

Re-Unite Revisited: An evaluation

July 2013

Jane Dominey & Loraine Gelsthorpe

Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge



Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to Ashley Horsey and Jane Glover (Commonweal Housing) as well as to the various Re-Unite project managers and project workers who have contributed to this report. We have much appreciated their willingness to talk with us and to send us material which has formed the basis of this report. The fact that they remain unnamed is to ensure confidentiality in the process, but our thanks are not a whit less sincere. Particular thanks are due to Re-Unite South London staff and Housing for Women for their support and interest in the evaluation for the past three years. We also wish to acknowledge the work of Dr Judy Renshaw in relation to the cost benefit analysis of Re-Unite in South London. Thanks also to Joanne Garner at the Institute of Criminology for her help in producing this report.

Preface

This evaluation was commissioned and sponsored by Commonweal Housing and all due credit should be given for both the imaginative and timely initiative itself and the willingness to sponsor full evaluation of the activities involved. We should point out that the research has been conducted independently, however, and that the views of the authors remain their own.

Publication Details: Commonweal Housing: London. July 2013

Copyright: Jane Dominey & Loraine Gelsthorpe, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge and Commonweal, 2013

Table of contents

	Page
Executive Summary	
Introduction	7
Key Findings:	
South London Re-Unite: The client group and their needs	8
Other Re-Unite projects: The client group and their needs	9
Re-Unite South London: Impact	9
Other Re-Unite projects: Impact	10
Conclusions	11
Re-Unite Revisited: Full Report	
1. Introduction	
1.1 The policy context	13
1.2 The impact of imprisonment on children	14
1.3 Background to the Re-Unite Project	15
1.4 The contribution of evaluation	16
1.5 The aim of this report	17
2. Re-Unite South London	
2.1 Re-Unite South London: From 2010-2012	17
2.2 How many women have used the Re-Unite South London Project?	18
2.3 How many children have used the Re-Unite South London Project?	18
2.4 Referrals to Re-Unite South London	20
2.5 More about the Re-Unite service users	21
2.6 The needs of Re-Unite South London service users	23
2.7 Evaluating the Re-Unite outcomes	25
2.8 Re-Unite and statutory agencies	28
2.9 Concluding points and observations	28

3.	New Re-Unite Providers	29
3.1	Re-Unite Greater Manchester: Threshold	31
3.2	Re-Unite Gloucestershire: ISIS	31
3.3	Re-Unite Birmingham: Anawim	32
3.4	Re-Unite Together Women	33
3.5	Re-Unite: Leeds and Bradford	34
3.6	Re-Unite: Hull	35
3.7	Re-Unite: Sheffield	36
3.8	Concluding points and observations	37
4.	Re-Unite Service Users in 2012: New Providers Outside London	
4.1	The 26 Re-Unite service users within the six new Re-Unite Projects	37
4.2	Children who have received the Re-Unite service	39
4.3	The needs of Re-Unite Service Users	41
4.4	Housing options for Re-Unite Service Users	42
4.5	What can we say about outcomes for this group of women and their children?	43
4.6	Concluding points and observations	45
5.	Case Studies	
5.1	Key Points from the Case Studies	46
5.2	Case Study A	47
5.3	Case Study B	48
5.4	Case Study C	49
5.5	Case Study D	50
5.6	Case Study E	51
5.7	Case Study F	52
5.8	Case Study G	53
5.9	Case Study H	54

6. Comparisons and Reflections	
6.1 Comparisons and reflections regarding the different models of provision	56
6.2 Does Re-Unite work and is it value for money?	57
6.3 Does Re-Unite work?	57
6.4 Does Re-Unite offer value for money?: A Cost benefit Analysis of Re- Unite in South London	58
7. Conclusions	
7.1 Seven signs of success	59
7.2 The external policy and commissioning environment	60
References	60
List of Charts	
Chart 1: Number of children in each Re-Unite family	18
Chart 2: Number of children and arrangements for the children during mothers' imprisonment	19
Chart 3: Age distribution of service users	21
Chart 4: Index offences	21
Chart 5: Variation in prison sentence length experienced by Re-Unite service users	22
Chart 6: Accommodation prospects in the absence of Re-Unite	23
Chart 7: Substance use at start of tenancy	24
Chart 8: Length of Re-Unite tenancy	26
Chart 9: Service user ages	38
Chart 10: Service users and previous convictions	39
Chart 11: Prison sentence lengths experienced by service users	39
Chart 12: Number of dependent children for each Re-Unite service	41
Chart 13: Housing on release	42
Chart 14: Circumstances of service user after 6 months with Re-Unite	44

List of Tables

Table 1: Costs and Benefits

59

Re-Unite Revisited: Executive Summary

Introduction:

As the Government's recent announcement on Strategic Objectives for Female Offenders acknowledges, many female offenders have a background of abuse and experience of the care system, there is evidence of a high rate of self-harm, and they are twice as likely as men to suffer from anxiety and depression; many have problems with drugs and alcohol misuse (Ministry of Justice, 2013). Significantly, nearly two thirds of women leave behind dependent children when entering prison. Minister Helen Grant goes on to suggest that 'we simply cannot afford - either financially or morally - to ignore these issues' in view of the costs of imprisonment for women (around £56,415 per woman each year) and the high reconviction rate (almost 45 per cent of all women released from custody in 2010 reoffended within 12 months). Re-Unite is an innovative project which supports mothers and their children at the critical time that the mother is released from prison. The project does this by aiming to help women obtain and maintain good quality accommodation in which they and their children can resume or seek to restore their family life.

The Re-Unite project dates back to 2006. The idea to develop and seek to replicate an innovative supported housing project for mothers leaving prison emerged in conversations and meetings between Commonweal Housing, a registered charity with a mission to support people to overcome social injustice through the provision of housing, Housing for Women (HfW), a London-based housing association, and Women in Prison (WiP), a voluntary sector organisation with considerable experience in supporting and advocating for women caught up in the criminal justice system. Commonweal has made a ten-year commitment to this piece of work. The first Re-Unite project was established in South London. Commonweal provided the funding for the project, including for the purchase of properties, HfW managed the properties and WiP dealt with referrals to the project and provided individual support to the first tenants and their children.

Re-Unite was set up with the aim of providing accommodation and support for mothers and children who would otherwise be homeless on the woman's release from prison. It was intended to offer a solution to the problems faced by some women leaving prison who, having lost accommodation as a result of offending, are seen as intentionally homeless and not entitled to social housing¹. In a further twist, women who do not have the care of their children are often assessed as single people and not allocated housing suitable for a family. Increasingly, Local Authority housing staff argue that women offenders have made themselves intentionally homeless - which further compounds the difficulties. This lack of suitable housing then makes it impossible for a woman to regain the care of her children. Whilst Re-Unite South London has developed over time, with the support being provided by Housing for Women since 2010 and now offering 'floating support' to women released from prison who do not live in a Re-Unite property, but who nevertheless seeking to be reunited with their children, this innovative concept of housing and support for women leaving prison in order to facilitate a re-uniting of mothers and children has remained absolutely central.

¹ Social housing is provided on a secure basis and at low rent to people in housing need. It is generally owned and managed by not-for-profit housing associations or local government.

Following an initial evaluation of the early phase (published in 2010 by Commonweal; see Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2010), this report reflects a three year evaluation from 2010-2012. It was always an intention to replicate the concept of Re-Unite and one distinctive feature of this report is an attempt to chart developments in other areas beyond South London, and to compare and contrast the developments and what seems to work.

Re-Unite South London has now been joined by projects in Birmingham, Gloucestershire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Humberside and Greater Manchester. Whilst all these projects share the central aim of providing support and housing so that mothers leaving prison can live with their children, they do not all operate in the same way. One key difference is that unlike in South London, where there is a dedicated pool of housing for the project, the new projects work in conjunction with different housing providers to facilitate tenancies. Also, by contrast to the outreach support which Re-Unite South London offers, the Re-Unite projects in Birmingham, Gloucestershire, Yorkshire and Humberside, are associated with Women's Centres - or in the case of Greater Manchester a homeless support charity - and thus 'Re-Unite' forms part of their integrated and holistic service for female offenders.

KEY FINDINGS

South London Re-Unite: The client group and their needs:

- In the 3 years between January 2010 and December 2012 a total of 31 women have been supported by Re-Unite staff.
- 68 women were referred between January 2010 and August 2012 - mostly from prisons, but with some referrals from probation and voluntary sector organisations.
- Of these 22 had become service users before the end of 2012, with plans for other women to become service users in 2013.
- In 7 of the 38 declined referrals this was because a property was not available at the time; in 4 of the 38 declined referrals this was because the women had no connection with one of the boroughs in which Re-Unite South London works; other referrals were declined because immigration rules or licence conditions meant that a woman was not able to live in South London upon release.
- In addition to the 31 women who have benefited from Re-Unite more than 55 children have benefited from the service - ranging from infants to older teenagers.
- Children stayed with grandmothers in the main whilst their mother was in prison, but also older sisters, foster carers, fathers, cousins, aunts, stepfathers or friends; a small number of infants were in prison with their mothers.
- Social Services were involved in 6 of the 17 cases reported in 2012 monitoring data; in these cases Re-Unite South London staff work as part of the multi-agency team involved in assessing the family's situation and offering support.
- For the 22 women where we know their age, most were in the 30-39 age category, followed by 20-29; with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

- Most of the women had been imprisoned for drugs offences, followed by fraud and theft - with a range of other offences too.
- The majority of service users received sentences of 2 years or longer; 6 women had received sentences of 6 years or longer.
- Mental health issues (predominantly depression) and debt problems were the issues most frequently identified at the assessment stage.
- Out of the 23 cases where we have information likely accommodation in the absence of Re-Unite would have been friends or family, followed by some sort of hostel accommodation - temporary and insecure accommodation which is hardly ideal for mothers wishing to be reunited with their children.

Other Re-Unite projects: The client group and their needs

- There were 26 women who were out of prison in 2012 and receiving support intended to help them secure stable housing and become re-united with their children. Each provider worked with a small number of women in 2012: Re-Unite Greater Manchester: Threshold (3), Re-Unite Gloucestershire: ISIS (3), Re-Unite Birmingham: Anawim (6), Re-Unite Together Women Leeds and Bradford (7), Re-Unite Together Women Humberside (4) and Re-Unite Together Women South Yorkshire (3). In addition, all providers were assessing the suitability of referrals and applications and were planning work with women due for release from custody in 2013. One project was working with someone on a community order.
- In contrast with Re-Unite South London most of the service users were age 20-29, followed by 30-39, and mostly white British.
- Depression was identified in 13 out of the 26 cases and drug use or misuse issues identified in 15 cases; alcohol was reported as a problem in 7 of the 26 cases.
- Just over half the women were identified as needing help with debt management or budgeting upon release from prison - in some cases there were long standing debts relating to previous rent arrears.
- The majority of offences for which sentences of imprisonment were received involved drugs, theft, GBH and other serious violence.
- From the information available, 14 women had a history of offending, 11 were first offenders; a small number of women were prolific offenders.
- 9 women had received a prison sentence of less than 12 months.
- Around 50 children have mothers who have been linked with these Re-Unite projects - although in a very small number of cases women prisoners were overly optimistic about being reunited with their children.
- In 5 cases children were living with foster carers whilst their mothers were in prison; 11 children were living in foster care at the moment their mother became a Re-Unite service user; in other cases children were living with grandparents, or sometimes fathers or aunts.

Re-Unite South London: Impact

- Of the 31 service users identified above, 15 have moved on in a planned way, and 10 were still fully engaged with the project in December 2012. This is impressive - since establishing and maintaining a tenancy, paying rent and achieving stability are very positive outcomes for people leaving prison. In the 6 remaining cases, the woman left her Re-Unite tenancy in an unplanned way. Each situation is different, but reasons included accumulation of rent arrears, disengagement from support workers and pressure from local criminal gangs. No one left Re-Unite South London in an unplanned way in 2012.
- There is evidence of reoffending for just two women after they have left Re-Unite; this is a remarkable feat in a context where nearly half of all women imprisoned reoffend again within 12 months of leaving prison.
- In a similarly positive way, evidence suggests improvements in health, financial management, employment and training.
- For a number of women, the support of Re-Unite has enabled them to engage with community mental health teams and receive counselling or drug treatment for depression and other mental health problems.
- The importance of school looms large in the work done with Re-Unite South London children. Mothers and children have been helped to secure school places, transfer to new schools closer to new homes, make the transition to secondary school and, in some cases, address behavioural issues at school.

Other Re-Unite projects: Impact

- None of the Re-Unite providers working outside London had dedicated housing for service users, but rather facilitated access to suitable accommodation, predominantly via social housing providers but also via the local authority and private landlords.
- Without the extra support provided by Re-Unite, all the women in the sample were facing the prospect of homelessness, relying on the goodwill of friends or family, hoping for a hostel place or returning to accommodation made unsuitable by the threat of eviction or domestic violence. For the most part women went into temporary accommodation provided by family or friends upon leaving prison; hostel accommodation (including approved premises) was the first accommodation after prison in 7 cases.
- But Re-Unite efforts during the year mean that 16 of the women were soon living in more permanent accommodation, ten of them with their children, and two were working towards re-union at the time of data collection; the remaining four women were at an earlier stage in the process of assessment, but re-union with children remained a distinct possibility.
- Re-Unite is still a young project and, outside London, there are only data about 15 women who have been out of prison for more than six months. It is, therefore, very early to be talking about outcomes. Nevertheless, at the six month after release stage, all but two of the service users remained engaged with Re-Unite. Of the remaining 13, two were recorded as having committed further offences. One received a community sentence for shoplifting offences and the other was sentenced to a further five months imprisonment.

- 8 out of 15 service users were re-united with their children and were proving to be successful in maintaining secure tenancies.
- Re-Unite service users and their children clearly benefit from the wider resources available from the new providers, such as groups and activities at women's centres as well as access to specialist supported accommodation.
- Key differences between the Re-Unite South London project and other projects outside London revolve around the fact that as a group, the South London project service users tended to be a bit older than the service users outside London and tended to have served longer sentences; service users outside London tend to have served shorter sentences and there is more evidence of mental health issues and other symptoms of chaotic lifestyles.
- In the projects outside London - where the women had served shorter sentences, it was not always possible to make a thorough assessment of the likelihood that mother and children could be re-united before the women was released from prison.

