

MEAM response to National Commission into women facing domestic and/or sexual violence and multiple disadvantage

5. What is currently working well for women facing domestic and/or sexual violence and multiple disadvantage?

This could include particular policies, practices, services, funding models, or structures. Please give evidenced good practice examples if you have them (and provide links).

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind. MEAM was formed to improve policy and services for people facing multiple disadvantage, which we define as experiencing a combination of problems including homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health. People experiencing multiple disadvantage fall through the gaps between services and systems, making it harder for them to address their problems and lead fulfilling lives. The MEAM Coalition also supports the Fulfilling Lives programme, which delivers support to people with multiple needs across 12 areas in England and Wales, funded by the Big Lottery.

The MEAM Approach helps local areas design and deliver better coordinated services for people with multiple needs. It encourages local areas to consider seven principles, which they adapt to local needs and circumstances. The MEAM Approach pilots had a case load that was 30% women and outcomes of the pilots can be accessed here. The MEAM Approach is currently being used by cross-sector partnerships of statutory and voluntary agencies in 25 local areas across England. A recently conducted evaluation report of MEAM Approach areas showed an average 23% reduction in wider service use costs and 44% improvement in client wellbeing.

MEAM is currently conducting research, alongside AVA, Agenda and St Mungo's that explores whether coordinated responses are working to meet women's needs. This response draws on some of the interim findings from this research.

To respond effectively to women experiencing multiple disadvantage, it is essential that policy and practice responses facilitate and deliver joined up, holistic approaches to women. Below we highlight examples of services and interventions that are helping to achieve this.

Manchester whole systems approach

It is important that both statutory and voluntary agencies work collaboratively to meet the needs of women with multiple disadvantage. One example of good practice is the Whole Systems Approach in Manchester, funded by Partnership Funds from Cheshire and Greater Manchester Community Rehabilitation Company (CGM CRC), NHS England and resources from the Financial Incentive Model (FIM), a payment by results reward for a reduction in demand on the criminal justice system (CJS). Nine women's centres across the boroughs provide the support 'hubs' for women referred via these different routes. An evaluation of the programme highlighted a range of benefits were achieved and split into seven areas that included:¹

1. outlook for the future,
2. likelihood of (re)-offending,
3. feelings about self,
4. health improvements,
5. developing practical/life skills,
6. reduced risk of harm,
7. and providing a streamlined system and reduced demand on other services.

Please see our answer to question 8 for more information.

Women's Centres

Women's centres are voluntary organisations (charities or social enterprises) that provide gender-specific services to meet the needs of the women experiencing multiple disadvantage. They operate using a 'one stop shop' model - delivering a range of services under one roof to address the diverse needs of their clients.

Women's centres treat each woman as an individual with her own set of needs, problems and aspirations. Many women's centres adopt a trauma informed approach and have an open-door and open-ended policy, which means women are able to receive support if and when they need it, for as long as they need it.²

A series of in-depth case studies of voluntary organisations that adopt this holistic approach are as follows:

¹ Sheffield Hallam University (2015) *Evaluation of the whole system approach for women offenders: Executive summary*, Online: <http://www.mmuperu.co.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-whole-system-approach-for-women-offenders-executive-summa> (last accessed 13.06.217)

² Homeless Link (2017) *An introduction to Psychologically Informed Environments and trauma informed care*, Online: https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/TIC%20PIE%20briefing%20March%202017_0.pdf (last accessed 23.02.2018)

- Nelson Trust Women’s Centres in Gloucester and Swindon³
- Anawim Women’s Centre⁴
- Lancashire Women’s Centres⁵
- Clean Break⁶
- Brighton Women’s Centre/Worthing Churches⁷
- Threshold’s Housing First service⁸

Women’s centres work to improve a variety of different outcomes including: mental health, relationships, confidence, self-esteem, housing, physical health and relationships. Working to improve these outcomes can lead to a reduction in reoffending, as highlighted by desistance theory and indeed by the Ministry of Justice’s Justice Data Lab.^{9 10} However, as the Prison Reform Trust state, is it important that the outcomes achieved by women’s centres should not be narrowed to focus on reoffending rates alone and “that any co-commissioning agreements for women’s centres look beyond the criminal justice system to embed measures of success that give due regard to the distance travelled by individuals and wider benefits to society such as the improved health of the users of women’s centres.”

