



**Women into Work
Pilot Project
Evaluation Report**

**Norfolk Women into
Employment and
Training**

**Women's Employment,
enterprise and
training Unit**

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Executive Summary

The Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative – WEETU

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 WEETU run Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative

The issues and obstacles that face women getting employment have been marginalised and have not addressed in a systematic and holistic way in Norfolk. The Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative is essentially about ensuring that ex offenders find and keep employment and/or access training by involving the target group in identifying the specific obstacles to accessing and retaining positive employment based on their own experiences in Norfolk; encouraging the participants to achieve their potential; enabling the participants to identify their skills and deal positively with disclosure of criminal records; working with employers in challenging negative perceptions of women ex- offenders; and providing role models and support through a non-judgemental trained volunteer mentor

The Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative has attempted to develop a voluntary peer mentoring service with women (ex)offenders. Excellent training and development work has been conducted with a small number of women who were recruited to be Volunteer Peer Supporters. These women have reported an increase in skills, knowledge, self confidence and motivation to succeed in the future.

Due to a heavy focus on the 'micro' issues within the project (i.e. work with individual Volunteer Peer Supporters) some of the 'macro' issues and strategic aims of the project were not developed. In particular, a key objective of working with employers in order to change attitudes to employing (ex)offenders was not met. The wider impact of the project in the Norfolk area is unknown at this time. However, some subtle but significant attitude shifts were reported among the staff involved in the project.

The Project Partnerships

- The project was initially intended to be conducted as a partnership between Norfolk Probation Service and Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services but NNVS had reservations from the start about their involvement with the project and felt unsure how the work fitted into their organisational priorities.
- A reluctance to commit on the part of NNVS and a corresponding reluctance to be overly directive on the part of the Probation Service resulted in the project going through a difficult period in its early stages. These seemingly irresolvable difficulties culminated in the withdrawal of NNVS from the partnership.
- It was originally intended that the Women's Employment and Enterprise Unit (WEETU) would provide training for beneficiaries participating in the project. However when offered, they willingly accepted the opportunity to become lead partners. on the 1st May 2004

Staffing and Support Issues

- Numerous staff changes occurred during the lifetime of the project which impacted significantly upon its success

- The original Co-ordinator left the project fairly suddenly, there was therefore very little in the way of handover for the new Co-ordinator coming into post and she was somewhat 'thrown in at the deep end':
- Lack of senior management support in addition to the insufficient handover between line managers resulted in the Project Co-ordinator feeling somewhat isolated in terms of day to day contact:
- Although the Assistant Chief Probation Officer had assigned a manager to be the liaison person for this project, face to face contact with Probation Service staff was limited due to conflicting time pressures of the appointed person
- Due to the problems experienced with the original partnership, the timescales for this project were increasingly tight and thus effective management and team work could be viewed as particularly important in terms of attempting to meet the project objectives.
- Bearing in mind the extremely tight timescales for the project and also the limited amount of hands on support received, it was of huge benefit for the Project Co-ordinator that Women into Work (the project funders) offered considerable flexibility in terms of project delivery and recognised the limitations imposed upon the individual worker.

Recruitment and Engagement of Volunteer Peer Supporters

- the Project Co-ordinator felt that VPSs should be recruited from the target group (i.e. themselves be ex-offenders).
- This project has highlighted some of the problems inherent in engaging with volunteer workers and the input which may be realistically expected from them.
- This issue is especially pertinent when working with women (ex)offenders who may be particularly financially insecure
- There is also clearly an empowerment issue here and the question is raised of whether it is possible to truly empower someone without validating their work with financial reward.
- The Project Co-ordinator clearly succeeded in facilitating a recruitment process which was perceived as empowering by VPSs.
- Consideration was given to any special needs which potential VPSs may have had and care was taken not to overwhelm them with information:
- The evaluation has revealed a significant amount of 'hand holding' on the part of the Project Co-ordinator in her engagement with beneficiaries

Learning Point: This project has shown it is undoubtedly a challenge to achieve an effective balance between ensuring the comfort and safety of potential mentors and 'over protecting' them from the potential challenges which may lay ahead in the 'world of work'. Issues around the 'readiness' of project beneficiaries have also been raised and this is discussed further later on.

- From the beginning of the recruitment process more emphasis was placed upon what potential VPSs would be able to gain from the project than what the project expected from them. The balance was tipped in favour of the personal gain of VPSs and informal 'action planning' took place from a very early stage:
- When attempting to recruit VPSs practical problems were encountered by the Project Co-ordinator, notably that Norfolk is a rural area with relatively poor transport links.
- Establishing momentum and maintaining motivation among VPSs proved continually problematic

Training and Personal Development Opportunities for Volunteer Peer Supporters

- Team bonding and the sharing of aspirations was a key feature of the training. All VPSs were awarded with a certificate after the initial training and this tangible evidence of their achievement was particularly appreciated and valued.
- In addition to this initial training, VPSs were also enabled to access a range of training courses
- A significant piece of additional training was an innovative film making venture. The amount of input which the peer supporters were enabled to have into the creative process was particularly valued:
- Involvement in the project provided a springboard to enabling beneficiaries to see their *future* potential. The benefits also spilled over into other aspects of life, thus enabling an all encompassing quality of life improvement:

Work with Mentees (or lack thereof)

- The PVSs had very limited opportunities to do 'hands on' work with mentees as recruitment and retention of mentees proved problematic throughout the project. Indeed only 4 referrals were made during the project
- The lack of opportunity to support mentees proved frustrating and disappointing for beneficiaries, as this was the primary motivation for their involvement in the project:

The Client Group and Issues of 'Readiness'

- It is clear that the VPSs who engaged with the project had complex and multiple needs and demands on their time, some of which related to their offending background
- The time and resources needed to meet the support needs of beneficiaries was undoubtedly underestimated when the original project objectives were being developed.
- Questions around the 'readiness' of beneficiaries to deliver a service to their peers were raised. It is perhaps unsurprising that despite receiving comprehensive training and support, VPSs found the prospect of meeting mentees to be daunting
- The voluntary nature of the work, the lack of selection process during recruitment and the small number women engaging with the project made it impossible to 'filter out' those beneficiaries who perhaps were not ready to undertake this kind of work.

Steering Committee

- From the start there existed a recognition that the Steering Committee would be non traditional, represented a departure from those usually convened within the Probation Service.
- As is often the case in Voluntary/Community sector projects, achieving consistent agency representation on the Steering Committee proved problematic.

Promoting the Project and Work with External Agencies

- Marketing materials were designed by the Project Co-ordinator and distributed to local and partner organisations within Norfolk.
- When the Project Co-ordinator first came into post momentum was strong in terms of linking in with outside agencies and considerable progress was made.
- However as time went on and the intensive support needs of VPSs became apparent this focus on the 'micro' level of the project, meant that the 'macro' level (i.e. forging strategic links with outside agencies) was unable to progress in any significant way.

The Referral Process

- Throughout the project there were ongoing problems in generating referrals to the project.
- There were differing perceptions of the reasons for this.
- It was anticipated that HMP Edmunds Hill (a local prison) would provide a key referral route for beneficiaries. The Project Co-ordinator visited HMP Edmunds Hill but the distance involved (140 miles roundtrip) and the imminent closure of the prison meant that this was not an avenue which she spent time exploring.
- Important issues have also been raised around the inherent dangers and trust issues involved in referring clients to an untried and untested service:
- Geographical issues also played a role in the problems in securing referrals.

Learning Point: Relative to other parts of the country few women actually relocate from prison to the catchment area for this project. It may be increasingly difficult to access and facilitate the involvement of women who are rurally isolated.