Conclusions:

- During 2012 Re-Unite providers have worked with women with chaotic backgrounds and significant needs in areas such as substance use, mental health and offending. Such needs are barriers to establishing and maintaining a tenancy and reduce the chances of children returning to live with their mothers.
- There is much evidence of success in establishing effective support, helping the women towards stable lives, and facilitating the restoration of their families with the result that children are now able to be with their mothers.
- The project helps to address the particular housing disadvantage faced by mothers in prison.
- The new Re-Unite projects either have a key role in providing support for mothers and children in specialist housing (Threshold, Greater Manchester) or in facilitating the application process for suitable accommodation (Together Women in Yorkshire and Humberside and ISIS in Gloucestershire). In Anawim, Birmingham, the Re-Unite work means speedier access to suitable family accommodation too and the strong support to help women to maintain their tenancies is critical.
- Crucially, for the children involved with the project, Re-Unite has provided the opportunity to return to their mother's care with additional support at a time of transition and change. For some children, the existence of Re-Unite has certainly prevented them from being taken into care or remaining in care - which, ultimately, can be shown to be detrimental to quality of life and life chances.
- The findings from the cost-benefit analyses of the project in Re-Unite South London suggest that there is a strong evidence that the project provides benefit to society in simple financial terms: the costs of providing the housing and the support is outweighed by the financial savings, even if estimated conservatively and restricted to less use of emergency housing and local authority child care, leaving aside the impact of increased stability in women's lives on patterns of offending.

- In sum, Re-Unite shows considerable success in helping women to settle down and be reunited with their children. The projects in South London and elsewhere are quite different, but the concept of Re-Unite and practice of providing or facilitating access to suitable housing combined with intensive support is an extremely valuable development in regard to women offenders.
- This is a very important finding in the context of policy developments regarding provision for women, and should be used to inform decisions regarding the sustainability of community-based work with women offenders.

Re-Unite Revisited: Full Report

1. Introduction

1.1 The Policy Context

In a context of concern to ensure appropriate provision for women offenders so as to reduce the prospect of reoffending, Re-Unite supports mothers and their children at the critical time that the mother is released from prison. The project does this by helping the woman obtain and maintain good quality accommodation in which she and her children can resume or restore their family life. The story of Re-Unite highlights a number of current issues in criminal justice; these include questions about provision for female offenders and concerns about the outcomes for the children of prisoners. Re-Unite provides an interesting example of the contribution that the voluntary (not-for-profit) sector can make to resettlement and after-care but may face challenges in a policy environment that requires evidence of quick and successful outcomes to continue to fund services.

Following an initial evaluation of the early phase (published in 2010), this report reflects a three year evaluation from 2010-2012. It was always Commonweal's intention to replicate the concept of Re-Unite and one distinctive feature of this report is an attempt to chart developments in areas beyond South London, and to compare and contrast the developments and what seems to work.

There have been a number of significant policy and practice developments regarding women prisoners in the UK since the turn of the millennium in particular. Prompts for action have included findings of the Scottish Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorate Report Women Offenders - A Safer Way which concluded that 'the backgrounds of women in prison are characterised by experiences of abuse, drug misuse, poor educational attainment, poverty, psychological distress and self-harm' (1998:13). The Prison Reform Trust (a voluntary sector campaigning group) produced a very compelling case for change in England and Wales in 2000 in Justice for Women: The Need for Reform. The Labour Government's Social Exclusion Report (2002), which showed that those in prison are amongst the most socially disadvantaged, directly acknowledged that women's needs were often greater than those of men and that the prison population of women was growing at a faster rate. It argued that 'the relatively small numbers of women in the prison system overall [means that] their needs are often overlooked or dealt with in a system designed primarily for male offenders' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002: 139).

More recent developments include the creation of the Women's Offending Reduction Programme (Home Office, 2004) which recognised the need for a distinct response to the needs of women, the setting up of demonstration projects in the community (with 'wrap around' holistic support), a Fawcett Society survey of community based possibilities for women (Gelsthorpe et al., 2007) and Baroness Corston's report on vulnerable women within the criminal justice system (Corston, 2007). The more radical recommendations of the Corston Report, including the replacement of large prisons for women with small local custodial units and making it harder for courts to use prison for women awaiting trial, did not find favour with the Government. The years since the publication of the Corston Report have, however, seen further investment in community based resources for

women offenders and women at risk of committing offences. England and Wales now has a network of Women's Centres offering the sort of gender-specific support and intervention that has been identified as relevant and effective, although such provision is not available across the whole country (see: www.womensbreakout.org.uk).

Despite evidence of agreement about constructive ways to work with female offenders (Prison Reform Trust, 2011; Ministry of Justice, NOMS Equalities Group, 2012) a further inquiry is underway (Justice Select Committee, 2012). It can only be hoped that such an inquiry will endorse all the work of the last decade rather than undoing it. It is also a cause for concern that, even with concerted efforts to reduce the female prison population, the numbers in custody continue to reflect increases. In June 2012, just over 4,100 women were in prison in England and Wales. The figure in 1995 had been just below 2000 (Prison Reform Trust 2012). New impetus appears in the announcement of Strategic Objectives for Female Offenders in March 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2013a) where Minister Helen Grant acknowledges that many women may be victims of abuse, experience mental health problems and may have been subject to a lack of care, notwithstanding their offending behaviour. In particular, she emphasises the need not only to see fewer women incarcerated, but to take proper account of the realities of women's lives, ensuring that resources are best targeted to help more women turn their lives around. In this context, the work of Re-Unite is critical since it seeks to support women leaving prison in restoring relationships with their children.

1.2 The impact of imprisonment on children

The number of children affected by parental imprisonment has grown in tandem with the overall (male and female) prison population: in 2007 it was estimated that 127,000 children under 18 each year in England and Wales have a parent in prison – around one per cent of all children (Murray, 2007).² By 2012 a Ministry of Justice Report (Ministry of Justice 2012b) put this at 200,000 children who have a parent in prison at some point in 2009. A high number of infants are born in prison: between April 2005 and December 2008, 283 children were born to women prisoners in England and Wales – a rate of almost two per week (Hansard, HC, 10 May 2011, c1072W).

Imprisoning mothers has a particular impact on the lives of children. Only 9 per cent of children whose mothers are in prison are cared for by their fathers in their mother's absence (Prison Reform Trust 2012) and the majority of imprisoned women's children lose their primary carer and around one third lose their only carer when their mother is incarcerated (Caddle and Crisp 1997). The small number of women's prisons relative to men's (there are 14 women's prisons in England and none in Wales) means that women in custody are often held some distance from home. In 2009 there were 753 women held over 100 miles from home (Hansard, HC 25 November 2009, c238w). Prison visits for family members are made difficult or impossible by distance and expense. Moreover, women prisoners may choose not to have their children visit them in order to protect them from the distress of witnessing the prison environment.

²A review of children of offenders by the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) gave a rather higher estimate of 160,000 children annually.

The collateral consequences of imprisonment on prisoners' children, particularly in terms of future criminality, have attracted considerable academic attention in recent years. In brief, research evidence shows that children and families of prisoners are a highly vulnerable group with multiple risk factors for adverse outcomes, including offending, antisocial behaviour, mental health problems, drug misuse, school failure and unemployment (Murray and Farrington, 2008). Prisoners' children have around twice the risk of developing antisocial behaviour and poor mental health outcomes than children whose parents have never been imprisoned (Murray et al., 2009).

Drawing these threads together produces a bleak picture for the children of women in prison. Many will have left their home to live with members of their extended family or been placed with foster parents or in a care home. Such arrangements are likely to exacerbate existing financial and emotional problems. Moving house may be accompanied by a change of school, disruption of education and loss of the support of friends all of which have major impact on children. Women's imprisoned status is, by implication, often accompanied by the label of 'bad mother' (Codd, 2008), and this stigma may extend to their children, who may be subjected to bullying or teasing at school. Substitute carers (either family members or representing social services) may be reluctant to allow children to return to their mothers upon release; they may judge the woman a poor mother, believe that the children are better off in their new place or want to maintain the benefits that they receive as a result of caring for the children.

The Children of Offenders Review (DCSF/MoJ, 2007) asserted that more needs to be done to improve outcomes for the children of offenders. In some areas, organisations such as the Ormiston Children and Families Trust provide support for prisoners' families (such as prison visitor centres and child-friendly prison visits). However, the DCSF/MoJ Review identified that there is little provision aimed at supporting families through the difficult adjustments experienced around the high-risk time of release from prison, as the parent tries to resettle into the community. It is this need, for support in general and good quality housing in particular, that Re-Unite seeks to meet.

1.3 Background to the Re-Unite Project

The Re-Unite project dates back to 2006. The idea to develop and seek to replicate an innovative supported housing project for mothers leaving prison emerged in conversations and meetings between Commonweal Housing, a registered charity with a mission to support people to overcome social injustice through the provision of housing, Housing for Women (HfW), a London-based housing association, and Women in Prison (WiP), a voluntary sector organisation with considerable experience in supporting and advocating for women caught up in the criminal justice system. Commonweal has made a ten-year commitment to this piece of work. The first Re-Unite project was established in South London. Commonweal provided the funding for the project, including for the purchase of properties, HfW managed the properties and WiP dealt with referrals to the project and provided individual support to the first tenants and their children.

Re-Unite was set up with the aim of providing accommodation and support for mothers and children who would otherwise be homeless on the woman's release from prison. It was intended to offer a solution to the problems faced by some women leaving prison who, having lost accommodation as a

result of offending, were seen as intentionally homeless and not entitled to social housing³. In a further twist, women who do not have the care of their children are assessed as single people and not allocated housing suitable for a family. This lack of suitable housing then makes it impossible for the woman to regain the care of her children.

The properties for the project were carefully chosen to give good quality accommodation for families, away from busy roads and within reach of schools and community facilities. In addition to the family houses, Re-Unite South London also has single person homes to accommodate women who are not yet able to live with their children, offering them a stable base from which to work towards the return of their children, for example from the care of social services.

The first women to become Re-Unite service users moved into the project's accommodation in September 2007. At the outset of the project, it was anticipated that women would be Re-Unite tenants for two years before moving on into permanent accommodation. Learning from experience, and from the evaluation process reduced this to an expected 12 month period as a Re-Unite tenant. Given that the Re-Unite tenancy was time-limited, it appeared best practice to be planning for the next move from the start. That said, the shortage of appropriate social housing in London means that many women still continue as Re-Unite tenants for longer than a year as, although ready to make a move, they wait for the offer of an appropriate tenancy. In another change since the inception of the project, WiP no longer provide the support role. HfW now undertake both the support and housing management tasks, employing a project worker who deals with referrals, assessments and then supports women from moving-in to moving-on. Individual support for the women and their children combined with housing management from the same organisation facilitates speedy response to any difficulties relating to the housing.

1.4 The contribution of evaluation

A commitment to evaluation was built in from the start of the project. An action research methodology was adopted, with findings from the evaluation being used to make changes to the implementation of the project and identify best practice. The first evaluation report was produced in 2010 (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2010). Some refinements were made to the project as a result of this report and its recommendations. The support function was taken on by HfW, for instance, and it was decided to offer accommodation for up to a year - with 'move on' or 'next steps' arrangements being initiated as soon as women were housed with their children - so as to facilitate more permanent accommodation. Developments in South London were subsequently evaluated in 2010, 2011 and 2012, with a cost benefit analysis having been carried out in 2010 and 2011. But the concept of 'Re-Unite' has also been extended to different parts of the country and incorporated in other work with women through women's centres and a homeless support charity.

³ Social housing is provided on a secure basis and at low rent to people in housing need. It is generally owned and managed by not-for-profit housing associations or local government.

1.5 The aim of this report

The aim of this Report is to offer an overall analysis of the three years between 2010-2012 in South London, and also to offer views and reflections on the replication of Re-Unite thus far in different parts of the country. We have analysed data based on the quarterly monitoring returns submitted to Commonweal in January 2013 in relation to the new projects. We have drawn out some interesting similarities and differences in the projects and conclude with some general reflections on the projects.

2. Re-Unite South London

2.1 Re-Unite South London: From 2010-2012

This section of the report outlines the work completed by Re-Unite South London in the three years from 1 January 2010. It therefore follows on from the evaluation of the early development phase of this work (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2010) and draws on the reports of the data for 2010 and 2011 (see Gelsthorpe and Dominey, 2010; Dominey and Gelsthorpe, 2011)⁴.

Since the beginning of 2012, three project staff have worked full-time on Re-Unite. One of these is a dedicated children's worker. Another development has seen the use of volunteers to enhance the service delivered to families. Volunteers are intended to provide low level mentoring and befriending, giving the support workers more time to focus on tasks, such as inter-agency work and negotiation with housing providers, requiring specialist knowledge and skills.

This report draws on records that were kept primarily for the purpose of service delivery. As time has passed there have been changes to the way that records have been kept. This is not an issue for the delivery of a project but makes some aspects of evaluation a challenge. Inevitably, as is often the case in evaluations of this sort, there are gaps and inconsistencies in the available information about Re-Unite service users and their children. The help of HfW staff in providing data for the evaluation, answering questions and checking details is gratefully acknowledged.

There is a specific lack of information about those women who were already residing in Re-Unite properties at the start of 2010. This is the point at which HfW took over the provision of support from Women in Prison as well as providing the housing management for the project. Some information about the background and circumstances of service users was not transferred to HfW and so is not available to this evaluation.

This report draws on data provided through the 2012 Commonweal monitoring process and on information from the interim evaluations in 2010 and 2011. The 2012 process asks some questions that did not form part of the data collection process in 2010 and 2011 and, as a result, not every piece of information is available in all cases.

⁴ Previous reports can be viewed at <http://www.re-unite.org.uk/our-success/evaluation>

2.2 How many women have used the Re-Unite South London project?

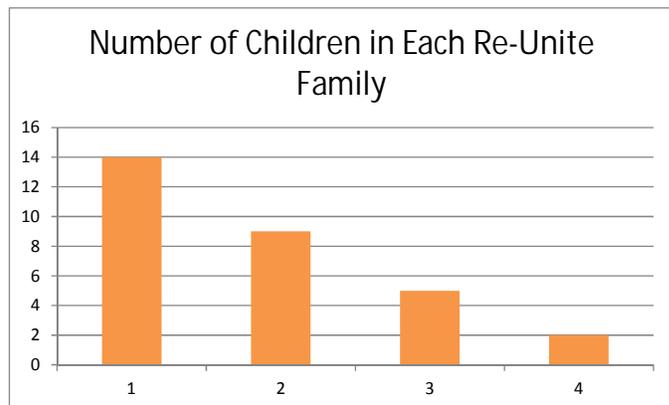
In the three years from 1 Jan 2010, a total of 31 women have been supported by Re-Unite South London. For the majority of these women this means that they have lived in a Re-Unite property – either in a family home or, if they have been part of the ‘mothers programme’ and not yet re-united with their children, in single person’s accommodation. A new development in 2012, made possible as the project now has sufficient staff to deliver this, is the provision of ‘floating support’ to women who do not live in a Re-Unite property but are supported by Re-Unite staff as they re-establish a settled family life following release from custody. Three of the 31 women have been supported in this way. Of these, one subsequently moved into a Re-Unite property when it became available.

