

Research Centre for Community Justice

Women into Work Pilot Project Evaluation Report

'The Network Club'

A 'Creative and Supportive Trust' Project

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Executive Summary

The Network Club' - 'Creative and Supportive Trust' Project

Background

In 2001 SOVA in partnership with Addaction, CAST (Creative and Supportive Trust), Department for Education and Skills (Offender Learning and Skills Unit), Home Office (Women's Policy Team), Job Centre Plus, London Probation Area, NACRO, National Probation Directorate, Prince's Trust, Prison Service, Sheffield Hallam University, Stonham Housing Association, along with 40 Associate Partner Agencies, were successful in securing funding from the Equal Fund for a 3 year Development Partnership named 'Women into Work'. The Women into Work programme was commissioned to work towards combating discrimination and inequality experienced by women who have been disadvantaged, particularly by their experiences of the Criminal Justice System.

The first phase of Women into Work involved conducting peer research in order to identify barriers to accessing Employment, Training and Education and the second phase involved the commissioning and delivery of Pilot Projects to address the needs identified through the research.

As a result of a commissioning process, 5 pilot projects were ultimately commissioned. All the projects were managed by Women into Work staff. Each project has been evaluated. This represents a summary of the findings of the CAST run Network Club Pilot.

Project Aims – as detailed in original tender document

Women in prison and ex-offenders in the community experience internal and external barriers to gaining work. Internal barriers such as lack of confidence and a feeling that doors will remain shut to them because of their history of offending will be overcome through the process of empowerment involved in setting up and running the Network Club. External barriers noted in the interim findings such as employer attitudes will be overcome through face-to-face contact between ex-offenders and potential employers.

The Network Club Pilot Project has effectively responded to the Peer Research recommendations contained within the Moving Mountains report by:

- Acknowledging the 'stepping stones' route which needs to be taken when working with women recently released from custody
- Listening to and validating women's aspirations for the future
- Empowering beneficiaries to take some control over their lives
- Introduced links to mainstream ETE and next steps towards employment

The key innovation of this project was using group work to meet the ETE needs of disadvantaged women. It is clear from the experiences of the Network Club that a climate of trust and safety needs to be created in order for a group of this kind to function effectively. Due to staffing changes and a long summer break, the Network Club was essentially two separate projects with a substantially different approach adopted in each stage. During its lifetime, the project developed from a loosely structured, therapy based group to a tightly structured, ETE focussed group. The success of the Network Club has offered a unique insight into both the complexities *and* the considerable potential of using group work to deliver personal development *and* ETE services to women ex-offenders. The successes and also lessons learnt during the lifetime of this innovative and dynamic Pilot Project have undoubtedly provided a useful springboard for future activity.

Staffing

- Significant staff changes occurred during the lifetime of the project
- The departure of the first Group Facilitator had a serious impact on the women enrolled in the group
- The departure of the staff member and the decision not to run the Network Club over the summer proved extremely disruptive and, of the 13 women who were enrolled in the Club in July 2004, only 2 of these returned to the Club in September.
- Throughout its lifetime the project was understaffed.
- Lack of 'physicality of staff' also impacted upon relationship building with *potential* beneficiaries.

Learning Point: the resources needed to conduct group work with women who have a high level of need can easily be underestimated including the need for one-to-one support outside the group time.

Steering Committee

- Lack of understanding (among both staff and beneficiaries) of the role and function of the steering committee prior to start of the project
- Lack of communication between partner organisations prior to the start of the project
- Lack of clarity about expectations of partner organisations
- Staff changes at both organisations making it difficult to develop and maintain strong relationships
- Lack of time to devote to the development of the Steering Committee due to a strong focus on and commitment to hands on client work and also a need to deal with disruptions caused by staff changes
- Difficulties around finding student representatives to commit to attending.

Recruitment to the club

- Initially the majority of women recruited were already receiving one to one ETE support or attending other activities at CAST
- Some joined the Club through hearing about it at Clean Break Theatre Company
- Recruitment largely occurred through word of mouth but publicity materials were also designed and displayed in both organisations.

Learning Point: It appeared to be particularly important that women had word of mouth recommendation as this provided an element of trust in the Club prior to attending.

Making the Transition to Group Work

- There was some initial resistance to group working and concerns were expressed around confidentiality:
- Ownership was achieved by:
 - Allowing members to develop ground rules for the group
 - Ensuring that members made a commitment to attending the group on a regular basis, thus achieving a degree of continuity
 - Ensuring that all new members go through the correct enrolment procedure
 - Enabling members to take the lead in resolving any conflict/disruption within the group
 - Enabling members to decide the direction and content of the group
- Fluctuation in membership proved challenging for beneficiaries, creating insecurity and hampering progress
- The activity of the Club was beneficiary driven and a flexible approach was adopted, in the second phase a more structured Life Skills Programme prevailed
- Beneficiaries valued sessions with guest speakers very highly.

Women into Work Conference - A Key Event in the Life of the Network Club

- The women chose to develop a performance piece as opposed to a more traditional presentation for their workshop resulting in a huge amount of time and resources being devoted to it, although ultimately rewarding, causing a huge amount of disruption to the Club
- Preparation was particularly intensive and time consuming as women needed to be emotionally as well as practically prepared for taking part in such a challenging event, occurring just at the time when the club had re-established itself
- Performing at a conference of this type was far outside their 'comfort zone' and some women felt particularly exposed and vulnerable
- Despite these considerable challenges, participation in the conference also provided huge benefits in terms of personal growth, increased confidence and enabling beneficiaries to realise their potential which also encouraged bonding which strengthened group cohesion.

'Marginal' vs 'Mainstream' Working Practices

- A large focus of the initial work was on creating safety, trust and acceptance among members rather than specific ETE work which was successful
- Change of staff led to a far more structured Life Skills programme and this shift represented an acknowledgement of the need to prepare women for mainstream education
- Some resistance to this change of approach but also eagerness among members to take the next step and begin to think about the workplace rather than dwelling upon the negatives in their lives
- The focus had clearly changed from 'inward' to 'outward' looking even if this 'moving on' process at times proved challenging
- A useful distinction between personal development per se and personal development related specifically to ETE issues was highlighted

Benefits of Group Work and Peer Support

- A striking feature was the strong sense of ownership which members felt towards it and this appears to have been an empowering process for members. There was a palpable sense of pride in the Club and their participation in it
- Members also showed a high level of commitment to each other which is not present in one to one work conducted at CAST and shows a commonality of purpose
- Increased self awareness and acceptance from each other is also a key feature of this group work
- Much of the learning which occurred in the Network Club has resulted from members' interaction with each other rather than 'from the taught agenda'.

Project Closure and Exit Strategies

- The closure of the Network Club certainly left beneficiaries wanting more. There was a sense that some of the women had emerged from the 'murky waters' and were ready to take the next step of actually engaging in work experience or further training and/or education
- In terms of individual beneficiaries, project staff were keen to offer some 'cushioning' during the difficult process of exiting the Club; one to one sessions were held with all beneficiaries to ensure that CVs were at an appropriate standard to be taken out and used in the market place and also to ensure that women had some kind of action plan for the future
- When asked about 'exit strategies', staff talked in terms of staff members and beneficiaries rather than the 'entity' of the project itself. This indicates that the issue of mainstreaming has not been high on the projects' agenda and little attention paid to the possibility of transferring policy lessons, securing funding to continue particular activities or ensuring that mainstream agencies adapt and reproduce examples of good practice.