Proactively reaching out – Inspiring Change Manchester

Women often represent a minority group for many services and can experience many barriers to accessing services which means many are not able to engage until their needs have become complex and entrenched. For example, we know that women are more likely to be in “hidden” homeless situations, and therefore will not show up on official statistics. Yet, despite

³ Clinks (2016) Case study: the Nelson Trust women’s centres in Gloucester and Swindon, Online: https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/isis_womens_centre_case_study_final_0.pdf (last accessed 23.02.2018).

⁴ Clinks (2016) Case study: Anawim women’s centre, Online: https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/case_study_anawim_womens_centre_june_2016_01.pdf (last accessed 23.02.2018)

⁵ Clinks (2016) Lancashire Women’s Centres, Online: https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/lancashire_womens_centre_case_study_final.pdf (last accessed 23.02.2018)

⁶ Clinks and the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (2017) Case study: Clean Break, Online: https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/basic/files-downloads/clean_break_case_study_august_2017.pdf (last accessed 23.02.2018)

⁷ Brighton women’s centre (2018) Accommodation support services in East and West Sussex, Online: <http://www.womenscentre.org.uk/services/accommodation-support-services-east-west-sussex/> (last accessed 23.02.2018)

⁸ Homeless Link (2018) Housing First- a solution for women experiencing multiple disadvantage, Online: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2018/jan/04/housing-first-solution-for-women-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage> (last accessed 23.02.2018)

⁹ Clinks (2013) Introducing desistance: a guide for voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations, Online: <http://www.clinks.org/resources-guides-toolkits-clinks-do-it-justice-resources/introducing-desistance-guide-voluntary> (last accessed 12.06.2017)

¹⁰ Ministry of Justice (2015) women’s centres throughout England report, Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/justice-data-lab-statistics-may-2015> (last accessed 6.06.2017)

women's unique and complex experience of homelessness, very few homelessness services are gender specific and responsive to women's multiple disadvantages and needs. According to Homeless Link's most recent annual review 28% of service users in homelessness accommodation projects in England were women, 24% of service users in day centres in England were women.¹¹

It is important that services actively review the number of women on their caseloads and take proactive action to reach out to women to encourage them to engage. A good example of this work was led by Inspiring Change Manchester. This is part of the Big Lottery Fulfilling Lives programme and has eight years of funding to deliver systems change service for people who are disengaged from services and who have entrenched needs. During the first year of the project 91% of clients were male. The project lead challenged this and worked with a group of women with lived experience to co-produce a conference 'speaking up, stepping out'. This led to the creation of the women's voices group, paid peer trainees and researchers and an action plan dedicated to helping services engage with more women. This work means that 25% of clients are now women.

Ministry of Justice grant funding programme

The Ministry of Justice's Whole System Approach scheme made grant funding available to organisations to provide multi-agency work that supports women already in the contact with the CJS and those at risk of CJS involvement.

This is an effective way of providing resources to allow women's organisations to fill in the gaps in support for vulnerable women and develop partnership between services through a localised approach. Despite the positive achievements of this scheme, consistency across England and Wales is still an issue, with many areas lacking the level of provision needed to make a bid in the first place. The scheme would benefit from voluntary sector engagement earlier on in the process to advise the Ministry of Justice on their grant making process. The MEAM coalition also encourage other government departments to develop and implement similar grant funding programmes, but also highlight that there needs to be synergy between them so that a cross-departmental approach is achieved.

¹¹ Homeless Link (2016) *Support for single homeless people in England: Annual Review 2016*, Online: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Support%20for%20single%20people%202016.pdf> (last accessed 23.02.2018)

6. What is not working well for this group of women? What are the challenges and barriers?

Again, this could include current policies, practice, services, funding models or structures.

There is a range of things that are currently not working well for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Below we highlight some of the most important:

A lack of understanding about women's past experiences including the impact of trauma

Many professionals working with women fail to understand how past experiences of trauma and abuse impact on women's behaviours and how they present to services. Research into women's offending identifies experiences of domestic abuse and sexual violence as key drivers of homelessness and offending for the majority of women involved in the CJS^{12 13}. Distance-based and trauma informed approaches emphasise the importance of practitioner strategies that are sensitive to the adverse experiences of women, such as rape, domestic violence and childhood abuse, highlighting the need to address the role these experiences play in women's offending.