2.3 How Many Children Have Used the Re-Unite South London Project?

At least 55 children have benefited from the service provided by Re-Unite South London. There is one family, from the group of service users already in residence at the start of 2010, where the number of children is not available. The ages of these children vary from very young babies, some of whom were born in prison, to older teenagers. Some Re-Unite service users had adult children who were no longer dependent on them and who, in some cases, had cared for their younger siblings whilst their mother was in prison.

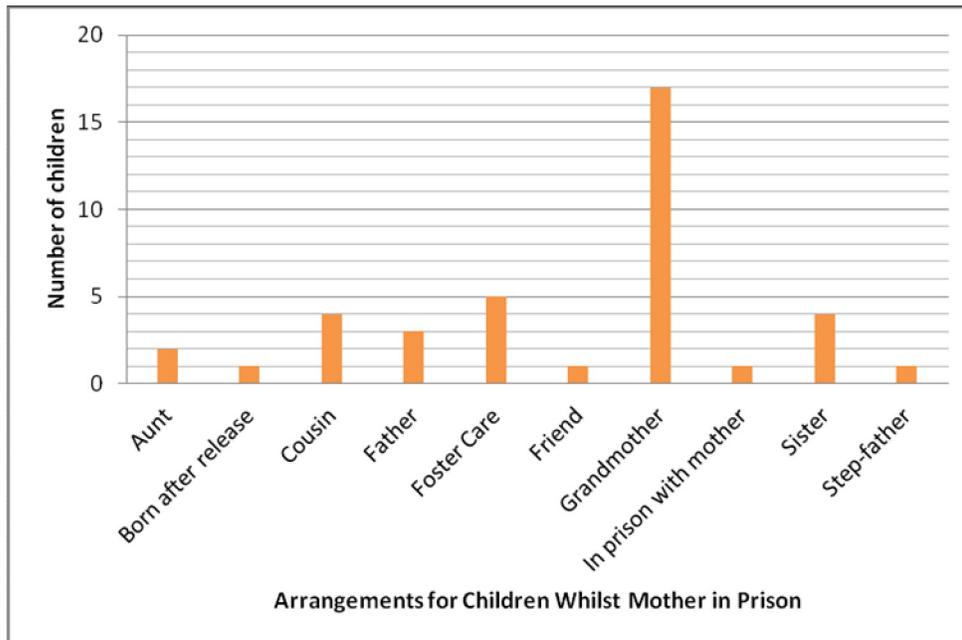
The chart (Chart 1) below illustrates the number of dependent children per service user. This shows that the majority of women were caring for one or two children, but Re-Unite South London has also worked with a small number of larger families.

Chart 1: Number of children in each Re-Unite family (30 families)



Whilst their mother was in prison, the majority of children were cared for by a female family member. This is illustrated in the chart below for the 39 children for whom this information is available.

Chart 2: Number of children and arrangements for the children during mothers' imprisonment (39 Children)



As can be seen, it is grandmothers who provided a significant amount of the care for the children who were separated from their mothers, with a similar role performed in some cases by aunts, cousins and older sisters. Siblings were sometimes separated. For example, in one family the three oldest children stayed with an adult sister and the youngest child went to her grandmother. In another family, both children went to live with their respective fathers. In only two families were the children living with foster carers.

Social services were involved with many of the Re-Unite South London families particularly at the point that the mother was sent to prison and arrangements for the care of the children were made. This involvement was often then withdrawn as social workers were satisfied by the care put in place by the extended family. In the smaller number of cases where there was concern that the mother could not provide satisfactory care, social services were actively involved at the end of the prison sentence. Social services were currently involved with 6 of the 17 cases reported on in the 2012 monitoring data. In these cases, Re-Unite South London workers are working as part of the multi-agency team involved in assessing the family's situation, offering support and seeking to ensure the safety of the children.

Difficulties and problems faced by the children of service users were not always evident at the start of their contact with Re-Unite South London. However, behaviour problems and concerns about attachment are identified for a number of children at the outset of their time with Re-Unite.

2.4 Referrals to Re-Unite South London

Between January 2010 and August 2012, the period for which data is available, 68 women were referred to Re-Unite South London. Of these 22 had become service users before the end of 2012. Another 2 women were accepted by Re-Unite but will not become service users until 2013.

Re-Unite South London receives referrals from a range of sources: the vast majority come from prisons, some from probation and voluntary sector organisations and some women refer themselves. The Re-Unite South London worker then visits the woman in prison to discuss the project and begin the process of assessment.

Referrals are declined for a range of contrasting reasons. In some cases, it quickly becomes clear that the woman's circumstances do not meet the criteria for the project. For example, Re-Unite South London does not accept women who have not been in prison and it cannot accept women whose children are all over the age of 18. Other referrals are declined because immigration rules or licence conditions mean that a woman will not be able to live in South London after leaving custody. Referrals have also been declined in cases where women had other housing options available.

Referrals to Re-Unite South London are also not appropriate if the woman has no prospect of securing move-on accommodation with the London boroughs where the project is located – that is, if she does not have an existing connection with one of the boroughs or is not needing to move to a new area after experiencing domestic violence. This was the case in 4 of the 38 refused referrals for which information is available

Re-Unite South London also declines referrals if it assessed that there is no prospect of re-uniting the mother and her children, for example if contact with social services reveals that there would be no support for a plan intended to return the children to their mother from their existing carer. This was the case in 5 of the 38 cases. Referrals are also declined if project staff assess that the woman requires more support than Re-Unite South London can offer or poses too great a risk to project staff (6 of the 38 cases).

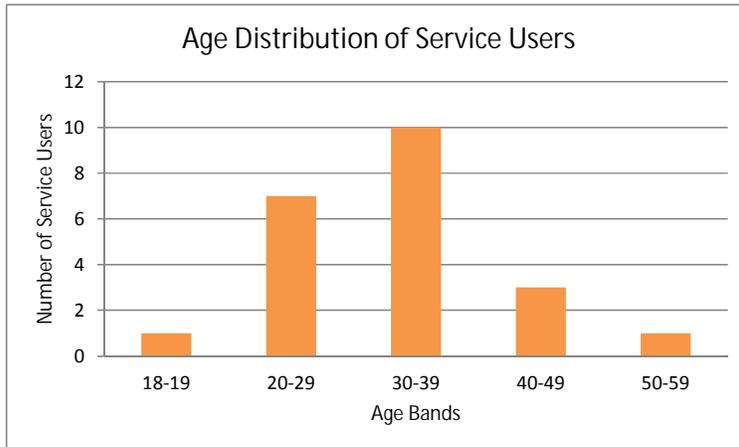
Some referrals come to nothing because the woman disengages from the referral process or changes her mind about going ahead with the referral (6 out of 38 cases). One woman was accepted for floating support from Re-Unite South London at the time of her release, but reoffended within a couple of days of leaving prison and was returned to prison.

This leaves a group of women who were assessed as suitable for the Re-Unite South London service but were unable to be offered a place because no Re-Unite property was available to them at the time they were released from prison. This was the case in 7 of the 38 cases for which data is available and provides some evidence that, if more resources were available, more women and children could be supported. The provision of floating support from 2012 goes some way towards meeting that need, enabling Re-Unite staff in South London to work with some families not living in Re-Unite properties.

2.5 More About The Re-Unite Service Users

The age of Re-Unite service users at the start of their involvement with the project is known in 22 cases. The oldest service user was born in 1959 and the youngest in 1993. The distribution of age is illustrated in chart 3 below.

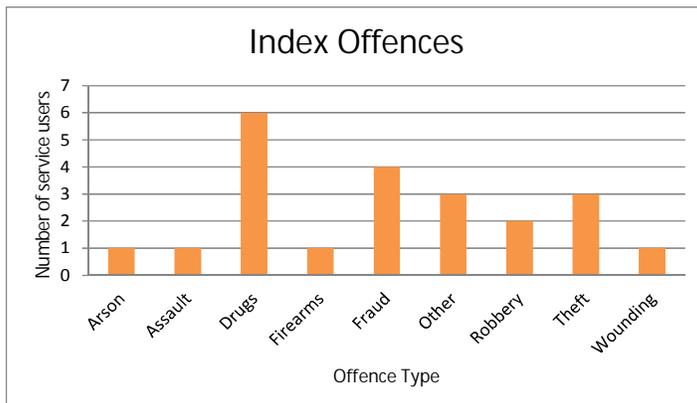
Chart 3: Age distribution of service users (22 service users)



The ethnicity of service users is available in the same 22 cases. The picture here is very diverse with service users identifying a wide variety of race and ethnic backgrounds. Thirteen service users identify themselves as Black – with a variety of ethnic backgrounds including British, African and Caribbean sometimes in combination. Five describe a mixed ethnic background and four identify as White (including British and Irish backgrounds).

Re-Unite South London service users had received prison sentences for a wide variety of offences. These are illustrated in chart 4 below for those service users where the information is available.

Chart 4: Index offences (22 service users)



The category 'other' comprises the three offences of concealing the proceeds of crime, assisting an offender and false imprisonment. The fraud offences include at least two offences committed by employees, one involving the issue of official documents and one offence involving illegal property

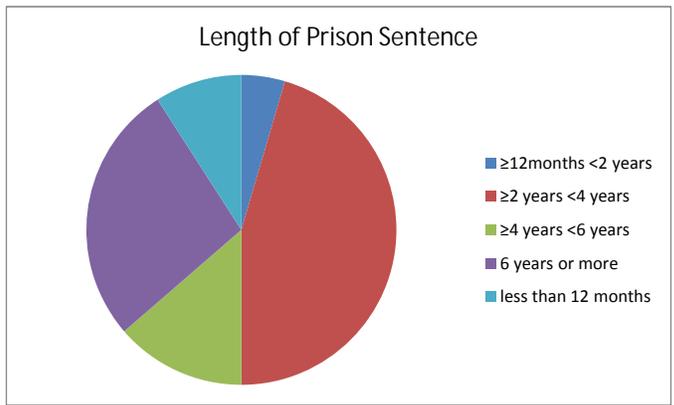
deals. The drugs offences include both offences of drug importation and drug supply. Service users convicted of violent offences are in the minority.

A woman with a conviction for arson was accepted by Re-Unite South London in 2012. This was a new departure for the project and involved careful risk assessment and then negotiation with the insurer for the Re-Unite South London properties.

The service user group includes first offenders and women with a persistent history of offending. Of the 22 women for whom this information is available, 12 had no previous convictions and, therefore received their prison sentence for a first, but serious, offence.

The chart below illustrates the variation in sentence length imposed on the Re-Unite South London service users.

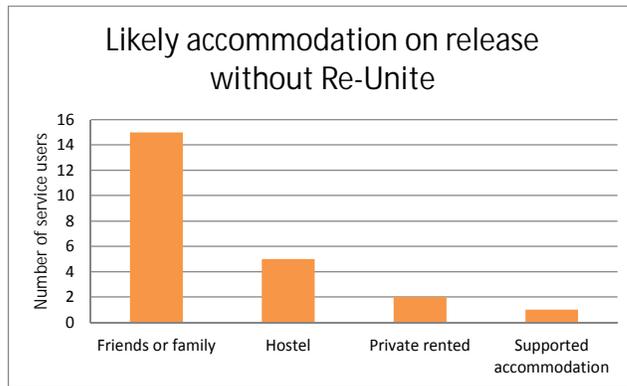
Chart 5: Variation in prison sentence length experienced by Re-Unite service users (22 service users)



The majority of service users received sentences of 2 years imprisonment or longer. Six women received sentences of 6 years or longer. These longest sentences were imposed for offences of wounding, importing drugs (2 cases), supplying drugs, fraudulently issuing official documents and false imprisonment. The length of the sentence imposed is not the same as the time served in custody, but it is clear that some women returned to the community having been separated from their children for a considerable period of time.

It is clear from the available information that, without Re-Unite South London, service users would have expected to leave prison for temporary and insecure accommodation. Information about likely accommodation after release in the absence of Re-Unite South London is available for 23 service users and illustrated in the chart below.

Chart 6: Accommodation prospects in the absence of Re-Unite (23 service users)



For many women leaving prison, the option of living with friends and family means over-crowded and unsuitable accommodation unlikely to be anything but temporary.

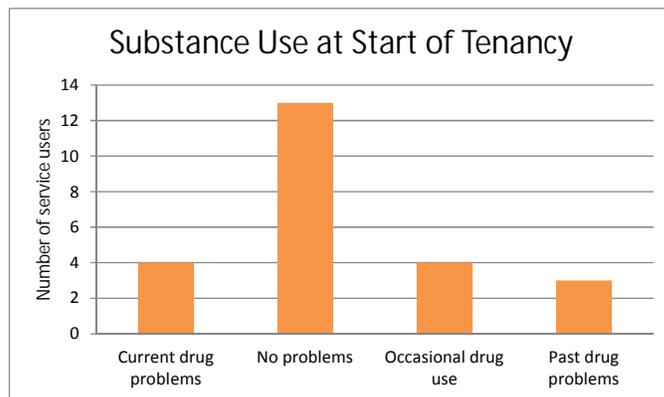
2.6 The Needs of Re-Unite South London Service Users

Data about the needs and difficulties faced by service users and the progress they make in addressing these whilst part of Re-Unite South London is collated in a number of ways, including the completion of the Commonweal monitoring form, the collection of case studies and the use of the Outcomes Star tool.

The Commonweal monitoring form contains information about a range of potential problems faced by Re-Unite service users. Mental health issues, predominantly depression, are the most commonly identified problem. Depression is identified in 9 of the 24 cases for which this information is available. In one case this is identified as post-natal depression and in another case as linked with post traumatic stress disorder. In addition, eating disorder is identified in one case and trauma arising from childhood sexual abuse in another. Physical health problems are mentioned in 3 cases: one woman had previously been treated for breast cancer, another was disabled by arthritis in her knee and a third suffered from asthma.