Recommendations

- Adequate time should be allocated to liaising with partner organisations prior to the start of projects. Roles and responsibilities of partner organisations need to be clarified
- Senior management needs to accept responsibility for implementing and maintaining clear demarcation of roles and duties among project workers
- It is vital to provide adequate time and resources to provide one to one support in addition to work conducted within the Club. This needs to be both emotional and practical support
- Outside of Club hours, workers need to have a physical presence in order to build rapport with beneficiaries and create a climate of trust which may be transferred into the Club
- Members should be encouraged to spend time together outside of the Club
- Projects undertaking 'personal development' work need to carefully consider the wider implications of raising sensitive issues with women with complex needs. Support needs to be provided to cope with the fall out of this.
- Projects need to be realistic about raising potentially sensitive issues without offering formalised therapeutic help
- Consideration needs to be given to issues around working with women at very different stages of their own rehabilitation – how realistic is it to work effectively with women at different stages of readiness for mainstream ETE?
- Clear protocols need to be drawn up around membership issues. Group members should have an input into deciding how many members should be allowed in the group at any one time and how fluctuations in memberships should be managed
- Clear boundaries need to be established around what group members can reasonably expect of workers and visa versa. When working with women with complex, multiple needs expectations of the progress which can be made should be realistic
- Non traditional routes need to be explored to encourage employment readiness (e.g. voluntary work, skills CV, word of mouth recruitment and non advertised positions)
- Projects should act upon advice on the role and function of the project Steering Committee. Steering Committees could have a potentially useful role in mainstreaming and dissemination strategies
- Awareness needs to be raised around the importance of dissemination and mainstreaming work and ways of balancing this with on-the-ground client work.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to Women into Work Pilot Projects

In 2001 SOVA in partnership with Addaction, CAST (Creative and Supportive Trust), Department for Education and Skills (Offender Learning and Skills Unit), Home Office (Women's Policy Team), Job Centre Plus, London Probation Area, NACRO, National Probation Directorate, Prince's Trust, Prison Service, Sheffield Hallam University, Stonham Housing Association, along with 40 Associate Partner Agencies, were successful in securing funding from the **Equal** Fund for a 3 year Development Partnership named 'Women into Work'. The Women into Work programme was commissioned to work towards combating discrimination and inequality experienced by women who have been disadvantaged, particularly by their experiences of the Criminal Justice System.

The first phase of Women into Work involved conducting peer research in order to identify barriers to accessing Employment, Training and Education¹ and the second phase involved the commissioning and delivery of Pilot Projects to address the needs identified through the research.

A Commissioning Group was set up in May 2003 in order to select suitable projects from those tenders submitted. This group served as a 'sub group' to the main Development Partnership and was made up of DP members. The main remit of this group was as follows:

- To determine and implement the application process for potential projects
- To identify eligibility and criteria for selection
- To ensure that projects selected meet the key themes of **Equal** (equal opportunities, empowerment, innovation, dissemination and mainstreaming)

¹ O'Keeffe, C. (2003) Moving Mountains: Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Employment, Training and Education from the Voices of Women (Ex)Offenders. SHU Press.

- To ensure that the findings of the Peer Research are utilised appropriately throughout the whole process
- To ensure that the whole process is transparent and consultative
- To identify projects which are cost effective and offer best value, be replicable and with the capacity to mainstream
- To consider current government policies and initiative which may add value and will aid dissemination and mainstreaming
- Identify and make recommendations on exit strategy and future funding beyond expiry of Equal initiative
- To assist in promoting opportunities for tendering organisations to understand the process and make bids
- To consider good practice from within the UK and Europe which may aid the decision making process
- To ensure projects selected address the findings of the peer research

As a result of this commissioning process, 5 pilot projects were ultimately commissioned. This report provides an evaluation of one of these 5 pilot projects – The Network Club.

All the projects were managed by Women into Work staff. A Special Programmes Manager was appointed who ensured that each aspect of accountability - finance; equal opportunities monitoring; support for the project staff; links to the DP - was efficiently managed. The SPM ensured that Steering Groups were set up to support the projects. Julie Otter was the first SPM and on becoming Action Programme Director, Valerie Monti-Holland took on this role. Nicola Cadet (Programme Director) had overall responsibility for contracting issues, ensuring that strategic objectives were met and also represented Women into Work on Pilot Project Steering Committees.

2.1 Overall Aim of Pilot Project Evaluation

- To provide a rigorous and 'user friendly' assessment of the extent to which this Women into Work Pilot Project has met its objectives using a combination of both formative and summative evaluation approaches

2.2 Objectives of Pilot Project Evaluation

- To provide information on the progress made towards objectives as outlined in tender bid document (incorporating the five leading principles of **Equal**)²
- To identify what worked well and what did not work so well (in terms of both what was done (outputs) and how it was done (processes))
- To provide information on the extent to which Pilot Projects have met the needs of the target group
- To recommend improvements to working practices with women (ex)offenders thus assisting Women into Work in their mainstreaming and dissemination strategy
- To assist with planning of future projects

2.3 Type of Evaluation

The evaluation incorporated both formative³ and summative⁴ elements. The formative element employed mainly qualitative methods and involved a process evaluation which enabled an understanding of the critical factors and mechanisms that shaped the delivery and outcomes of the Women Into Work

²² Innovation, Equal Opportunities, Transnational Co-operation, Mainstreaming and Empowerment (Equal Support Unit Guidance Note on Evaluation, 2002)

³ A type of process evaluation for the purpose of new programmes or services that focuses on collecting data on programme operations so that changes or modifications can be made to the programme in its early stages. Formative evaluations can be used to provide feedback to staff about the programme components that are working and those that need to be changed.

⁴ A type of outcome evaluation that assesses the results or outcomes of a program. This type of evaluation is concerned with a programme's overall effectiveness (<http://www.synergyaids.com/lacriids/glossary.asp>)

Pilot projects. The process evaluation is valuable in helping to understand what works, for whom and why.

The summative element focussed upon outcomes and impact of the Pilot Projects and drew upon both quantitative and qualitative data.

The Evaluation was conducted in consultation and co-operation with Women into Work. In particular, Women into Work were responsible for monitoring beneficiary information.

2.4 Methodology

As previously mentioned, the evaluation included both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. These included the following:-

- Analysis of project documentation including:
 - Minutes/Notes of meetings
 - Terms of Reference
 - Recruitment/publicity material
 - Training materials
 - Documents/diagrams relating to project structure
 - Reports relating to issues/progress so far
 - Any other documents which reflect work conducted

The following information sources were also used:

- Pilot Project progress reports
- Analysis of beneficiary records
- Observation of Pilot Project activities
- Analysis of data collected from Entry, Exit, Early leaver forms

The above data sources are used within the context of this report in order to map and describe project activity and progress.

2.5 Interviews

In addition, in depth semi structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted, as detailed below:

Project Role	No. of Interviews	Timepoint
CAST Director	1	April 2005
Network Club Facilitator (1)	1	July 2004
Network Club Facilitator (2)	1	April 2005
Project Leader	1	April 2005
Beneficiaries x 4	1 (Group interview)	April 2005

Interview schedules were developed and amended according to the stage of development of the Pilot Projects.

CHAPTER 2 – THE PROJECT

1.0 Project Information/Details

Project Title: The Network Club

Timescales: March 2004 – May 2005

Location: London

Funds allocated to Project: £53,834

The following sections are intended to inform the reader of the original project intentions. The information is sourced from the tender documents which were submitted at the commissioning stage, thus are written in the future tense.

1.1 Rationale

The interim findings from the Women Into Work programme show that women in prison and ex-offenders in the community experience internal and external barriers to gaining work. This project is aimed at overcoming both of these. Internal barriers such as lack of confidence and a feeling that doors will remain shut to them because of their history of offending will be overcome through the process of empowerment involved in setting up and running the Network Club. External barriers noted in the interim findings such as employer attitudes will be overcome through face-to-face contact between ex-offenders and potential employers. The interim findings suggest that peer support would contribute significantly to women ex-offenders' empowerment and transition into work.