A lack of community provision

Diversion from custody relies on the existence of joined-up, holistic support in the community. Women's centres have a strong record of providing this but are limited in number and reach. The biggest issues currently facing women's centres are access to sustainable funding and commissioning processes that hinder multi-agency partnership work.

Clinks' State of the Sector reports have demonstrated a shift from grant funding to contractual funding is frequently problematic for small and medium voluntary organisations due to the resource intensive nature of the bidding process, evidencing contractual outcomes and the difficulties in securing full cost recovery.¹⁴ These challenges mean that there is a real risk of the loss of effective services and existing expertise.

Imprisonment

Imprisonment often has a severe and far-reaching impact on women's lives through separating them from family, causing the loss of accommodation and aggravating already existing trauma and mental health issues.

¹² Prison Reform Trust (2014) *Prison Reform Trust submission to Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into violence against women and girls*. Online: <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Consultation%20responses/Prison%20Reform%20Trust%20submission%20-%20violence%20against%20women%20and%20girls.doc>

¹⁴ Clinks (2017) *The state of the sector: key trends for voluntary sector organisations working with offenders and their families*, Online: <https://www.clinks.org/resources-reports-mapping/state-sector-reports> (last accessed 23.02.2018)

Organisations providing specialist services to women in contact with the CJS have expressed significant concern about the Ministry of Justice's plans to build five new 'community prisons' for women, and have argued that community services for women should be developed instead.

A lack of quality through the gate services

Continuous support from a key worker throughout the custodial sentence and after release is widely understood as best practice for supporting women leaving prison to settle in the community^{15 16}. However, a number of voluntary organisations have experienced increased difficulties in gaining access to women in prison in order to provide this support. Similarly, many have raised concerns about the quality and level of the through the gate support provided by Community Rehabilitation Companies¹⁷.

A lack of appropriate accommodation

Evaluations of the Threshold Housing First Project¹⁸ and Basis Housing First Pilot¹⁹ identified issues faced by women experiencing multiple disadvantages in accessing appropriate housing. The Basis Housing First Pilot, working with women who were sex workers, homeless and had complex needs, found that hostels with strict curfews and inflexible requirements around engagement (for example requirements to keep strict keyworker appointments) created barriers for the women in accessing the accommodation. This can lead to women avoiding entering the hostel system, which can have a significant impact on their ability to access stable housing in the community as in some areas hostels are the primary mechanisms to support women experiencing homelessness find housing in the community. Research has also shown that many women will stay in 'hidden homeless' situations, and will often rely on informal sources of support rather than attend (largely male-dominated) services".²⁰

Further, social or private rented housing that provide additional floating support arrangements are often not enough to address the needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Chaotic periods of living and issues including drug and alcohol use, physical and mental health issues and domestic violence requires intensive housing management as well as dedicated and individual support to prevent tenancies from failing. Evaluations of the Threshold and Basis Housing First models showed positive outcomes for women experiencing multiple disadvantage, including improvements to personal safety and personal development. However, the model faced challenges in terms of the availability of social and private landlords willing to offer tenancies or management

¹⁵ Beyond Youth Custody (2014). *Resettlement of girls and young women*.

¹⁶ HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2016). *An Inspection of Through the Gate Resettlement Services for Short-Term Prisoners*.

¹⁷ Clinks (2016). *Case study: Anawim women's centre*

¹⁸ [Evaluation of the Threshold Housing First Project for Women Offenders Interim report](#)

¹⁹ [Basis Housing First Pilot. The story so far](#)

²⁰ Crisis (2008) *Policy briefing: Homeless Women Briefing*, Available at:

http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/2945Homeless_women_policy_recommendations.pdf

agreements and sufficient access to local support services for drug, alcohol, and other health-related issues.