The extent to which substance misuse was identified as a problem is illustrated in the following chart. The category 'occasional drug use' here includes women who disclosed some continuing use of illegal drugs (particularly cannabis) but where this was not identified as a particular concern. The category 'past drug use' includes women who had not used drugs for some years. The category 'current drug problems' includes those women whose use of drugs was described as regular or who had only recently completed a drug treatment programme either in prison or in residential rehabilitation. Problematic alcohol use was not identified for any of this group of Re-Unite service users.

Chart 7: Substance use at start of tenancy (24 service users)



Specific information about debt is available for those women who were Re-Unite South London tenants in 2012. Only 2 from this group of 17 were without debt issues and existing rent arrears were identified in 7 cases. Some women came to Re-Unite South London with very significant financial problems. One had been made bankrupt owing in excess of £30,000 and another had a debt of £6,000 made up of rent arrears, bank overdraft, owed council tax and a social fund budgeting loan.

HfW has been using the Outcomes Star tool with Re-Unite service users since the middle of 2010. The Outcomes Star provides a measure of 'distance travelled' in a number of areas (for example offending behaviour, managing money and managing debt, accommodation and tenancy management and physical and mental health). The tool, which is used by a wide variety of projects and organisations, is designed to be used collaboratively by service user and key worker and to both support and measure the progress that is being made. For further information about the tool, see <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/>. As a result, the tool is valuable both in practice and for the purpose of evaluation.

Re-Unite South London aims to use the Outcomes Star at four points during the service user's time with the project. The precise timing of these four points will depend on the progress made by the woman and her overall length of time as a tenant but, on average, the points are: start (within the first couple of weeks of coming into the project), review (3/4 months into the project), end (9/10 months in) and move-on (around 1 month after moving on).

Since June 2010, the Star has been used with 19 service users. There is a 'start' Star for all of these women. Six service users have a complete set of 4 Stars. Of the remaining 13, 5 have moved-on from the project but for a variety of reasons do not have a complete set of 4 Stars and the remaining 8 are current Re-Unite tenants. As time passes, if the tool continues to be used in a systematic way, then the Outcomes Star data will grow into a resource that provides useful data for demonstrating progress. The use of the tool could also be extended to Re-Unite providers outside London.

For each woman the change in the shape of her Star reflects her changing circumstances during her time as a Re-Unite service user. In general, the picture is one of improvement and progress. The tendency is for scores for each element of the Star to increase. However, for each service user with a complete set of Stars, there is at least one element which sees a decrease in score at some point. There are a number of reasons why this might happen: a period of poor health, a more honest

acknowledgement of a long-standing problem made possible by a good relationship with the project worker, or a more realistic appraisal of the likely difficulties of finding a job for instance.

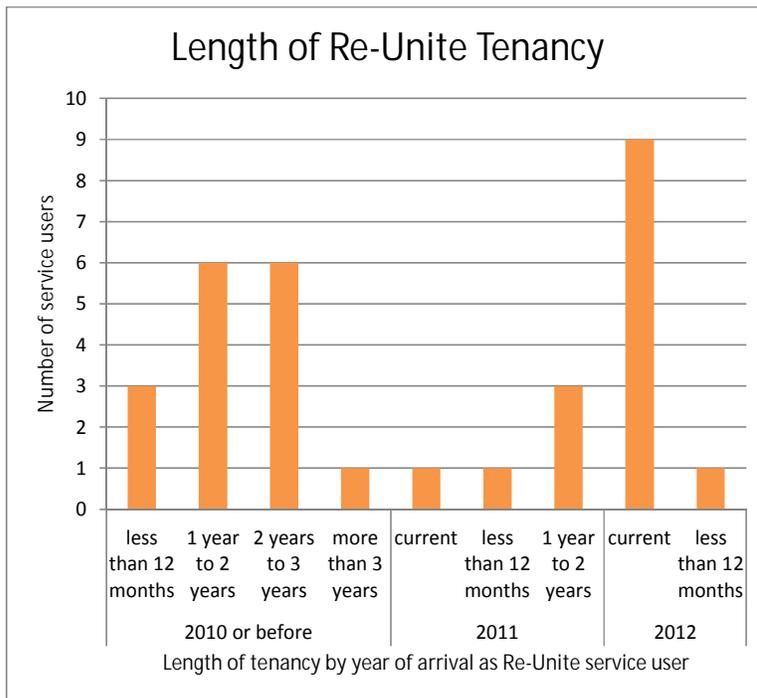
There is a match between the elements of the Outcomes Star that are most often rated as a problem by Re-Unite service users and the issues that are identified on the Commonweal monitoring form. The lowest scoring elements when women arrive as service users are physical health, mental health, social networks, managing money and managing debt, and meaningful use of time.

2.7 Evaluating the Re-Unite Outcomes

Information about Re-Unite South London mothers and their children is available for all service users from the point that they engage with the project until the moment that their Re-Unite tenancy or period of floating support ends. Some families continue to keep in touch after this point and so Re-Unite South London workers have more recent but anecdotal knowledge of their circumstances. The majority of families move on from Re-Unite in a planned way when they secure a permanent tenancy with a social housing provider. However, a small number move on in an unplanned way having disengaged from support workers, accrued rent arrears or been returned to custody. This section explores these outcomes in more detail.

The following chart shows how long women have spent as Re-Unite South London service users. Not surprisingly, only one woman who became a service user in 2012 has moved on from Re-Unite. In this case, the woman received floating support which was ended at the point it was no longer required. Women who were already service users at the start of 2010 or became service users in that year tended to remain as tenants for a longer period of time than those women who arrived in 2011. It is not possible to draw firm conclusions when numbers are small, but this change does reflect the recommendation of the evaluation of the early development phase of Re-Unite that planning and preparation for moving-on should begin at the outset.

Chart 8: Length of Re-Unite tenancy (31 service users)



The extent to which women have remained engaged with Re-Unite South London and moved-on from the service in a planned way is impressive. Of the 31 service users, 10 are currently engaged with the service and 15 moved-on in a planned way. Establishing and maintaining a tenancy, paying rent and achieving stability in the community are very positive outcomes for people leaving prison.

The circumstances of the 6 unplanned departures vary and include some positive outcomes for the women and children involved. For example, in one case, the relationship between Re-Unite South London and the service user broke down at the end of a long tenancy during which records show that progress was made for both the mother and her son. However, at the end, rent arrears led to eviction. In another case, a young woman was on the mother’s programme for a period of 8 months but fell back into drug use and offending and received another prison sentence. Where possible, Re-Unite South London continues to assist service users who leave in difficult circumstances. For example, one woman had to leave a Re-Unite property quickly because of concerns that she was at risk from a local criminal gang and received help to negotiate the housing application process in an outer London borough. No-one left Re-Unite South London in an unplanned way in 2012.

The process of securing appropriate homes so that families can move on from Re-Unite South London in a planned way has always been a major task and seems likely to become more challenging as changes to rules about social housing and the payment of benefits come into force over the coming year. Negotiating with local authorities and with housing associations is a key task for Re-Unite workers. HfW also plans to use move-on accommodation in the private rented sector and has negotiated with a charity to participate in a programme designed to achieve this.

On occasions, Re-Unite South London staff have supported service users to decline offers of a property that are clearly inappropriate. For example, one service user who had made considerable progress to overcome a long-standing problem with drug use was supported in her refusal of a house in an area with a reputation for drug problems. She and her young child were subsequently offered more appropriate housing.

It is not the case, of course, that successfully moving-on from Re-Unite means that a family faces no more problems. Where service users keep in touch with Re-Unite staff they often pass on positive news about the progress of children and of paid or voluntary work. However, Re-Unite is aware that one family that moved-on in 2012 is now involved with social services because of concerns about the welfare and behaviour of the children.

The evaluation data provides evidence of re-offending for only 2 of the 31 service users during their time with Re-Unite South London. In one of these cases, as previously outlined, the woman received a further custodial sentence and left her mother's programme property. In the other case, the woman committed an offence of driving whilst disqualified and was recalled to prison for three months. She retained her Re-Unite property whilst she was back in prison. Whilst there is no systematic data about the re-offending outcomes for service users after they have left Re-Unite, information gathered informally by project staff is largely positive

Securing stable accommodation and staying out of trouble are key outcomes for Re-Unite service users but they are not the only ways in which the intervention of Re-Unite South London has improved the lives and circumstances of women leaving prison. Evidence from the monitoring data identifies a number of other important areas: health, financial management and employment and training.

For a number of women, the support of Re-Unite South London has enabled them to engage with community mental health teams and receive counselling or drug treatment for depression and other mental health problems. The provision of support for mental health problems is specifically mentioned for 6 women who were 2012 service users. By contrast, drugs and alcohol are not stated to be a problem for any of the 2012 sample following their release from prison.

Re-Unite South London has also enabled women to make progress with financial problems by addressing past debts, claiming the appropriate benefits and assisting with budgeting. The monitoring data shows almost all service users achieving financial stability and, where necessary, beginning to pay off debt. There is a single counter-example amongst the current service users – a young woman getting into debt with utility companies and through loans from her friends.

The Re-Unite South London monitoring data also provides much positive information showing service users finding employment, engaging with training or getting involved with voluntary work. Examples include women working for themselves in businesses as diverse as web-design and personal training, women employed by large employers such as supermarkets and women with work which links to their experience of the criminal justice system such as employment with the St Giles Trust. Similarly, there are a wide range of examples of voluntary work, from food-banks to riding stables. There are other service users who are not looking for work, for example as a result of health problems or because of their choice to be full-time carers of their young children. Again,

there is no systematically collected data about longer term employment outcomes for service users after they move-on from Re-Unite.

As well as looking at the outcomes for mothers, it is also important to explore what is known about the outcomes for the Re-Unite children. The employment of a dedicated children's worker in January 2012 has enabled a greater focus on this aspect of the work.

The importance of school looms large in the work done with Re-Unite South London children. Mothers and children have been helped to secure school places, transfer to new schools closer to new homes, make the transition to secondary school and, in some cases, address behavioural issues at school. For a minority of children, behavioural problems at school have been significant. In at least 2 cases, the Re-Unite South London worker has been a key player in multi-agency meetings intended to find solutions for children excluded from mainstream school or at risk of exclusion. Without the intervention of Re-Unite it seems likely that some children would have fallen out of education.

In other cases, emotional and behavioural problems (some of them identified as stemming from the period of the children's separation from their mother) have been dealt with by referrals to community health services and local voluntary organisations. In one current case, the children's worker is looking for parenting classes for a young mother with a small baby.

Not all children have wanted to be involved in the children's activities organised by Re-Unite, but, for other families, these have been important in terms of social inclusion and support.

2.8 Re-Unite and Statutory Agencies

The two statutory agencies working most closely with Re-Unite South London tenants are social services and the probation service. Almost all Re-Unite service users (everyone except women over the age of 21 sentenced to less than 12 months) are released from custody on licence. The 2012 monitoring data shows no-one recalled to prison for breach of licence conditions and women being required to report to their probation officers once or twice a month. Re-Unite South London supported one woman through the process of requesting a change of probation officer with whom she had a poor relationship.

The data shows more joint work between Re-Unite South London and social services than between Re-Unite South London and probation. Social services are not involved with every Re-Unite family but, in some cases, Re-Unite workers play a key role in multi-agency child protection arrangements. The existence of Re-Unite has certainly enabled some mothers to regain care of their children from foster carers or other family members. The complexity of the work that Re-Unite is able to do is well described in two attached case studies (Case G and Case H). In both these cases, social services are now content with the care of the children and have withdrawn from the family.

2.9 Concluding Points and Observations

The data that Re-Unite South London has collected over the past 3 years contains much evidence that the project has been able to help women leaving prison to establish stable and secure homes for themselves and their children. In some cases, in addition to the necessary help with accommodation, Re-Unite workers have also provided a vital link with health services, with schools and with social services. Given the nature of the data it is not possible to make long term statements about project outcomes in areas such as re-offending (for mothers) or educational achievements (for children) but, alongside encouraging case studies, relevant findings from the evaluation include:

- The majority of Re-Unite South London service users had been separated from their children by custodial sentences of more than two years. Few service users had significant current problems with drugs or alcohol although many had issues with depression.
- Without Re-Unite South London women and their children would have been in limbo, either placed in accommodation unsuitable for children or lodging indefinitely with friends or family.
- Only two women re-offended whilst Re-Unite South London tenants and none were recalled for a breach of licence conditions. This positive finding reflects the support provided to women by Re-Unite along with the careful process of referral and assessment.
- The majority of women move-on from Re-Unite South London in a planned way, having successfully maintained their tenancies for at least 12 months.
- In a small, but important, number of cases, the intervention of Re-Unite South London has led to children living with their mother rather than being permanently removed by Social Services.
- On the down side, there are new challenges. Changes to social housing regulations mean that families are waiting longer to move-on and Re-Unite South London workers are finding it harder to negotiate with housing departments on behalf of service users.
- More positively, whilst Re-Unite South London receives more suitable referrals than it can accommodate, the recent development of 'floating support' enables more families to be helped.
- The introduction of a children's worker has led to a greater focus on the needs of Re-Unite children. This has included advocating for children excluded from school or at risk of exclusion.

3. Re-Unite New Providers

Re-Unite South London was the first project to be established, but it has now been joined by projects in Birmingham, Gloucestershire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Humberside and Greater Manchester. Whilst all these projects share the central aim of providing support and housing so that

mothers leaving prison can live with their children, they do not all operate in the same way. One key difference is that unlike in South London, where there is a dedicated pool of housing for the project, the new projects work in conjunction with different housing providers to facilitate tenancies. Also, by contrast to the outreach support which Re-Unite South London offers, the Re-Unite projects in Birmingham, Gloucestershire, Yorkshire and Humberside, are associated with Women's Centres and thus 'Re-Unite' forms part of their integrated and holistic service for female offenders. But there are differences between the projects too. Whilst in some projects the initial accommodation is on a short-term tenancy, with the plan that the woman will move into a permanent social housing tenancy in due course, in others, mothers are able to establish longer term tenancies following a short period on a probationary tenancy. Some Re-Unite projects have established relationships with housing providers which mean that Re-Unite service users are accorded priority, whereas in other projects, being a Re-Unite service user means simply that there will be support for a housing application. Being a 'Re-Unite' client is seen to lend legitimacy to the application, but not to prioritise it.