Challenging Statutory Sector Working Practices

- The project has had subtle but nonetheless significant impact in terms of challenging traditional working practices within the Probation Service and has contributed to a shift in approach on the part of the Assistant Chief Probation Officer.
- An increased awareness of the value of empowering ex-offenders has also been observed during the course of the evaluation:

Project Closure and Exit Strategies

- The Project Closure Report stated that the results of short term funding are particularly disruptive
- The Project Co-ordinator recognised the problems which individual beneficiaries may face in leaving the project and conducted significant work to attempt to 'cushion the blow'.

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
- In order to facilitate effective group work with VPSs, conflict resolution skills should be incorporated into training
- Ensure adequate time is allocated to developing the skills and confidence of VPSs
- Ensure adequate time is allocated to developing the relationship between VPSs and Project Co-ordinator and also between VPSs and mentees. Issues of trust and safety are particularly important in these relationships
- A productive balance between ensuring the well being of VPSs and 'hand holding' needs to be achieved in order to develop a truly empowering approach
- Adequate time needs to be allocated to developing strong links with community organisations and prisons in order to successfully generate referrals
- The Probation Service need adequate information and liaison with projects in order to inform their decisions about referral of clients.
- The potential problems of working with women at very different stages of their own rehabilitation needs to be considered
- In training situations, group members should have an input into developing ground rules
- Clear boundaries need to be established around what beneficiaries can reasonably expect of Project Co-ordinator and visa versa. When working with women with complex, multiple needs expectations of the progress which can be made should be realistic
- A forum for Peer Workers between Pilot Projects could provide a useful support function for workers
- VPSs would benefit from the opportunity to 'workshadow' an experienced VPS/mentor before they are given their own mentees
- The impact of lack of experience of staff in working with women in the Criminal Justice System needs to be recognised and support provided to help with issues which may arise as a result
- Commitment to the Steering Committee needs to be firmly established at the outset; roles, responsibilities and representation on this committee must be clarified

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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)
- 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

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 identify projects which are cost effective and offer best value, be replicable and with the capacity to mainstream
- To consider current government policies and initiatives 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 the commissioning process, 5 pilot projects were ultimately commissioned. This report provides an evaluation of one of these 5 pilot projects – The Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative.

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 Acting Programme Director, Valerie MontiHolland 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.

2.0 The Evaluation

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 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.

² 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 programmes overall effectiveness (<http://www.synergyaids.com/lacriaids/glossary.asp>)

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
- Analysis of data collected from Entry, Exit, Early leaver forms

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

Project Role	No. of Interviews	Timepoint
Project Manager	2	August 2004, March 2005
Assistant Chief Probation Officer*	2	August 2004, May 2005
Beneficiary (Volunteer Peer Supporter)	1	March 2005

*Key contact from main Partner Organisation

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 Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative

Timescales: March 2004 – May 2005⁵

Location: East of England (Norwich)

Funds allocated to project:

£9,613 (with partners Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services NNVS)

£61,670 (with partners Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit)

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

1.1 Rationale

There is a strong body of research showing that unemployment is closely linked with re-offending and high rates of recidivism (Finn, 1998; May, 1999). Unemployment is a strong criminogenic factor (MacKensie, 1997). Offenders are more likely to be unemployed (national research suggests that 37% are unemployed) and finding employment has been shown (Lipsey) to be the best single predictor for success in preventing further offending. (Yet 60% of ex-offenders are refused jobs because of their criminal record). The link is not only monetary based, but can also be about the status and social inclusion that work

⁵ From March 2004 - May 2004, the project was a partnership between Norfolk Probation Area Service and Norfolk and Norwich Voluntary Services (NNVS). From May 2004 - March 2005 the project was a partnership between Norfolk Probation Area Service and the Women's Employment and Enterprise Training Unit (WEETU)

brings. Although both of these factors are relevant to women, in so far as the majority of female offending is of a minor nature, is acquisitive and they can experience feelings of social exclusion and “difference” (Interim Report).

It should be noted that the research suggests that it is not only about *getting* a job that has such a positive impact but that the *quality* and *pay* of the job can also be relevant. Getting women offenders into appropriate employment on a suitable basis is not straightforward as the Peer Research Interim Findings highlights. (With 71% of women offenders having no qualifications they often have low expectations and are directed into low paid, low status employment).

Despite this evidence, the issues and obstacles that face women in this position have been marginalised and have not been addressed in a systematic and holistic way in Norfolk. The Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative is essentially about ensuring that ex offenders find and keep employment and/or access training. It is also, crucially, that the wider lessons from the Interim Report are used to create a more integrated approach amongst those agencies in Norfolk that have some responsibility for the rehabilitation and employment of women offenders.

The Norfolk Initiative seeks to address this by:

- Involving the target group in identifying the specific obstacles to accessing and retaining positive employment based on their own experiences in Norfolk.
- Encouraging the participants to achieve their potential and not to lower their sights because of perceptions (true or otherwise) that employers will react negatively to them.
- Enabling the participants to identify their skills, identify the path they want to take and assisting them to reach their goals.
- Enabling the participants to deal positively with disclosure of criminal records. (63% of recruiters seek information on criminal records when filling vacancies)
- Working with employers in challenging negative perceptions of women ex-offenders and working to challenge the discriminatory use of previous convictions.

- Working with employers to show the benefits to them of ensuring that women with previous convictions are not excluded and engaging with key statutory agencies and the wider community in giving ex-offenders a chance to re-integrate.
- Facilitating general and life skills – including social skills, appearance, a positive attitude, literacy, numeracy and ESOL, and diversity.
- Assisting beneficiaries to access qualifications and skills for life training. Improving their “self concept”.
- Addressing the multiplicity of difficulties that women offenders can experience in their personal circumstances (childcare responsibilities, insecure accommodation, substance misuse, and breakdown of family relationships).
- Providing role models and support through a non-judgemental trained volunteer mentor. Advocating on their behalf where necessary as well as enabling personal responsibility and empowerment.
- Ensuring that mentors are ‘matched’ along diversity grounds.
- Providing individualised, one to one, personalised support and assistance.
- Developing a more integrated and holistic approach to women (ex) offenders and ETE among Norfolk agencies responsible for offender rehabilitation.
- Developing opportunities for accessing a range of work related opportunities (including self-employment).
 - Providing women in the community with the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence through becoming trained mentors (and accessing relevant qualifications).

1.2 Objectives of the Programme

Specific objectives of the Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative Pilot are to:-

- Enable the target group to identify the benefits of getting into ETE
- Improve the self-concept of the beneficiaries
- Enable beneficiaries to identify their own needs, difficulties and objectives.
- Enable participants to deal positively with disclosure of criminal records

- To engage with employers over their attitudes towards employing ex offenders.
- Ensure that the housing support needs of women ex offenders are recognised
- Ensure that the needs of drug misusing women offenders are addressed
- Ensure that each participant has access to a trained and properly matched mentor
- Beneficiaries to receive information guidance and advice on accessing the employment and training.
- Beneficiaries to gain further qualifications

1.3 Partners involved

Partner Organisation	Main Contact	Roles and responsibilities
Norfolk Probation Area	Stuart Macdonald. Assistant Chief Officer.	Chair of Project Steering Group. Provision of referrals. Data analysis for local monitoring. Representation on other strategic Norfolk Forum. Dedicated time from an ETE officer to disseminate learning and engage with local employers and forum. Support of casemanagers as part of statutory supervision.
Jobcentre Plus	Yvonne Hendry/Paul O'Donovan	Referrals. Priority access to specialist advisors. Access to programmes (e.g. New Deal).