A joint briefing by Women in Prison and the Prison Reform Trust found that 60% of women leaving prison do not have a home to go to on release. The briefing identified issues such as: a lack of suitable accommodation options for women with children or affected by substance misuse, mental health problems, or domestic abuse; and insufficient joined up working between prison authorities, probation services, housing providers, and local authorities.²¹

Unequal outcomes for BAME women

In the final report of his review of the treatment of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) individuals in the CJS, David Lammy expressed particular concern about disproportionate outcomes for BAME women throughout the CJS.²²

Research by Imkaan shows that women who have experienced domestic and sexual violence are more likely to access specialist BAME women's organisations and feel safer to speak about their experiences of violence in these environments.²³ However, these organisations are experiencing unique challenges, with Clinks' most recent State of the sector survey highlighting that 30% of specialist BAME organisations report they are at risk of closure, compared to 5% of organisations that do not provide a specialist service.²⁴

7. What changes could make the biggest difference to women facing these experiences?

This could be an idea for policy change, legislative change, changes to practice, funding structures, etc. Please give evidenced examples and provide links if appropriate.

There are many changes that need to take place to ensure the needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantage can be met. In September 2017 we published **Multiple needs: time for political leadership**. It is based on consultation with experts by experience and frontline practitioners from our local partners. The paper makes four key asks of government:

²¹ Women in Prison and Prison Reform Trust (2016) *Home Truths*, Online: <http://www.womeninprison.org.uk/perch/resources/final-report-by-prt-and-wip-home-truths.pdf> (last accessed 05.02.2018)

²² Lammy Review final report

²³ Imkaan (2016). Capital losses: The state of the specialist BME ending violence against women and girls sector in London. Available online:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_MKSoEcCvQwdjJXQm5GVDBISmM/view

²⁴ Clinks (2017). The State of the Sector. See: <https://www.clinks.org/resources-reports-mapping/state-sector-reports>

- **Commit** – by showing leadership as a government in tackling both the causes and consequences of multiple disadvantage. This includes publicly committing to support both those at risk of developing multiple needs as well as those who are experiencing them now.
- **Collaborate** – by taking a collaborative approach across government so that every department is working together to address multiple disadvantage, modelling the approach that local areas have shown can work. To do this they will need to consult with local areas and people with lived experience to develop the shared outcomes we need to see. All national government strategies should explicitly address and complement each other, and there needs to be synergy between the upcoming Ministry of Justice female offender strategy, the Violence and Women and Girls Strategy, the NHS Five Year Forward View for Mental Health and the care leavers’ strategy for example.
- **Challenge** – by setting a clear expectation that every local area must take effective action to support people with multiple disadvantage. This should allow commissioners, services and people with lived experience to design the best solutions to the problem, and ways of measuring success.
- **Invest** – by making sure flexible funding is available that encourages services to work together and allows them to respond to local needs. Secure, long-term investment would protect key services that prevent people’s needs from escalating, and create a sustainable base for specialist voluntary sector organisations that meet specific needs.

These asks are not gender-specific, but we believe they would improve the support provided to women experiencing multiple disadvantage. Alongside this broader approach, we propose the following additional changes that need to take place to ensure the distinct needs of women can be met.

Recognition of the value of gender-specific services

As highlighted during a meeting of the women’s networking forum, which acts as a reference group to the Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group, there is often a lack of recognition by commissioners and some statutory service providers that women have specific, unique needs and the value of gender-specific services is being lost. There was a real concern that this is leading to gender neutral provision of services as women are not seen as a distinct group, as well as a loss of women’s spaces. To address this, it is imperative that the value of gender-specific services is promoted both nationally and locally. This will help ensure these organisations receive support and resources to enable them to work to meet the needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantage. We note that gender specific services can be provided either as part of a wider service or as a standalone intervention.

Trauma informed responses

As highlighted, many women with multiple disadvantage has experiences of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Trauma Informed Care (TIC) is an approach which can be adopted by organisations in order to improve awareness of trauma and its impact, to ensure that the services provided offer effective support and, above all, that they do not re-traumatise those accessing or

working in services. TIC is an approach which is widely used across many sectors in the US and elsewhere, and is growing in popularity here in the UK.