A one-off small amount of seed corn funding has been provided by Commonweal to each of the organisations which deliver Re-Unite to aid them in establishing the project and embedding it within existing service provision. This funding is used in different ways by the different organisation depending on their existing structures, but there is a clear expectation that organisations should consider the sustainability of their Re-Unite project in their business plan.

In all cases, the new projects have indicated that Re-Unite work is embedded within the work of the centre, or in the case of Manchester embedded in the work of the Offender Project, although the additional monies have been used in different ways - with the employment of additional staff or extension of hours for existing centre staff to facilitate housing work and support for women on the Re-Unite project. Little mention has been made of distinctive 'mothers' projects or 'mothers and children' projects however. Rather, the projects have merged into one. Each of the new projects might be described as a centre based support plus housing model except for Greater Manchester which is a Specialist Housing Project linked to an Offender project. This is in contrast with the South London Re-Unite model which is a housing plus outreach support model.

Whilst we identify specific challenges to the projects within each section below, all of these projects face broader challenges in terms of their sustainability. Given that some of the funding for the centres or some of the activities described below are contingent upon the current organisation of probation provision for offenders, continuation of the projects as a whole - and obviously Re-Unite as an important adjunct - will be contingent upon developments following the Government's consultation and proposals to privatise elements of current probation provision as described in Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform published by the Ministry of Justice on 9th May, 2013. Already, there is suggestion that some Probation Trusts will no longer ring-fence funding for work with women offenders, notwithstanding Government promises. A secondary challenge here concerns the evidence base for small scale projects for offenders within community based centres for women offenders. Thus far, it has not been able to gather sufficient or sufficiently robust data from across the centres to demonstrate impact on offending behaviour - which is taken by the Government to be a key measure of success. Finally, As the Government moves towards Payment by Results in the new structure - which emphasizes that work with lower risk offenders (such as

women) will be undertaken by Third Sector organizations (voluntary organizations) underpinned by funding from social investment companies, it is clear that work with women offenders may not attract investment. The number of women offenders is so low as to suggest that the returns for social investment companies would not be great enough (see Gelsthorpe and Hedderman, 2012).

3.1 Re-Unite Greater Manchester: Threshold

The Re-Unite replication project in Greater Manchester is managed by Threshold, an organisation which provides a wide range of supported housing, floating support and other services to homeless and vulnerable people. Re-Unite sits alongside Threshold's Greater Manchester Offenders' Project (GMOP) which works to help offenders, particularly those leaving custody, to find and then maintain suitable accommodation. Women offenders are one of the GMOP priority groups. Threshold has launched Re-Unite as a 2-year pilot which will run until April 2014. The funding allows for 7.5 hours a week of staff time for Re-Unite. However, because the staff who deliver Re-Unite also provide GMOP services they are available throughout the week and able to work with Re-Unite service users as required.

Re-Unite service users benefit from the housing advice and resources available from Threshold. For example, one woman is currently living in Threshold supported accommodation for single women and young parents.

Re-Unite Greater Manchester is currently working with 3 women who were released from prison in 2012. The focus of the Re-Unite work is assisting the women to establish some stability in the community and address problems in areas such as substance misuse and debt. None are yet living with their children or ready to move into a permanent tenancy. As part of an agreement with the New Charter Trust Housing Group, two homes can be made available to Re-Unite service users as part of the pilot.

Model: Specialist Housing Support linked to an Offender Project.

Referrals: GMOP runs an in-reach service at HMP Styal where potential Re-Unite service users can be identified, often at an early enough stage in their sentences to allow for attention to be paid to past housing problems, such as rent arrears, and to plan for housing on release.

Key Challenges: Looking ahead, the future development of Re-Unite Greater Manchester depends on securing funding and success in grant applications. An increase in funding would enable Threshold to develop its work with Re-Unite children whilst continuing its service to their mothers.

3.2 Re-Unite Gloucestershire: ISIS

The Re-Unite replication project in Gloucestershire is run by the ISIS Women's Centre. The ISIS Women's Centre, in Gloucester, offers support, guidance and practical help to women offenders and those who are at risk of offending. ISIS is a project of the Nelson Trust, which provides a range of

specialist services many of them in the area of drug and alcohol treatment. Funding from the J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust now provides 2.5 days per week of staff time for Re-Unite.

In practice, Re-Unite work is not separate from the other work of ISIS. Following release from prison service users and their children are able to benefit from the wide range of activities and groups provided at the Women's Centre, for example anxiety management or self-esteem. Women on licence are able to keep appointments with their probation supervisor at the centre.

The task of ensuring that appropriate accommodation is available at the point of release, particularly when release dates change at short notice, is a particular challenge. ISIS does not have any dedicated accommodation for the Re-Unite project so relies on developing partnership agreements with local housing associations and providers of supported accommodation as well as working with private landlords. For example, a recently negotiated arrangement with Stonham housing could provide mothers programme accommodation for women who are working towards re-union with their children.

Model: The model might be described as Centre-based Support plus Housing.

Referrals: Potential Re-Unite service users are identified by the ISIS in-reach service at HMP Eastwood Park.

Key Challenges: Looking to the future, funding for Re-Unite in Gloucestershire relies on continued success in securing funding for ISIS.

3.3 Re-Unite Birmingham: Anawim

Anawim has its roots in Catholic Church outreach work with vulnerable women in the mid 1980s. Anawim's approach is holistic, individually tailored and designed to last for as long as it takes for a woman to change her life for the better. Anawim has been closely involved in initiatives to reduce women's offending and re-offending, particularly by offering alternatives to custody. About 20 case workers are divided into teams: Criminal Justice, Outreach, Mental Health and Family Services who cater to the needs of specific client groups. Financial advice, drug and alcohol services and counselling are all offered at the Centre. The Centre also offers a wide variety of courses, ranging from those focussed on self-help and confidence, creative arts and therapeutic workshops to academic and accredited courses designed to move the women towards employment. The Centre operates a crèche staffed with professional childcare workers. The Family Service offers the women advice and support with all aspects of parenting including child development, nutrition and school attendance, and workers undertake home visits to help women to take advantage of facilities in their own areas.

Whilst Anawim has always given some attention to women's housing needs, partnership with Commonweal to develop a Re-Unite project was conceived as a way of giving new impetus to this work. A formal agreement for a Re-Unite project was thus set up in January 2011. An agreement with Midland Heart housing was also established so as to give Anawim service users priority. The arrangement with Midland Heart has changed over time, but it now means that the housing

organisation will offer Anawim up to 40 properties each year (Anawim service users are fast tracked). In this sense, Re-Unite served as a lever with the housing organisation. The properties are unfurnished and one of the first tasks is always to assist service users in applying for care grants for furniture.⁵ Midland Heart is seen to be very responsive to women's needs, and indeed, a four-bedroomed house was recently identified to address the needs of one particular Re-Unite service user. About 30 service users have now been found accommodation through the partnership with Midland Heart, but not all the women can be classified as 'Re-Unite' service users. One feature of this Re-Unite project is that the women are housed permanently (following a six month probationary period women are offered a five year standard (renewable) tenancy) - thus there is no 'move on' work as such; rather, Re-Unite continue to use the services and resources of Anawim and work is phased out as and when women feel that the time is right. One of the advantages of Anawim is that it has crèche facilities on site and runs school holiday schemes including day trips out (to which Re-Unite service users and their children are invited). Another key benefit is that there is a wide range of resources and services for Re-Unite service users (including family services) - as described above.

Model: Centre-based Support plus Housing.

Referrals: Potential Re-Unite service users are identified through outreach work in HMP Drake Hall, HMP Foston Hall and HMP Eastwood Park. This is general outreach work, of which Re-Unite forms a small part.

Key challenges for the functioning of Re-Unite revolve around i) finding women immediate accommodation upon release from prison whilst their applications for Midland Heart accommodation are processed (this is commonly 6-8 weeks following release from prison). The difficulty is that lets require payment of rent, benefits to facilitate the payment of rent cannot be sorted out whilst the women are in prison; ii) finding support for women during this interim period - given that the discharge grant is just £47 and is meant to last for two weeks; ii) difficulty in engaging social services and sorting out child protection issues with them so that mothers can be reunited with their children; iii) women are sometimes unrealistic about the prospects of being reunited with their children and this can take time to check with social services; iv) some of the women are serving very short sentences which barely gives time to make plans for post release accommodation (though the implication of this is not to suggest that longer sentences are necessary). Another challenge concerns the reduction in funding from the area Probation Trust (a reduction of some 17.7%) notwithstanding the fact that there are three Offender Managers co-located at the Anawim Centre.

3.4 Re-Unite Together Women

The Together Women Project is a registered charity that offers support to women offenders in centres located in Sheffield, Leeds, Doncaster, Bradford and Hull. There are Re-Unite projects embedded in the following centres:

⁵ It is acknowledged that Community Care grants ceased to exist at the beginning of April 2013, and have now been replaced with schemes administered by local authorities.

3.5 Re-Unite: Leeds and Bradford

Re-Unite services are available to all women over the age of 18 living in Leeds and Bradford through the Together Women Centre. The centre in each place involves a consortium of voluntary sector agencies: Foundation Housing, DISC and Touchstone (which offers short term furnished accommodation in single tenancies), with Shelter and Keighley Asian Women's Centre as delivery partners included. The programme provides support and advice to maintain accommodation and reduce risk of homelessness; access to learning and development; support to access health services; raising awareness of substance misuse; advice on money matters; parenting skills development and counselling and emotional support. TWP workers also work in partnership with Probation staff to actively support compliance and successful outcomes while subject to a Court Order.

In some ways, Re-Unite might be described as the smallest strand of work within the work of Together Women Leeds and Bradford because women offenders and women at risk of offending form the smallest group of women with whom the Centre works, but it is clearly an important part.

Together Women in Leeds and Bradford works with several housing providers, the choice of any one provider for a mother and children depends on previous experiences with the providers (and whether there are existing debts) as well as location and what the organisations have on offer at any one point. In Bradford there is the Rother Project; in Leeds there is Council accommodation and a federation of housing associations and organisations.

Thus the main aim of 'Re-Unite' work with mothers is to signpost them to housing possibilities, negotiate on their behalf, and offer additional support by making all the services in the Together Women Centres available to women referred to the Re-Unite project (including one to one support).

At present, the Re-Unite initiative contributes to the funding of a key worker who deals with Re-Unite referrals alongside her normal workload. Ideally, it is thought that a dedicated Re-Unite worker could facilitate extension of the housing work - and enable more outreach work. The Re-Unite work thus far has certainly allowed further contacts to be made with housing providers - and to 'ease the way' in negotiations between mothers and housing providers. In particular, the Re-Unite work has included a focus on striving for maximum length tenancies so as to ensure that there is a real prospect of mothers and children being resettled together. There are crèche facilities - with Homestart (pre-school support for children) and parenting classes at the Centre. It is thought that Re-Unite in Leeds and Bradford has involved work with 8 or 9 mothers thus far. The majority of women linked to Re-Unite have come out of prison to single accommodation - or have returned to their families and friends for temporary accommodation until something better can be found via the connections with housing providers. Although no priority is given to Re-Unite service users - it is thought that the support offered to the mothers serves them well in their applications to housing providers.

Model: Centre-based Support plus Housing.

Referrals: Referrals come through the link worker in HMP New Hall (shared across the three TW Re-United initiatives). The link worker helps to identify women coming up for release; some priority is given to women serving under 12 months because there is no statutory responsibility towards them.

Key challenges: revolve around the need to find family accommodation. Negotiations with Social Services have also proved difficult in regard to child protection issues - sometimes Social Services are coming to the end of their decision-making process with conclusion that children should not be returned to their mothers - just at the time when Together Women Re-United is able to offer support. Thus it is thought that there is not enough time to offer support to women at a time when there is still prospect of their children being returned to them.

3.6 Re-United: Hull

Together Women in Hull offers a 'one stop' women only community based service for women involved in the criminal justice system. The Centre offers a wide range of courses, as well as support in relation to self harming behaviour, substance misuse, single parenting, surviving abuse, and domestic violence.

The Re-United project is embedded within these existing services and gives housing support a clearer profile within the range of services offered. It has been running for about a year - since March 2012. Housing is provided by Hull City Council and the East Riding Local Authority. Re-United Together Women staff have also liaised with other housing providers (Sanctuary and Release were both mentioned in this regard - both offer short term accommodation). Alas, Re-United service users are given no priority within the housing provided by Hull City Council and the East Riding LA, but women's involvement in 'Re-United' and in the Together Women project give potential housing providers reassurance that the women's intentions or hopes are genuine. In other words, involvement in 'Re-United' gives legitimacy to the women's claims. At the time of the interview for this research (March 2013) there had been 3 Re-United service users (with 9 children between them).

Re-United support is offered to facilitate applications for housing and to offer guidance and support though other services in the Centre. There is no direct support for the children of Re-United service users (or indeed any other service users in the Centre) but there is support for the mother - which, in turn it is argued, means support for the children. The Centre would like to offer crèche facilities but is unable to do so because of a lack of funding. Additional support is offered to Re-United service users in terms of referrals to Social Services and other relevant agencies - including application to charities for food parcels.

Model: Centre-based Support plus Housing.

Referrals for the Re-United element of the work undertaken through the centre come from the link worker in HMP New Hall.

Key Challenges: The main challenges to the work include the fact that there is no short-term accommodation available upon release from prison - meaning that women have to resort to staying

with family members or friends - before their applications for accommodation can be completed. Another challenge concerns the lack of direct support for children.

3.7 Re-Unite: Sheffield

The Sheffield Together Women Centre provides intensive support and interventions around: domestic abuse, health, education and training, housing, substance misuse, finance, and family issues.

The support is offered in a women only centre which has key workers as well as co-located specialist workers and probation staff. The aim of the Together Women Project is to support women in breaking out of the cycle of offending.

The Re-Unite project has been operational within the Together Women Centre in Sheffield since April 2012 - and it is perceived to have added the ability to assist with housing for women and their children. A variety of housing providers are utilized, but there is a particularly good relationship with a housing association called Target - which means that speedy referrals can be made (although there is no provision for priority housing).

