



## Support for Women Around Northumberland

# Evaluation briefing

### SWAN

**Support for Women Around Northumberland (SWAN) is one of two projects in the North East which have received funding from the Ministry of Justice under their Diverting Women from Custody Programme. The objectives of SWAN are to reduce the re-offending of female offenders or those at-risk of offending through providing a range of diversionary and preventative interventions. The project became operational in February 2010 and has received funding until March 2011.**

SWAN is delivered by a partnership of voluntary sector organisations in Northumberland: ESCAPE Family Support (the lead agency); the Women's Health Advice Centre (WHAC); Fourth Action; and Relate. The project team consists of a Project Coordinator, three Women's Intervention Workers and a Project Counsellor.

SWAN was evaluated in December 2010 by an independent research organisation, Barefoot Research and Evaluation. This is a summary of the evaluation (a full evaluation report can be supplied by ESCAPE).



A women's group session

**"Friends and family have come back because of SWAN"** Service user

### Project approach

In March, the project started taking their first referrals which came from the Probation Service, from the Ashington and Blyth offices. Later referrals came from children's centres, housing, Police, Social Services and the partnership agencies themselves.

Women's Intervention Workers engage with those women referred and provide support in a number of areas:

- Accompanying to activities, such as the gym
- Advocacy such as to benefit agencies, Core Group or Child Protection meetings, housing, GPs and MARAC
- Booking and accompanying onto courses such as confidence building and employability
- Booking and accompanying onto therapies such as head massage and acupuncture
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Motivational Interviewing
- Counselling, either provided by Women's Intervention Workers themselves or referring to WHAC or Relate
- Emotional support

**"If SWAN was not in existence the only other option for the Police would have been enforcement, either through housing and eviction or through the courts"** Police

These are the ways in which, as one project worker described, "we're trying to find a lever with which to change people's lives around". The Women's Intervention Workers have caseloads of around 20.

Many women who are referred in are difficult to either contact and/or are reluctant to engage. As a consequence, the project workers repeatedly and persistently attempt to contact and engage women for the first time. One project worker gave the example of trying to engage one client over six weeks, who in the early stages used to put the phone down on the worker; now this client is seen weekly. Referrals will never be closed and contact will be attempted at less frequent periods.



A counselling session

## Findings of the evaluation

Between February and November a total of 120 women have been referred into SWAN. At the time of writing this evaluation report, a total of 70 women have been assessed with a resultant support plan. Of these, a total of 50 women have engaged regularly with the project.

**“There is a group of female offenders who mostly have alcohol problems which are linked to offending which receive no support from anyone ... now SWAN helps these clients”** Probation

The project has made a 70 percent reduction in the rate of re-offending of the women who have engaged with the project. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of charges (73 percent) made by the Police and the number of convictions (81 percent) amongst engaged female offenders. There has also been a 72 percent reduction in appearances before Magistrates.

The evaluation makes the following findings in relation to the project's impact on women:

- The project staff and approach are highly valued and appreciated: those service users who were interviewed spoke very highly of the quality of the support they received from the Women's Intervention Workers, particularly their empathetic and non-judgemental styles.
- The female only nature of the project was appreciated: service users reported their appreciation of the service as it was only for women. Several service users reported

that there was often danger associated with going to a mixed service as often violent ex-partners or abusive male associates were present, which discouraged them from going.

- The project reduces re-offending: women spoke of the impact that the project had on reducing their offending behaviour and associated criminality. This occurred on a number of levels, from supporting them to reduce or stop their substance misuse to supporting them emotionally and reducing anger levels.
- SWAN helps women reduce and/or stop their drug and alcohol misuse: women reported that the intervention had helped them reduce or stop their drug use in a series of ways. These included supporting them emotionally to give them the strength to stop their substance use, through providing them with activities, such as alternative therapies and group work.
- The project addresses need across all pathways: service users reported that the project supported them in multiple ways, including emotional support and counselling, reducing their substance misuse, helping them find accommodation and helping them with parenting and family relationships. There is evidence that indicates that without the intervention, children would have been removed from the care of their mothers or conversely because of the support, children have been returned to them sooner.
- SWAN intervenes across all phases of need, from crisis to recovery and rehabilitation: service users reported that they had been supported to escape immediate danger, into emergency accommodation and refuges and provided with clothes when they had none. Other service users received support to prevent relapse and maintain emotional resilience during their recovery and stabilisation.