1.2 Objectives of the Programme

Development of Network Club

- Liaise with partner Clean Break
- Steering Group membership

- Plan promotion and activity, through Steering Group
- Launch club, through Steering Group

Set up Network Club

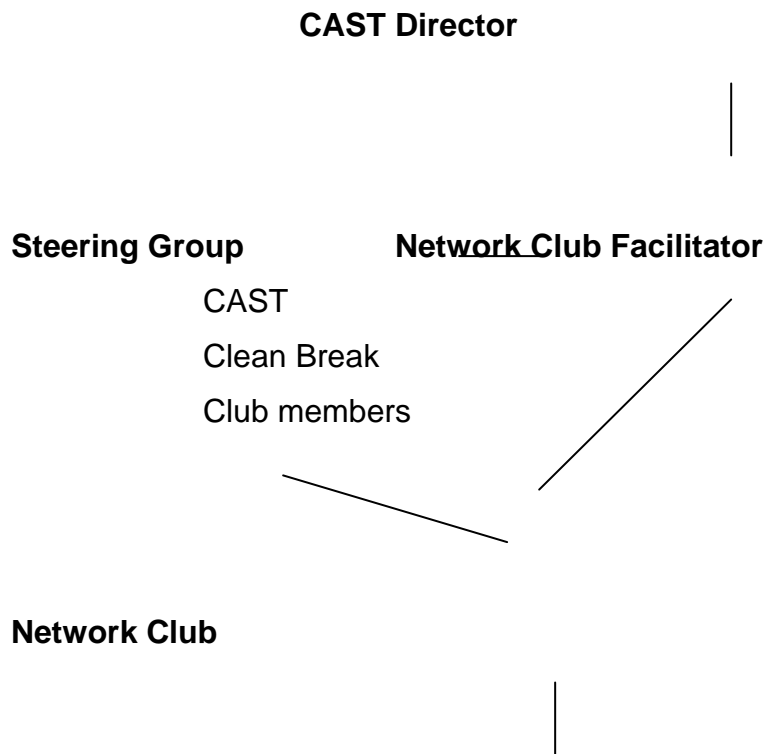
- Invite beneficiaries to launch and activity
- Arrangements for Club and structure of meetings
- Schedule of meetings and peer agreement to commitment to Club
- Weekly meetings
- Quarterly meetings
- Event to promote Club to employers
- Event for Club

It was intended that the overarching objectives of the project listed above would be achieved through adherence to a detailed workplan (submitted alongside tender document). All elements of the workplan are thus evaluated within this document, according to stated objectives and tasks.

1.3 Partners involved

Partner Organisation	Main Contact	Roles and responsibilities
Clean Break Theatre Company	Anna Hermann	Education Manager. Responsible for promoting the project at Clean Break and liaising with the Network Club facilitator. Attend steering group.

1.4 Management/Project Structure



CAST and Clean Break training programmes

1.5 Target Group

Women ex-offenders who are also:

- Unemployed and looking for work;
- 33% from black and minority ethnic groups
- 40% with a disability
- 10% parents

In addition, the following EQUAL criteria applied to all beneficiaries in custody entering Pilot Projects:

- Upon release they will be resident within the EU
- They are due to be released within two years from the start of their involvement with Women into Work

1.6 Anticipated Activities

The “Network Club” will be a peer support club for women ex-offenders who are keen to secure work. Its objectives throughout the project will be:

- 100% of club members to increase self-confidence, evidenced by formal and informal feedback.
- 100% of club members to increase their knowledge and skills relevant to securing work, e.g. Criminal Record disclosure, CV writing, putting together work portfolios.
- Work with four employers to break down barriers through visits, discussions, and work placements.
- 35% of club members to secure employment

The club will be facilitated by a worker based at CAST, and women ex-offenders attending CAST and Clean Break Theatre Company would be able to join the club. Members of the club would draw up a schedule of activities, and would take a lead in arranging events.

Priorities for action will be:

- recruiting women to the club
- drawing up terms of reference and a schedule for the first year
- recruiting employers who are interested in getting involved in the project

CHAPTER 3 – TARGET GROUP RESULTS

1.0 Target Group Results

1.1 Number of beneficiaries participating over the lifetime of the project

	Target Set	No. achieved
Unemployed or not active in the labour market	40	22
Employed	0	0
Other* (incl ex-offenders)	0	0
Total	40	22
*Please state		

1.2 Ethnicity of Beneficiaries

Ethnic Group	Target Set	No achieved
White-British	24	5
White-Irish	3	0
White-Other	0	4
Mixed-White and Black Caribbean	0	2
Mixed-White and Black African	0	1
Mixed-White and Asian	0	0
Mixed-Other	0	2
Asian or Asian British -Indian	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Other	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	10	3
Black or Black British – African	3	2
Black or Black British – Other	0	3
Chinese		
Other**		
Not Known		
Totals	40	22

1.3 Disabilities

	Target Set	Actual Number Engaged with
Physical disability	3	1
Mental Disability	8	8
Learning Disability	5	4
No Disability	24	9
Total	40	22

1.4 Background (NB.Women were able to tick more than one box)

Background	Target Set	Actual Number Engaged with
Ex-offenders	40	15
Homeless People	3	5
Refugees	0	0
Asylum seekers	0	0
Drug and alcohol misusers	8	14
16-17 year olds in danger of being excluded from school	0	0
Gypsies and travellers	0	0
People over 50	0	0
Labour market returners	8	0
Those from disadvantaged areas (i.e. the 10% most deprived wards)	20	2
Job seekers with low basic skills	40	5
Lone parents/ care responsibilities	4	4
Prison leavers/ those under statutory supervision	10	
Others*	0	10
Total	133	55
* Please state	8 Domestic Abuse/Prostitution 2	

1.5 Qualifications Please estimate how many beneficiaries will have the following qualifications before engaging with the project)

Qualification Level	Target Set	Actual Numbers
No qualification	10	4
Qualifications below NVQ 1 (or equivalent)	20	0
NVQ1 or equivalent	10	0
NVQ2 or equivalent	0	8
NVQ3 or equivalent	0	6
NVQ4 or equivalent	0	4
NVQ5 or equivalent	0	0
Other **	0	0
Total	40	22
**Please state		

1.6 ETE Outcomes

What will happen to beneficiaries following their involvement in the project activities?

	Target Set	Actual Number
Full-time employment	4	1
Part-Time employment	9	1
Self-employment	1	3
Voluntary work	10	4
Further education, training	10	5
Government programmes e.g. New Deal	0	1
Unemployment	5	0
Other**		3
Not known	1	7
Total	40	22

2.0 Workplan Results (see Appendix A)

The table attached as Appendix A provides a 'snapshot' of the extent to which the original objectives of the project, as outlined in the tender document, have been achieved. The project was required to ground each objective in the principles of EQUAL (innovation, empowerment, equal opportunities, transnationality, dissemination and mainstreaming). These themes were

required to inform and guide all aspects of programme delivery. The theme(s) applicable to each objective are detailed in the 3rd column.

The following chapter provides more detailed information on successes and also barriers to achievement which arose from in depth interviews with project staff. This data proved vital in understanding process issues and outlines the critical factors and mechanisms that shaped the delivery and outcomes of the Women into Work Pilot Projects. The qualitative data collected and presented also provides evidence on the extent to which the themes were incorporated.

CHAPTER 4 - DECONSTRUCTING THE PROJECT PROCESSES

This section draws upon a thematic framework analysis of interview data in order to explore further the process of project delivery, successes encountered, barriers encountered and how these have /have not been overcome. This analysis provides:

- a comprehensive mapping of issues uppermost in the minds of stakeholders (including beneficiaries) as the project progressed
- evidence of good practice in the work of the programme and identification of where improvements could be made to encourage reflection on and re-conceptualisation of current thinking and practice

The issues identified are not grounded in arbitrary external judgments but are firmly grounded in the data collected during the course of the evaluation.

1.0 Staffing and Support

1.1 Staffing Issues

Significant staff changes occurred during the lifetime of the project:

- Original Group Facilitator (1) and CAST Support Worker left in July 2004
- A replacement Group Facilitator (2) came into post 17th September
- A Project Leader came into post 1st October
- The above posts were both part time at 2 days per week
- Director of CAST left at the end of March 2005

The departure of the Group Facilitator (1) had a serious impact on the women enrolled in the group at that time. The Evaluator visited the Network Club on the day when some members found out about this and witnessed the distress of some women at what they perceived as abandonment. This also caused difficulties for the Group Facilitator herself which raises important issues for maintaining emotional boundaries when working with this particular client group:

‘One of the women today said “Oh, you know, there’s been so much change and you’re the only reason that I stay here at Cast, that I carried on coming, and now you’re going too so I’m not going to come back in the summer.” And I thought, okay, I can really hear that you value me and that’s great, however, I also hear a kind of ... there’s desperation, but there’s also a kind of blackmailing. It’s about trying to get back some control and trying to get control perhaps by ... with this kind of threat. It is something that obviously anyone working in this kind of organisation has to guard against Obviously I’m involved with the whole person but....there’s a distance there too’ (Group Facilitator 1)

Following the departure of Group Facilitator (1) a decision was taken by the Director of CAST not to run the Network Club over the summer thus adhering to the normal CAST terms and holiday arrangements. It was not detailed in the original tender submitted that this would be the case and did prove to be extremely disruptive to the Network Club. Indeed of the 13 women who were enrolled in the Club in July 2004, only 2 of these returned to the Club in September.