Thus far, Re-Unite in TW Sheffield has worked with 4 women (3 with children) in regard to housing provision. Three of the mothers are still engaging with the Centre and with Re-Unite. The Centre does have crèche facilities and very much tries to take a family approach in offering women support, but due to staffing difficulties there are no special activities during the school holidays.

Model: Centre-based Support plus Housing.

Referrals: Referrals come through the 'Through the Gate' work established via the link worker at HMP New Hall (or through the prison resettlement worker who gives information to the link worker).

Key Challenges: The major challenge is that Target and other housing providers do not offer permanent housing, only temporary housing. There is a shortage of temporary housing beyond Bed and Breakfast provision and hostels - none of it suitable for mothers to be reunited with their children there. It can also take up to 13 weeks for women to get on to housing lists - and family housing cannot be sought until mothers have been reunited with their children - thus there is a classic catch 22 situation with women not being properly housed in family accommodation until they are reunited with their children, and not being able to be reunited with their children until they have appropriate accommodation. Linked to this is the challenge that Local Authority housing staff persist in claiming that women have made themselves intentionally homeless. The route is often release from prison -> Bed and Breakfast accommodation -> TARGET accommodation -> more permanent housing (that is, standard tenancy agreement).

3.8 Concluding Points and Observations

- The main model of provision in Re-Unite projects outside South London concerns centre-based provision with housing support.
- There are differences between the projects in terms of the nature of housing support and relationships with housing providers and in terms of crèche provision for children.
- The exception to this model of centre-based provision plus housing support is in Greater Manchester where Re-Unite project is managed by Threshold, an organisation which provides a wide range of supported housing, floating support and other services to homeless and vulnerable people. Re-Unite sits alongside the Greater Manchester Offenders' Project - which has made women one of the priority groups.
- It is clear that each project offers something distinctive - and to good effect.
- As previously indicated, all Re-Unite providers face the challenge of financial sustainability. Re-Unite very much complements existing work within the centres in Sheffield, Hull and Leeds and Bradford and the core funding provided by Commonweal has allowed the centres to provide an intensive level of support and services. However, in a context of commissioning and proposed arrangements whereby women serving under 12 months will be supported post release by Third Sector organisations it is not clear if there will be resources to continue the Re-Unite initiative. Moreover, it is thought that there has not been time to fully implement the initiative across the centres at a level which can show positive outcomes (including a cost benefit analysis). Whilst each Re-Unite project had been asked to produce a report after a year, it is unclear as to whether this can provide a sufficiently robust data base so as to create substantial evidence in support of further funding.

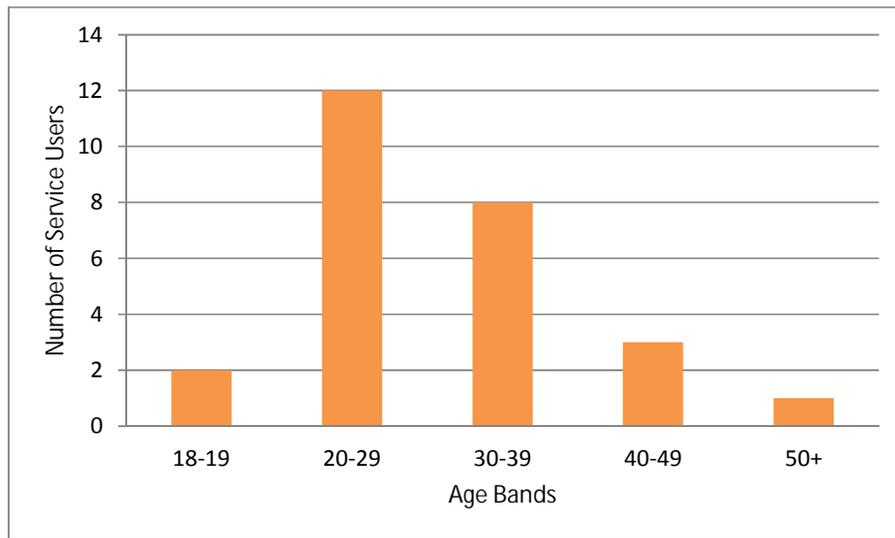
4. Re-Unite Service Users in 2012: New Providers Outside London

This section of the report is about the women and children who were part of Re-Unite outside London in 2012. The report focuses on those women who were out of prison in 2012 and receiving support intended to help them secure stable housing and become re-united with their children. Each provider worked with a small number of women in 2012: Threshold Greater Manchester (3), Isis Gloucestershire (3), Anawim Birmingham (6), Together Women Leeds and Bradford (7), Together Women Humberside (4) and Together Women South Yorkshire (3). In addition, all providers were assessing the suitability of referrals and applications and were planning work with women due for release from custody in 2013.

4.1 The 26 Re-Unite service users within the six new Re-Unite projects

These Re-Unite service users range in age from 19 to 51. Chart 9 below shows the variation of age within the group.

Chart 9: Service user ages (26 Service users)

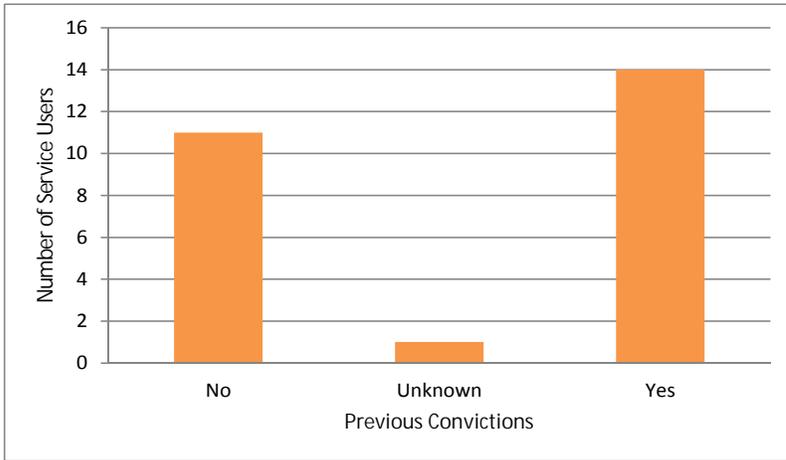


A large majority of this group described their ethnic origin as White British (21 out of 26). Three service users described themselves as Black British, one as Chinese and one as of mixed ethnic origin.

One of the women in this group had not served a prison sentence, but was subject to a Community Order. She had no previous convictions but had narrowly avoided a custodial sentence for offences of child neglect. In 2012, Re-Unite providers were working with women who had committed a wide range of offences: including drugs offences (6 out of 26), theft (5 out of 26), GBH and other serious violence (4 out of 26), burglary (3 out of 26) and arson (1 out of 26).

Fourteen women had a history of previous offending, in some cases with a history of prolific offending. Eleven were first offenders and in one further case this information was missing. This is illustrated below.

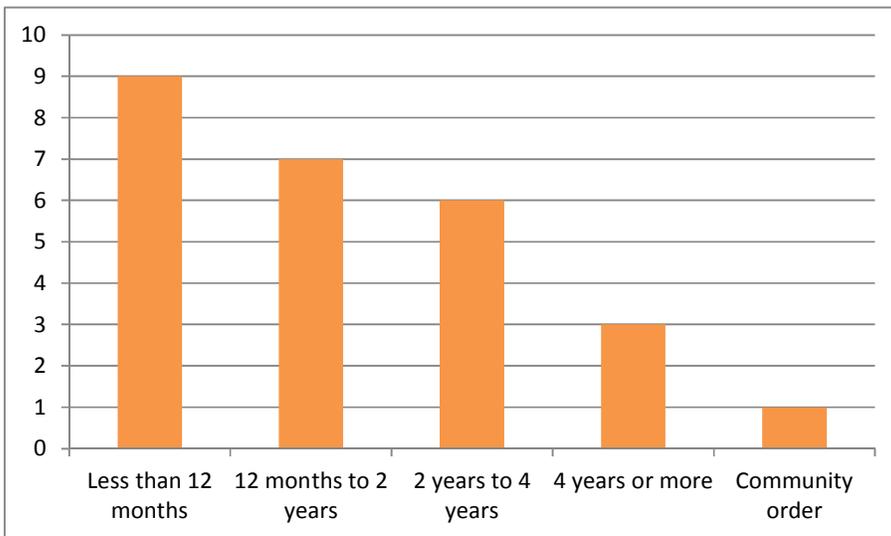
Chart 10: Service users and previous convictions (26 service users)



Some Re-Unite providers were working with women with established patterns of offending behaviour and considerable experience of both custodial and non-custodial disposals. For example, Leeds and Bradford worked with a woman with more than 30 previous convictions. Greater Manchester worked with a woman with previous convictions for robberies and shoplifting.

Given this mixed picture of offence type, offence seriousness and past criminal history, it is not surprising to find a considerable variation in length of prison sentence (from 2 months to 7 years). The variation in sentence length is illustrated below. It is worth noting that 9 women received a prison sentence of less than 12 months. Short sentences cause disruption to mothers and their children but give little time for planning for release. In the case of women over the age of 21 they also mean that no statutory post-release supervision is provided by the probation service. This shows the need for the support provided by Re-Unite but also highlights the need for Re-Unite to be able to work very quickly following the referral of a short sentence prisoner.

Chart 11: Prison sentence lengths experienced by service users (26 service users)



4.2 Children who have received the Re-Unite service

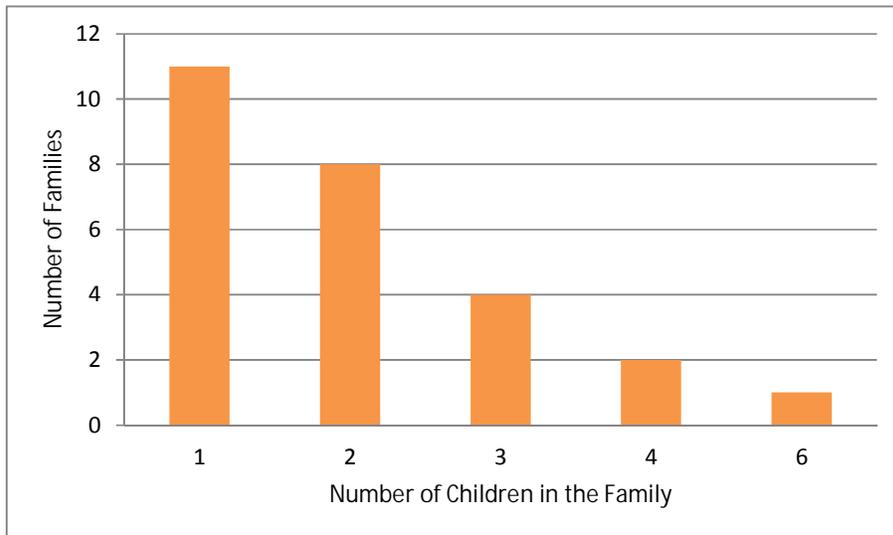
Around 50 children have mothers who have been linked with these Re-Unite projects. The involvement of the children with Re-Unite varies considerably from those who returned to live with their mother very soon after her release from custody to those who have remained in local authority care. In a couple of cases, the final steps in the adoption process have taken place since the mother's release from custody and in these cases there is no prospect that the Re-Unite 'candidate' will regain care of her children.

Social Services were involved with the families of 18 of the 26 women at the start of their contact with Re-Unite. In 5 cases (4 of them from Leeds and Bradford), children were living with foster carers while their mother was in prison. A total of 11 children were living in foster care at the moment that their mother became a Re-Unite service user. In other cases, the children were either 'children in need' or on the 'at risk' register and living with family members (usually grandparents, but sometimes fathers or aunts). Interviews with Re-Unite providers highlighted that, in some cases, women prisoners were overly optimistic about their chances of having their children returned to their care. Subsequent conversations between Re-Unite staff and social workers revealed a different picture. In consequence, a small number of women have been taken on as Re-Unite service users despite having very little realistic prospect of being re-united with their children. There are two points to make here: firstly, when women are serving short prison sentences it may not be possible to complete a complex multi-agency assessment prior to release and, secondly, where Re-Unite is delivered alongside a range of other services then a woman can continue to be supported by the agency even if her children are not likely to be returned to her care.

Re-Unite providers have mixed experience of working with social services. Essential information exchange does not always work smoothly, especially in cases where social services were satisfied with the care provided by grandparents and had closed the case. On the other hand, Re-Unite also provides examples of very careful, sensitive and effective inter-agency work. Two case studies illustrate these points. Case study D tells the story of a mother who, as a result of careful work with Re-Unite, is gradually resuming life with her children despite having a conviction for neglect. Case study C describes the links between Re-Unite and social services in a case where one child was settled with grandparents and the other, younger, child was in care and subsequently adopted.

The children of Re-Unite service users range in age from babies, including babies born to women who were pregnant whilst in prison and babies who lived with their mothers in prison, to older teenagers. The majority of mothers have one or two children, but Re-Unite has also worked with larger families. This is illustrated in Chart 12 below.

Chart 12: Number of dependent children for each Re-Unite service user (26 service users)



4.3 The Needs of Re-Unite Service Users

Data about the needs of the women at the time that they left prison reveals a picture of considerable personal difficulty and disadvantage. Most striking is the proportion of women reported as experiencing mental health problems, particularly depression. Depression was identified in 13 (out of 26) cases, with bi-polar disorder reported in a further case. Re-Unite Birmingham report depression as an issue for 4 out of 6 service users. Re-Unite Leeds and Bradford report depression as a problem in 5 out of 7 cases. The significance of these health problems is made clear by the subsequent work done to enable these service users to access counselling services, community mental health resources and appropriate medication.

Information was also collected about the problems with drugs and alcohol that women had experienced prior to their imprisonment. Drugs were identified in 15 cases, ranging from the occasional use of cannabis to the long-term use of heroin and cocaine. Of the 7 women from Leeds and Bradford, 5 were being prescribed methadone, one was identified as a heroin user and the other was a past user of cocaine. By contrast, none of the 3 women in Gloucestershire were identified as having substance use problems. Alcohol was reported less commonly as a problem, being identified in 7 of the 26 cases.

The significant incidence of depression and substance use amongst service users makes clear that Re-Unite is often working with women who are facing a number of barriers to living settled and stable lives.

Just over half the women in this group (14 of the 26) were identified as needing help with debt management or budgeting on release from prison. In a number of cases, these debts related to previous rent arrears and, therefore, posed a particular obstacle to the search for suitable permanent housing.

