

# Case study: Supporting women involved in prostitution

**SAFER FUTURE COMMUNITIES**

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REDUCING CRIME, ENABLING DESISTANCE AND SUPPORTING VICTIMS

## A WAY OUT: WOMEN'S OUTREACH SERVICE & CHANGING LIVES FOR WOMEN

CASE STUDIES FROM THE VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SECTOR

November 2013



There is prostitution in all areas of the North East and Cumbria, some is visible on-street prostitution but most is hidden, taking place behind closed doors. Many of those involved are the most excluded and vulnerable women in our communities, many of whom are disengaged with support services. This case study focuses on two charities that provide support services to women involved in prostitution: A Way Out and their Women's Outreach Service in Stockton and Changing Lives For Women (previously the The Cyrenians GAP Project) in Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead. The objective of these projects is to improve the safety of women whilst they are still involved in prostitution, and ultimately to help them exit prostitution entirely.

These two projects have demonstrated effectiveness on a number of levels and this case study explains how the projects have been able to do this, looking at both their outputs and their impact. A brief summary of their activities includes:

- Supporting women who are known to be those most resistant to any form of engagement with services
- Helping women to exit prostitution
- Enabling them to make positive changes in their lives, such as finding stable accommodation, reducing drug use and desisting from crime.
- Reuniting mothers with their children, who have been taken into care.

### Prostitution & survival

Recent research (carried out by Barefoot Research and Evaluation and funded by Northern Rock Foundation) found that approximately 1500 women and 350 men are involved in prostitution across the North East and Cumbria. Of the women, almost half are involved in survival sex.

This is the exchange of sex for essential resources, such as accommodation and food, or to feed an alcohol or drug addiction. For those involved in survival sex, life experiences are poor: violence (often extreme); homelessness; drug addiction; poor mental and physical health; committing crime, spending time in custody; and the removal of children. Women involved are often described as being difficult to work with, refusing to engage with services or engaging sporadically. The boundary between victim and perpetrator can also be blurred, with most women being involved in offending (including convictions for violent offences). However, most crimes committed are for shop theft which is often linked to their substance misuse.

### The charities & projects

A Way Out is a charity based in Stockton that was established in 2002. They are an outreach and prevention service, specialising in engaging vulnerable and hard to reach women and young people with issues such as substance misuse problems, those involved in prostitution, homelessness and offending.

Their Women's Outreach and Recovery Programme

has the main aims of engaging women who are involved in prostitution into services and to establish recovery pathways for them. Such women have needs relating to exploitation, substance dependency, homelessness and domestic abuse. The project includes both drop-in sessions and structured programmes intended to improve self-esteem, confidence and decision making. The ultimate aim of these services is to create long term aspirations for the women; something which has been absent for the majority of them. The service is delivered by women for women, as it aims to create an environment that feels safe, secure and welcoming despite any history of exploitation or abuse.

They provide a lot of accommodation support and advice, trying to get the women into a stable home and out of living with their pimps. They do this by working with the council's Housing Options team and with Rock Solid, a voluntary sector housing provider. They say "getting a girl



### Case study: Becky\*

Becky was heavily involved in prostitution in order to fund both her partner's alcohol habit and her own crack and heroin use. She lived a very chaotic lifestyle and although she was seen regularly by the women's outreach team, she would engage very sporadically and was never quite ready to make a complete break away from her destructive lifestyle. In 2011, she became pregnant and initially stopped taking drugs. Unfortunately due to pressures from her partner, who was very controlling, and the chaotic temporary accommodation where she lived, she soon relapsed and disengaged with the service. In 2012, Becky gave birth to a son who was immediately taken into care. Despite trying to maintain contact, the pressures from her partner meant visits soon reduced and the plan for the baby became adoption. Throughout this time A Way Out kept up support with Becky and one day she finally decided enough was enough and made the decision to leave her partner. They were able to find her a place in a women's refuge and since leaving, she has made a dramatic turn around. Since moving into the refuge, she gave weekly clean drug tests, engaged with all agencies and eventually had an independent social worker assessment, which was positive. A rehabilitation plan was devised by A Way Out and her social worker in order to return her son to her. She is now in regular contact with her family and enjoying unsupervised contact with her son.

