



**Support for Women
Around Northumberland**

Project evaluation

December 2010



Barefoot
Research and Evaluation

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to a series of people for the time and resources they have committed to this evaluation. We would like to thank the service users who gave up their time to be interviewed as well as the many professionals. In particular we would like to thank Hayley Morrison, the Disclosure Manager from Northumbria Police, who provided us with the re-offending data in a timely, efficient and very helpful way.

About the authors

Barefoot Research and Evaluation is based in Newcastle upon Tyne. It has particular expertise in work with vulnerable and at-risk groups and on projects and strategies to support them. Barefoot Research and Evaluation has carried out work for Nacro, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, the Probation Service and local authorities on initiatives to reduce crime and re-offending and improve community safety. Dr. Christopher Hartworth, who set up Barefoot, has 20 years' experience of research and evaluation, beginning in developing countries in poverty alleviation programmes and continuing in the North East of England in work with disadvantaged communities.

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Executive summary

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.

Outputs

The original project document stated that between February 2010 and March 2011, the project would undertake needs assessments and create support plans for 80 women. It also stated that over the course of the project, a total of 50 women will consistently engage with the project.

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.

The project has resulted in 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.

Findings from service users

The evaluation produces the following findings based on service user interviews.

- 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 is 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 (improving thinking and behaviour).
- SWAN helps women reduce and/or stop their drug and alcohol misuse: women reported that the intervention had helped them reduce or stop their substance misuse in a series of ways. These included supporting them emotionally to give them the strength to stop their substance use and through providing them with activities, such as alternative therapies and group work.
- The project addresses need across all reducing re-offending pathways: service users reported that the project supported them in multiple areas of need, 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 to their recovery.
- SWAN improves women's health: related to the above point, service users 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 was structure and how SWAN has introduced this 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.

Findings from partner agencies¹

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.
- It fills an important service gap: SWAN delivers services to 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.
- SWAN has 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. In certain cases, joint visits are undertaken at the point of referral.
- SWAN has benefited from the cooperation of its partner agencies: this has come through promotional activities and referrals.
- 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 where clients are often isolated.
- 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.
- SWAN has been a valuable addition to Safer Northumberland's Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) groups: SWAN has increased the range of support options that can be provided to female offenders across Northumberland. Previous to SWAN there were limited options for this group. LMAPS make direct referrals to SWAN.
- 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.
- 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 an additional 20 percent have reduced their consumption.

The project effectively delivers interventions across all stages of a woman'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 one 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.

¹ Such as Police, Probation and Northumberland County Council



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1.0 Introduction

Support for Women Around Northumberland (SWAN) is one of two projects² in the North East which have received funding from the Ministry of Justice under their Diverting Women from Custody Programme (the Corston Report provides the evidence base upon which the programme is based, see box 1.1). 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 (see box 1.2).

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 (see appendix one).

This evaluation was commissioned by the SWAN Partnership to examine the impact of SWAN and its outcomes.

1.1 The evaluation

The evaluation was carried out by Barefoot Research and Evaluation, an independent specialist organisation based in the North East of England³. The evaluation consisted of:

- Semi-structured interviews with service users.
- Focus groups, semi-structured interviews and participatory appraisal sessions with project staff and the SWAN partnership organisations.
- Semi-structured interviews with associated strategic and operational professionals, including NOMS North East, Drug and Alcohol Action Team, Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving (LMAPS) group representatives, Social Workers, Northumbria Probation, housing agencies and the Police.
- An analysis of project records and monitoring information (requirements of the Home Office).
- An analysis of offending data from the Police National Computer.

The results of the focus groups and semi-structured interviewed have been thematically analysed and coded and are presented in this report.

²The other is the WoW! project in Newcastle delivered by The Cyrenians. SWAN is the only one of the two which has been independently evaluated.

³For more information on the organisation, see www.barefootresearch.org.uk



Box 1.1 The Corston Report

Baroness Corston's Report, a Review of Vulnerable Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) was published on 13 March 2007. Baroness Corston made a number of recommendations calling for a more coordinated approach to tackling women's needs in the community. The report refers to generic women's centres as models of good practice. These centres provide access to a range of services on-site as well as referring women to appropriate agencies, the aim being to tackle problems in relation to mental health, accommodation, education and employment, childcare, finance and debt and other issues that may contribute to the women's social exclusion and/or offending behaviour.

Baroness Corston called for a larger network of women's centres to be developed advocating that this type of 'one-stop-shop' approach is effective in meeting women's multiple and complex needs and diverting them away from the CJS. The Diverting Women from Custody Programme was set up to ensure vulnerable women who are not a danger to the public are dealt with appropriately in the community.

Source: Ministry of Justice, 2009

Box 1.2 Aims and objectives of the Diverting Women from Custody Programme

SWAN receives funding from the National Offender Management Service's Women's Community Projects (WCPs) programme. The WCP grants are part of the national Diverting Women from Custody Programme which belongs to the Ministry of Justice. The Diverting Women from Custody Programme was set up to ensure women who are not a danger to the public are dealt with appropriately in the community. The overall aim of the Programme is:

To achieve a reduction of the number of women in prison who do not need to be there as they are not serious or violent offenders who pose a risk to the public.

In order to achieve the aim, the services provided using the grant funding must deliver the following objectives:

- To provide additional and enhanced one-stop-shop services in the community for women at risk of offending and women offenders including women at risk of receiving a custodial sentence, women on bail (police or court bail), women on community orders and women released following custodial sentences
- To ensure coordination of services for women at an early stage in order to tackle factors that can lead to social exclusion and the risk of offending
- To engage with women at each stage of the Criminal Justice System in order to tackle factors that can lead to social exclusion and to ensure coordination of services for women to protect the public and reduce re-offending
- To work in partnership with local criminal justice agencies to divert women from custody and increase compliance rates by providing integrated packages of support that meet the needs of women, specifically in relation to mental health, accommodation, skills and employment, drugs and alcohol, childcare, finance and debt and other issues that may contribute to the women's social exclusion and/or offending behaviour
- To work with mainstream services outside of criminal justice such as Social Services and health, to facilitate women's access to specialist services and their integration into mainstream services
- Provide a gender specific service sensitive to the needs and diversity of all women in order to promote equality and avoid discrimination for service users and staff.

Source: Ministry of Justice, 2009

2.0 Project background

In May 2009, ESCAPE Family Support in Northumberland initiated the formation of a partnership for the purposes of submitting a bid to the Ministry of Justice to deliver a diverting women from custody project in Northumberland. The partnership organisations were: ESCAPE Family Support who have expertise in substance misuse and general support; the Women's Health Advice Centre (WHAC) with expertise in women's health, counselling and domestic violence; Relate who provide generic counselling with specialities in couple counselling and sexual abuse; and Fourth Action with a mentoring programme which covers the rural areas of Northumberland.

It was proposed that in Northumberland SWAN would be a virtual one-stop-shop providing a range of services for women. It was to be virtual as it would not be based in one geographical location but would take the service to the woman, either in their own home or in an appropriate local community venue.