HMP Highpoint North (female prison)	Alison Aylward. Senior Probation Officer	Referrals. Access to target beneficiaries pre- release.
Chamber of Commerce	Angi Doy.	Access to employers. Advice on engaging with employers and the wider business sector.
Business Link	Julie Schofield.	Engagement of local employers. Use of the project to develop case studies as tools to overcome perceptions of recruiting offenders.
Learning Skills Council Norfolk.	Zoe Tuijl	Steering group representation. Linking with Learning Providers and development of joint protocols.
Norfolk ACRO	Amanda Payne	Access to housing advice and support. Access to Skills for Life assessment and basic skills tutoring through to qualification. Debt advice.
Addaction	Diane Stevens	Referrals, access to support group for substance misusing offenders. Links to support through Progress2Work.
DAT.	Bridget Punton	Steering group

		representation. Link to local Drug Alcohol Reference Groups
IAG Norfolk	Carol Jones	Assessment and access to intervention programmes (e.g. The Ladder Project. The Learning City Project).
WEETU	Saskia Kent	Referrals. Bespoke individual programme design and delivery Access to existing programmes (e.g. Choosing the Way). Progress to certification at OCN level 2.
Orwell Housing	Alison Thorpe	Referrals and accommodation provision.

1.4 Target Group

The project will target women being released from custody (both from Remand and Sentenced prisons) into the Norfolk Area. It will also work with women already subject to post custody supervision and Community Sentence supervision by the Norfolk Probation Area, female offenders subject to Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, those involved with the local Drug and Alcohol treatment services and disadvantaged women accessing a range of agencies within the criminal justice arena.

The beneficiaries will gain:

- Skills: that is, behaviours or practical abilities.

- Qualifications: the scope to access learning opportunities.
- Support: personal and organisational in addressing and finding solutions to difficulties they face.
- Assistance: in accessing suitable employment/training, information, advice and guidance.
- Confidence and self-belief: through role modelling and involvement in decision making and action planning.

In addition, the following **EQUAL** criteria applied to all beneficiaries 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

1.5 Anticipated Activities

The ESF support will seek to ensure that:

- a mentoring programme for this target group is established
- the needs of the target group are addressed both operationally and strategically across agencies in Norfolk
- the obstacles experienced by the target group are highlighted and the particular needs of women made explicit in planning for services
- employers are engaged with to take forward the employment needs of the target group
- users have a voice in the development of inter agency relationships.

These will be achieved through:

- Employment of mentor co-ordinator and recruitment of a pool of mentors countywide.
- The involvement of key people in the Steering group in a position to work within their respective areas of influence to highlight the needs of this group.
- Disseminating the Interim Report findings (and on going research/experience from the transnational projects) to participating

agencies and the wider community through a specialist employment, training and education officer employed by the Norfolk Probation Area.

- Surveying the needs of employers, targeting specific employers and engaging more widely with the business sector on how to increase the recruitment of ex- women offenders.
- Involving user representation on the steering group, encouraging beneficiaries to be pro-active in local community forums, using their experiences of the system from action planning to publicise the obstacles they face.

CHAPTER 3 - TARGET GROUP RESULTS

1.0 Beneficiary Profile

1.1 Number of beneficiaries⁶ participating over the lifetime of the project

	Target Set ⁷	No. achieved
Unemployed or not active in the labour market		
Employed		
Other* (incl ex-offenders)	20	7
Total	20	7
*Please state	Prisoners	

1.2 Ethnicity of Beneficiaries

Ethnic Group	Target Set	No achieved
White-British	13.6	6
White-Irish	0	0
White-Other	4	0
Mixed-White and Black Caribbean	0.8	0
Mixed-White and Black African	0	0
Mixed-White and Asian	0.8	0
Mixed-Other	0	1
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	0.8	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0

⁶ Agreement was reached between the Women into Work Commissioning Group and WEETU that both mentors and mentees would be classed as beneficiaries as mentors were being recruited from the target group

⁷ The target number for beneficiaries engaged during the lifetime of the project was adjusted from 25-20. Thus in the tables below there are instances where the target set is reported as a figure less than 1 (i.e. 0.8). This is because the original target was 1 and has been adjusted to reflect the new overall target.

Black or Black British – Other	0	0
Chinese	0	0
Other**	0	0
Not Known	0	0
Totals	20	7
** Please State		

1.3 Disabilities

	Target Set	Actual Number Engaged with
Physical disability	0.8	0
Mental Disability	4	0
Learning Disability	0	1
No Disability	15.2	6 ⁸
Total	20	7

1.4 Background⁹

Background	Target Set	Actual Number Engaged with
Ex-offenders	14.4	6
Homeless People	0	2
Refugees	0	0
Asylum seekers	0	0
Drug and alcohol misusers	4.8	5
16-17 year olds in danger of being excluded from school	0	0
Gypsies and travellers	0.8	0
People over 50	0	0
Labour market returners	4.8	0
Those from disadvantaged areas (i.e. the 10% most deprived wards)	0	2
Job seekers with low basic skills	0	0
Lone parents/ care responsibilities	8	2
Prison leavers/ those	12	0

⁸ Although 3 beneficiaries stated they had 'currently or in the past received professional support or medication for emotional well being e.g. depression, stress etc'

⁹ Women were able to tick more than one box

under statutory supervision		
Others*	0	4
Total	44.8	21
* Please state		4 Domestic Abuse

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	13.6	2
Qualifications below NVQ 1 or equivalent	3.2	0
NVQ1 or equivalent	0.8	0
NVQ2 or equivalent	0	4
NVQ3 or equivalent	2.4	1
NVQ4 or equivalent	0	0
NVQ5 or equivalent	0	0
Other **	0	0
Total	20	7
**Please state		

1.6 ETE Outcomes

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

	Target Set	Actual Number¹⁰
Full-time employment	4	1
Part-Time employment	1	1
Self-employment	2	0
Voluntary work	4	1
Further education, training	6	3
Government programmes e.g. New Deal	1	0
Unemployment	18	0
Other**	0	0
Not known	0	0
Total	18	6

¹⁰ Although the project had clearly defined targets regarding ETE outcomes, it has not been possible to ascertain the extent to which these were met due to the lack of Exit Forms received from beneficiaries on their departure from the project

2.0 Workplan Results (see Appendix A)

The table contained within 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.

In the next chapter, there also follows 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 **Equal** themes were incorporated into the projects work.

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 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 The Project Partnerships

The project was initially intended to be conducted as a partnership between Norfolk Probation Area Service and Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services¹¹ (a Voluntary/Community Sector organisation). However, the tender submitted was primarily driven forward by Norfolk Probation Area who felt the proposed project offered an excellent opportunity to put women (ex)offenders onto the agenda in the Norfolk area:

'It was the issue about women and working with women successfully. It's been a particular concern to me I think in terms of Norfolk, I think the issue about diversity in terms of female offenders is something that we've not tackled in a sufficiently strong way. I don't think we've done sufficient within our own organisation to look at it and this for me was a way of getting that onto the agenda really' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

¹¹ Hereafter referred to as NNVS

The evaluation has revealed that NVS had reservations from the start about their involvement with the project and felt unsure how the work fitted into their organisational priorities. In addition, in the words of the Assistant Chief Probation Officer, the other partner organisations were '*pulled together pretty quickly*'. This is significant in helping to understand problems which occurred later in the project.

Once the bid was successful and the project was commissioned, tensions quickly arose around the demarcation of responsibility between NNVS and the Probation Area. This was compounded by the fact that the manager at NNVS who had been involved during the bid development and submission process left the project and the staff member who replaced her did not have the same level of commitment to the proposed initiative.