It became clear during interviews that throughout its lifetime the project was understaffed. This indicates that the resources needed to conduct group work with women who have a high level of need were somewhat underestimated. In the early stages when there was just one worker it proved difficult to balance facilitating a (potentially large) group with providing additional one to one support as well as meeting the administrative and financial requirements of the project.

'When the praise comes, it all comes to me, but yes, when that falls down, it all comes to me too. And also just physically I can't ... when the group is bigger, I can't get round. I can't get check things out for people. I can't do the individual support.....it feels like bad planning, bad organisation not to have thought, "Well, this is the size of the group. I want it to be this size, therefore I need to have this amount of people to run it." And yeah, I mean there's the report writing that's involved....' **(Project Facilitator 1)**

'In so many ways it's valuable to have at least two people working in the project.... I just think we need to think about the administration of it and that would be very manageable if they had a worker and a manager, a co-worker whatever' **(Project Facilitator 1)**

Indeed these considerations were taken into account with two new appointments (Group Facilitator and Project Leader) being made. The number of staff hours was approximately the same as with one full time worker. However, having two part time workers brought it's own problems.

'The difficulty was filling one full time post with 2 part timers so I wasn't getting the full time physicality of staff. We ended up with four days which wasn't ideal...but we were desperate and they were both ideal for the tasks in hand' **(CAST Director)**

This lack of 'physicality of staff' also impacted upon relationship building with *potential* beneficiaries:

‘What has been happening over the last month or so is that when you come in and they go ‘oh who are you I haven’t seen you before’ and it’s more about having that presence or being seen and people then go ‘what do you do then, what’s that [the Network Club] about?’ and they are far more likely to bring people along if they know you are here instead of just waltzing in on a Friday’ (Group Facilitator 2)

It is important to note that the client group for the Network Club were women with complex and multiple needs. Sensitive, personal issues frequently arose from discussions in the Network Club which had potentially damaging implications for beneficiaries. Although the two workers made every reasonable attempt to conduct one to one sessions to conduct follow up work, due to the part time nature of the two new posts, there was not enough scope for the ‘picking up’ of such sensitive issues outside of Network Club hours.

‘Some of the stuff that we were discussing especially around personal development and you know changing the way they view themselves....when you start to open up another world you know, that has brought up a lot of issues. It’s really heavy and there was nobody here to hold that’...the women really had to dig deep into their own resources just to keep coming back’ (Group Facilitator 2)

This was also keenly felt by the women themselves:

‘We’ve had a lot of ups and downs, people getting upset....vulnerable people and there’s been no support and back up. We needed a counsellor or middle person as back up, it’s not [Group Facilitator or Project leaders] role’ (Beneficiary)

The limited number of hours and working within strictly contracted hours also meant that outside obligations of the role e.g. attending Women into Work functions were not fulfilled:

'We didn't get paid for the extra that we did....I saw it as part of my role, to present the client or represent the client but those events, or you know being around to be able to talk...it's not really feasible, actually no.' **(Group Facilitator 2)**

The Project Leader stated in interview that the original intention of having clearly defined roles on the project (i.e. the Group Facilitator running the group and the Project Leader conducting all other activity) did not happen in practice. This resulted in uncommunicated and unresolved issues regarding the division of workload:

'I think where it was difficult or has been difficult is the challenge of one person doing more than their kind of role and one person doing not quite the role that they were assigned to do... So it's that kind of tension I guess because it's just the amount of work load it has been quite tremendous....I've probably done about 60% [of group facilitation]. Another frustrating thing was being the Project Leader but not being a line manager... That has been a real source of frustration for me because it has been very difficult for me to delegate to anybody and so it's either a question of things don't get done or I do them'
(Project Leader)

The Project Leader felt that this impacted upon the amount of quality of time which could be spent with students outside of the Club and also greatly increased the amount of stress which the job involved. The Group Facilitator did not mention workload issues but also indicated that she found the job stressful.

1.2 Steering Committee

It was envisaged when the tender document was submitted that the Steering Committee would bring together the two key partners in the Network Club (CAST and Clean Break) and play a key role in project development and delivery. Indeed some students were recruited to the Network Club via Clean

Break but on the whole steering committee activity was limited. This was due to:

- Lack of understanding (among both staff and beneficiaries) of the role and function of the steering committee prior to start of the project
- Lack of communication between partner organisations prior to the start of the project
- Lack of clarity about expectations of partner organisation
- Staff changes at both organisations making it difficult to develop and maintain strong relationships
- Lack of time to devote to the development of the Steering Committee due to a strong focus on and commitment to hands on client work and also a need to deal with disruptions caused by staff changes
- Difficulties around finding student representatives to commit to attending

Women into Work had asked for representation on the Steering Committee. Women into Work Programme Manager (1) contacted Network Club Group Facilitator (1) on several occasions to explain the purpose and membership of this group (including mainstreaming and dissemination activity) and request that a group be established. Communication also took place between Women into Work Programme Manager (1)/Acting Programme Director and the Director of CAST on this subject.

A Steering Committee meeting was eventually held in November once the Network Club had been re-established and a new recruitment drive had taken place. The meeting had a strong beneficiary focus and proved particularly successful in enabling students of the Network Club to *'give feedback on what they felt they needed and what they wanted'*. Attendance at the meeting also served to validate their commitment to the club:

'I think they were quite impressed you know to meet the exec director of the other organisation and to have our own director there.....I think it did give them a sense of what they were involved in what was

important and people were interested in it so I think it did help them take it seriously' **(Group Facilitator 2)**

The Steering Committee meeting appeared to inject a renewed enthusiasm into the partnership between CAST and Clean Break:

'It has brought the two organisations closer together – the students know about what they do now, they did before but now they have physically experienced the facilities and visa versa. They will work together now so that's a huge benefit' **(CAST Director)**

1.3 Recruitment

Contrary to one of the stated objectives in the tender document, there was no official launch of the Network Club. Initially the majority of women recruited were already receiving one to one ETE support or attending other activities at CAST. An additional few heard about and joined the Club through hearing about it at Clean Break Theatre Company. Recruitment largely occurred through word of mouth but publicity materials were also designed and displayed in both organisations. It appeared to be particularly important that women had word of mouth recommendation as this provided an element of trust in the Club prior to attending.

There were plans for a CAST Outreach Worker to recruit women from HMP Holloway. However only one woman was recruited in this way as the Outreach Worker left the organisation and this avenue of recruitment was never actively pursued. This may also be because some concern was expressed by Group Facilitator (1) around allowing women into the group who had just left custody:

'When you've just come out and it's all a bit hectic, isn't it? I was just wondering as well like how that might work in terms of being at very different stages, if you like. You know, with the women that attend the

group now, it seems like, you know, maybe they're further on' **(Group Facilitator 1)**

Following the summer break it was clear that recruitment had to be actively pursued, only two of the original members having returned to the Club. Attempts were made to follow up and track former students with a view to inviting them back to the Club, however, these attempts were largely unsuccessful. Confusion over the venue and re-start dates for the Club also confused matters for former members. Women were somewhat suspicious of the new workers therefore some trust building had to occur before women could feel comfortable:

'There were teething problems I mean there really, really were and at one point you know 2 women showed up and then it was very slow because they wanted to know it's that word of mouth you know and if (interruption) sorry yes so it was almost as if we had to be sussed out in a sense and the group and what we were doing' **(Group Facilitator 2)**

Once the two new workers were in place a new recruitment drive took place. CAST and partner organisation Clean Break worked together to actively pursue new members. A promotion event was held at Clean Break in October and student numbers rose to 14 by December 2004. This number reduced to 10 between December and March as women left due to 'personal issues'.