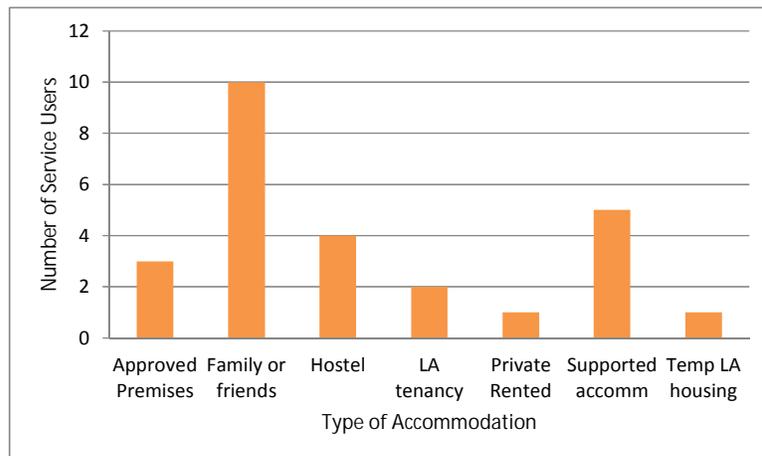
4.4 Housing Options for Re-Unite Service Users

Women in prison were identified as suitable for the Re-Unite service based on their need for suitable housing which would enable them to establish a stable base for their children on their release from prison. Some women had lost stable accommodation as a result of their imprisonment; others had been homeless or in temporary housing before going to prison. A couple of women, one serving a community sentence (Re-Unite Birmingham) and one (Re-Unite Leeds and Bradford) who had been sentenced to 8 months in prison, retained local authority tenancies but in one case the property was too small for the children to be returned to their mother from foster care and the other woman was facing the prospect of eviction as a consequence of rent arrears.

Although operating in slightly different ways, none of the Re-Unite providers outside London had dedicated housing for service users. As a result, women usually left prison and moved into temporary accommodation as the process of obtaining something more permanent began. This temporary accommodation was in the majority of cases (10 out of 26) provided by family or friends and, on occasions, was far from satisfactory. For example, in one case (Leeds and Bradford) a woman left prison and went to live with a family member in contravention of the child protection arrangements in place for her children. Hostel accommodation, including approved premises, was the first accommodation after prison in 7 cases.

Chart 13 shows the type of housing that women moved into on their release from prison. Differences between areas reflect the combination of the differing circumstances of the women and the resources available to each provider. For example, Re-Unite Greater Manchester and Re-Unite Birmingham both report making use of their organisations' supported accommodation. Case Study A describes the thorough work undertaken by Re-Unite South Yorkshire, which included making use of the provisions for release on temporary licence, to ensure that a service user would obtain temporary accommodation for herself and her son on leaving prison on Christmas Eve.

Chart 13: Housing on release (26 service users)



Many of the women in this group remain temporarily housed and, in part, this is not surprising as they were only released from custody in the final few months of 2012. The monitoring data shows that 16 women in the group are living in more permanent accommodation, either from the point of their release or having moved from their initial temporary accommodation. This more permanent accommodation is provided from a range of sources: housing associations, local authorities, specialist projects for care leavers and, in one case, with a private landlord. Of these 16 women, 10 are living with their children and 2 are working towards re-union, for example, by having the children to stay for some of the week. The remaining 4 women are at an earlier stage of the process of assessment and possible re-union. They have been assisted by Re-Unite to move into supported accommodation (usually single person accommodation) as a step towards addressing the problems that stand in the way of a possible future chance of being re-united with their children.

The work of Re-Unite in making links with local housing providers and negotiating access to accommodation for women with children leaving prison is evident. This process is illustrated clearly by Case Study E. In this example, on leaving prison E initially lived in supported accommodation near to her mother (who was caring for her older child) and began to rebuild family relationships. Re-Unite worked closely with the family, with social services and with the linked housing association. This hard work was rewarded when, about 8 months after her release from custody, the mother was able to move into her own housing association property together with her two children.

Without the work of Re-Unite the prospects of housing after prison for this group of women looked particularly bleak. Without the extra support provided by Re-Unite, all the women in the sample were facing the prospect of homelessness, relying on the goodwill of friends or family, hoping for a hostel place or returning to accommodation made unsuitable by the threat of eviction or domestic violence.

4.5 What Can We Say About Outcomes for This Group of Women and Their Children?

Re-Unite is still a young project and, outside London, there are only data about 15 women who have been out of prison for more than six months. It is, therefore, very early to be talking about outcomes.

At the six month after release stage, all but two of the service users remained engaged with Re-Unite. Of the remaining 13, only two are recorded as having committed further offences. One received a community sentence for shoplifting offences and the other was sentenced to a further five months imprisonment.⁶ A further woman was recalled to prison for breaching licence conditions at a time when she was living in approved premises. Interviews with project staff and detail from case studies show that, on release from prison, many service users are working with a wide variety of agencies and services to address problems with debt, drugs and alcohol and mental health. The input of Re-Unite often plays an important part in co-ordinating these efforts.

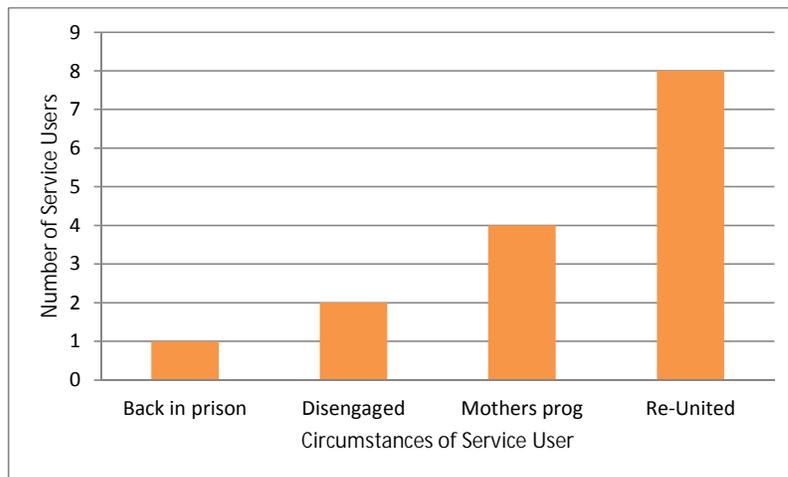
⁶ The information about the new offences is not provided.

Where Re-United is delivered from a Women’s Centre, there is evidence that Re-United service users and their children benefit from groups, courses and other facilities offered at the centre. Six months after release, one woman was planning to start a university course and another to start a part-time college course.

In a number of cases, Re-United workers are centrally involved in discussions with social services about the options for service user’s children. In four cases, the stability achieved by the service user was sufficient to enable social services to withdraw from the family by the six month after release point. In some cases, the absence of suitable secure accommodation is not the only obstacle preventing the re-union of mother and children. Social services may also have concerns about risks to the children stemming from the mother’s past history and the children may be viewed as settled with grandparents or other carers. In such cases, Re-United workers are involved in the multi-agency child protection process.

Chart 14 below shows, in very broad brush terms, the circumstances of service users six months after their release. For this chart, ‘Re-United’ means that the service user and her children are living together in stable and secure housing. This group includes women facing relatively few difficulties but also some women accessing support from Re-United to manage challenging issues in areas such as mental health and financial management. The category ‘Mothers Programme’ includes those women who are not yet in a position to be re-united with their children. This group ranges from women who are engaged with the help offered by Re-United and progressing towards re-union with their children to women who are being supported by Re-United through the process of having their children permanently removed by social services.

Chart 14: Circumstances of service user after 6 months with Re-United (15 service users)



There is information about just two women who have been out of prison for more than 12 months. In both cases, the story is a positive one. The women are living with their children in secure and suitable accommodation. They had committed no further offences 12 months after release from prison, although one woman has subsequently reoffended and been made subject to a suspended

sentence order. This order includes a condition that she attend a programme of activities that take place at the Women's Centre that is the base for the Re-Unite programme. Both women have made good progress with debt issues and health problems. There are no concerns about the children. Social services were involved with one family, but have now closed the case. The other woman remains on post-release licence, but her appointments with her supervising officer are reduced to once every six weeks and take place at the Women's Centre.

4.6 Concluding Points and Observations

During 2012, the six new Re-Unite providers worked with 26 women and around 50 children. The Re-Unite project has developed in slightly different ways in different places, reflecting the skills and experience of the organisations that deliver it. Whilst, given the early stage of the project, it is too soon to talk about longer-term outcomes for women and children, the following points emerge from the evaluation.

- Re-Unite meets a need in terms of accommodation for women leaving prison. Without Re-Unite, service users had few options apart from temporary accommodation or lodging with family and friends.
- Six months after release, 8 out of 15 service users are re-united with their children and successfully maintaining secure tenancies. Five other women remain engaged with Re-Unite but are at an earlier stage in the process of achieving sufficient stability to live a settled life with their children.
- Where women are serving short prison sentences, it is not always possible to make a thorough assessment of the likelihood that mother and children can be re-united before the woman is released from prison. In such cases, Re-Unite workers offer 'through the gate' support (with issues such as housing, finance and substance use) before the plan for the family is clear.
- During 2012 some Re-Unite providers have worked with women with chaotic backgrounds and significant needs in areas such as substance use, mental health and offending. Such needs are barriers to establishing and maintaining a tenancy and reduce the chances of children returning to live with their mother. However, women in prison do often have chaotic backgrounds and significant needs, and so this is likely also to be the case for women referred to Re-Unite.
- All new Re-Unite providers have been involved in multi-agency work with Social Services and have been developing knowledge and experience about child protection practice and procedures.
- The new providers offer a range of services to female offenders alongside the Re-Unite service. This means that Re-Unite service users are able to access resources such as Women's Centres and specialist supported housing. It also means that there is not always

(and need not be) clear division between the help available to a woman as a Re-Unite service user or as a client of the larger organisation.

5. CASE STUDIES

5.1 Key Points from the Case Studies

Case studies giving rich detail about the circumstances of 8 women are set out below. The women in the case studies vary in age from late teens to early fifties. Their children span the full age range from small babies to near adults. The case studies also illustrate the variety of criminal justice histories. One woman is serving a community sentence, one was most recently in a residential drug rehabilitation centre, a third received a four month prison sentence and a fourth received a seven year sentence. The advantages of being able to plan for release, particularly if this enables liaison with housing and with social services, is shown in Cases B, E and G.

The case studies provide vivid illustration of some of the points made earlier in this report. The expert knowledge that is needed to provide housing support and guidance to this client group is clear. All eight women have required practical support and specialist resources as they have sought suitable accommodation for their children and themselves. In Cases A and B Re-Unite workers advocated on the service user's behalf with local authority housing departments. In Case C, help to deal with past rent arrears enabled the young woman to access supported accommodation for care leavers. Cases D, E and F benefited from links developed between the Re-Unite provider and local housing associations. In case G, Re-Unite supported the mother to access the health services that she and her children required.

All six service users outside London have had access to the expertise and resources of the particular Women's Centre that manages Re-Unite in their areas. The case studies give examples of the way that attendance at groups and other activities has helped women deal with issues about health, domestic violence, drug awareness and preparation for employment. The women were also able to report to their probation supervisors and meet the requirements of their statutory supervision at the Women's Centres.

Liaison with social services is a theme in a number of case studies which provide contrasting examples of the work of Re-Unite. The project works with families where mother and child(ren) can be re-united quickly (Case A and Case F), families where time and support help to rebuild relationships and confidence (Case B, Case D and Case E) but also families where the chaotic life and considerable needs of the mother mean that re-union is not a likely option in the short or medium term (Case C). Case H shows Re-Unite playing a key part in a multi-agency child protection plan with a positive outcome.

Taken together, the case studies give a good flavour of the diversity of the work of Re-Unite.

5.2 Case Study A

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (A) had been sentenced to 7 years for drugs offences. At the time of her release she was in her early 50s. Her 15 year old son had been living with his maternal aunt whilst A was in custody. There have been no significant concerns about his well-being, behaviour or care. A also has older children living independently. She is of Chinese ethnic origin.

This is a case from Re-Unite South Yorkshire.

Particular Needs in this Case

A was referred to Re-Unite by her prison offender manager. Her most pressing need on release was to find housing in the area where her son had been living and was established at school. Prior to her imprisonment she had been living in private rented accommodation elsewhere in Yorkshire and had been in employment. A felt guilty about the impact of her prison sentence on her children and was anxious about moving to live in a new city. She had no significant problems with debt, health or substance use.

Work Done By Re-Unite

A has been motivated and committed to work with Re-Unite. She used a short period of release on temporary licence to meet Re-Unite staff for an assessment and attend a housing appointment. Re-Unite staff supported A through the process of applying for and obtaining temporary housing for herself and her son and liaised with social services to ensure that there were no obstacles to re-uniting the family. This work ensured that accommodation was available to A on her release from prison on Christmas Eve.

Since her release, A has continued to work with Re-Unite. Re-Unite is helping A to secure suitable permanent accommodation and supporting her and her son to deal with racial abuse that they have experienced where they are temporarily housed. A also makes use of the facilities at the Women's Centre where Re-Unite is based, for example for social contact, to meet the requirements of her parole licence and to use the computers.

Outcomes and Impact

As a result of her contact with Re-Unite, A was able to leave prison with effective support for her particular issues: homelessness, social isolation and potential discrimination. Her son has made a good transition from the care of his aunt to return to live with his mother. He continues to do well and attend school.

As A herself says

'It was nice to be able to attend here before I came from prison. They helped me understand what I had to do to get housing, money and make sure my son could come and live with me. My worker went with me to housing and knew what to say, she even came with me on

Christmas Eve. I wasn't sure what exactly you did, but sorting out my housing for me was really important to me.'

5.3 Case Study B

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (B) had been sentenced to 2 years for perverting the course of justice. At the time of her release she was in her early 30s. B has four children, aged between 4 and 12. The family are of white British ethnic origin. B's children were being cared for by their maternal grandmother. Social services were involved with the family and the children were on the 'at risk' register.

This is a case from Re-Unite Humberside.

Particular Needs in this Case

B was referred to Re-Unite by the Prison Link worker. She was assessed, prior to release, as having a range of needs. As a result of her custodial sentence B had surrendered the tenancy of a local authority house and had no accommodation to return to. Social services concerns about the children stemmed from a history of domestic violence in the family. A parenting assessment whilst B was in custody concluded that the children could return to live with B on her release but would remain on the 'at risk' register.