Having played a key role in the successful commissioning of the project, the Assistant Chief Probation Officer felt it was then appropriate for him to 'take a back seat' thus allowing NNVS to mould and drive forward what was essentially 'their project'. This process of 'pulling back' was bound up with a reluctance to be viewed as overly directive and prescriptive. It was also because during the tendering process, Women into Work had stressed the importance of projects being Voluntary/Community Sector led. However, as is often the case in partnership working, the lines of communication were not always clear:

'I mean in a sense what I then sought to do was perhaps withdraw slightly in an attempt to say to NNVS, this is your project, you're the lead, and I think maybe I didn't communicate that sufficiently clearly because I think they were coming back and saying 'We'll do that because that's what we know about, but there are other aspects of the project which are not us, which are you or other people' and I think there was a bit of a break down in communication between ourselves and NNVS in terms of the vision I had of it, where we saw it was going and in a sense not trying to lead it.. I think I tried not to appear as a heavy handed male, statutory agency...not to be overly managerial ...' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

A reluctance to commit on the part of NNVS and a corresponding reluctance to be overly directive on the part of the Probation Area resulted in the project going through a difficult period in its early stages. Also the Co-ordinator who was appointed to the project at this stage did not have the necessary skills base and confidence for the role. This meant that little progress was made in terms of recruiting mentors¹² and linking in with agencies to assist in this process. There was also confusion between NNVS and the Probation Area around the role of Project Co-ordinator and the extent to which the person in this role would be expected to lead and drive forward the projects' awareness raising agenda as opposed to just being responsible for managing the VPSs. These seemingly unresolvable difficulties culminated in the withdrawal of NNVS from the partnership.

Despite these initial problems the Women into Work Commissioning Group and Norfolk Probation Area were keen for the project to continue. It was originally intended that the Women's Employment and Enterprise and Training Unit (WEETU) would provide training for beneficiaries participating in the project. However when offered, they willingly accepted the opportunity to become lead partners:

'We were lucky enough to link up with WEETU, it was principally down to the fact they had a very dynamic, imaginative manager involved who was really willing at short notice to pick it up and run with it and thankfully, began to take it forward' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

Thus, on the 1st May 2004 WEETU took over as lead partner and a Project Co-ordinator was appointed.

2.0 Staffing, Support and Recruitment

2.1 Staffing, Support and Recruitment

In addition to the change of partners, numerous staff changes occurred during the lifetime of the project which impacted significantly upon its success and in

¹² Hereafter referred to as VPSs (Volunteer Peer Supporters)

particular, the experience of the Co-ordinator. After the problems experienced with the original partner it became clear that roles and responsibilities needed to be clarified. From this point forward the main role of Norfolk Probation was established as management of the Steering Committee and providing referrals for the project. The Co-ordinator would be responsible for day to day management of the project including practical, process and operational issues.

Because the original Co-ordinator had left the project fairly suddenly, there was very little in the way of handover for the new Co-ordinator coming into post and she was somewhat 'thrown in at the deep end':

'I was given a sort of lightening introduction as to what it's all about and I just jumped in to take it over just really quickly... as far as I can gather NNVS might have sent out a bit of a letter of introduction. I got the lap top from the woman who had run it before me and there was information on there about what they'd done' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

Soon after being appointed the Co-ordinator's line manager left her post. Although disappointing, this did not initially phase the Co-ordinator:

'Yes I've spent most of my life being self employed and I am quite sort of self managing.... I was absolutely devastated and I did think 'oh am I going to be able to carry on?' and I thought 'Yes I'm going to just go for it'. So I did' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

Another line manager was appointed soon after, who although enthusiastic and committed, was not familiar with the background and aims of the project. However, due to a supportive atmosphere within the office, enthusiasm for the project across the organisation and the additional support of the Women into Work team, this was a largely satisfactory arrangement. However, staff changes within the organisation resulted in the newly appointed line manager effectively taking on the role of Chief Executive, leaving little time to offer 'hands on' support to the Project Co-ordinator.

This lack of management in addition to the insufficient handover resulted in the Project Co-ordinator feeling somewhat isolated in terms of day to day contact:

'I'm a very independent person. I can work on my own that's not the problem. It's when you are starting something new and there's nothing set out in stone as to what to do, you do need people to bounce ideas off and say 'should we do this what do you think?'. It's not even the sort of major things, it's the little in between things that happen at the time, do you know what I mean?' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

Although the Assistant Chief Probation Officer had assigned a manager to be the liaison person for this project, face to face contact with Probation Area staff was limited due to conflicting time pressures of the appointed person:

'I think she was doing about 4 different jobs. She had an awful lot in her head and she was really willing to be helpful but at the end of the day she was actually unable to be because she was too busy. It was a busy time and I remember being very stressed because I was very much on my own' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

The Assistant Chief Probation Officer acknowledged this situation but was too far removed from the project to be able to address it:

'I've not seen [Project Co-ordinator] for some time I would say, so whether she feels isolated, what support she feels she's getting or not getting ...my guess is she probably feels that she's pretty much adrift so is focusing therefore on specifics around getting mentors together ' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

Due to the problems experienced with the original partnership, the timescales for this project were increasingly tight and thus effective management and team work could be viewed as particularly important in terms of attempting to meet the project objectives. It is somewhat ironic that in a project with 12 partner organisations the

Project Co-ordinator felt very much alone and received little direction in terms of the decisions she had to make:

'Due to the increasingly tight deadline and the fact that my contacts within partner organisations kept leaving, I often just had to go with what I thought was best at the time or the project would have ground to a halt. I am employed but it was very much like being freelance. I've been very much on my own. I mean it just seems to be the same story all the way through. It was impossible to keep the replacement or 'stand in' staff within partner organisations up to date with the history of the project in such a short space of time'

(Project Co-ordinator)

This was also the perception of the Assistant Chief Probation Officer:

'[Project Co-ordinator] has been allowed to get on with it and to do as she would'

Bearing in mind the extremely tight timescales for the project and also the limited amount of hands on support received, it was of huge benefit for the Project Co-ordinator that Women into Work (the project funders) offered considerable flexibility in terms of project delivery and recognised the limitations imposed upon the individual worker.

2.2 Recruitment and Engagement of Volunteer Peer Supporters

Although not stipulated in the original tender, the Project Co-ordinator felt that VPSs should be recruited from the target group (i.e. themselves be ex-offenders). By the time WEETU had come on board as partners, the benefits of offering peer support could clearly be seen in the other Pilot Projects and this provided an impetus for this decision. The Probation Area also supported this view and it is encouraging that this project was able to challenge the traditional view of what a mentor 'looks like':

'I became much more interested in the process of how we attracted mentors and getting the mentors that fitted the spec of how I began to

understand what we should be doing rather than just getting the mentors on board.....I didn't want it to be just a white, middle class thing' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

This project has highlighted some of the problems inherent in engaging with volunteer workers and the input which may be realistically expected from them. This issue is especially pertinent when working with women (ex)offenders who may be particularly financially insecure:

'The whole issue about volunteering and payment has really hit home. I struggle with this in terms of working with women who in the main are going to require some financial input into doing that kind of work... those people who could afford to do it voluntarily are not necessarily the ones who you would want to come on board in terms of being representative of the people that you are working with' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

There is also clearly an empowerment issue here and the question is raised of whether it is possible to truly empower someone without validating their work with financial reward. In reality the decision to recruit from the target group proved to be both a blessing and a curse, as will be discussed in later sections.