2.0 The Network Club

2.1 Making the Transition to Group Work

The Network Club represented a significant departure from the traditional one to one ETE support offered by CAST. Group Facilitator (1) experienced some resistance to group working and concerns were expressed around confidentiality:

'Initially when I talked to women about joining the club as a way of getting their ETE needs met, some of them said, "Oh no, I don't like working in a group. I don't want to share that information with other people. I want to work one to one. I prefer the privacy."

'There are just one or two where I accepted that they really couldn't cope with being in a group and still do have needs that I need to meet by seeing them one to one. Today I know that one woman didn't attend and was actually sitting outside because she felt the group had got too big' **(Group Facilitator 1)**

In order to facilitate this significant change it was vital to ensure that women felt safe in the group environment and also that they felt a degree of ownership of the group. Group Facilitator (1) successfully achieved this by:

- Allowing members to develop ground rules for the group:

'The group talked about that and about, you know, people letting us know if they're running late and deciding what's the latest someone can come in before they weren't allowed to come in, and not talking across each other and, you know, all the things that continue to be challenges. So that did create a particular kind of dynamic, which I think made a lot of members feel very safe' **(Group Facilitator 1)**

- Ensuring that members made a commitment to attending the group on a regular basis, thus achieving a degree of continuity
- Ensuring that all new members go through the correct enrolment procedure
- Enabling members to take the lead in resolving any conflict/disruption within the group
- Enabling members to decide the direction and content of the group

An ongoing concern for the group and the Facilitator was new members arriving just when the group appeared to have 'gelled' and make progress. In the early stages it was felt that the group should be consulted if a new member wanted to join. However as the group progressed and the need to

increase numbers became more pressing this consultative process dwindled. Membership of the group fluctuated considerably during its lifetime. Not surprisingly among this client group, many women left the group for personal issues and others left without citing a reason. Some women had to be dismissed from the group on account of their disruptive behaviour. This fluctuation in membership proved challenging for beneficiaries, creating insecurity and hampering progress:

'We were under the impression that the group would stay like that rather than loads of new faces. We'd started planning things. Later on I was asked to say something personal that I had said at the start but didn't necessarily want to share it with the new people' (Beneficiary)

They can't just do mainstream teaching and recruit more and more to get the numbers. We kept having to go back over things when new people came in' (Beneficiary)

2.2 Network Club Activities

The first few Network Club meetings were taken up with deciding the future content and structure of the Club. This activity was beneficiary driven and a flexible approach was adopted when considering the direction which the Club would take. In addition, work was conducted in the following areas:

- CV writing
- Computer and word processing skills
- Identifying transferable skills
- Improving self esteem
- Managing stressful situations
- Communication skills

As already mentioned, it was stated in the original tender document that the Network Club would work with four employers to break down barriers through

visits, discussions, and work placements. It was also anticipated that the Network Club would host an event to promote the Club to employers.

In the early stages Group Facilitator (1) made some links with Job Centres with a view to working with them in this way. However during the lifetime of the project this aspect of the work did not gain momentum. Several reasons were identified for this:

- Did not appear relevant/appropriate to the aims of the group as it developed and did not fit in with 'where they were at' in terms of their own personal development
- Lack of time to develop the work due to staff changes and closure of the Club over the summer months
- A view that this work was too ambitious to undertake:

'I mean it is it is very, very hard to engage potential employers very hard; there needs to be such a huge educational campaign really that's what is called for you know on a much bigger scale than you know a little kind of agency writing to them saying 'oh we are doing this and you know, come and meet our women' (Group Facilitator 2)

When the two new workers came into post a slightly amended version of a Life Skills Programme which had been designed and implemented by the Project Leader and successfully implemented with similar client groups was introduced to the Network Club.

The following table (extracted from the Network Club Closure report) clearly outlines the format and content of the course from November 2004 - April 2005:

Sessi on	Date	Topic	Teaching and Learning strategies
1✓	Thurs 4 Nov	My Motivation	Overview, aims and objectives of the course. This will be followed by an exploration of what motivates and inspires you to learn and how using a journal can help you understand yourself better and achieve your goals.
2✓	Thurs 11 Nov	What's A Skill?	This session explores what a skill is and what you currently do in your life that can serve as transferable or "soft skills" that employers are looking for. We will explore ways to highlight your strengths and address areas of weakness.
3✓	Thurs 18 Nov	My Belief System	This session focuses on our belief system and how we are conditioned in early childhood by the people around us. Learn new ways to free yourself from the shackles of limited and negative thinking and begin to create the life you really want to live.
4✓	Thurs 25 Nov	Working With Others	You are <i>Lost at Sea</i> and have to rely on teamwork to ensure things run smoothly until help arrives. This session will focus on using consensus decision-making to develop your communication and interpersonal skills.
5✓	Thurs 2 Dec	Event Planning	Planning For January Event
6✓	Thurs 9 Dec	Event Planning	Planning For January Event
7✓	Thurs 16 Dec	Event Planning	Planning For January Event
Christmas and New Year Break			
8✓	Friday 7 Jan	Event Planning	Planning For January Event
9✓	Fri 14 Jan	Event Dress Rehearsal	Planning For January Event
10✓	Fri 21 Jan	Final Event Planning	Planning For January Event
11✓	Fri 28 Jan	Event Feedback /	How do you really feel about yourself?

		My Self-Image	In this session we will look at how our self-image controls our lives and how we can make constructive changes to achieve success and confidence in every area of our lives.
12✓	Fri 4 Feb	Time Management	We all have 24 hours, 7 days per week, yet some people still have difficulty getting things done on time. This session will help you get organised for life, work and study.
13✓	Fri 11 Feb	Understanding The Recruitment Process	Learn how employers select the right person for the job and how to "stand out from the crowd" by networking effectively and capitalising on "hidden" opportunities.
Half Term			
14✓	Fri 25 Feb	Soft Skills Vs Hard Skills	Learn the difference between the two and why knowing your soft skills can help you unlock your true potential and market you most effectively to employers.
15✓	Fri 4 March	Marketing Yourself On Paper (1)	Does your CV do you justice or are you selling yourself short? Learn how to highlight all your skills and experience but play down your weaknesses - essential for anyone considering a career change or with gaps in their history!
16✓	Fri 11 March	Marketing Yourself On Paper (2)	Part 2 of the above session to allow students to prepare an effective Skills CV or at the very least identify their USPs
17✓	Fri 18 March	Marketing Yourself In Person	In this session we look at how to be successful in an interview and impress an employer by developing good answers to difficult questions. You will also get useful tips on presentation and body language
Easter Break			
18✓	Fri 1 April	Disclosure - Do's and Don'ts (Guest Speaker)	In the workplace, honesty is not always the best policy, especially if you are an ex-offender! Learn from an expert what to say and what not to disclose.
19✓	Fri 8 April	Approaching Employers (Guest Speaker)	Believe it or not, there are sensitive and empathetic employers out there who'll give you a chance. Attend this session to learn who you need to approach and how!

20✓	Fri 15 April	Coming Off Benefits (Guest Speaker)	Is there life after benefits? Find out if you will be able to survive on your income without additional benefits or indeed if you can access new benefits by going into work.
21✓	Fri 22 April	Going Self-Employed (Guest Speaker)	Employment is not the only option, you can also work for yourself - but have you got what it takes and do you know where to start?
22✓	Fri 29 April	Celebration and Awards Ceremony	In this final session, students will have the opportunity to practice their USPs and will receive feedback from the group. This will be followed by a course evaluation, awards ceremony and celebration.

Key aims of involving guest speakers towards the end of the project were to reduce students' dependency on the project as the Network Club drew to a close by facilitating the mainstreaming of students into the labour market. Beneficiaries valued these sessions highly and having people come in specifically to address their needs made them feel valued and increased motivation.

2.3 Women into Work Conference - A Key Event in the Life of the Network Club

A particularly significant event during the lifetime of the Network Club was the Women into Work national conference held in January 2005 to promote and celebrate the work of all the Pilot Projects. All 5 pilot projects were asked to lead a workshop to raise awareness and generate discussion about their work. In interviews this event was talked about more than any other activity which occurred during the lifetime of the project thus demonstrating the impact which it had on the Club.

The Women into Work team allowed the individual projects to decide on the scope and content of the workshop. Beneficiaries were encouraged to take the lead in designing and planning the workshop and decided to develop a number of sketches which reflected 'a day in the life of the Network Club'.