The partnership was notified at the end of November 2009 that they had been successful in their bid. By February 2010, ESCAPE had appointed a full time Project Coordinator, then in March they employed one full time and two part time Women's Initiative Workers. Also in March, WHAC appointed a Project Counsellor (starting on 18.5 hours which has recently increased to 25 hours).

Relate and Fourth Action have not employed additional staff and chose to deliver their services from existing resources. In relation to the former, this consisted of the purchase of 98 counselling sessions over the duration of the project. Fourth Action budgeted a total of 10 hours per client with a total of 20 clients.

Relationships between the partners have been quick to develop and are reported to be relaxed and harmonious. It was noted that in practice it has been more of a virtual partnership, mostly using email, than a face-to-face partnership. This has been due to the large geographical size of Northumberland and a lack of necessity as the virtual partnership was working well.

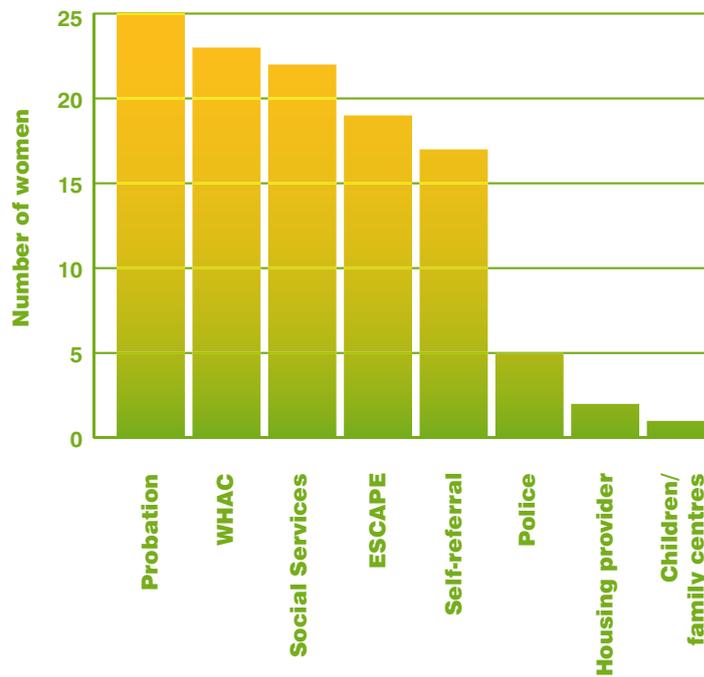


2.1 Project approach

First referrals to the project 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 (see graph 2.1). The Women's Intervention Workers provide regular feedback to the referring agencies about their work with clients and their progress.

Upon receipt of the referral, clients are contacted within a minimum of 48 hours (but commonly the same day). The first meeting is for introductory purposes and allows the client to hear about what the service consists of. This meeting may take place at a woman's home⁵, in a community venue, e.g. café or Sure Start or if the client is being introduced by another service, at that venue, e.g. at a Probation office or Social Services building. Women are also often brought to the ESCAPE or WHAC offices by the referring agency.

Graph 2.1 Referrals between February and November 2010



⁴These are monthly meetings attended by agencies such as housing, local authority services and the Police.

⁵A joint visit will be carried out at first in order to manage risk.

Box 2.1 SWAN services at Relate

Women are seen for around one hour by a trained psychotherapist, once a week at either a local community venue or they are seen at Relate's headquarters at Mea House in Newcastle. The therapist uses a range of methods including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Psycho-Sexual Therapy and Transactional Analysis.

SWAN clients are described as different to other Relate clients because of their chaotic and vulnerable lifestyles. Routine clients will come for counselling about a specific issue whereas SWAN clients do not have such an awareness of their need for counselling. As a consequence of this, the therapist's initial approach is to allow the client the space to be able to vocalise and identify the particular issues which require discussion and resolution. The therapist said "it's important to get to the root of their problems ... to help them understand why they are where they are ... I ask them have they ever explored their childhood or upbringing and they all say no".

All of their clients so far have had problems with self-esteem and self-worth and most have been very isolated. Most also have alcohol or substance misuse issues, have experienced domestic abuse and have financial difficulties. The therapist reports "[the therapy] gives them an opportunity to talk about themselves ... it gives them extra support to keep believing in themselves, to keep positive when everything else about their lives is so negative".

The next appointment is the assessment session where the project worker records all the relevant information from the client. This takes approximately 90 minutes and the information will direct the intervention and form the baseline information (for example, the flower power assessment tool is completed for the first time - see appendix two).

Following the assessment, the intervention will begin and includes a range of support areas. The project worker will visit the client as often as is required, from several times a week over a number of hours to once a week or fortnight; there tends to be more frequent visits at the start of the intervention which become less frequent as needs become fulfilled. For some clients the contact will be more sporadic, with some intensive support required at particular periods, followed by infrequent support. As one Women's Intervention Worker illustrated "they need you when they need you". The project worker will provide support to the client 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 MARAC⁶
- Booking and accompanying onto courses run through ESCAPE such as confidence building
- Booking and accompanying onto therapies such as head massage and acupuncture
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Motivational Interviewing
- Counselling, either provided by Women's Intervention Workers⁷ themselves or referring to WHAC or Relate
- Emotional support

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 (more for the full time worker and less for those part time). A total of six cases have been closed (out of a total of 50 women who have engaged with the project).

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. This is an important aspect of the project and is examined in the discussion section (5.1) later in this report.

There are three women's activity groups which were started by the project in October, in Ashington, Blyth and Prudhoe (an additional group is soon starting in Berwick). These are mutual support and activity-based groups where the women decide between themselves what they want to do, for example one group has organised pamper days.

⁶ Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference – these are fortnightly meeting attended by the Police, domestic violence services, local authority services and other relevant agencies. Through joint action, these meetings manage risk to individuals caused by domestic violence.

⁷ Who are all qualified counsellors.



Table 2.1 Stages in women's offending career and recovery

From the research⁸ for this evaluation, we have been able to schematically present women's progression in their offending career, including giving examples of causes of offending⁹. It is useful for this evaluation as clients can be located in their respective stages. These stages often have corresponding service implications, for example, a client in crisis is more likely to require more intervention than a woman in the rehabilitation stage. The stages also have implications for progression, i.e. a woman in crisis will not be ready for skills and employment support, as someone in stage three would be.

Pre-stage Determinants/origins	Stage 1 Crisis	Stage 2 Recovery	Stage 3 Rehabilitation
Childhood sexual/ physical abuse	Homelessness	Accommodation	Education
Dysfunctional family life	Domestic violence	Counselling	Stable mental health
Growing up in care	Drug and alcohol misuse	Detox/rehab	Stable family relationships/return of children
Drug/alcohol-related bereavement	Crime/anti-social behaviour	Controlled drug and alcohol use	Abstinence/ reduction of methadone/alcohol
Critical incident, e.g. divorce, domestic violence incident, sexual assault	Removal of children	Benefits/debt management	Development of trust and attachments
	Loss of finances	Reconciliation with family	Employment
	Mental breakdown	Engagement in activities	



Fire Academy
meets the
women's group

⁸From testimonies of service users, Women's Intervention Workers and referring agencies.

⁹ It is recognised that this is a somewhat dispassionate tool. The common reality is that service users are vulnerable and damaged individuals. As one partner agency reported "the offence is often the last thing that happens in a protracted awful period in their lives".