Since the last report Becky is still clean and has moved out of the refuge into her own property. She now has her son living with her permanently and is doing really well. She is now making plans around her and her son, registering with schools and thinking of how she can become part of the work force again in the future. A Way Out continues to support Becky although contact has now dropped to fortnightly to encourage her independence. They are still part of the core group and attend the Children's Social Care reviews. They also continue to work alongside her social worker so she can access support if needed.

\*Not her real name.

a good home is the most important thing ... the hostels and B&Bs are a real problem ... they put a young woman in a hostel with 17 men and no locks on the doors!" They also work with the women around debt issues and the importance of budgeting. They work with CRI, a local drug treatment charity, to help women with their addictions.

Changing Lives was set up in 1970 (then called the Cyrenians) as a homeless charity. They have grown in complexity as an organisation and now provide a range of services across the North East and further afield. These include housing, substance misuse and employment services.

Changing Lives For Women began as a small drop-in for women involved in sex work which was held at St Thomas's church in Newcastle in 2006. They now provide a number of services for women involved in survival sex and in commercial sex work, including group support, assertive outreach and a drop-in. They have also recently started a project for men involved in sex work. Note: Changing Lives do not refer to their client group as being involved in prostitution but refer to them as involved in sex work and sexual exploitation.

The project provides case management support to around 45 women at any one time, providing one-to-one and facilitated group support. Groups offered vary from weekly peer support drop-in sessions, educational groups (where qualifications are achieved), Freedom Programme and Just for Girls, a weekly women only substance treatment one-stop-shop. These groups are based on a Dialectical Behavioural Therapy approach, which is a NICE recommended treatment model for women who have histories of abuse.

Referrals into both projects come from a variety of sources, including Probation, sexual health and drug services and self referrals; news of the projects is spread amongst women by word of mouth.



## The method

The 'sex markets' in both areas are different, for example in Stockton it is mostly on street and in Newcastle and Tyneside it is off street, taking place in brothels, people's houses and in other premises. However the method, adopted by both services in this case study is the same. For example, both projects use assertive outreach as a key method; in Stockton, outreach takes place on the street, in Newcastle, it takes place via word of mouth and individual contacts or referrals. Other common methods include: one-to-one support; the use of drop-ins; the provision of a warm, welcoming, safe and non judgemental environment; never denying services or closing cases despite no shows or non attendance; and respite activities (such as horse riding or nail design, as shown in the photos). Consistency is felt to be key, the consistent presence of a worker who stays open and empathetic, regardless of the behaviour of the women. This is important because many of the women involved have very little in the way of constant, trusted relationships in their lives and many will test this by pushing boundaries and breaking rules. As one worker illustrated "they'll push you, test you, behave really badly, then confide in you, open up, then try to hurt you on purpose ... most of them have got attachment issues ... you have to stay with them".

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*You have helped me a lot. I had nowhere to go ... now I've got a good hostel, I come to the groups on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, I see my probation worker here and if I didn't see her here I would be breached as I always miss my appointments ... I love it.”* Service user

Both projects use a staged approach when working with the women, which broadly runs from non-involvement in service (or continuing involvement in prostitution) to full engagement (exiting sex work) and ultimately discharge (independent living). Changing Lives for Women's four stage approach includes:

- **Pre-change: harm reduction**  
Women are still involved in sex work and the project focuses on harm reduction strategies, such as looking at women's safety, providing condoms and engaging with GUM services.
- **Accepting help: crisis interventions, practical and emotional support**  
Women acknowledge and identify that they need support to address complex issues. Women are offered holistic support packages where the allocated support worker will use an outreach approach and provide tailored and needs led interventions. The holistic approach is focused around the Outcomes Star tool ([www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk)).
- **Change: progression**  
The Outcome Star now indicates that the women are at a different stage, highlighting the progression. All areas of the Star continued to be focused upon but less support is offered as the women take more responsibility.
- **Self reliance: stability**  
Women are self reliant, stable and are reviewed regularly at weekly case management meetings.

