

Women @ the Well: An holistic and integrated approach, providing support to women experiencing complex needs.

Kathryn Hodges

Trustee, Women @ the Well

Senior Lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University

kathryn.hodges@anglia.ac.uk

Women @ the Well

- **Mission:** to provide a creative and supportive space for vulnerable women, based on Gospel values by delivering a holistic response to their needs. To empower the women to make choices to improve the quality of their lives.
- **Women @ the Well** aims to provide a setting with a 'family-type' feeling delivered by a team of people who care deeply about their work and want to help women realise their full potential.
- The '**Well**' has traditionally been a gathering place for women and has both spiritual and transformational significance which has inspired the name.

Who Women @ the Well Support

Focused on needs of women caught up in multiple cycles of abuse through involvement in the many facets of pavement culture, including:

- Homelessness
- Prostitution
- Drugs & alcohol
- Mental &/or Physical ill health
- Partner violence
- Involvement with criminal justice system
- Learning difficulty

W@W are specifically concerned about;

- the needs of women sexually exploited through their involvement in street based prostitution;
- women who have experienced trafficking.

Presenting needs

Last year, 335 women were seen at W@W, all of whom had support plans put in place.

- >90% - exhibited symptoms of mental ill-health
- >60% - learning disability (Bradley definition)
- >50% - currently involved in criminal justice system
- >20% - recently been in prison
- >70% - history of involvement in street based prostitution
- >80% - substance misuse issues
- >70% - ASBO's, ABA's in place and/or currently classified as "street active"
- >80% - homeless / insecurely housed

Support offered

Services are provided for women by women in a supportive environment with the aims of;

- providing a creative, non-judgemental and supportive space;
- developing a holistic and timely response to their needs;
- promoting emotional well-being;
- empowering these women to make choices to improve the quality of their lives ;
- working towards meaningful and rewarding social participation;
- Diverting women from the criminal justice system;
- To divert women from unhealthy and dangerous situations.

Complex needs: a framework

“A framework for understanding multiple interlocking needs that span health and social care issues” Rankin & Regan (2004)

Breadth (range of need)

+/or

Depth (severity of need)

Too often services fail to recognise the interconnected nature of peoples needs, the physical, social and emotional requirementspeoples needs are closely related to factors in the wider community (Rankin & Regan, 2004)

Multiple interlocking needs that span health and social issues that lead to limited participation in society “ (Gallimore et al, 2008)

Multiple and Complex needs

Baroness Corston (2007) in her investigation into women in custody;

- Most were **mothers** and some were pregnant.
- They had problematic relationships with **drugs and alcohol**
- They often looked very **thin and unwell**
- They had been **sexually, emotionally and physically abused**
- They were **not in control** of their lives
- They **did not** have many **choices**
- They were noisy and at first sight confident and brash but this belied their frailty and vulnerability and masked their **lack of self-confidence and esteem**
- They had **mental health** problems and they **self harmed**
- They were **poor**.
- They were not all the same, they were **individuals**
- There were significant **minority groups, including BME and foreign national women.**

A need for a **holistic and integrated** approach in supporting women is essential

Complex needs: why the concern?

- Adults facing severe or multiple disadvantage tend to be less likely to access services and, when they do, they are less likely to gain from them....they can find it difficult to engage with multiple public services in order to improve their lives and often live at the very margins of society” (HM Government, 2006).
- Seen as being served quite poorly by helping services
- Concern that those who are most in need of accessing services for help and support are frequently not doing so
- Some argue – those with multiple needs do not engage due to lack of motivation
.....others say that services are poorly designed to meet their need, that individuals are in effect designed out of services.
- To understand that the difficulties people face can not be separated from societies' structures, such as education, employment, housing and the experience of poverty (Neale, 2004).

Barriers to Effective Support

- Services fragmented- mostly developed to respond to single need – not responding to the range of need
- Professional assessment – needs responded to in line with specialism
- Disconnect – local and national policy, and within national government
- Practical barriers – child care, safe space, opening hours, referral routes etc

An Holistic & Integrated Response

Regardless of particular combination of need...those with multiple and complex needs wanted;

- Simple, quick access to services;
- Single point of access to service or one service
- Respect from staff
- Culturally sensitive staff: equal, fair & non-judgemental
- Consistent and positive relationships
- Effective joint working between agencies;
- Flexible approach;
- Support with daily practicalities
- Involvement in decision making

Agency for Change

Key challenge for helping services;

- Consider individuals personal capacity to access the services they need and resilience to barriers to accessing support;
- To understand individuals previous experience of care when considering capacity to engage.

Gallimore et al (2007)

We enjoy coming here, not just for the help that we receive from the staff and volunteers, but for the company of other women who understand some of things we find difficult. We feel listened to and respected. It is a real boost to have people take an interest in each of us as women who have something to offer and gifts to be used, rather than be seen as someone who needs “fixing”.

Women @ the Well Service User

References

Corston, J. (2007) *The Corston Report*. The Home Office, London.

Demand for Change: <http://www.demandchange.org.uk>

Gallimore, A., Hay, L. and Mackie, P. (2008) *What do people with multiple and complex needs want from services*. NHS Lothian and NHS Highlands.

HM Government (2006) *Reaching out: An action plan on social exclusion*. Cabinet Office, London

Neal, J. (2004) *Gender and Illicit Drug Use*, British Journal of Social Work, 34, 851-870

Rankin, J. and Regan, S. (2004) *Meeting Complex Needs: The Future of Social Care*. Turning Point/IPPR, London

Rosengard, A., Ling, I., Ridley, J., and Hunter, S. (2007) *Literature Review on Multiple and Complex needs*. Scottish Executive Social Research.

Women @ the Well: <http://www.watw.org.uk>