Box 2.2 SWAN services at WHAC

The SWAN service at WHAC started taking referrals in February which came from both external organisations like Sure Start and from WHAC's own waiting list (these were clients which had a history of offending or who were at-risk of offending and who were waiting for a specialist counsellor). There are several recurrent and dominant themes amongst their clients, which are:

- The experience of childhood abuse (emotional, physical and sexual) from their parents and/or carers
- Alcohol misuse
- Low self-confidence and esteem
- Anger
- Attachment and trust issues
- Family breakdown and/or dysfunction.

Women are seen for one hour a week and as long as the woman requires the counselling. SWAN clients appreciate the fact that WHAC is a neutral venue and is not associated with substance misuse or offending. The Project Counsellor reported "some people that do have alcohol problems do not want to go to ESCAPE because they didn't want to be associated with who they see as a drug and alcohol service". They continued "[here] they don't feel labelled, it's [WHAC] just a service".

Box 2.3 SWAN services at Fourth Action

Fourth Action is based in North Northumberland and they specialise in supporting women through mentoring and linking them into structured activities. Their mentoring support is aimed at women who are currently at the recovery or rehabilitation stage (see table 2.1) and in a position to be able to move on into productive life. Women are matched with a mentor who visits the client as often as she requires. The SWAN mentor says "we identify their skills, build up their confidence, develop a programme of activities and bring women together".

They have currently worked with a total of eight women but this number is expected to increase as SWAN clients progress from crisis to recovery and rehabilitation. The mentor says "we haven't had many women in the early days but that's a reflection of where they're at ...".



A Reiki therapy session to help with relaxation



3.0 Findings

3.1 Findings from service users

From interviews¹⁰ with service users and their subsequent thematic analysis, we make a series of findings.

- **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. Comments given included “brilliant”, “I don’t know where I would be without them”, “it’s great, the best support I’ve got”, “they are just great”. A repeated theme of service users was that of trust and either their inability to trust or the absence of trust in their lives. SWAN was reported to establish trust with the women which was highly appreciated. For example, one client said “trust is a very big issue for me ... I never used to trust anyone ... I trust the SWAN workers” and another said “I really click and gel with [name of worker]”.
- **The female only nature of the project is 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. One client said “it’s reassuring that it’s only for women”. This point was corroborated by partner agencies.
- **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. One woman said “I’d binge [drink], get arrested for Affray ... since I’ve been with SWAN that hasn’t happened”.
- **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 (e.g. self-confidence building workshops). For example one woman said “if it hadn’t been for SWAN I would definitely be using [heroin] again”.
- **The project addresses need across all pathways:** service users reported that the project supported them in multiple ways, including emotional support and counselling (the thinking and behaviour pathway), reducing their substance misuse (drug and alcohol pathway), helping them find accommodation and helping them with parenting and family relationships (the children and families pathway). 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. One client said “friends and family have come back because of SWAN”. There is also evidence to indicate that the intervention improves the mental health of women, which the Corston Report explicitly links to offending behaviour. The project helps women into work through working on their issues of self-esteem and confidence and by providing short readiness for work courses. For example, one woman who had been out of work for several years had attended two A4e employability courses. She said that both SWAN and the courses had put her in a position where she felt confident enough to apply for jobs. She said “I’d been in the house for four years, I’d lost all confidence ... I felt like I lost myself ... now I want to get back into work”.
- **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 (e.g. from perpetrators of domestic violence), into emergency accommodation and refuges and provided with clothes when they had none. Other service users received support to prevent relapse (into drug taking or alcohol abuse) and maintain emotional resilience during their recovery and stabilisation. One service user said “I understand why I was behaving like I was, being destructive ... I’m stable now”.
- **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, for example, service user comments included “when I can’t face it, she [worker] helps me”, “she helps me keep motivated, keeps me straight” and “when I leave [the session] I got a big smile on my face ... it makes me feel more confident”.

¹⁰There was a total of eight in-depth semi structured interviews undertaken with current clients.

- **SWAN improves women's health:** related to the previous 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). In one example, a client reported to that the project played a significant role in reducing her alcohol use and stopping risk-taking behaviour (such as binge drinking or going on 'benders', i.e. prolonged periods (from days to weeks) being intoxicated). This client had been hospitalised twice in the recent period before engaging with SWAN, one as a result of alcohol-related serious injury and the other for a suicide attempt. The project's impact on improving mental health was also reported by the Women's Intervention Workers, for example "when they first come in the door they cannot hold eye contact with you and they've no confidence, but after a few weeks they are addressing you direct, going to Social Services and asking questions, where they wouldn't before". The project may have the ultimate health impact of saving lives, as many times respondents talked of suicide, e.g. "if they hadn't been here, I wouldn't be here", "I woulda been dead [without SWAN support]"
- **The project gives 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. For example, one woman said "they help with anything ... it gives us structure", another said "it's the boredom that drives you mad ... SWAN gives you things to do". Another said "[the support sessions] keep me focussed, they stop me dragging my heels ... it helps me feel like I can do stuff ... without her [worker] I wouldn't have made progress". This ultimately helps women return to productive life. An additional element to SWAN was that it connected women with other activities. Indeed, SWAN clients were reported to like the fact that they could access other services facilitated through SWAN should they wish.
- **All the women interviewed had positive aspirations:** the researcher ended the client interviews with the question 'where would you like to see yourself in 10 years?'. Responses varied but all were positive, for example, "clean and sober, with a stable lifestyle", "working and happy", "living in my own home in Cramlington with my kids" and "happy and being a good parent".

Case study 1 - Michelle

In June 2010, Michelle, a 30 year old woman with a four year son, was referred into the SWAN project by Social Services. They became aware of Michelle's situation from the Police who had been called out a number of times to the property to deal with disturbances of the peace. These were alcohol-related and were caused by both Michelle's sister who had a drink problem and Michelle herself who had also started binge drinking. As Michelle has a young son living with her, the Police notified Social Services, who then made the son the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

As part of the Plan, the sister had to leave her flat and Michelle had to start working with the SWAN project. Since June she has been receiving weekly one-to-one sessions with her support worker. She has also completed two back-to-work courses run from ESCAPE and taken advantage of the alternative therapy sessions as part of her support package. She has also received six counselling sessions from the WHAC Project Counsellor.

Michelle reported that it was a combination of factors which caused her offending behaviour: low self-esteem, her sister moving in, depression and the binge drinking. Michelle says because of the SWAN project her self-confidence has significantly improved and she said that she would also have continued binge drinking. She says "I won't let anyone walk over me any more". She said that before the intervention of SWAN she was scared to go to a doctors about her depression, which she now has. She said that previous to SWAN, "I was feeling really low, I couldn't look people in the eye ... I was a prisoner in my own house".

Michelle says that the intervention has improved her relationship with her son and her home is now more harmonious. She felt that without the intervention she would have become more depressed and would have carried on binge drinking. She said "I probably would have lost my son".



Case study 2 - 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.