The fact that women chose to develop a performance piece as opposed to a more traditional presentation for their workshop resulted in a huge amount of time and resources being devoted to it. Indeed, this seemingly straightforward task, although ultimately rewarding, caused a huge amount of disruption to the Network Club.

Preparation for the workshop began several weeks before the conference began and was particularly intensive and time consuming as women needed to be *emotionally* as well as *practically* prepared for taking part in such a challenging event. This occurred just at the time when the club had re-established itself. This was felt by workers to be bad timing and had knock on implications for the future work of the group:

'We lost 6 weeks between the 1st December and the event on the 25th January in planning for the event because it took so long just to get them to come round to wanting to do it and to come up with ideas...it had taken us 3 months to actually get a group together and suddenly we were pulling this group kicking and screaming towards this event. It was just bad timing but I mean I suppose there is never really a good time for things like that because Easter would have conflicted with the winding down of the project' **(Project Leader)**

Indeed there was much resistance from beneficiaries especially around issues of confidence. Performing at a conference of this type was far outside their 'comfort zone' and some women felt particularly exposed and vulnerable. This posed a dilemma for the project workers who wanted to respond successfully to the request of their funders to lead the workshop but also wanted to protect the vulnerable client group.

'They didn't want to stand up in front of people but we were told they had to you know they had to contribute and you know that in itself when we were just trying to gain their trust as well and encourage them and build up their confidence then we were asking them to stand up in

their sort of role as an ex offender or a user and that was very difficult'
(Group Facilitator 2)

The very objective of the conference, to raise awareness around working with women (ex)offenders meant that women were revealing their backgrounds to the audience. This posed significant problems for some women:

'There was a woman who didn't want her daughter to know....when she heard that her mum was performing or was involved in this big conference she wanted to come and she said 'no I don't want anyone knowing'. She said 'I can't have her there' and it really caused a lot more problems than I think people realised and about disclosure and who they were disclosing to' **(Group Facilitator 2)**

On reflection, the contribution which the Network Club chose to make to the conference was perhaps over-ambitious. However, it is highly commendable that it was a completely beneficiary led piece of work. The impact of participation in the conference on the women personally and also on the Network Club itself was considerable. The event undoubtedly proved emotionally challenging for beneficiaries. This was largely due to the high level of stress felt by the women throughout the process:

'I mean there were nearly punch ups after it was so kind of fraught and angst ridden because all the emotions were so high' **(Project Leader)**

'It took a long time to get the balance back to the group, we had to sort ourselves out. There was so much conflict in the group because of the conference. There was a lot of 'side' coming out of people 'cos of fear'
(Beneficiary)

However, despite these considerable challenges, participation in the conference also provided huge benefits in terms of personal growth, increased confidence and enabling beneficiaries to realise their potential:

'I had to work so hard on myself just to be able to do it' (Beneficiary)

'I would never had dreamt I would have the confidence to do it. It made me realise what I've got going for me' (Beneficiary)

'It was challenging to me and a good opportunity to and work with people it was safe to work with. I thought 'I can do this, I can stand up in front of people' (Beneficiary)

'I think it had some plusses. I think obviously it took them out of that comfort zone it made them realise that they actually are quite great people and they can do amazing things, they can get up on stage....the workshop was completely in their hands' (Group Facilitator 2)

It also ultimately encouraged bonding which strengthened group cohesion:

'I mean in a way the event was quite a bonding event too because they were working together outside of here....if one was late one would be ringing round...so they all kind of pulled together' (Group Facilitator 2)

Involvement in the conference held additional benefits in terms of 'moving forward':

'We were encouraged by the Chair to talk to someone we didn't know during the break. That was good, it reminded me that I used to do that when I was working. It reminded me that I could do these things, reminded me of the nice parts of being in the working world' (Beneficiary)

Despite these considerable benefits some women and the Project Leader felt that their efforts weren't fully appreciated by Women into Work. This created

some feelings of resentment and questions were raised around who ultimately benefited the most from the conference experience:

'It was like 'we are professionals, you're just the students' and when they were all awarding each other at the end it was like they were blowing their own trumpet. What about us?' **(Beneficiary)**

'I think on the day the reality was that they were almost like on show to the funders to say 'this is what we've achieved'. It was more about glorifying the funding regime and I think maybe they [beneficiaries] felt a little bit exposed and vulnerable' **(Project Leader)**

2.4 'Marginal' vs 'Mainstream' Working Practices

During the initial stages, the club appeared to have a clear therapeutic function for members and the balance of work was tipped in favour of exploring personal issues and growth rather than specific ETE work. A large focus of the work was on creating safety, trust and acceptance among members and between the members and the facilitator. This appeared to be successful:

'It could be chaotic, it could be really wild because there's so much ... you know, people have got so much that they could be saying, but that there's this sense of....you know, that they value their space and that somewhere they feel something's keeping it safe or something's making it safe' **(Group Facilitator 1)**

Members were encouraged to share life experiences with the group at a weekly 'checking in' session. Again, this was deemed important personal development work and crucial to create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance within the group:

'You know, one of the things that holds women back from re-entering education or training is coming to the class and thinking, "I've got to put

everything that's happened to me today or last year outside. I've got to keep that out because it's nothing to do with learning whatever," and I think it's very important to know that actually it is part of it. I want to know about it, the rest of the group wants to know about it and it's going to allow me to work much more effectively with you around your fears. I really, really believe that – that it's got to be the whole person that we look at' **(Group Facilitator 1)**

Due to the differing levels of 'neediness' in the group, the 'check in' process proved a contentious issue:

'There was a huge kind of polarity in the group...some of the women actually liked the kind of coffee morning chats and just sort of bumbling away and other women who were saying look we're ready we want to get on' **(Project Leader)**

'A lot of the women felt that it was just off loading and it could bring the energy of the group right down. I mean people come in, they're in a good mood and then by the time the third person has shared their woes and how dire everything is everyone is feeling quite crap' **(Group Facilitator 2)**

The two new members of staff represented a significant change in approach to working with the group. A far more structured approach was adopted which according to the Director of CAST provided '*the catalyst for the growth of the club*'.

This shift was partly due to the wishes of the majority of women but was also influenced by the increasingly tight timescales of the project and a growing awareness of the need to produce tangible outcomes.

'We were just like how on earth are we going to move these women forward from where we are at to what we have to get done and looked at the programme and thought right okay if this has worked and I mean

it was much more structured and challenging I think for the women'
(Group Facilitator 2)

The 'check in' still occurred but was a less lengthy process and occurred at the end of the group as opposed to the start. In addition, a space at CAST was allocated for women to spend time together outside group hours where they could discuss more personal issues. As already mentioned a rigidly structured Life Skills programme was introduced to the Club. This shift also represented an acknowledgement of the need to prepare women for mainstream education. The new approach posed a stark contrast to the 'touchy feely' therapeutic approach used in the early stages:

'We're doing it in a very nice way but people out there may not be so nice. We don't want to spoil them, it's not going to be all roses out there just because you're having a bad hair day'. It's about getting women prepared for mainstream education but still keeping them safe'

(Director of CAST)

The new approach was certainly more businesslike with little input from the students around the structure and content of sessions. Despite this, beneficiaries maintained a high level of 'ownership' of the club throughout its lifetime. There was some resistance to this change of approach. However, there was also eagerness among members to take the next step and begin to think about the workplace rather than dwelling upon the negatives in their lives.

The focus clearly changed from 'inward' to 'outward' looking. The Project Leader was quick to identify a lack of knowledge in the group around the 'real world' and how to re-enter the mainstream. In the last few weeks of taught sessions the facilitator role was clearly that of 'impartor of knowledge' as opposed to 'therapist'.