- The emotional support that SWAN provides is a common theme and is rated highly: all women interviewed valued the emotional support that the project provided. This support was considered by the service users to be important in their recovery.
- SWAN improves women's health: related to the above point, respondents reported a series of positive impacts in relation to their physical and mental health. This included stopping anti-depressants because of the project support and doing more sport (at the gym for example).
- The project gave the women structure: a common theme discussed by women was structure and how SWAN has introduced a structure to their lives which was highly valued. This was contrasted to their lack of structure before they were referred to SWAN. This ultimately helps women return to productive life. An additional element to SWAN was that it connected women with other activities.

**“I'd binge, get arrested for Affray ... since I've been with SWAN that hasn't happened”** Service user

The evaluation produces the following findings based on interviews with partner agencies.

- The project is thought well of and appreciated by partner agencies: all agencies interviewed were enthusiastic about the project and appreciated its existence. Much of this appreciation related to the project's uniqueness and it filling a service gap.
- It fills an important service gap: SWAN delivers services to many people who would have previously received no service. Many of these are women with alcohol problems, victims of domestic abuse and those with poor mental health.
- The project has benefited partner agencies in a number of ways: these include helping partners manage their caseload and helping achieve targets and service outcomes.
- There has been a good relationship with partner agencies and there is evidence of good partnership working: there is good information flow between organisations which include updates on client progress, which is appreciated by those organisations. In certain cases, joint visits are undertaken together at the point of referral.
- The newness of SWAN is an advantage: it was reported by referring agencies that SWAN benefits from being a new project; clients have no preconceptions about the service and it has no reputation amongst service users.
- The duration of support is a key advantage: it was reported that an important advantage to the SWAN service is that it is not time limited.
- The project delivers an effective service to the County's rural area: in other areas around the country, the offender will go to the organisation, with SWAN, the organisation goes to the offender. This is particularly beneficial to service the rural areas and it is common for some women to have been banned from driving because of drink driving offences, which further isolates them.
- It provides a service that spans socio-economic categories: SWAN clients are not only limited to those from deprived communities. It also supports women who may be classed as more affluent and middle-class. For many of such women, their offending is linked to alcohol misuse.

**“The only outstanding piece of work was to deal with the woman's alcohol abuse which we couldn't do ... so we referred her to SWAN”** Social Services

- SWAN has been a valuable addition to Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) groups: SWAN has increased the range of support options that can be given to female offenders across Northumberland. Previous to SWAN there were limited options to this group. LMAPS make direct referrals to SWAN.
- The project has a social benefit to communities: it does this through reducing re-offending and anti-social behaviour, reducing the risk of harm to both communities and the individual and their children, it helps keep families together and they link women into the wider community, strengthening social networks.

## Conclusion

It is important to conclude an evaluation with a judgement against original objectives. Therefore, firstly, we can say that the project is engaging with the appropriate cohort of women (i.e. offenders) and is on track to fulfil its targets. Secondly, we can also say that the project has led to a significant reduction in re-offending rates in terms of arrests (a 70 percent reduction), charges (73 percent) and convictions (81 percent reduction). It also reduces or stops drug and alcohol use: a total of 22 percent of clients have abstained and 20 percent have reduced their consumption.

The project effectively delivers interventions across all stages of a women's offending career: from crisis intervention, such as when a woman is homeless, through recovery and to rehabilitation, for example when a client is almost ready to re-enter employment. This is important as the project is sufficiently flexible to respond to all of their clients' needs and not just a particular group.

It is also necessary to conclude that SWAN's unique model of operating a virtual one-stop-shop has been effective on a number of levels, including: addressing rural isolation and service inequality and effectively taking interventions to women. This model has been highly appreciated within partner agencies and is clearly well thought out.

Finally, the front of the Corston report bears the subtitle, 'The need for a distinct, radically different, visibly-led, strategic, proportionate, holistic, woman-centred approach'. It is clear from this evaluation that the intervention was well identified by Baroness Corston and well constructed and delivered by the SWAN Partnership and it has achieved exactly what it was conceived to do.