Case study 3 - 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 4 - Joan

Joan was referred to SWAN in May by a worker at ESCAPE, who had been working with her around her alcohol misuse problems. Joan is in her fifties and comes from Wooler in North Northumberland, where she has always lived and worked and where she is well known. She had been through a period of recovery over the past year and had been on sickness benefits and was now ready to try to get her life back on track. She wanted help from Fourth Action to develop her confidence and to learn new skills. She worked with her mentor to identify learning and social opportunities in and around Wooler and to timetable her weekly activities to give her life more structure. She was supported in applying for a grant to pay for travel costs for training and for home broadband access, to support her ongoing studies (both of which are key barriers to people in rural areas).

SWAN has also helped her with travel costs to get to a leisure centre and for training in numeracy and literacy at Alnwick and Berwick. Joan has now got a part time job in Wooler and is continuing with studies and looking to develop her career by doing further studies. After meeting with her mentor weekly she now feels able to manage her affairs and meetings are now monthly; she is now more aware of where she can access varied support. Joan says "the support from SWAN helped me to look at opportunities available and gave me the confidence and motivation to go for things ... I never thought I'd get a job in Wooler again".

3.2 Findings from partner agencies

This section presents findings from both operational and strategic agencies who have been involved with SWAN as a referring agency (e.g. Probation or Police) or as an associated strategic partner (e.g. the Drug and Alcohol Action Team).

- **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. Comments from senior managers and frontline staff included "the project works very well", "it's a really good project", "SWAN is a godsend" and "I wish we had a similar service for men". Similarly, the Women's Intervention Workers were all appreciated. For example, one manager from a partner agency said "The workers are fab, they have a lovely manner ... women want to engage with real people, they want to know someone really cares".
- **It fills an important service gap:** SWAN delivers services to 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. One Probation manager reported "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". The gap in service provision for those with alcohol-related problems was a recurrent theme amongst partner agencies. The presence of such a service was appreciated and reported to have many service benefits. For example, Social Services reported "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". Another partner agency manager reported the benefit of a female-specific service; "having specialist female workers for women [in Northumberland] is a must". Another said, "the issue is how services are presented and offered to women ... the benefit is their female focus".

In addition to this, it was reported that whilst women in South East Northumberland would be able to access certain services (such as ESCAPE Family Support or Addictions), people in areas such as Wooler or Rothbury have unequal access.

- **They have 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 at the point of referral. Probation also encourage women to engage with the project and will accompany them on first visits.
- **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. For example, it was reported by agencies who work with substance misusers that certain clients do not wish to engage with ESCAPE Family Support because they do not wish to be labelled as a drug user if seen going into the venue. Also, certain service users are reluctant to go to ESCAPE because of the worry they will meet other drug users. SWAN has none of these connotations and as an outreach-based service does not have to rely upon service users coming into a particular location. This encourages service users with different characteristics to engage. One referring agency said "some middle-class women wouldn't go to ESCAPE [in case they were seen going in] but they will engage with SWAN".
- **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. One referrer reported "if you refer, you know that the support [from SWAN] is going to go on long after the order has finished".

Where clients are on their offending career progression (see table 2.1) has links to the duration of the support they receive. For example, if a client is in crisis at the point of engagement with the project it is likely that support will be intensive and long lasting, whereas if the woman is in the rehabilitation stage then support duration will be shorter.

The open ended nature of the support is very important to service users who will disengage when they feel they are ready to. To illustrate, when asked how long do they need the support, one service user said "for as long as I need, until my day-to-day life stabilises ... if she leaves sooner that'd be a bad thing".



Box 3.1 The Police and SWAN

This case concerns a married, 50 year old woman living in council property. In July 2010 she was arrested six times in two months for stealing alcohol from shops. Prior to these arrests she was known to the Police as an ambulance had previously picked her up as she was drunk and disoriented and had reported her to the Police.

The Police heard about SWAN through the local LMAPS meeting and the Neighbourhood Policing Team had made a subsequent referral. If SWAN was not available then they would have asked Homes for Northumberland, the council housing agency, to commence enforcement activities.

SWAN started to work with her and she subsequently has never since come to the attention of the Police. SWAN worked with this offender who was responsible for three percent of the sector's monthly crime statistics and stopped her offending. The Neighbourhood Beat Sergeant said "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".

The Blyth Police Sector is the busiest sector in Northumberland. They currently have around 180 recorded crimes a month. However, there are relatively few females responsible for those crimes. Blyth Neighbourhood Police Team has other referrals for SWAN, for example, one woman with a disabled daughter with alcohol and domestic violence problems. She has been drunk and disorderly and has been causing a community nuisance.

- **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. One partner agency manager reported "it has allowed a better quality service to be provided in the rural areas". An additional factor which compounds rural isolation and poor public transport infrastructure is low mobility amongst local communities. For example, it was noted that many of those living in Blyth do not travel for services or for employment outside of the area. Thus it was important that a service is brought to such communities, which is something SWAN provides.
- **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 example, they currently work with a woman who is an ex-Police Officer, a business secretary and a shop manager. For many of such women, their offending is linked to alcohol misuse.
- **SWAN has been a valuable addition to LMAPS:** SWAN has increased the range of support options that can be given to female offenders across Northumberland. Previous to SWAN there were limited options for this group. LMAPS make direct referrals to SWAN.

Box 3.2 Addressing rural isolation

One of SWAN's clients is a woman who lives in an isolated village in north Northumberland which is a two mile walk to the next village which is the nearest bus stop. The bus from there leaves for Alnwick every other day. This woman received a community order for a drink driving offence but has been unable to complete certain requirements (such as attending drink driving courses) because of her isolation. This has been compounded because of an injury she suffered. Because SWAN can provide her with a home-based service, she is able to address her offending behaviour and receive the support she requires. Northumbria Probation said about her "if it wasn't for SWAN I don't know what we'd have done with her".

- **SWAN has benefited from the cooperation of its partner agencies:** this has come through promotional activities and referrals. For example, Probation cascaded the information about the project via team meetings, through the Women's Champions (who have slots at each local team meeting) and via emails. It was reported that the Women's Champions have been very important to the success of the SWAN project and initially they have been the first point of contact for other Probation staff who are unsure about referring into the project.
- **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. For example, it helps Probation manage the Tier One and Two offenders and it has meant that Probation staff can spend longer on higher risk categories. It was reported by a Probation manager "it is a reasonable assumption to say it has saved us time".

Another advantage to the Probation Service is that it provides them with one point of referral. Once referred, SWAN then coordinates the support package and referrals into other services where necessary. Without SWAN, Offender Managers will spend time identifying other organisations to refer in to (for areas such as counselling, family support, education, etc), contacting agencies, accompanying clients to those organisations and coordinating appointments. This time saving means that Offender Managers can spend time on other higher risk cases. One Women's Champion reported "SWAN does the segmenting for you ... if more support is required around alcohol treatment or if it's counselling and that saves you lots of time". In addition to this, women may have such low self-esteem that they require significant encouragement and support to give them the confidence to access other services, which is also something that SWAN does. One Women's Champion said "sometimes it's very, very difficult to get a woman with low self-esteem through the door ... SWAN helps with this".