The Project Co-ordinator clearly succeeded in facilitating a recruitment process which was perceived as empowering by VPSs. Throughout recruitment there was an emphasis on ensuring the well being and trust of potential workers at all times. Beneficiaries were taken through the recruitment process at a pace which reflected individual need. In addition, beneficiaries were able to take the lead during this process thus increasing their own personal power in a potentially daunting situation:

'She [VPS] sounded really quite shy and I phoned a few times and then arranged just to have a coffee with her at her favourite coffee shop in the market town and that was great and she'd actually brought her mum along ...we all had a chat and she was much more relaxed and then her next

challenge as far as I was concerned was getting her to come and see me at the WEETU office’ (Project Co-ordinator)

‘I think I made everything sound very informal. I just rung her up and was just chatting and then I sent her a text I do find that different people prefer to communicate different ways and when we met I didn’t arrive early cause I wanted her to feel that she was in charge of the situation’ (Project Co-ordinator)

Consideration was given to any special needs which potential VPSs may have and care was taken not to overwhelm them with information:

‘Then I sort of then I gave a brief introduction just verbally to the programme and because I wasn’t sure what her skills were like, I didn’t want to throw documentation at her in case she might have trouble reading it’ (Project Co-ordinator)

The evaluation has revealed a significant amount of ‘hand holding’ on the part of the Project Co-ordinator in the recruitment of beneficiaries, as reflected in the quotes below:

‘I said [to VPS] I’d like to invite you to come and see me at WEETU. If you get the bus into Norwich I will meet you from the bus if that would be helpful’

‘I said text me when you arrive in Anglia Square because I wasn’t sure she would actually find the office and she said she’d prefer to meet me at the camping shop because she knew where that was’ (Project Co-ordinator)

There are undoubted merits in adopting such a gentle approach when working with this potentially vulnerable client group. However, it is also important to note that beneficiaries were ultimately expected to deliver an effective mentoring service to mentees. This project has shown it is undoubtedly a challenge to achieve an effective balance between ensuring the comfort and safety of potential mentors and ‘over protecting’ them from the potential challenges which may lay

ahead in the 'world of work'. Issues around the 'readiness' of project beneficiaries have also been raised and this is discussed further later on. It should also be noted that the approach adopted by the Project Co-ordinator proved to be incredibly labour intensive, resulting in a very heavy workload. This undoubtedly compounded the problems of tight timescales and limited support.

From the beginning of the recruitment process VPSs were informed of what they would be able to gain from the project and informal 'action planning' took place from a very early stage:

'I told [VPS] that if she was interested in being part of the programme...what I could do for her in terms of her present development and what volunteering and becoming a mentor would do for her confidence.....then we started talking about what she really hoped to be able to do, what her goals might be career wise' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

However, VPSs were also very keen to hear about the ways in which they would be able to use their own experiences to help potential mentees and the Project Co-ordinator facilitated this. VPSs were eager to gain new skills and knowledge as a result of their involvement in the project but this was not necessarily about personal gain but more about how new skills could benefit mentees. After an initial meeting, the second stage of the recruitment process was to ask VPSs them to come to the WEETU office for a more formal 'interview' where they were asked about previous experience.

It states in the project closure report that to become a VPS the women needed to demonstrate the following skills:

- Recent experience of overcoming issues that the mentees would relate to
- Good communication skills
- Sufficient time available (minimum of one hour per week to spend with 'mentee(s))
- Non chaotic lifestyle

However, the 'interview' was no more than a formality and there was no process of selection as such. This has implications for the calibre and levels of 'readiness' of

mentors which a project is likely to attract. The Project Co-ordinator notes that she also interviewed a number of other potential volunteers who could be classed as *'typical white middle class women with time on their hands and some interest or experience of the client group'*. These women were turned down as to recruit them was not considered to be in line with the original objectives.

As well as the issues around *ways* of working, issues arose around the *hows* of working. When attempting to recruit VPSs practical problems were encountered by the Project Co-ordinator, notably that Norfolk is a rural area with relatively poor transport links. Thus it frequently proved difficult and time consuming for VPSs to travel to the WEETU office to attend training etc. It is likely that such constraints will have impacted upon the motivation levels of VPSs. Indeed this is borne out by the fact that there were numerous instances when VPSs failed to arrive for pre-arranged meetings and appointments.

Establishing momentum and maintaining motivation among VPSs proved continually problematic. This was largely due to the very small number of women engaged as VPSs and the fact that recruitment took place over a period of time. This meant that it was difficult to gain an initial 'surge' of enthusiasm among the group:

'The problem I had at that point was that I hadn't got any other mentors which she [1st VPS recruited] knew. I told her she was first one and I couldn't say 'ok the training is going to start on such and such a date'

(Project Co-ordinator)

The Project Co-ordinator made proactive attempts to overcome this barrier by arranging a further meeting with the VPS even though no specific dates had been set for training to prevent her *'drifting off'*. Attempts were also made to engage her in external training activities (as detailed in a later section).

2.3 Training and Personal Development Opportunities for Volunteer Peer Supporters

Once a small group (4) of VPSs had been recruited a training course was delivered by the Project Co-ordinator. A further two VPSs received the training at

a later date. The Project Co-ordinator had developed the training in a previous role and it was adapted according to the needs of this target group. It was conducted over five morning sessions:

- Session 1 – Induction
- Session 2 – Mentoring
- Session 3 – Communication skills
- Session 4 – The Mentoring Process and Learning Shop Visit
- Session 5 – Goal Setting, action planning and personal safety

Additional Issues Covered:

- Referral Process
- Record Keeping

Team bonding and the sharing of aspirations was also a key feature of the training. All VPSs were awarded with a certificate after the initial training and this tangible evidence of their achievement was particularly appreciated and valued.

In addition to this initial training, VPSs were also enabled to access the following training courses during the lifetime of the project:

- Report Writing and Presentation Skills (SOVA)
- ICT skills (WEETU)
- Women in the Criminal Justice System (SOVA)
- Communicating with Confidence (Local community centre)
- Drug and Alcohol Awareness (WEETU)

A significant piece of additional training was an innovative film making venture. A video making and producing course was developed in collaboration with a WEETU colleague, the first session of which was an excellent confidence and skills building course called 'Stepping into the Unknown'. Subsequent sessions involved developing a short film about the VPSs experiences of the project.

It was hoped that in addition to enabling the VPSs to develop skills and knowledge in film making and producing, the end product could also be used as a promotional tool to be used to promote the project during its lifetime but also provide a 'living

testimony' of the project's work once it ended. This piece of work was very much enjoyed by beneficiaries and it proved vital in keeping VPSs engaged in the project. The amount of input which they were enabled to have into the creative process was particularly valued:

'When we did filming we had choices about what we wanted to put in the video and we all sat down together and discussed it together not just [Project Co-ordinator] saying 'right we are going to do this and we are going to do that'we had a lot of input which was good' **(VPS)**

All of the training engaged in by beneficiaries offered valuable 'non traditional' routes to personal development and career progression for women who had not been able to achieve formal qualifications. The training offered also 'filled a gap' in the lifespan of the project whilst awaiting referral of mentees and prevented disengagement from the project.

VPSs also engaged in a range of Women into Work activities (as detailed in a later section) which offered informal learning and development opportunities. Being in the 'work' environment at times proved challenging for beneficiaries and they perceived a noticeable gulf between themselves and 'professionals'.

