**Executive Summary**

**Evaluation of the Women’s Outreach Team (WOT) Service**

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**Overview**

This independent evaluation set out to capture the service’s impact on the women and children, hearing from them directly, and also assessing the economic benefit. An analysis of 35 files was carried out and a qualitative study undertaken of 12 women who had been supported by the WOT Service for a year, with five of the women re-interviewed two years on from their initial contact with the service. An economic assessment was carried out based on the women’s accounts and the success they attributed to the support. The research base shows that women and their children are the group most damaged by imprisonment, and supporting women to fulfil community sentences is a gap in provision.

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| **Key Facts from the 35 Case Files:*** 33 women (94%) had not re-offended and no one had returned to prison.
* Support is required for a year for positive outcomes to be reached.
* 23 (66%) had made substantial progress with the support of the service.
* Specifically 10 cases (37%) were closed with positive conclusions, with the women in stable housing, no longer taking substances and managing their finances better; 3 were no longer with their abusive partner and one had got a job; 5 had stopped engaging but had been supported into stable housing and 2 into volunteering, showing that non-engagement might not always be for negative reasons. For the 8 currently active cases, 5 have reduced their substance misuse and 3 have been connected to mental health support and left their abusive partners.
* 4 cases (15%) had been referred to specialist mental health services.
* 16 women (46%) had been supported with housing.
* 20 women (57%) had reduced their substance misuse.
* The service directly supported 49 children, ranging from taking them on family days away to more intensive support.

**Economic Evaluation*** Costs and estimated benefits are discounted at 3.5% pa, in line with HMT guidance[[1]](#footnote-1), to calculate present values. All monetary values shown are at 2017-18 prices to account for inflation.
* The average present value of programme cost per engaged woman is £187 per month.
* The estimated Net Present Value of the programme depends crucially on assumptions made about a) ‘distance travelled’ towards complete absence of a problem on the outcome measures; and b) how long the benefits of the programme are assumed to persist after the woman leaves the programme.
* Depending on the assumptions used, the average Net Present Value per woman ranges from a modest £31 to a substantial £29,253, but is on average positive.
* The estimated average Net Present Return per £1 of public funding ranges from £0.02 - £19.52, depending on the assumptions used.
* To pass the central government’s threshold of value for money of >£2 return per £1 of funding, it needs to be assumed that on average women improve 30% or more of the distance towards full relief from a problem, if the benefits only last for one year.
* If the benefits last for two years, but diminish to only 90% of the value achieved in the first year, the value for money threshold is achieved with as little as 10% or more of the distance towards full relief from a problem.
* It may be concluded that, under reasonably conservative assumptions, the WOT programme provides good value for public money.
* The most valuable immediate social benefits are improved mental health. The biggest immediate fiscal benefits are to Children’s Social Services.
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The 12 women interviewed reinforced the work recorded in the files, that is support to get housing, deal with debt, get the ‘right’ benefits, access food banks, connect with mental health provision and get to appointments. This service is recognised as immediately ‘different’ to others, seeing strengths. Reinforcing the wider research base on women who have offended, they reported underlying issues of past physical and sexual abuse, miscarriages, bereavements, and having had difficult, painful lives. Half had tried to commit suicide and felt judged and worthless. They had hit an all time low when they were referred into WOT through the criminal justice system, and in their own words, the main difference made to them was the help given to ‘build them up’, from being so low they no longer wanted to live, to starting to like themselves, have confidence, self-esteem and hope in a different future. Through this support, four had left their abusive partners and were starting a new life with their children. For most, they felt that without the WOT service things would now be very different and predicted they would otherwise now be dead, have reoffended or lost hope. They continued to face barriers such as having a criminal conviction but they wanted to ‘get on’, to get into employment, training or volunteering.

For five women, now two years on, two had originally said their main issue was having an ‘abusive partner’, and both had left this partner and had their own home and were looking at higher education options. Alcohol had been the main issue for two women and they had given it up entirely. Finally, one woman who reported having anger issues said she was no longer angry and wanted to move away for a fresh start. These women felt like very different people from before, such was the progress made and sustained.

For the other women who had received support for one year from the team, two were away from their abusive partners. One woman who had felt isolated was engaging more in the community and considering setting up her own business. The other women continued to struggle with their main issues, one had relapsed after her longest period of abstinence from alcohol, one struggling financially and another finding it hard to cope with her mental health issues. This highlights that even with progression, reversing years of trauma and violence is not without setbacks and requires support.

Circle and ASC are committed and passionate about helping the women, children and their families, going above and beyond ‘the norm’ to help them engage, making home visits, reminder texts, calls and continually making an effort. Taking into account how rural these women are, maybe this is what ‘the norm’ needs to be. By emphasising the role of mothers and the individuals’ strengths, the service helped to reinforce positive identities. The concern for the workers was that other services sometimes refuse to let these women move on. The barriers identified for other services were structural issues, challenging systems and a level of professional pessimism.

To conclude, this evaluation shows that the service are not just helping women to fulfil their Community Sentences but also crucially to build self worth, confidence and work towards a better future, supporting them and their children. This service is shown to be cost effective and worth investing in. It is helping women into stable housing, to get away from abusive partners, deal with past trauma and abuse, access mental health provision and move away from addiction. This service is life-changing for the women, their children and the wider family and, it could also be said, for the communities they come from.



1. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-governent [↑](#footnote-ref-1)