SWAN also helps Probation to manage risk. The Probation Service manage Tier Three offenders in the community (these are those who have a number of characteristics such as violent offenders, have children on the Child Protection Register or who have significant mental health problems). Although Probation visit these clients each week (and for certain clients this is often an office-based visit), the SWAN regular visits (often home-based) improve the management of risk to both the community and the individual (including the management of risk to children). An example was given by one referrer in relation to domestic violence, which is suffered by many of their clients. They reported "some women don't realise about the abuse they suffer, [SWAN] even by raising awareness that a relationship is abusive helps the women reduce their risk".

SWAN enables the processing of clients by partner organisations. There was evidence from several agencies that as a result of SWAN they are able to close client cases sooner. For example, Social Services reported "we made the referral to SWAN and we were able to close the case in a planned and organised way".

Homes for Northumberland reported that the project helps them manage their tenants and provides them with support options to complement their enforcement approach. A Housing Officer said "it's great because it gives us another tool that allows me to support tenants". Such tenants include those suffering from domestic violence or those causing anti-social behaviour. They also report that as SWAN has helped women stay in their tenancies through their intervention, it ultimately saves them human and financial resources. For example, the Housing Officer continued "yes, it does have cost implications because [if we pursue eviction actions] we have to pay legal fees, there's time spent in court and it also saves on Officer time having to deal with problem tenants".

SWAN contributes to the strategic goals of several agencies such as the Drug and Alcohol Action Team, NOMS North East and the Safer Northumberland partnership. For example, the latter's annual work plan contains NI132 Reduce Repeat Victimisation (currently this stands at 30 percent for Northumberland compared with a national average of 28 percent), which SWAN will contribute to.

For NOMS NE, female offenders are a priority group within their 2010-2013 Commissioning Strategy. There is also a national NOMS target to reduce the number of women in the custodial estate by 300 in March 2010 and by 400 by 2012, to which SWAN also contributes to.

In relation to the DAAT, their strategic assessment identifies that women are under represented in substance treatment. Women with substance misuse issues are therefore a particular target of the DAAT's efforts. A DAAT manager said "Interventions for females will always be a priority because of their under representation". Indeed, there was a recognition by the DAAT that women in the Criminal Justice System are the most vulnerable and require a different intervention approach. SWAN helps the DAAT achieve these targets which would otherwise be difficult to achieve.



Box 3.3 Probation and SWAN

Most of the County team's women offenders are Tier One or Two offenders and as such they are not afforded a high-risk weighting. This means they only qualify for a maximum of one or two hours supervision per month. However, in reality as they are often complex and needy cases, Probation Officers can often spend longer with these female clients (up to four hours). The advent of the SWAN project has meant that they can refer women and the project can provide the necessary services. This in turn means that Probation can concentrate on addressing offending behaviour (spending their one hour with the offender) and SWAN can provide the wrap-around support, which Probation may have attempted to do. One Probation manager said "the project gives us additional flexibility and options when working with clients".

As the project reduces re-offending it helps a number of strategic and operational organisations which share that target. Agencies such as NOMS, the Police (one Sergeant commented "it reduces Officer time [on individual cases], reduces crime and disorder, reduces ambulance time [through having to respond to offending-related incidents]"), Probation, Safer Northumberland and others.

SWAN also benefits its own partner organisations. The service has significant benefits to both WHAC and ESCAPE Family Support. It benefits WHAC and its clients through being able to offer specific support to women at-risk of offending or those with offending histories. These clients are often more needy than other WHAC clients and require fully qualified counsellors or trainee counsellors with a specific skill set. As such they may be on the waiting list for longer than others waiting for a suitable counsellor. The SWAN counsellor can immediately take these referrals, giving them the specialist expertise they require. This means that not only do the women receive the support they require but also other women are able to access counselling sooner. Therefore SWAN benefits WHAC by providing both capacity (through the Project Counsellor) and a level of expertise which would not normally exist.

SWAN benefits ESCAPE Family Support as it enables additional expert capacity specifically focusing on offenders and those with alcohol misuse problems. There are such clients on their waiting list. As it is able to deliver services to these clients and address their offending behaviour, benefits also accrue to the SWAN partner agencies, both strategic (such as the DAAT) and operational (e.g. Police and Probation).

- **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. One Police Sergeant commented about a specific case, "Yes [they do have a social benefit], because the woman was drinking in the street and causing a community nuisance". A Housing Officer for Homes for Northumberland concurred and said "without a doubt it has a social benefit to communities because it reduces the incidence of criminality".
- **The project offers a different type of support:** it was reported that SWAN offers a different type of support for women compared to the other professionals involved in their lives. One project worker described this by saying "Addictions hold people's scripts, Social Services hold their benefit cheques, so they have to engage with them, but for SWAN it's all voluntary ... it's a different relationship ... they feel more equal".

Box 3.4 The Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) and SWAN

DIP refers clients to SWAN who are either: in need of continuing support (and who are no longer in receipt of intensive support); or who require specific interventions to address alcohol abuse (there is very little in the way of services in Northumberland for people with alcohol abuse problems). They have also referred female partners of DIP clients into SWAN. In one such case, their client and his partner were both victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse by their partner (although the male being the more significant contributor). They referred the woman, who was considered at-risk of offending, into SWAN to enable work around domestic violence to be carried out. There was a subsequent action point on the man's DIP target plan to allow his partner to attend SWAN.

4.0 Outputs and outcomes

4.1 Outputs

The original project document stated that between February 2010 and March 2011, the project would undertake needs assessments and create support plans for 80 women. It also stated that over the course of the project, a total of 50 women will consistently engage with the project (with regular contact for three months or more).

Between February and November a total of 120¹¹ 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 (over half have engaged for three months or more).

A total of 24 percent (n=17) of the women who undertook an assessment have been involved with the Criminal Justice System in the past and 61 percent (n=43) are currently involved. Examples of such involvement includes:

- Serving Community Order (n=8)
- Serving Suspended Sentence Order (n=3)
- Awaiting sentence/trial (not remanded or on bail) (n=2)
- In receipt of a fine (n=2)
- Just released from custody (n=2)
- Conditional caution (n=1)
- On bail (n=1)

A counselling session



¹¹All have been White British with the exception of one Black British woman.



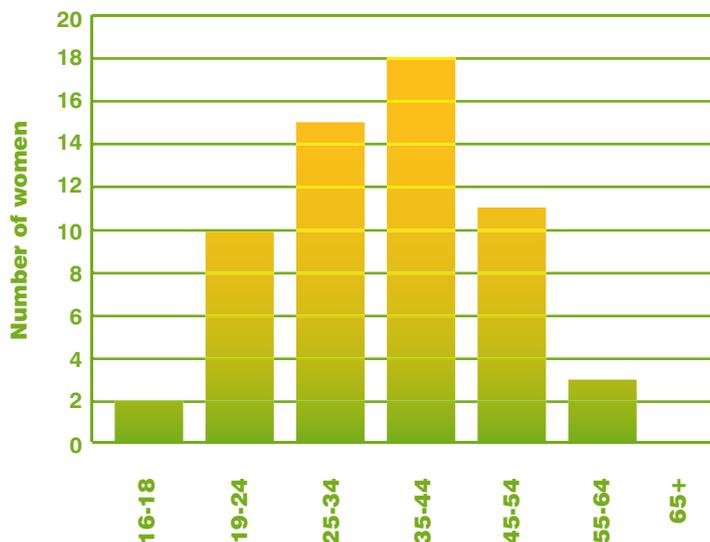
Map 4.1 Where the clients live

SWAN clients come from across Northumberland. As can be seen from the map and as would be expected due to the high indices of poverty, most referrals come from South East Northumberland which incorporates Blyth, Ashington, Bedlington, Cramlington and Wansbeck. This is followed by Berwick which has a total of 10 referrals. There are also clients who live in Alnwick, Hexham, Rothbury and Amble.