'I always get paranoid because they [professionals in meetings] always really dress nicely and I don't like dressing in like smart trousers and things like that. I always felt that they were looking down at me because I wouldn't be how they are. They know that you've volunteered, that you've been in prison yourself. They're probably not even thinking that but you think 'oh, what if someone does'

(VPS)

However, this VPS did report that the second meeting attended proved significantly easier than the first. She particularly appreciated being able to liaise with fellow peer workers and this helped to put her at ease. Also dealing with the challenge of attending formal meetings increased self confidence:

'I used to talk with my head down and not really say a lot....before I used to hide down my hair like this, but not now' (VPS)

Additional life skills such as time management and communicating effectively were also developed as a result of this activity.

The empowering approach of the Project Co-ordinator in the training and also the welcoming office environment at WEETU played a key role in its success. The faith which the Co-ordinator showed in the PVSs was viewed as particularly important:

'[Project Co-ordinator] was very good. I think if she hadn't been doing it I don't think I would have carried on but she was so encouraging and she sort of built your confidence up a bit...everyone in the office was really nice and it made you feel more comfortable and at ease to go in the office because them offices are quite daunting' (VPS)

As a result of their involvement with the project, VPSs were signposted to engage with a number of other support agencies including NORCAS, the Careers Service, the Learning Shop, the Library Service, Norwich City College and Easton College. The following outcomes were also achieved by beneficiaries (as outlined in Project Closure Report):

- Obtained place at City College to do hairdressing
- Part time bar work and place on a level two floristry course at Easton College, Norwich
- Completed level one counselling course (Jan – Feb 2005). Currently attending level two counselling skills course. Has obtained alternative voluntary work and attending SureStart project with her baby
- Joined Project '91 in Great Yarmouth
- Intended to enrol for level 3 counselling course at City College Norwich
- Obtained full time work and intended to study to be a social worker
- Looking for alternative voluntary work

Involvement in the project provided a springboard to enabling beneficiaries to see their *future* potential:

'It's given me sort of an insight to what it can be like so you know you start to imagine to do other things. I wouldn't have walked into a counselling course at college...I wouldn't have even known where to start to do it... If I hadn't of done this I probably wouldn't have done anything' (VPS)

The benefits also spilled over into other aspects of life, thus enabling an all encompassing quality of life improvement:

'I think it's made me more confident with [name of daughter] as well, even though it's nothing to do with babies and stuff and like that. Because I was more confident in myself I suppose then I thought then I could do that as well so it sort of helped in both ways really' (VPS)

Practical assistance was also highly valued:

'Every training day I had here they've paid child care....that was a big thing because otherwise I couldn't have done it' (VPS)

As well as extensive one to one support, attempts were made to conduct team meetings with the VPSs. However, getting people together proved difficult and also tensions within the group (discussed later) meant that such meetings were not well attended.

3.0 Work with Mentees (or lack thereof)

The PVSs had very limited opportunities to do 'hands on' work with mentees as recruitment and retention of mentees proved problematic throughout the project. Indeed only 4 referrals were made during the lifetime of the project. This is discussed further in a later section). Indeed, those who were referred often did not turn up for appointments and no meaningful work was engaged in.

Despite the range of skills and experience gained during the project, the lack of opportunity to support mentees proved frustrating and disappointing for VPSs, as this was the primary motivation for their involvement in the project.

'It has been really good and everyone is really supportive but I don't think there's enough referrals for you to say that you've really achieved something, like you've helped someone to achieve accommodation or achieve anything because there hasn't been long enough to get that far, so that's the disappointing thing' (VPS)

4.0 The Client Group and Issues of 'Readiness'

It is clear that the VPSs who engaged with the project had complex and multiple needs and demands on their time, some of which related to their offending background:

'The people who have come to me have been really keen but what I've found is that they've actually got a lot of stuff happening in their lives and by stuff I don't necessarily mean they have got unstable things happening in terms of accommodation and relationships but they have a lot of other things they've got to report to. They've got to report to probation, they have to report to this that and the other. A lot of them have health problems or you know they are on DTTOs¹³ or they seem to have meetings they have to go to. And the things they have to go to are more important than coming here because it means they get food, they get cash, they get better help with housing which are obviously basic needs' (Project Co-ordinator)

An extreme lack of confidence was also evident among VPSs:

'So it took her sort of three shots to come [into the office] and she eventually she came in and then once she'd come here she said 'oh it's

¹³ Drug Testing and Treatment Orders

really nice, they're really friendly' and so she is very much on board now'
(Project Co-ordinator)

In addition, already mentioned tensions developed within the small group of VPSs which proved difficult to manage and at times hindered progress:

'They've all built their confidence and trust in me but then they have these relationships between themselves. Some of them have inappropriate behaviour and they say or do quite unintentionally inappropriate things so having them in a group together is very difficult. They haven't got that confidence and that assertive approach and this is why you get problems cropping up' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

Although these factors were anticipated to a certain extent, the time and resources needed to meet the support needs of beneficiaries was undoubtedly underestimated when the original project objectives were being developed. For example the training needed to be extremely comprehensive:

'I took [their needs] on board and I gave them this rather long, intense training course, more intense than I would have done to other groups who would have had better skills to start with' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

And much one to one support was perceived as essential by the Project Co-ordinator. This appeared to cultivate a certain dependence on her and the project as a whole:

'Unless they are coming in and seeing me.... they need to see a lot of me, they need a lot of one to one. Unless they are coming in constantly they sort of fall apart. I'd find that once they've not seen me for a week or two they start going downhill in their relationship with WEETU. They are very up and down and if they haven't walked into the office on their own two weeks they'll need support with that' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

The factors outlined above, raise questions around the 'readiness' of beneficiaries to deliver a service to their peers. It is perhaps unsurprising that despite receiving comprehensive training and support, VPSs found the prospect of meeting mentees to be daunting:

'I have actually thought 'oh I don't think I can do this, I don't think I can actually do it'. I was worried in case I failed, in case I just wouldn't be able to help someone or something like that....I had cold feet really' (VPS)

'They've only kept coming because they thought they were going to help somebody else but when it actually came to giving them a mentee they were really quite frightened and nervous about it and I think that they couldn't have done a lot of things that needed doing with them because some of their behaviours weren't appropriate. Do you see what I mean? It's quite complicated' (Project Co-ordinator)

It was the perception of the Assistant Chief Probation Officer that the project had attempted to engage with beneficiaries too soon in their own rehabilitation. The voluntary nature of the work, the lack of selection process during recruitment and the small number women engaging with the project made it impossible to 'filter out' those beneficiaries who perhaps were not ready to undertake this kind of work. It appears that due to her close involvement, the Project Co-ordinator was able to make an informal assessment regarding 'readiness' and offer alternative ways of engaging with the project. These have already been outlined. However, this did of course mean that although superb work was done with a small number of beneficiaries it was not possible to build the capacity to build a wider mentoring service.

The Assistant Chief Probation Officer also usefully points out:

'There a danger in handing over potential beneficiaries to women who are still going through lots of difficult issues themselves. It's a time issue again. If she [Project Co-ordinator] had been able to work with them more to get them more ready she would have got to the point where they would then be

able to provide some support for others' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

5.0 Engaging External Agencies

5.1 Steering Committee

As already mentioned, at the start of project, a key role of the Assistant Chief Probation Officer was to Chair the project's Steering Committee. It was intended that this committee would guide the project processes and ensure that the strategic aims of the project were met. From the start there existed a recognition that the Steering Committee would be non traditional, represented a departure from those usually convened within the Probation Area. Participation in the Women into Work Equality and Diversity Advisory Group played a key role in this thinking:

'Subsequent to the diversity meeting because I became conscious of the make-up of the group who we had on board and again it was as much about how that was drawn together, those involved, how that group managed itself, how the group operated was going to be just as important as some of, you know, the harder edged outputs we were trying to achieve. We've been trying to get an (ex)offender and a sex industry worker on board' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

As is often the case in Voluntary/Community sector projects, achieving consistent agency representation on the Steering Committee proved problematic. Additionally the momentum of the group was affected by the change in partnership and subsequent staffing problems. Also the operational problems meant that there was not an effectively functioning project on which to build the strategic direction which could have been taken forward by the Steering Committee:

'It lost a bit of impetus really, there wasn't a focus for bringing people together around the table because....the project suffered with basic processes not being in place. It was hard to get members on board to be

involved in a project that wasn't particularly active' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

Despite these difficulties the Steering Committee did meet 3 times during the lifetime of the project. However, during the latter stages momentum was lost and meetings were cancelled.

