an active role in deciding her own course of action and was supported every step of the way by the FC2S caseworker. S* achieved many improvements in her life including a healthier lifestyle; much less impulsivity and a greater willingness to engage in a range of supportive services. As a result of her engagement with FC2S, S* was receiving an ongoing package of financial, emotional, and practical support to keep her moving in the right direction and cease further involvement in the CJS.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Overview

It is clear that the From Court to Support project had to cope with unprecedented and unforeseeable challenges in the forms of the coronavirus pandemic and the upheaval caused by the re-structuring of the probation service. These two factors had a significant impact on the operation of the pilot and, crucially, on the number of referrals it received. It was only in the penultimate two quarters of FC2S, that the true level of unmet need in terms of the numbers of women in, or at risk of, breach started to become clear. Nevertheless, project staff and probation officers were united in their view that the project was needed and that the model of intervention was appropriate.

Recommendations for future women's breach interventions

There were three principal important learning points which emerged from the operation of the FC2S project and its evaluation:

1. A *"collaborative partnership"*, rather than a commissioner-provider relationship, between the probation service and a women's centre is critical to the success of this type of project. This full partnership emerged over the course of the pilot with the probation service taking increased ownership of FC2S once it had negotiated its complex and disruptive reunification process. This ownership increased referral rates and encouraged joint working and mutual support between the professionals involved. The fact that FC2S caseworkers did not demonise statutory supervision and encouraged women to abide by the conditions of their orders was vital.
2. The expectation that all women with complex problems supervised on community orders should be referred to the local women's centre as soon after sentence as possible maximises referrals and engagement in support. Probation officers were increasingly convinced of the value of FC2S as they had more contact with it and were open in acknowledging that most women could receive a more comprehensive and intensive service from a women's centre than from themselves, primarily because of resource constraints but also because of the benefits of participating on a voluntary basis.
3. Finally, that the core principles of women's centres – the provision of a holistic, co-produced and trauma-informed approach – were appropriate and effective. In addition, the offer of an open-ended service with no restrictions on the time it took for a woman to engage in support (via a process of continuous, assertive outreach) nor the period for which they could receive that support was felt by all stakeholders to be essential in helping women tackle what were typically long-standing and complex issues.

Additionally, BWC staff advocated for an increase in services that create opportunities to work with women at the earliest opportunity (e.g. 'upstream services'). Out of court disposals are a good example of this and work with women who are coming into contact with Police for the first time and before they become involved in criminal justice support

services. Women's centres are tailored to provide this support in a way that is trauma informed and holistic.