Graph 4.1 Ages of women

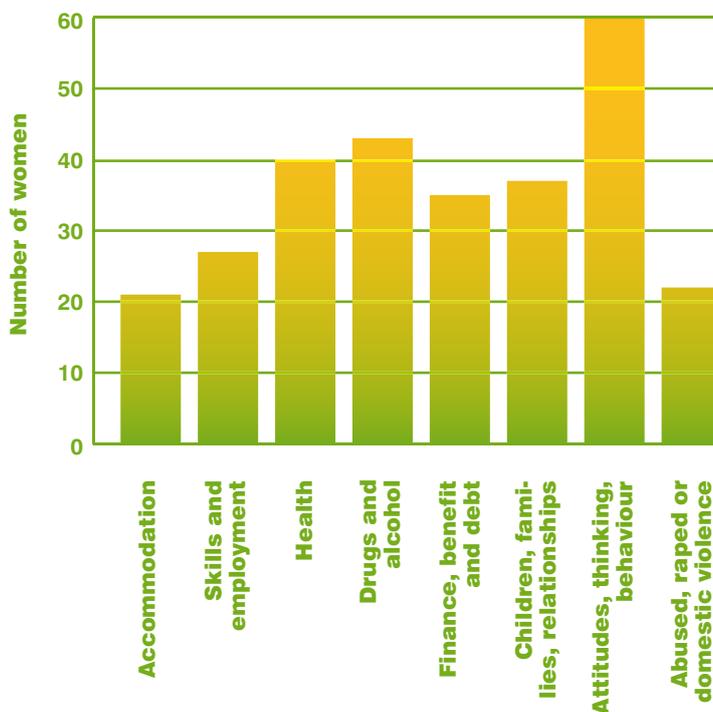
This graph shows that there has been a range of ages of women worked with, from 17 to 56, with the most numerous being in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups.



4.2 Addressing the Pathway¹² needs of women

SWAN clients have needs which span the reducing re-offending pathways (see graph 4.2). Almost all women have needs in relation to attitudes, thinking and behaviour and there is a significant number which have drug and alcohol, financial, health and children and family needs.

Graph 4.2 Need of clients in relation to reducing re-offending pathways



¹² This relates to the seven reducing re-offending pathways identified by the Social Exclusion Report (2002) and the additional two female specific pathways identified by the Corston Report (2007).



SWAN has provided support in each of these areas and a number have been recorded to have made positive progress.

- Accommodation: a total of 41 percent (n=10) of the women with a need in this area have shown progress through: moving from unsafe to safe accommodation (n=4); through moving to settled accommodation (n=3); or sustaining existing accommodation (n=2).
- Skills and employment: a total of 65 percent (n=22) of clients with a need have shown positive progress through: gaining or improving their employment or training (n=11); sustaining employment for four weeks (n=1); increasing their capacity to work through 80 percent attendance on courses (n=1).
- Health: a total of 55 percent (n=24) of women have shown progress with their health through: accepting support (80 percent project attendance) (n=23); registering with GP or dentist (n=14); or reducing self-harm (n=3).
- Drugs and alcohol: 60 percent of women (n=28) have shown a positive progression through: abstinence (n=11); reduced intake (n=10); management (n=6); and reduced class of drug (n=1).
- Finance, benefit and debt: 33 percent of women (n=13) with a need in this area showed positive progress through: a reduction or management of debt (n=10); increased income (n=3).
- Children, families and relationships: a total of 53 percent (n=23) of women have shown progress in this area through: improved parenting skills (n=14); children moved from care to return to mother or removed from child protection register (n=12); and improvement of school attendance (n=3).
- Attitudes, thinking and behaviour: a total of 71 percent (n=45) of women with a need have shown progress in this area through: attendance and engagement (completing 80 percent of their care plan) (n=25); maintaining non-offending status (n=20); reduction of offending (n=20); increasing their self-esteem and confidence (n=12); improvement of well-being through attending therapies (n=7); attending life skills classes (n=7).
- Supporting women who have been abused, raped or experienced domestic violence: a total of 56 percent (n=14) of women who were identified as having a need in this area have shown positive progress through: being referred to specialist agencies (n=6); attending a MARAC (n=3); and creating safety plans (n=2).

Box 4.1 Why women have not engaged

Of the 120 women who have been referred into the project, a total of 50 have not been able to be contacted. This is in spite of repeated attempts by project workers to contact them through direct phone calls, letters and texts to the women or through efforts to contact them through the referring agency. Although it is difficult to say with any certainty why these women have not engaged, it is suspected that because there is no element of enforcement to the engagement, women can decide simply not to allow contact. It is reported by those people who either know those women, such as their Probation Officers, or know of those women, for example other service users or Women's Intervention Workers¹³, that there are many reasons why some women will not engage. These include: current chaotic drug and alcohol use; mental ill health; experience of violence; and homelessness.

There has been a total of 18 women who have completed initial assessments but have then not engaged from that point. Again this is despite repeated attempts. For these women, the project employs a re-engagement plan which consists of regular though less frequent contact attempts and clients' cases are never closed. The SWAN Project Coordinator feels that whether or not a woman engages with the project depends on where that person is in terms of stages of change (see table 2.1).

Service users say that it is important to keep trying to contact those women and also never to close the case as it is felt that if they do not engage now, they will at some point in the future.

¹³ These know of such women through the experience of the project workers in trying to engage with women for a number of months and then them finally engaging very well and also clients themselves who initially refused to engage but are now engaging regularly.

4.3 Reducing re-offending

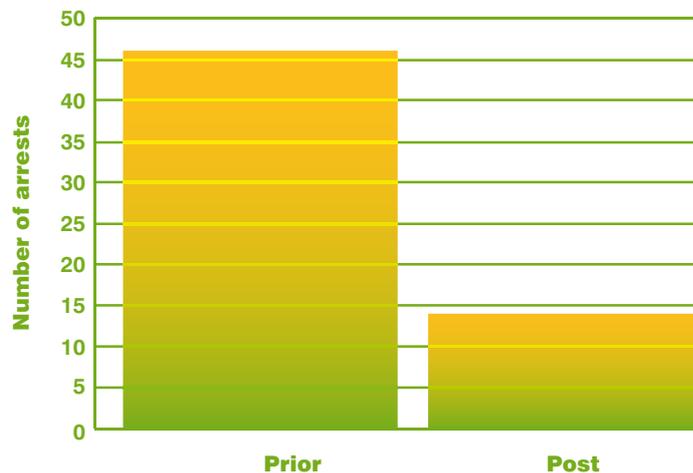
For the purposes of this evaluation, we are measuring re-offending rates by using data from the Police National Computer, supplied by Northumbria Police's Disclosure Unit. We have examined the arrest and conviction data for the SWAN clients who have engaged with the project (i.e. have sustained and regular contact) in the six months prior to engaging and in the time period during engagement. Note: this is the same method that Northumbria Probation's Drug Intervention Programme uses to measure their impact on reducing re-offending.