5.2 Promoting the Project and Work with External Agencies

Marketing materials were designed by the Project Co-ordinator and distributed to local and partner organisations within Norfolk. In addition, in order to promote the work of the project:

- An editorial in the Eastern Daily Press newspaper was published
- A talk and video presentation was delivered to the East Mentoring Forum
- A workshop talk and video presentation was delivered to the Rural Women's Conference, Carlisle

Additionally, meetings were held with /referrals were made to the following agencies:

- Norfolk Drug Action Team
- Probation Area (Norfolk, Thetford and King's Lynn areas, numerous different contacts made in Community Punishment and with Board Members and individual case workers)
- Archways Hostel
- NACRO Project 91 (accommodation service)
- Connexions
- NACRO Pathfinders

When the Project Co-ordinator first came into post momentum was strong in terms of linking in with outside agencies and considerable progress was made. She worked hard to generate interest in the project and perceived this an important part of her role:

'I wrote to them [numerous agencies in Norfolk area] and said 'I'm here and I've started this and I want to come and see you all and I made lots of

appointments and I've been zooming around speaking to everybody'. Quite a lot of people have got really inspired and said 'Oh I've got just the person for you' (Project Co-ordinator)

However as time went on and the intensive support needs of VPSs became apparent, an increasing amount of the Project Co-ordinator's time was spent on addressing their needs. As already discussed, this proved to be extremely intensive work but understandably the Project Co-ordinator felt that this investment was justified to avoid losing the few beneficiaries which the project had. As a result of this focus on the 'micro' level of the project, the 'macro' level (i.e. forging strategic links with outside agencies) was unable to progress in any significant way.

Time constraints on the part of the project itself and the external agencies also proved a significant barrier to progress:

'Everybody I've spoken to is terribly busy, they all have their own agendas and one of the things I realised with this project was it could be sort of be put on the back burner quite quickly' (Project Co-ordinator)

Again the absence of a fully functioning project (i.e. no mentees to speak of) impeded progress with this aspect of the work:

'The thing is because the project was so new and didn't evolve out of another programme 'I could only say 'this is what I'm trying to do, this is what I'm striving for', I could not yet say this is what the beneficiaries need, how does this fit in with what you are doing?' Because my project was still in the very early stages of development' (Project Co-ordinator)

5.3 The Referral Process

Throughout the project there were ongoing problems in generating referrals to the project. There were differing perceptions of the reasons for this. The Probation Area did give the Project Co-ordinator a list of all women being currently being supervised in the area as well as instructions to contact individual officers.

However the Project Co-ordinator felt that she would have benefited from the Probation contact being directly involved in this process to overcome any over-zealous 'gate-keeping practices'. This did not happen:

'[Probation contact] was going to arrange for me to go round and just talk about the project to probation officers at their staff meetings in Norfolk but she didn't seem to be getting on with that...the meetings did not get arranged' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

It was anticipated that HMP Edmunds Hill (a local prison) would provide a key referral route for beneficiaries. The Project Co-ordinator visited HMP Edmunds Hill but the distance involved (140 miles roundtrip) and the imminent closure of the prison meant that this was not an avenue which she spent time exploring. However, it is important to note that the contact with Edmunds Hill took place relatively late in the lifetime of the project rather than in its development phase. This could have been an important factor in the problems encountered.

Important issues have also been raised around the inherent dangers and trust issues involved in referring clients to an untried and untested service:

'There was a difficulty in terms of the project selling itself to probation officers.....our experience is that you need to get alongside Probation Officers quite closely to generate a trust and confidence in you....there were some tensions around that and that's where you get into problems because you don't want to generate too much of an interest and generate referrals if there's not the provision to pick up on those referrals...unfortunately it's still the case that you only need one bad experience and people will then hold very negative attitudes and it takes a long time to shift that' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

'They didn't want to hand over their clients because they didn't know what we were going to do with them and they thought if anything I did sort of upset the status quo of their clients, that would make their job more difficult and they didn't know me from Adam. Some of them didn't even know

WEETU very well so I could understand why they didn't want to hand them over' **(Project Co-ordinator)**

Geographical issues also played a role in the problems in securing referrals. Relative to other parts of the country few women actually relocate from prison to the catchment area for this project. It may be increasingly difficult to access and facilitate the involvement of women who are rurally isolated.

6.0 Challenging Statutory Sector Working Practices

The project has had subtle but nonetheless significant impact in terms of challenging traditional working practices within the Probation Area and has contributed to a shift in approach on the part of the Assistant Chief Probation Officer. An increased awareness of gender issues within the working environment can be observed:

'I went away after [the meeting] thinking that was useful because it challenged how I'm used to managing meetings and my experience of meetings. It was actually a different way of working and it made me think. It clashed somewhat with the cultural way in which we work in the statutory sector. That's part of the buzz of it. I do think as a man it made me reflect on how I operate. I think there is an issue about the way in which women operate in a group and appear to be more understanding of differences of style and approach. I think it was about maybe people being willing to give each other some space and people being allowed to have differences of approach and style. I don't think I'd reflected on that before and that I have taken a very 'male' view. I think I came away thinking it's much more enabling to allow people more space and a different pace to talk about issues' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

An increased awareness of the value of empowering ex-offenders has also been observed during the course of the evaluation:

'I think it was probably at that Diversity meeting.....there was this notion about empowering the participants and for me it was exciting because it was challenging the way that the Probation Area works with offenders and was much more about trying to look at the individuals, taking responsibility for their lives and empowering them to be involved in decision making processes and how a project developed. I still think in Probation we tend to "do to others". I came away thinking, "Actually, the real exciting bit about this project is about the empowerment, is about the involving the women". Equality issues and diversity issues, they were not just peripheral. They were central, core' **(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)**

7.0 Project Closure and Exit Strategies

The Project Closure Report submitted to Women into Work clearly states;

'When working with such a vulnerable client group the results of short term funding are particularly disruptive. The WEETU project had just started to engage with projects in a meaningful way with our clients when the funding ended. As a result all the development work is lost and the clients have disengaged with the wider organisation.

It proved particularly difficult for beneficiaries to have to leave the project having secured so few referrals and it was recognised by all involved that a much longer term investment would be needed to make a success of a volunteer based peer mentoring project:

'The whole project itself has been really good it's just the fact of the referrals and not actually being able to help anyone....there is that bigger problem. It needs to be quite a long term sort of thing really' **(VPS)**

The Project Co-ordinator recognised the problems which individual beneficiaries may face in leaving the project and conducted significant work to attempt to 'cushion the blow'. This included:

- One to one meetings to discuss future action planning

- Producing a folder of certificates to provide a 'living reference' of their achievements
- Organising a 'leaving lunch'
- Writing to beneficiaries who were no longer engaging with the project to inform them of its imminent closure

Consistent with the approach adopted throughout the project, care was taken to acknowledge and validate achievements. It is also commendable that the Project Co-ordinator was so conscientious in providing a comprehensive audit trail of project activity on leaving her post.

