

Rebuilding Shattered Lives

Theme round up

Cross agency support

Homeless women experience complex and interrelated needs. Cross agency working can provide a wider range of support addressing the whole story and life course of each individual woman.

Chepstow House, a Brighter Futures project which combines services to provide advice and support for women offenders, operates as an alternative to prison where the Courts are able to refer women to the project. It provides a comprehensive package of interventions including counselling, art therapy, NOCN accredited courses in Life Skills, Employability, Literacy and Numeracy.

There is further scope for learning about cross agency work from international models such as Columbia University's Adkins Life Skills: Career Development Series, which enlists clients in discovering their strengths and taking responsibility for their own development and employment.

Expanding the opportunities on offer

In a male dominated support sector it is important to recognise that some of the training and employment opportunities that have been developed may not always meet women's needs or aspirations:

"I think that for me the main thing is making sure that there are opportunities for the residents male or female, from hospitality and leisure, construction and many more. In the past the type of jobs that residents would come to the team for would often be in the construction field of work, which isn't always appealing for the female residents who might think that there are no opportunities for them."

Job Coach, St Mungo's

Mainstream employment and training providers may have little awareness of homelessness. Opportunities for them to engage with homeless women are therefore important to raise awareness, challenge stigma and increase the opportunities on offer. The women's employment and training fair at South London YMCA Conference Centre in July 2013 set up by St Mungo's Women's Strategy and the Homeless Employability Network, provided an opportunity for attendees to network with Marriot Hotels, KPMG and City Lit. One woman commented:
"I was able to look at setting up my own business and how achievable it may be."

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Rebuilding Shattered Lives

Rebuilding Shattered Lives theme round up: Skills and Employment

Led by Expert Group member, Baroness Stedman-Scott,
Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People



Baroness Stedman-Scott, Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People

Introduction

The potential for meaningful occupation, training and employment to boost self esteem and help women's recovery from homelessness cannot be underestimated. We, therefore, need to get it right.

Around one in 10 people sleeping rough are women and about a third of those in contact with homelessness services are women. Understandably then, the homelessness sector has traditionally catered more for men than women when it comes to services.

This means that training programmes for people experiencing homelessness can often be male dominated, or designed and tailored towards male applicants in more 'male' sectors such as construction, for example.

For the many homeless women who have experienced sexual or domestic violence an environment in which they might be the only woman, or one of a few, can be intimidating and even prohibitive.

Issues around childcare also remain a barrier to training and work, and for those that have children, or have lost and regained contact with children following homelessness, it can be a struggle too far to arrange childcare during work hours on top of moving into appropriate housing. This should not be the case.

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It is important not to buy into stereotypes about what work and training ambitions men and women might have, however courses based on demand from men, might not necessarily be of interest to all women.

The debate of women only versus mixed services has been evident in every theme of Rebuilding Shattered Lives so far. Throughout this theme we have heard from a range of women only support services, as well as mixed programmes that are gender aware and recognise the particular needs and ambitions of their female clients.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this theme and in particular the women who have taken the time to share their personal stories and future aspirations.

Baroness Stedman-Scott, Chief Executive of Tomorrow's People

Summary of Submissions

Pre employment emotional and confidence building support

Homeless women and women at risk of homelessness face a number of emotional and physical barriers to returning to education or entering employment. Domestic and sexual violence, mental health problems and substance abuse are just some examples of the many challenges these women face, often making formal training and stable employment difficult.

We received detailed evidence from practitioners and clients which emphasised the importance of holistic support that meets the needs of individual women in helping them move towards training and employment, and recover from the issues that create and fuel homelessness.

"Engaging women creatively in activities that help build confidence, self esteem and break destructive patterns and addictive behaviours – basically to start a process of recovery – is essential. Providing women with the opportunity to talk openly, to connect, and heal within a safe environment (e.g. singing, writing, sewing groups) taps into hidden skills and motivations which can help them get back into the workplace."
Programme Centre Worker, St Mungo's

Confidence building and emotional support is often an important stage before any formal job or employment coaching:



"One young woman was sexually abused by her father and using drugs quite heavily. I asked if money wasn't an issue what she would want in the future in terms of career. Her answer was that she wanted to have a child but was fearful that social services would take it, and what her father would do when he was out of prison. In this case I think counselling was more necessary at that point rather than job coaching."
St Mungo's Job Coach

In one resident's view women *"need different support depending on their experiences, but I think the key factor to move towards training/employment is regaining self-belief. You need to believe you can do it and want to make a change."*

Responses indicate that programmes which are client driven and support self reflection are some of the most effective for helping women identify their skills and interests, building self-belief and self-esteem.

"The best way to support women into employment is to brainstorm what they are good at and what they enjoy, then for women to have a go at different tasks to see how they get on and pinpoint what they want to do."

Respondent, Outside In Women's Group

Women Only Space

Women having the choice of women only space was highlighted as important to addressing complex needs, building confidence and clarifying professional and personal aspirations.

IntoWork runs a Women's Empowerment Programme: *"It provides an opportunity for participants to take an in-depth look at themselves, including their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, so that they may use this information to focus on moving forward with their careers and lives. It also brings focus onto issues surrounding being a woman in today's society and how that affects their lives."*

IntoWork Development Officer, ClementJames Centre



We heard from many practitioners of the benefits of women only services as effective recovery models in their creation of a shared identity and understanding around women's complex needs.

Clean Break, a women's only theatre company which brings the hidden stories of imprisoned women to a wider audience, provides a specialist theatre based education and training programme enabling women offenders and those at risk of offending to develop personal, social, professional and creative skills leading to education and employment.

"Our women-only identity is crucial to our history and rationale, and provides us with the most effective model for representing, understanding and meeting the complex needs of women who offend."
Head of Education, Clean Break

Working Chance is an example of a specialist service providing recruitment, education and training services together with one-to-one advice for women offenders.

"Employment is proven to help reduce re-offending and break the cycle of disadvantage and offending that is so often transmitted from generation to generation. Women offenders tell us that on release from prison their aspirations are to get their children back, live in a secure environment and to earn a living wage."
Chief Executive, Working Chance

Services addressing practical barriers to employment

Despite high levels of motivation, many homeless women face a number of practical barriers that prevent them from getting training and work including the cost of course fees, child care, and a lack of appropriate clothing. Services addressing these barriers are essential to making work possible for homeless women.

Tees Valley Womens Centre provides education and employment opportunities and resources for women across the Tees Valley area with a free onsite crèche available for women attending courses.

Smart Works is a charity addressing the needs of women who have a job interview but no suitable clothes of their own to wear to it, by providing them with high quality second-hand interview clothes.