We recognise that the Home Office's routine measure of re-offending rates is an absence of re-offending in a 12 month period after last offence or conviction. For obvious reasons, we are unable to use this measure. In the absence of this, using arrest and conviction data provides good indications of the impact on re-offending rates.

At this point, it should be noted that female re-offending rates are high. The current average re-offending rate for women who have received a custodial or community sentence is approximately 50 percent¹⁴. However, re-offending rates from the local female prison, HMP Low Newton, is significantly higher at 75.5 percent¹⁵.

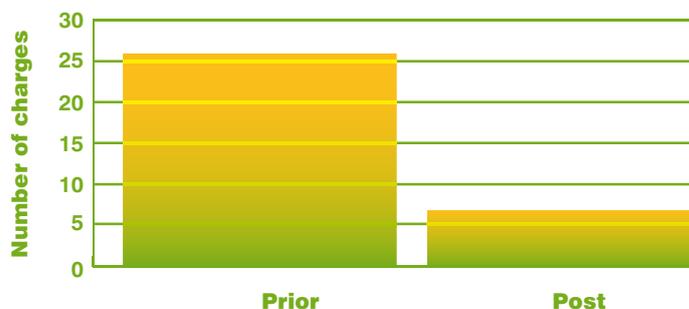
From Police data we can see that the project has made a 70 percent reduction in the re-offending rate of the women who have engaged with the project. A total of 20 women had been arrested 46 times in the six months prior to engaging with the project. Since engaging with the project, there have been 14 arrests; a reduction of 70 percent. An additional 10 recent re-offenders had also not been arrested since engaging with the project.

Graph 4.3 Number of arrests of SWAN clients prior and post project engagement



The following graphs also shows that there has 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.

Graph 4.4 Number of charges of SWAN clients prior and post project engagement

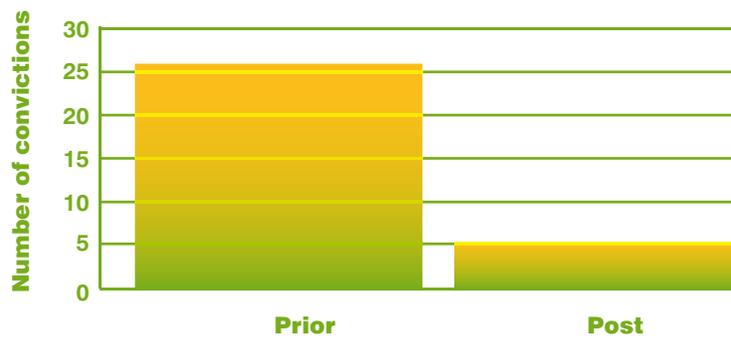


¹⁴ Custodial re-offending rate is 53.6 percent and community or suspended sentence is 47.3 percent (Ministry of Justice, November 2010, Compendium of re-offending statistics and analysis, Statistics bulletin)

¹⁵ *ibid*, 2010

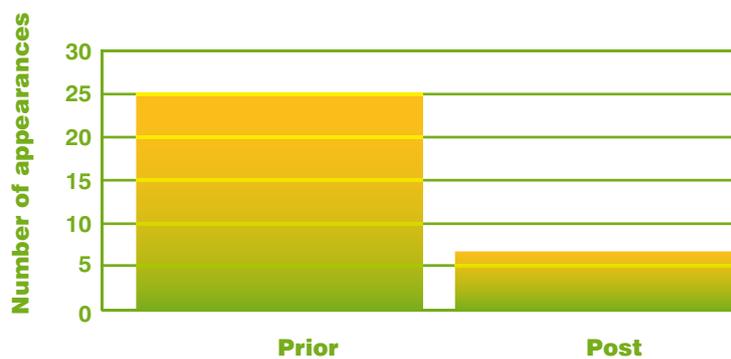


Graph 4.5 Number of convictions of SWAN clients prior and post project engagement



Finally, graph 4.6 shows the number of SWAN clients who appeared before magistrates before entry into the project and whilst with the project. Similar to the other categories, there has been a significant (72 percent) reduction in appearances.

Graph 4.6 Number of appearances before the Magistrates Court prior and post project engagement



4.4 Achievement of original target outputs and outcomes

SWAN's targets which were developed by CJWST, NOMS and the project partnership were 80 women referred into the project with completed needs and risk assessment and with an associated support plan developed. It was also stipulated that of these, 50 women to consistently engage with the project with regular contact for three months or more.

At the time of writing this evaluation report, a total of 70 women had been assessed and had a support plan and 50 women were regularly engaging (over half for three months or more). There was no specification of reducing re-offending targets.

The project did have targets associated with the NOMS reducing re-offending pathways. Table 4.1 displays the project's original targets and the extent to which they have been achieved and table 4.2 similarly shows the original project target outcomes.

Table 4.1 Pathway area target and level of achievement (RAG¹⁶ coded)

Pathway area	Target	Achieved in eight months	Narrative
Accommodation	80 percent + progress within nine months	41 percent - down 39 percent	There is a shortage of appropriate and accessible accommodation types for women in Northumberland and a target of 80 percent progress in accommodation for women with a need is unrealistic.
Skills and employment	80 percent + progress within 12 months	65 percent - down 15 percent	
Health	80 percent + progress within three months	55 percent - down 25 percent	
Drugs and alcohol	20 percent + progress within 12 months	60 percent - up 40 percent	Alcohol is a common area of need with SWAN clients and the project has had a good impact on reducing use or in helping women abstain.
Finance, benefit and debt	30 percent + progress within three months	33 percent - up three percent	These are common areas of need and so is one often addressed by the project.
Children, families and relationships	30 percent + progress within six months	53 percent - up 23 percent	
Supporting sexual and domestic violence	10 percent + progress within four months	56 percent - up 46 percent	Many clients have or are currently experiencing abuse and is consequently an area where women are supported through the project, MARAC or counselling.
Attitudes, thinking and behaviour	80 percent + progress within three months	71 percent - down nine percent	Most women receive emotional support from one-to-ones, counselling or CBT/ motivational interviewing which tackles attitudes, thinking and behaviour. It would appear therefore that most clients have made progress in this area and this is not reflected in the recorded figures. This figure is expected to be surpassed towards the end of the project.
Supporting identified sex workers	Five percent + progress within three months	Only one sex worker identified but she is not currently engaging	Many clients have or are currently experiencing abuse and is consequently an area where women are supported through the project, MARAC or counselling.

Note: we have judged the last row not appropriate to RAG.

¹⁶ Red, Amber, Green; where Red signifies target not achieved and attention/more work required, Amber, nearly achieved and a little more work required and Green, achieved or surpassed.