In addition a video launch event was organised for partners in and around Norfolk. However, this potentially exciting event was not well attended.

In terms of wider impact of the project, some valuable lessons have been learnt:

'In terms of our learning we are now going out and recruiting a Volunteer Mentor Co-ordinator ourselves so we are going to be carrying on the project but I think the learning for me is rightly or wrongly is that it's far easier to have more control where you have that direct employment of the Co-ordinator. Clearly what we are looking at now is for other agencies to provide the volunteers themselves but I think we've felt it's important for someone to have the understanding of how we operate and how we work, much more in house so that's how we're moving it on'
(Assistant Chief Probation Officer)

8.0 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 Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative has engaged in the following activities with other Pilot Projects:

- participated in and presented at Pilot Project meetings

- liaising and networking at other Women into Work events including the conference and transnational events (see below)
- liaised with SOVA project re: access to prisons and with NACRO project re: client contact forms

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
- Assistant Chief Probation Officer attended transnational event in Sheffield in March 2004

The project did have specific objectives related to transnational work, as outlined in the tender document. However, in reality there were 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'

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

1.0 Summary of Results

The Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative has attempted to develop a voluntary peer mentoring service with women (ex)offenders. Excellent training and development work has been conducted with a small number of women who were recruited to be Volunteer Peer Supporters. These women have reported an increase in skills, knowledge, self confidence and motivation to succeed in the future.

The project has encountered numerous difficulties including a change in original lead partner and numerous staffing changes within both WEETU and Norfolk Probation. These have undoubtedly hampered project progress and resulted in an isolating working experience for the Project Co-ordinator. The project has raised important issues around the appropriateness of recruiting women (ex)offenders as Volunteer Peer Supporters, particularly around the stage of 'readiness' which women may be at in their own rehabilitation. It is unfortunate however, that due to the tight timescales of the project (largely resulting from the change in partner in the early stages) and problems with referrals this method of working could not be tested out in any meaningful way.

Due to a heavy focus on the 'micro' issues within the project (i.e. work with individual Volunteer Peer Supporters) some of the 'macro' issues and strategic aims of the project were not developed. In particular, a key objective of working with employers in order to change attitudes to employing (ex)offenders was not met. The wider impact of the project in the Norfolk area is unknown at this time. However, some subtle but significant attitude shifts were reported among the staff involved in the project.

2.0 Recommendations

The preceding chapters have set out key successes and barriers to success encountered during the Norfolk Women into Employment and Training Initiative Mentoring and Resettlement Pilot. 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
- In order to facilitate effective group work with VPSs, conflict resolution skills should be incorporated into training
- Ensure adequate time is allocated to developing the skills and confidence of VPSs
- Ensure adequate time is allocated to developing the relationship between VPSs and Project Co-ordinator and also between VPSs and mentees. Issues of trust and safety are particularly important in these relationships
- A productive balance between ensuring the well being of VPSs and 'hand holding' needs to be achieved in order to develop a truly empowering approach
- Adequate time needs to be allocated to developing strong links with community organisations and prisons in order to successfully generate referrals. This should take place early on in the programme as it takes a significant amount of time to build these links
- The Probation Area need adequate information and liaison with projects in order to inform their decisions about referral of clients.
- The potential problems of working with women at very different stages of their own rehabilitation needs to be considered

- In training situations, group members should have an input into developing groundrules
- Clear boundaries need to be established around what beneficiaries can reasonably expect of Project Co-ordinator and visa versa. When working with women with complex, multiple needs expectations of the progress which can be made should be realistic
- A forum for Peer Workers between Pilot Projects could provide a useful support function for workers
- VPSs would benefit from the opportunity to 'workshadow' an experienced VPS/mentor before they are given their own mentees
- The impact of lack of experience of staff in working with women in the Criminal Justice System needs to be recognised and support provided to help with issues which may arise as a result
- Commitment to the Steering Committee needs to be firmly established at the outset; roles, responsibilities and representation on this committee must be clarified

Appendix A - Workplan Results Table

Objective	Equal Theme	Evidence of Achievement /Barriers to Achievement
<p>1. Enable the target group to identify the benefits of getting into ETE</p>	<p>➤ Empowerment</p>	<p>➤ Project Co-ordinator conducted informal assessment of Volunteer Peer Supporters¹⁴ levels of motivation throughout the lifetime of the project</p> <p>➤ Personal objectives of VPSs were identified and continually reviewed</p> <p>➤ Due to problems with referrals from external agencies and also a lack of time to get the VPSs to a stage where they were ready to offer support to mentees, very little motivational work was conducted with mentees</p>
<p>2. Improve the self-concept of the beneficiaries</p>	<p>➤ Empowerment</p>	<p>➤ Significant improvements in self concept shown in VPSs as a result of training activities, involvement in Women into Work meetings etc</p> <p>➤ VPSs undertook the following training courses related to this objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Communicating with Confidence' ○ 'Stepping into the Unknown' <p>➤ However, low self esteem remained an issue for some VPSs throughout the project</p> <p>➤ Due to very limited contact, not possible to ascertain whether any improvement in self</p>

¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as VPSs

<p>3. Enable beneficiaries to identify their own needs, difficulties and objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment 	<p>concept was experienced by mentees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Extensive action planning was conducted by Project Co-ordinator with VPSs to enable them to define their own objectives in relation to both personal and career development ➤ Due to problems with referrals from external agencies and also a lack of time to get the VPSs to a stage where they were ready to offer support to mentees, very little action planning was conducted with mentees ➤ Local support agencies were accessed by VPSs and to a very limited extent, by mentees
<p>4. Enable participants to deal positively with disclosure of criminal records.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ VPSs experienced anxiety that when attending Women into Work meetings their status as an 'ex-offender' would be immediately apparent ➤ Guidance on disclosing criminal record was made available to VPSs and discussions were held around particular anxieties in this area
<p>5. To engage with employers over their attitudes towards employing ex offenders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dissemination and Mainstreaming ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Due to a focus on the support needs of individual VPSs and the very short timescale of the project following the change of partner, it was not possible to engage in this work ➤ The Steering Committee provided a useful forum for developing this work but progress was limited
<p>6. Ensure that the housing support needs of women ex offenders are recognised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Equal opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This did occur in relation to VPSs, as an 'all encompassing' support system was

		<p>offered which took into account all individual needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No evidence to suggest the project contributed to the 2004 – 2009 Norfolk Supporting People Strategy as detailed in original tender document
7. Ensure that the needs of drug misusing women offenders are addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Equal opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ See above
8. Ensure that each participant has access to a trained and properly matched mentor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Innovation ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 6 VPSs received training to equip them with the relevant skills to become a peer supporter ➤ Such a small group of VPSs and differing levels of confidence within the group meant that a matching process was difficult to implement ➤ Problems with referrals and slow progress of the project meant that only 4 mentee referrals were received during the lifetime of the project
9. Beneficiaries to receive information guidance and advice on accessing the employment and training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ VPSs received extensive information and guidance from Project Co-ordinator although contact with JobCentre Plus limited ➤ Limited information offered to mentees due to problems already outlined
10. Beneficiaries to gain further qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 3 VPSs accessed/completed further education courses as a result of their involvement with the project
11. The development of a more integrated and holistic approach to women offenders across Norfolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dissemination and Mainstreaming ➤ Equal Opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project had little strategic impact but has provided a useful impetus for future work (i.e. a probation run mentoring scheme) and has highlighted important issues related to the needs of women offenders in the area



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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