'I think some of the training was actually teaching because they didn't have a clue about the market place and that was quite blatant some of them had not worked for 10 years.....so getting back into the normal world the real world they were just well 'what do I do, who do I go to, how do I do this?' There was resistance but also lack of knowledge, ignorance in that sense which had to be kind of challenged' **(Project Leader)**

This 'moving on' process at times proved challenging. It was difficult to make progress with a client group who were dealing with complex issues in their lives and who lacked a solid foundation of self esteem from which to grow:

'There isn't the kind of stability, they haven't reached that point of saying 'I'm on the shore now,' they are still in those murky waters, they haven't reached the other side and it's only really when they get to the river bank that they can say 'give me some information and I'm getting a job because now, I'm ready'. They haven't reached that kind of hard ground yet' **(Project Leader)**

The Project Leader also makes a useful distinction between personal development *per se* and personal development related specifically to ETE issues and questions the feasibility of having both within one project. Her view was clearly that personal development work within this context has to have a specific focus:

'Personal development is such a grey area. There's a lot of new age spiritual kind of stuff which is good...but all it works on is really trying to help someone; it is almost like self therapy self medication, kind of sorting yourself out really... but the fact is that that personal development has to be practical, it has to have a work focus, there has to be kind of a marriage between the two' **(Project Leader)**

This view was also echoed by the Director of CAST who spoke of the need to guard against giving beneficiaries false expectations of the 'outside world':

'I like to think that if we've hoiked them a couple of rungs up the ladder – you know we do an awful lot of support – touchy, feely stuff but I made it quite clear that 'you need to move on, you need to cut the cord here' I really enjoyed working with both of them because they've had the tenacity to say 'this has got to be worked on because this is what's going to face you out there'. (Director of CAST)

Clearly the 'rapid fire' approach adopted is not just attributable to the personal philosophies of staff members but was also dictated by tight time scales and the desire for outcomes. This undoubtedly proved challenging for some students and again the need for additional support outside the club is highlighted:

'We did need more help at times. I know that targets needed to be met but may not have been ready to do some things that were asked of us. People got stressed. If you don't know, you need help. Like when typing up our CVs we were left on our own to do it and we had to be really forceful to get the help. The atmosphere was crazy, most of us felt 'lost in space'. We definitely needed more individual help as well as a group' (Beneficiary)

'I think for me it was like dipping them in cold water and saying swim now I am going to give you your arm bands I'm going to take you to the other side and I think for a lot of them it's overwhelming, it's overloading them a little bit and it's just pushing me too over my comfort zone..... if I'd have had maybe more time to do the quality of one to ones with students' (Project Leader)

2.5 Benefits of Group Work and Peer Support

A striking feature of the Network Club was the strong sense of ownership which members felt towards it. They felt very clearly felt it was 'their' club and

they had the right to influence how it was run, as exemplified in the example below:

‘Once we set up the ground rules, especially about not talking across each other... there were women in the group who really don’t speak easy in group situations who were really talking. And at one point there was a student who wanted to join and who burst into the room and said, you know, “I didn’t know about this club! Why haven’t I been told?”.....everyone kind of looked really shocked. You know, she went on a bit and then I took her out of the room and we kind of talked about it...and then I took that back to the group they said, “Well, we don’t want her to join in that way because (a) we don’t want anyone disrupting the group and (b) we want her to go through the same process that we’ve gone through. She has to enrol. She has to agree to be part of the group.” You know? So it was really ... women in the group who wouldn’t have said that easily in any other setting said, “No, I don’t want this. This is my group. I’m owning this now and I don’t want it to be ...” (Group Facilitator 1)

This appears to have been an empowering process for members and also demonstrates how highly they valued their time at the Club. The evaluator observed a palpable sense of pride in the Club and their participation in it.

Members also showed high level of commitment to each other which is not present in one to one work conducted at CAST and shows a commonality of purpose:

‘Even when it was snowing out there they came in and they didn’t do that when they were doing the ordinary stuff, they’d ring in and say ‘don’t feel very well’. There’s definitely something about having a group. It’s because they got as much out of the support from each other as they did from the facilitators – there’s the safety in that as well’ (CAST Director)

Increased self awareness and acceptance from each other is also a key feature of group work:

'In the group someone will say ' I see [name] like this now'. It's positive affirmation. I know that she's seen me develop so I can trust what she's saying. She's been able to praise me and that's also good for her and her development and good for me. It feeds into each other'
(Beneficiary)

Such developments were noted and appreciated by Group Facilitator 2:

'It is I mean you can draw up all the ground rules in the world and everyone can go 'oh yes, they're great we'll all sign them' but working them is something else, but what I have witnessed is that they have taken more of their awareness, their self awareness has increased so much that they know themselves and they'll actually say 'I'm really sorry and I'll just shut up' because they know they have talked over you know each other or one will say to the other 'I think you've spoken enough now' which is great because it means I don't need to step in at that point' **(Group Facilitator 2)**

Interestingly, it has emerged in interviews that much of the learning which occurred in the Network Club has resulted from members' interaction with each other rather than 'from the taught agenda'. Examples of skills and knowledge developed include:

- increased consideration of how their behaviour affects others
- an understanding of the benefits of co-operation with others (e.g. not arguing with each other = more time for learning)
- an appreciation of the value of compromise
- improved listening skills (and improved skills in all aspects of communication)
- anger management skills! (increased awareness of how to control negative emotions)

In summary:

'There has been a real sense of 'god this is good'. They saw the benefits themselves and they took ownership of it. It's the group dynamics that make it work. The main theme that echoes around is that of peer support' **(Director of CAST)**

2.6 Project Closure and Exit Strategies

The closure of the Network Club certainly left beneficiaries wanting more. There was a sense that some of the women had emerged from the 'murky waters' and were ready to take the next step of actually engaging in work experience or further training and/or education.

An idea raised by the Director of CAST was to apply for the next round of EQUAL funding to have a 'Network Club Plus'. This would build on the successes of the Network Club but also incorporate elements of peer mentoring and work with employers.

In terms of individual beneficiaries, project staff were keen to offer some 'cushioning' during the difficult process of exiting the Club. Both workers expressed concern at the women having to leave behind 'the special little world' which the Network Club had created for them. In order to facilitate this process, one to one sessions were held with all beneficiaries to ensure that CVs were at an appropriate standard to be taken out and used in the market place and also to ensure that women had some kind of action plan for the future. It was expected to prove challenging to balance this kind of intensive 'hands on' work with the additional demands of project closure (i.e. report writing and financial returns).

The short term nature of the project was a huge shame for beneficiaries:

'Things are all just falling into place and now it's closing down. We feel like we've really built it up. It's amazing what we've achieved by all interacting together . It will be a sad loss' **(Beneficiary)**

It is interesting when asked about 'exit strategies', staff talked in terms of staff members and beneficiaries rather than the 'entity' of the project itself. This indicates that the issue of mainstreaming has not been high on the projects' agenda and little attention paid to the possibility of transferring policy lessons, securing funding to continue particular activities or ensuring that mainstream agencies adapt and reproduce examples of good practice. Although this evaluation report will provide an impetus for this work, it was hoped when projects were commissioned that mainstreaming and dissemination would be a key feature of all projects.

2.7 Links with Women into Work Team and Other Pilot Projects

As already mentioned this Pilot Project is one of five commissioned by Women into Work. The aim was that Pilot Projects would liaise with each other and share good practice. During the course of the project the Network Club has engaged in the following activities with other Pilot Projects:

- participated in Pilot Project meetings
- liaising and networking at other Women into Work events including the conference and transnational events (see below)
- hosted a visit to the Network Club from the SOVA Peer Mentoring Support and Resettlement Pilot

And have also engaged in the following activities with the Women into Work team:

- had ongoing support from the Women into Work team including visits from the Programme Manager

- had ongoing support from the Finance Manager re: any financial concerns and submitting claims
- participated in Pilot Project and Pilot Project Management meetings
- participated in and presented at the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Group
- A beneficiary, the Student Services Manager and the (ex)Director of CAST participated in a visit to Gothenburg to share good practice with Swedish partners
- Director of CAST and Group Facilitator (1) attended transnational event in Sheffield in March 2004
- Director of CAST attended the Mikiri Transnational Conference in January 2005

The project had specific objectives related to transnational work, as outlined in the tender document:

'The main elements of the proposed activities of interest transnationally are: the Club approach led by women ex-offenders; working with potential employers to break down barriers; practical experience of disclosing criminal records'

However, in reality there was limited opportunities for project staff to become involved in Transnational Work. This was an issue for all five pilot projects, as explained by the Women into Work 'Transnational Co-ordinator below:

'My original intention from March 2004 when a transnational meeting was held in Sheffield was to link each pilot project with a partner. The connections didn't happen, mainly because the pilots were so busy with domestic issues and I still wasn't entirely clear on what was happening in France or Germany at that point. Also, there were staffing changes in NACRO, CAST & WEETU. The problem with women still being on licence and some not having passports was also an issue. The plan changed to travelling to Sweden in February 2005 as that was the

earliest time some on licence could leave the country, if permission by probation were to be granted'

However, it is encouraging that one beneficiary took up the valuable opportunity to travel to Gothenburg to share knowledge and good practice with the Swedish partners.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

1.0 Summary of Results

The Network Club Pilot Project has effectively responded to the Peer Research recommendations contained within the Moving Mountains report by:

- Acknowledging the 'stepping stones' route which needs to be taken when working with women recently released from custody
- Listening to and validating women's aspirations for the future

The key innovation of this project was using group work to meet the ETE needs of disadvantaged women. It is clear from the experiences of the Network Club that a climate of trust and safety needs to be created in order for a group of this kind to function effectively. The project workers succeeded in creating a safe and empowering environment for beneficiaries by establishing clear groundrules and including a significant amount of 'personal development' work within the content of the programme.