Table 4.2
Project target outcomes and level of achievement

Outcome target	Achieved Yes/No	Description of the method of measurement
Positive change created for women so that they acquire new skills and patterns of behaviour which are specific and measurable	Yes	Evaluation of individual's goal setting action plans, including personal feedback Evaluation of reduction in offending Evaluation of reduction in substance use Improvement in well-being
Women are empowered to take control and create clear goals and solutions for themselves and their families	Yes	Evaluation of goal setting action plans, including personal feedback
Women engaged and receiving appropriate support and treatment to reduce or eliminate substance misuse	Yes	Number of women in treatment Regular attendance at appointments Monitoring missed appointments
Prevalence and impact of domestic violence and abuse is reduced	Yes	Reduced incidence of abuse Increased safety of victim Reduction in offending by perpetrator
Increase the development of confidence and skills and progress into mainstream learning opportunities	Yes	Number of women participating Regular attendance at appointments Numbers of women progressing
Improved mental health and well-being	Yes	Evaluation of individual's goal setting action plans, including personal feedback Evaluation of reduction in offending Evaluation of reduction in substance use Improvement in well-being
Women diverted from criminal and anti-social activity	Yes	Reduction in offending and reports of Anti-Social Behaviour
Women into accredited courses and employment	Yes	Mapping of service users' progression

5.0 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

There are four dominant themes amongst SWAN's clients which repeatedly show themselves either as individual parts or as a combination. These are: the experience of domestic violence; substance misuse (commonly alcohol); poor mental health; and the experience of childhood abuse. These factors are significant determinants in the women's offending histories which can be grouped into acquisitive crime (related to drug and alcohol use), violent crime and disorder (mostly related to alcohol) and driving offences (alcohol-related). To address these areas, SWAN provides a focus on individual safety, structured activities and emotional support and counselling. As the outputs and outcomes of the project demonstrate, the project has clearly been effective using these interventions.

However, a number of referrals into the project have not engaged despite regular and sustained efforts by the Women's Intervention Workers. A total of 50 women referred have not had contact with the project and consequently have not been assessed. Furthermore of those 70 women who had been assessed, 20 of these have not engaged after that point of assessment.

We questioned service users, referring agencies (most notably Probation who have a statutory supervision role and whose clients must have contact) and the SWAN project as to the reasons for this non-engagement. Service users were particularly valuable in this exercise as there were those who initially did not engage despite numerous approaches by the project. It would appear from this research that the reason why women do not engage is simply because they are not ready to engage and their lives are so chaotic that conditions make it difficult for them to engage (chaotic drug or alcohol misuse, fleeing domestic abuse, poor mental health, no fixed abode, etc.). However, it also appears important that the project maintains efforts at contacting the women who, it was reported, may wish to engage at some point in the future. For example, one service user said "some people just aren't ready [to engage] but they will do at some point ... with SWAN the door's always open". Another said "sometimes help is there but you're not ready ... sometimes you are ready but the help is not there".

It was also identified that for many women in the crisis stage, trust and attachment are difficult to establish and this may compound their reluctance to engage. It was reported by service users that it was important to continue to try and contact those who do not engage as it demonstrates a level of commitment from the project to those women. The SWAN counsellors, who have much experience of working with vulnerable women, reinforced this latter point by reporting that often women with histories of abuse will often seemingly push new people away and resist engagement repeatedly. They continued that this was a means of testing people's resolve and commitment. One counsellor said "They are very challenging because of their vulnerability ... the challenge is their safeguard ... they have a lot of attachment and trust issues ... they say 'how much can I push you before you go away?' They need to be valued".

To conclude this section, it would appear that many women do not engage as they are not ready in the current context of their lives. However, with repeated attempts by the project to make contact and by always 'keeping the door open', those women may at some point in the future choose to engage. As one service user concluded, "[despite not engaging] it's still not a waste to be referred in".



5.2 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 11 clients have abstained and 10 have reduced their consumption.

The project effectively delivers interventions across all stages of a woman'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. One client said "it helps different women at different stages". 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 interesting that the project workers never specifically focus on offending behaviour as the emphasis is on the whole person. It would appear that three areas of importance in reducing offending behaviour demonstrated by the project are addressing substance (particularly alcohol) misuse, supporting women to leave or address situations of domestic violence and the provision of emotional support or counselling.

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 women's group session

Appendix one: 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). ESCAPE's ethos is to work with individuals and their families at all stages of their treatment journey or their involvement with the Criminal Justice System from pre-arrest, at arrest, pre-sentencing, imprisonment, to release.



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. WHAC adheres to the ethical and practice guidelines laid down by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

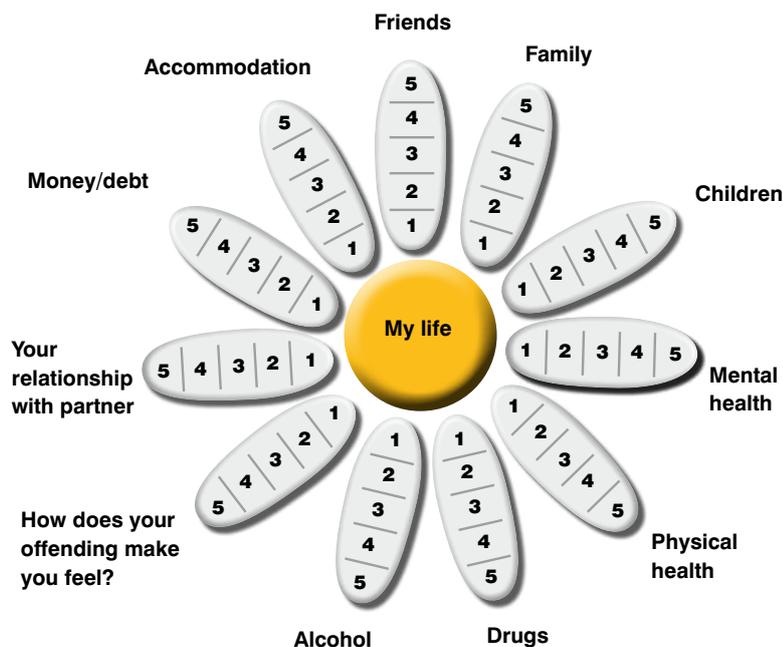


Relate Northumberland and Tyneside are part of the Relate Federation. Relate is the UK's largest provider of relationship counselling and psychosexual therapy with over 70 years of experience of working with individuals and couples. Relate Northumberland and Tyneside helps clients to understand their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



Fourth Action is based in rural Northumberland and promotes equality within 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 priority focus is on equality and its main client groups are people facing exclusion and discrimination. Its main focus has been gender equality, working primarily with women but also with men.

Appendix two: Flower power assessment tool



How are things for you?

Name:

Date:

Circle the number showing how you feel about each at present.

- 1 - Very poor
- 2 - Poor
- 3 - Average
- 4 - Good
- 5 - Very good





Support for Women Around Northumberland



ESCAPE
Family Support

www.escapefamilysupport.co.uk



www.whac-online.co.uk



www.relate-nt.org.uk



www.nnwn.org

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For more information about the SWAN project contact ESCAPE Family Support, admin@escapefamilysupport.co.uk, 01670 544055

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