A Reiki therapy session to help with relaxation

## Case study - Sam

Sam is a 36 year old woman who was referred into the project through MARAC as someone who was at high risk of serious harm from domestic violence. She is also on an 18 month community supervision order for a domestic violence incident against her adult son.

At the point of referral, Sam was homeless and was found accommodation at a women's refuge. Her ex-partner, the perpetrator of the abuse who had previously set her on fire, had destroyed all her clothes

as well as her home. The Women's Intervention Worker's first job after locating safe accommodation and making sure she was safe from harm, was to find her some warm clothes to wear.

Sam was both physically and emotionally damaged and required intensive crisis intervention. She spoke very highly of the support from SWAN and said "if SWAN hadn't been here? I'd been wandering the streets ... and probably dead".

## Case study - Sheila

Sheila is 47 and has recently completed an 18 month community supervision order which she received for a drink driving offence. Sheila lives in her own property and has been a shop manager. Around two years ago her husband left her and started an acrimonious divorce process, which she says started her drinking. Leading up to the conviction, she had a significant drink problem and would go on 'benders' which would last a couple of weeks. She was referred into SWAN by Probation as although her order was coming to an end, they were worried that the risk of relapse was high. Her Probation

Officer felt that she required the continued support which she was no longer in a position to provide as her order was finished.

Sheila has been engaging with the project very well and has taken advantage of a range of courses and therapies. She says "it's given me structure, got me out of the house, doing something with purpose". Now after eight months of support she is ready to contemplate a life with no support and has resolved to re-enter employment.



ESCAPE Family Support Ltd.  
93 Bondicar Terrace  
Blyth, Northumberland  
NE24 2JR  
Tel: 01670 544055  
[www.escapefamilysupport.co.uk](http://www.escapefamilysupport.co.uk)  
[admin@escapefamilysupport.co.uk](mailto:admin@escapefamilysupport.co.uk)  
Charity Number: 1063500  
Company Number: 3256554

## About the partnership organisations

ESCAPE Family Support has worked in Northumberland for 14 years. It provides holistic support to substance users their families and carers across Northumberland, delivering stand alone services and interventions in partnership with statutory and non-statutory agencies. ESCAPE provides Tier 2 (advice, advocacy, information) and Tier 3 services (including Person Centred Counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), structured care programmes, therapies, support to employability, brief interventions and 24 hour help line support.



Women's Health Advice Centre  
1 Council Road, Ashington, NE63 8RZ  
Tel: 01670 853977  
[www.whac-online.co.uk](http://www.whac-online.co.uk)  
[admin@whac.uk.com](mailto:admin@whac.uk.com)  
Charity Number: 1119121  
Company Number: 5987640

The Women's Health Advice Centre has been providing a non-medical service to women for 25 years. Their objectives are to help women improve their physical, mental, social health and well being. This is achieved by offering counselling, lifestyle sessions, personal development courses, support and advice services, family law, debt, housing welfare rights and through providing volunteering opportunities.



Relate Northumberland and Tyneside  
3rd Floor Mea House, Ellison Place  
Newcastle, NE1 8XS.  
Tel: 0191 2697905  
[www.relate-nt.org.uk](http://www.relate-nt.org.uk)  
[enquiries@relate-nt.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@relate-nt.org.uk)  
Charity Number: 1055953  
Company Number: 3118600

Relate Northumberland and Tyneside are part of the Relate Federation. Relate is the UK's largest provider of relationship counselling and psychosexual therapy with over 70 years of experience of working with individuals and couples. Relate helps clients to understand their circumstances and relationships and explore the implications of their current situation.



Fourth Action  
33 West Street, Belford,  
Northumberland, NE70 7QB  
Tel: 01668 219879  
[www.nnwn.org](http://www.nnwn.org)  
[hala@nnwn.org](mailto:hala@nnwn.org)  
Company Number: 5410843

Fourth Action is based in rural Northumberland and promotes equality with communities. The organisation has a long and strong track record in community, project and network development, as well as training, research and evaluation. Fourth Action's main focus has been gender equality, working primarily with women but also with men.

SWAN is funded by the Ministry of Justice