Due to staffing changes and the long summer break, the Network Club was essentially two separate projects with a substantially different approach adopted in each stage. During its lifetime, the project developed from a loosely structured, therapy based group to a tightly structured, ETE focussed group. Although contributing to a sense of inconsistency within the project, the two different approaches have enabled significant learning around the relative merits and pitfalls of each. It is highly commendable that beneficiaries were able to maintain high levels of 'ownership' of the group despite these considerable disruptions. This can be attributable to the tenacity and commitment of both beneficiaries and project workers to the success of the Club.

The experiences of this project have indicated that conducting group work with women who have multiple and complex needs is extremely labour intensive. The Network Club and its beneficiaries would undoubtedly have

benefited from increased staffing levels, particularly in terms of offering a higher level of one to one practical *and emotional* support outside of Club hours. A fully functioning Steering Committee and increased involvement of the projects partner organisation could also have benefited the Club by offering an effective feedback loop for beneficiaries and workers and also by taking responsibility for operational issues, thus relieving some of the pressure on individual workers. The Steering Committee could also have advised on stopping/continuing the Club, mainstreaming and funding issues but was not effectively utilised despite requests from Women into Work for this to happen.

A key objective of the project – ‘*to work with four employers to break down barriers through visits, discussions, and work placements*’ was not met. However, it is commendable that project workers recognised that Network Club members were not at an appropriate stage of ‘readiness’ to undertake this work. The inability to meet this objective also reflects a lack of available staff time to invest in such a labour intensive piece of work and the prioritisation of meeting beneficiaries individual needs on the part of project workers.

The experience of Network Club members can be characterised as ‘a roller coaster ride’ with considerable highs and lows. Particular challenges for beneficiaries included dealing with fluctuations in group membership, overcoming numerous emotional hurdles to present a workshop at a national conference and having to adapt to the fast pace of working during the final weeks of the project. It is extremely encouraging that involvement in the group was perceived by stakeholders to have numerous benefits not only in terms of improving the employability of individuals but also in terms of increasing self awareness, self confidence and communication skills.

Finally, the success of the Network Club has offered a unique insight into both the complexities *and* the considerable potential of using group work to deliver personal development *and* ETE services to women ex-offenders. The successes and also lessons learnt during the lifetime of this innovative and

dynamic Pilot Project have undoubtedly provided a useful springboard for future activity.

2.0 Recommendations

The preceding chapters have set out key successes and barriers to success encountered by the Network Club. In addition the proactive attempts which have been made to overcome barriers have been noted. Clearly the barriers presented and the ongoing learning evidenced during the lifetime of the project need to be turned into opportunities. To support and give direction to this process the following recommendations are made which will enable more effective service provision in future Women into Work projects and for working with women (ex)offenders generally. It is anticipated that these recommendations will inform decision making during the commissioning process and delivery period of Round Two projects.

- Adequate time should be allocated to liaising with partner organisations prior to the start of projects. Roles and responsibilities of partner organisations need to be clarified
- Senior management needs to accept responsibility for implementing and maintaining clear demarcation of roles and duties among project workers
- It is vital to provide adequate time and resources to provide one to one support in addition to work conducted within the Club. This needs to be both emotional and practical support
- Outside of Club hours, workers need to have a physical presence in order to build rapport with beneficiaries and create a climate of trust which may be transferred into the Club
- Members should be encouraged to spend time together outside of the Club
- Projects undertaking 'personal development' work need to carefully consider the wider implications of raising sensitive issues with women with complex needs. Support needs to be provided to cope with the fallout of this

- Projects need to be realistic about raising potentially sensitive issues without offering formalised therapeutic help
- Careful consideration needs to be given to working with women at very different stages of their own rehabilitation – how realistic is it to work effectively with women at different stages of readiness for mainstream ETE?
- Clear protocols need to be drawn up around membership issues. Group members should have an input into deciding how many members should be allowed in the group at any one time and how fluctuations in memberships should be managed
- Clear boundaries need to be established around what group members can reasonably expect of workers and visa versa. When working with women with complex, multiple needs expectations of the progress which can be made should be realistic
- Non traditional routes need to be explored to encourage employment readiness (e.g. voluntary work, skills CV, word of mouth recruitment and non advertised positions)
- Projects should act upon advice on the role and function of the project Steering Committee. Steering Committees could have a potentially useful role in mainstreaming and dissemination strategies
- Awareness needs to be raised around the importance of dissemination and mainstreaming work and ways of balancing this with on-the-ground client work.

Appendix A - Workplan Results

Objectives	Set Task	EQUAL Theme	Evidence of Achievement	Barriers to Achievement
Development of "Network Club"	Liaise with partner: Clean Break Steering Group Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Innovation ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clean Break showed a willingness to be key partner in the Network Club project ➤ Some women recruited to the Network Club via Clean Break ➤ Advice was received from Women into Work Programme Manager (1) re: the proposed purpose and membership of this group ➤ Attempts were made to draw up Terms of Reference for Steering Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little liaison occurred with Clean Break prior to/at the start of the project ➤ Steering Group membership not established at this stage and advice from Women into Work was not acted upon

	Steering Group: Plan promotion and activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Innovation ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Group Facilitator (1) largely responsible for producing publicity materials and promoting project mainly via CAST and Clean Break ➤ Discussions held between Group Facilitator (1) and Director of CAST around the potential activity of the Network Club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Steering Committee not formed at this stage so unable to undertake promotion and activity planning
	Steering Group: Launch Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Innovation ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project 're-launch' event was held at Clean Break in October 2005 following the summer break. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Network Club had no official launch initially ➤ Project 're-launch' event organised by Project Leader and Project Facilitator (2), not Steering Committee
Set up "Network Club"	Invite beneficiaries to launch and activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Innovation 	See above	See above
	Arrangements for Club and structure of meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Innovation ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Network Club activity (including arrangements for Club and structure of meetings) was decided in collaboration with beneficiaries during initial meetings of Club 	

	Schedule of meetings and peer agreement to commitment to Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Considerable time spent establishing ground rules for Club and encouraging group bonding during initial meetings. Such activity was 'beneficiary led' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Difficulties encountered in achieving consistent membership/attendance of the Club
	Weekly/quarterly meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Weekly meetings held during which a wide range of support work was undertaken. Support included both personal development work and ETE advice and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Club did not meet between end of July and October 2005. Staffing changes also occurred during this period causing considerable disruption to the Club
	Event to promote Club to employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dissemination and Mainstreaming ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Guest speakers from a variety of agencies visited the Club to offer advice and support to beneficiaries in it's latter stages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No specific event held to promote the Club to employers. This element of the proposed work was considered to be overly ambitious in view of project time scales and stage of personal development which beneficiaries were at
	Event for club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Innovation ➤ Equal opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Celebration and awards ceremony held during final session of Club where feedback was given/received??? 	



The Women into Work programme was commissioned by the **Equal** Fund to work towards combating discrimination and inequality experienced by women who have been disadvantaged, particularly by their experiences of the criminal justice system. The programme which is managed by SOVA in partnership with 12 agencies, focuses specifically upon Employment, Training and Education



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