Trauma informed approaches understand what has happened to women instead of asking what is wrong with women, for instance recognising why a woman is using substances and providing trauma informed responses to empower her with alternative coping strategies and the support she needs

Psychologically Informed Environments

Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) are services that are designed and delivered in a way that takes into account the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals using them. The concept of PIE emerged following discussions of a multi-agency working group, convened by the Royal College of Psychiatry, interested in community mental health provision in the UK. It was recognised that high numbers of homeless people have needs around mental and psychological wellbeing. However, any service working with vulnerable people including women experiencing multiple disadvantage can become a PIE.

A focus on early intervention and prevention

Too often women experiencing multiple disadvantage are unable to access support until their needs have become complex and entrenched. It is imperative that resources are focused downstream to ensure that preventative services receive adequate funding to ensure they can work to meet women's needs. This can also ensure that women receive support in the community, rather than being subject to criminal justice interventions for example.²⁵

Strategic engagement with voluntary organisations and women with lived experience

Voluntary organisations have substantial knowledge and expertise about the local communities they work in, the service users they work with and the strategies needed to meet their service users' needs. Further to this, women experiencing multiple disadvantage are experts by experience in relation to what does and doesn't work to meet their needs.

It is important that flexible and systematic routes are developed to allow voluntary organisations and women with lived experience of multiple disadvantage to inform the development of policy and practice in this area.

²⁵ More information about a preventative approach to meeting the needs of people experiencing multiple disadvantage can be accessed [here](#).

8. Are you aware of any ideas for improved early intervention and/or preventative interventions that would be particularly appropriate for women at risk of violence and/or multiple disadvantage?

Please give evidenced examples and provide links if possible.

One good practice example of early intervention and partnership work is the Greater Manchester Women's Alliance. This is formed of eight voluntary sector women's organisations, working in partnership to deliver a Whole Systems Approach across the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. This approach and the alliance model was formed over five years through working with the National Offender Management Service, Greater Manchester Public Service Reform and a range of commissioners including the Community Rehabilitation Company and the Justice and Rehabilitation Executive.

Having secured the funding to build the infrastructure for the alliance, bringing together women's organisations that had previously been in competition with each other due to commissioning processes, the alliance worked with commissioners to develop a Whole Systems Approach to ensure that women across Greater Manchester could access community services at every level of the CJS. Rather than seeking additional funds, the alliance focused on encouraging commissioners to use the funds already allocated in a different way and to develop a set of shared outcomes to enable contracted organisations to work together.

Through this Whole Systems Approach, women across Greater Manchester being diverted from the CJS have access to the holistic support of women's centres. While the organisations involved have been able to maintain their individual, localised approach, the Alliance model has also provided consistency in provision and quality, as well as allowing organisations to share their expertise.

The collective approach has opened up more funding opportunities to the organisations involved, enabling them to bid for larger pots of funding. Despite cuts to commissioners' budgets, the Alliance has been able to secure funding for the next three years to continue their work.

It is important to recognise however that developing this approach and model requires financial and structural support from commissioners. Small organisations often do not have the resources or time to support consortia-building work and will benefit from financial support to do this, particularly in the form of grants. Awareness among commissioners of the importance of a Whole Systems Approach and a willingness to contribute towards a shared approach rather than focus on siloed outcomes is also vital to the success of this work; this can be supported by clear leadership on the Whole Systems Approach from government departments including the MoJ, Department for Work and Pensions and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

9. What evidence, if any, would better help you with your work with women facing these issues?

For example research, statistics, information on a particular area, evidence that may help you with your work

Intersectionality of need

It would be useful to have additional research that focuses on intersectionality of women's needs and presents the experiences of women from equalities groups and/or those with protected characteristics who are also experiencing multiple disadvantage.

Further to this, there is limited literature focusing on the needs and views of transgender and disabled women in relation to their experiences of multiple disadvantage and it would be useful to have more qualitative information about their experiences.

Experiences of hidden homelessness

Given the lack of evidence on the gendered nature of homelessness²⁶ (see Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness), further research is required into how women experience homelessness, looking in depth at the experiences of women who are hidden homelessness.

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²⁶ Bretherton, J. (2017) *Reconsidering gender in homelessness*, Online: http://www.feantsa.org/download/feantsa-ejh-11-1_a1-v045913941269604492255.pdf (last accessed 23.02.2018)