## Outputs

In the last 12 months, A Way Out has worked with a total of 32 women who are involved in on-street prostitution. Most are between the ages of 21 and 40 years old. Most women have heroin and crack addictions, others are poly drug users, taking anything they can, including alcohol.

In 2012/13, Changing Lives for Women has worked with around 60 different women, mostly involved in off-street sex work, including some who may have been trafficked and others who are involved with escort agencies. The ages of their clients are slightly younger than those of A Way Out, with most being between 25 and 34 years old.

## Outcomes

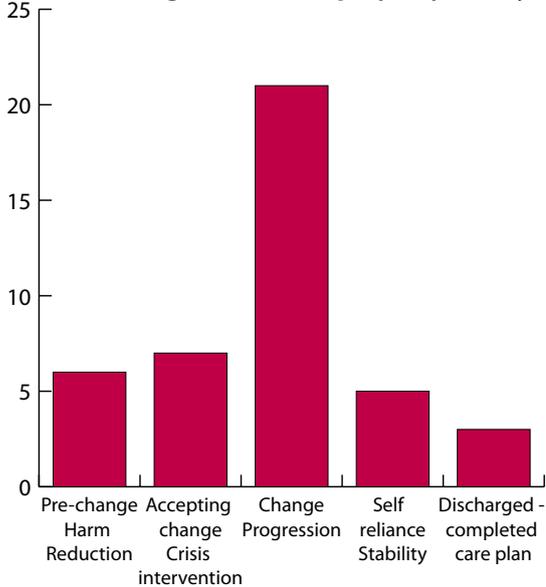
Outcomes are measured in different ways: through monitoring women's involvement in prostitution, their family status and involvement in employment and training. Changing Lives For Women uses the Outcome Star as a way of both focusing and directing interventions and monitoring outcomes. They also monitor women's progress through the project's stages.

A Way Out has helped 40 percent (n=13) of the women exit prostitution: most of these have either stopped using drugs altogether or are on reducing substitute prescriptions (although there have been several who have

relapsed on their recovery journey): three have started full time education; one woman has started work; and three have custody of their children who are no longer on the child protection register.

In 2012/13, Changing Lives For Women helped 30 percent (n=25) of the women exit sex work and remain exited. Women also progress through the different stages of the project. As can be seen in the graph, most women have been taken from the pre-change to the change/ progression stage of intervention.

**Women's stage within the project journey**



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*I have been coming to A Way Out for about two years now and I have changed my life around. I wouldn't be where I am now without the support of my worker.”* Service user

## Conclusion

Women involved in prostitution are the most vulnerable, exploited and excluded members of our community. They experience regular violence and homelessness and much of their substance abuse is self medication to cope with these and their poor physical and mental health. Without help and support, the prospect for change or improvement is unlikely. Projects such as those delivered by A Way Out and Changing Lives, help women change, supporting them to exit prostitution and turn their lives around. Any strategy to address violence against women and girls must include an element to support women involved in prostitution in order to give them that chance to escape a life of violence and abuse.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

These case studies are part of a series which showcases the work of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in the North East in reducing crime, promoting community safety and reducing reoffending. Clinks supports, represents and campaigns for the VCSE sector working with offenders. Clinks aims to ensure the sector and all those with whom they work, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of offenders. Clinks' work in the North East is funded by the Northern Rock Foundation and is delivered in partnership with Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE). The Local Development Officer for the North East, Natalie Maidment, works with the VCSE sector, supporting their work to reduce crime, promote community safety, and reduce reoffending. For further information, please contact Natalie at [natalie.maidment@clinks.org](mailto:natalie.maidment@clinks.org)



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