B is no longer in an abusive relationship, her former partner having died, but she continued to have concerns about the impact of past events on her well-being and that of her children. B's oldest son was struggling at school and showing signs of emotional problems.

B has a history of mental health problems, including depression. In addition, she had outstanding debts to deal with on her return to the community.

Work Done By Re-Unite

Work with B began before she was released from prison. Re-Unite workers liaised with the local authority housing office to ensure that B was offered suitable accommodation as soon as possible.

B has remained engaged with Re-Unite since her release from prison. She has made use of a range of services offered by the Women's Centre where Re-Unite is based and has been helped to maintain her tenancy, seek help from a debt advice agency and receive support with parenting, confidence building and preparation for employment. She has recently begun counselling sessions to work through past abuse issues and improve her mental health.

Outcomes and Impact

B is now living with her children in a permanent accommodation – a 3-bedroom local authority house. Social services are satisfied with the care of the children who have been removed from the 'at risk' register. Social services now have minimal involvement with the family. B's mental health has improved, her relationship with her parents is improved and her outlook on life is positive.

B is now working closely with her children's schools and health workers to begin to resolve her children's difficulties.

B is complying with the requirements of her parole licence. Attendance at the Women's Centre meets the formal requirement to attend for supervision.

The intensive support offered by Re-Unite has played a key part in achieving this progress and stability for B and her children.

5.4 Case Study C

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (C) had been sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for a violent offence. She has a number of previous convictions as a juvenile, including for robbery and violence. At the time of her release she was aged 19. She is of white British ethnic origin.

C has two children. Social services are involved with the family. The older child (aged 2) lives with his paternal grandmother and there is a residency order in place. C has regular contact with her son, but he is expected to stay living with his grandmother. The younger child, born whilst C was in prison, was taken into the care of social services and placed with foster parents.

This is a case from Re-Unite West Yorkshire.

Particular Needs in this Case

C is a young woman who has grown up in care. She was abused as a child and now suffers poor emotional and mental health, including issues with self-harm, attempted suicide and depression. She is no longer in a relationship with the father of her children, but continues to receive support from his mother.

C was released from prison with a licence condition that she reside at approved premises. She had rent arrears from a previous tenancy and nowhere to move on to after her period at the hostel. Alcohol use was a contributory factor in her most recent offence and C also has a history of problems with drug use.

C is committed to maintaining contact with her children but has previously struggled to engage with statutory services, including social services and the probation service. She has not wanted to engage with mental health services.

Work Done By Re-Unite

Re-Unite began to work with C while she was living at the approved premises. Given C's unsettled background and history of difficult relationships with professional workers, establishing trust and building rapport has taken time and careful input.

Work done by Re-Unite has enabled C to claim back-dated housing benefit and clear her rent arrears. She has also been introduced to the services offered by the Women's Centre where Re-Unite is based and encouraged to engage with support and programmes available there.

Outcomes and Impact

C is continuing to engage with Re-Unite and the Women Centre. She is complying with the requirements of her parole licence. She has moved from the approved premises to supported accommodation for care leavers.

Following a process of court hearings and parenting assessments, social service's decision that the younger child be adopted was confirmed. C remains in contact with her older child who continues to live with his paternal grandmother. This is a stable arrangement for C's son and he is thriving.

5.5 Case Study D

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (D) was made subject to a community order for offences of child cruelty and neglect. These offences arose in the context of long-standing and severe domestic violence perpetrated by D's ex-partner. She has no previous convictions.

D has six children aged between 15 and 5 years. Social services are involved with the family and the children placed with foster carers.

D is in her early 40s and of White British ethnic origin.

This is a case from Re-Unite Birmingham.

Particular Needs in this Case

D's relationship with her abusive partner finally broke down when his violence extended from her to the children. Alongside the domestic violence, D also suffered from mental health problems and depression. At the time of her referral to Re-Unite her self-confidence and self-esteem were very low. She was ashamed and guilty about what had happened to the children.

D had been living for many years in a 2 bedroom property that was not adequate for her and the children. She had some small debts, few qualifications and no recent employment history.

Work Done By Re-Unite

D has engaged positively with Re-Unite and made use of a range of support and services offered at the Women's Centre that is the base for Re-Unite.

Through Re-Unite, D has obtained the tenancy of a 4 bedroom housing association property which provides her with somewhere suitable to resume family life. Work has been done to clear her debts

and access funding to furnish the new home. She is attending courses in literacy and numeracy at the Women's Centre.

D has accessed counselling and emotional support. She has a link with a CPN. Her mental health is much improved and she is no longer taking medication. She has also attended one-to-one sessions with a focus on developing parenting skills.

Outcomes and Impact

D now lives in her new home. Her mental health, emotional well-being and practical circumstances are considerably improved and social services have allowed the oldest three children to return to live with her. These three children are now classified as 'in need' rather than 'at risk'. Social services will continue to work with the family with the intention that the three youngest children will be re-united with D too.

D is now much more confident and happy. She is able to make good use of a range of community services and resources.

5.6 Case Study E

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (E) was sentenced to 5 years in prison for importing drugs into the UK. She has no previous convictions.

E was pregnant at the time of her sentence and her baby daughter was born while she was in custody. E and her daughter were placed in a prison mother and baby unit for 18 months and then the baby went to live with her father, with whom E no longer has a relationship. E's older child, a son, was living with E's mother. Social services were involved with the family and both children were subject to interim care orders.

E is in mid-20s and is of Black British ethnic origin.

This is a case from Re-Unite Birmingham.

Particular Needs in this Case

E's wanted to be re-united with her children on her release from prison but had no suitable accommodation available on her release and was very nervous about returning to the community.

E had been an occasional cannabis user in the past and had some debts from her life before prison, but neither of these were significant problems.

Work Done By Re-Unite

While E was still in prison, the Re-Unite worker made contact with E's mother, E's probation officer and the children's social workers to establish the circumstances in which mother and children could

be re-united. It was agreed that, if E was able to offer the children a stable home, then there were no barriers to the return of the children.

Re-Unite helped E to obtain accommodation, initially in supported accommodation and then the tenancy of a 3-bedroom house provided by a local housing association working with Re-Unite. It was possible for E to live close to her mother, helping E rebuild family relationships and ensure stability for her son.

Re-Unite supported E through her negotiations about housing, with social services and encouraged her resettlement into the community.

Outcomes and Impact

E now lives with her two children. Both children have settled well and are making good progress. Nine months after her release, E was offered a work placement in a solicitor's office and was subsequently offered a full-time job.

As E says

'I have gained so much confidence and have gone from feeling a failure in society to being a fully paid up member of society. I couldn't have done it without the support of Anawim and the Re-Unite Programme.'

5.7 Case Study F

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (F) was sentenced to 4 months in prison for her involvement in the riots of Summer 2011. She has no previous convictions. F's partner had also been involved in the riots and had received a sentence of 5 years imprisonment. The couple had a baby girl who was a few weeks old when F went to prison. The baby was cared for by F's parents.

F was 19 years old when she was sent to prison. She is of white British ethnic origin.

This is a case from Re-Unite Gloucestershire.

Particular Needs in this Case

F heard about Re-Unite on one of the regular prison visits made by the project worker. She did not have independent accommodation for her daughter and herself on release and was interested in the support and help available from Re-Unite.

F had no significant problems with her health or with substance use.

Work Done By Re-Unite

On release from prison, F initially went to stay with her parents. However, with the help of Re-Unite she was soon allocated a 2-bedroom flat provided by a local housing association. Re-Unite helped F

apply for grants to furnish the property as well as to make arrangements to repay some debts (to catalogue companies) accrued before her sentence.

Outcomes and Impact

F now lives in her own home with her daughter. The two of them continue to visit F's partner as he serves his sentence.

F has successfully completed her period of post-release supervision and is no longer involved with probation. She continues to be supported by Re-Unite and the staff at the Women's Centre where Re-Unite is based. She is attending a health and beauty college course two days a week.

F's daughter is thriving.

5.8 Case Study G

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (G) was sentenced to 3 years in prison for an offence of arson – she had set fire to her previous home. She has no previous convictions. G is 25 years old. She is of white British ethnic origin.

G has three children under the age of 5. The youngest child was born whilst G was serving her sentence and removed from her care within hours of his birth. Whilst G was in prison the three children lived with their paternal grandmother.

This is a case from Re-Unite South London.

Particular Needs in this Case

G's family background was chaotic and abusive. She has a close and positive relationship with her children's paternal grandmother but, at the point of her imprisonment was separated from her partner. Social services were initially of the view that the children should remain permanently with their grandmother. However, the grandmother wanted G to have the chance, with support and monitoring, of being re-united with the children.

G's offence was committed at a time of emotional distress and instability. Her abusive past and chaotic lifestyle had exacerbated her mental health problems. Although not having problems with substance misuse herself, drugs were a problem for G's partner and other family members.

Work Done By Re-Unite

On release from prison, and following careful discussion and assessment given her conviction for arson, G moved into a Re-Unite property. G had not previously lived in South London, so Re-Unite workers provided considerable support to ensure that G and her children had access to schools, health services and community resources. The two older children have some health problems and Re-Unite has helped G to access the input they need.

Re-Unite has also worked closely with G to boost her self-esteem and develop her assertiveness.

Outcomes and Impact

G and her children are living together in their Re-Unite home. G's partner has worked hard to address his problems and G has resumed their relationship. G co-operated with the assessments made to ensure that he was not posing any risk to G or the children. Family relationships appear to be stable and loving.

Social services remained involved after G's release from prison, but have made a positive assessment of the care provided to the children and have now withdrawn from the family. G's children have adjusted well to their new life with their mother and retain a strong relationship with their grandmother.

When asked what she had changed for her as a result of Re-Unite, G replied

'My life, my kids life, as a mother, as a person I have gained the confidence to lead a good life.'

And would she recommend Re-Unite to other families? '110% definitely'

5.9 Case Study H

About the Mother and Children

The mother in this case (H) has a long history of offending and failing to comply with statutory supervision. She has served a number of prison sentences and, most recently, spent time at a residential drug rehabilitation centre. H is 36 years old. She is of Black British ethnic origin.

H has a young son who was born just before she went into residential rehab and was able to live with her there. She also has older children with whom she has no contact, this having been lost during her period of prolific offending and drug misuse.

This is a case from Re-Unite South London.

Particular Needs in this Case

The key issues in this case were H's continued recovery from her significant drug problems and the future of her baby son. He was subject to an interim care order, with social services giving serious consideration to the option of permanent removal from his mother and adoption.

In addition to her history of substance misuse, H also had issues with depression.

Work Done By Re-Unite

Re-Unite provided H with considerable support in her dealing with social services and the family courts. Re-Unite workers attended court with H and, following lengthy discussions regarding the care package, social services decided to 'give her a chance' under a very strict multi-agency plan involving Re-Unite, social services, drug intervention programmes, GP, counselling services and the child's guardian (CAFCASS) service. H was allowed to move into Re-Unite accommodation.

Re-Unite have worked intensively with H and her son. Much of this intervention has involved careful multi-agency working.

Outcomes and Impact

H has made impressive progress. She engaged well with Re-Unite and the other support available to her, including counselling, and worked closely with social services. As a result, she was awarded full custody of her son who is no longer subject to a care order.

H has moved on from her Re-Unite property into a permanent social housing tenancy.

H has recently been able to resume contact with one of her older children and her young son is doing well.

6. Comparisons and Reflections

6.1 Comparisons and reflections regarding the different models of provision

The Re-Unite provision outside South London is still developing and there is work to be done to consolidate monitoring and data collection across the different models over a longer period of time. This said, the evidence gathered to date allows some useful observations.

Where Re-Unite is part of a Women's Centre it is hard to separate the work of Re-Unite from other work of the Centre which makes it difficult to attribute exact proportions of time and effort spent on Re-Unite work. This might make any future cost benefit analyses difficult across different models of provision, although in each case it is very clear that Re-Unite has added to the value of the work accomplished with service users because Re-Unite service users benefit from the range of other services and activities available in the centres.

Women's Centre staff do not always feel that they have the necessary depth of knowledge about housing, although in some cases involvement in Re-Unite is acknowledged by the staff to have contributed to increased knowledge and skills in this direction.

Whilst direct comparisons are not possible because of differences in scale and sample size, the new Re-Unite projects seem to be working with women who have received shorter sentences compared with women involved in the Re-Unite South London project. This might be explained by the large catchment area of the London prisons and the fact that HMP Holloway, in particular, receives women who have been given long sentences where the trials have been in the Central Courts, although we should also note that women have to have a South London connection to be accepted on the Re-Unite programme. It adds to the difficulty of comparing different models of provision of course.

One common feature regarding the service users across the different Re-Unite projects relates to their difficult and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Unlike Re-Unite South London, and although operating in slightly different ways, none of the Re-Unite providers outside London had dedicated housing for service users. As a result, women usually left prison and moved into temporary accommodation as the process of obtaining something more permanent began. This temporary accommodation was in the majority of cases provided by family or friends and, on occasions, was far from satisfactory. This highlights the importance of Re-Unite.

Some Re-Unite providers in 2012 appear to have been working with women who are a long way from the point where they could manage a tenancy successfully or would be allowed care of their children (where women are still leading chaotic lives through drug misuse and mental health problems, and subject to domestic violence). But it is a measure of the huge value of Re-Unite that such women are included and there have been achievements in facilitating a more stable lifestyle through appropriate housing and support.

The above leads to the observation that different models of provision are potentially as useful as each other. Each model has something distinctive and valuable to offer, drawing on local or area housing provision. Outside London some of the partnership arrangements in centre-based provision

with housing providers are still emerging. As trust develops between staff in the centres and housing providers it may be that women and their children will become even more of a priority than they currently are.

There is scope to develop and consolidate data collection across the different projects (to ensure full data sets) and this will enable future comparison of the needs of women in different areas, as well as their offending backgrounds. Extending the use of the Outcome Star tool across all Re-Unite projects would yield valuable information for project workers and managers. In time, this approach could facilitate the sharing of best practice between different models of provision, based on a clear picture of their service users (mothers and children).

6.2 Does Re-Unite Work and is it Value for Money?

Two key questions of course are whether Re-Unite works and whether Re-Unite is good value for money. However, neither question can be easily answered; both lead to complicated issues of purpose and outcome.

6.3 Does Re-Unite Work?

Three points emerge from the life stories of Re-Unite service users, the accounts of project workers and the process of independent evaluation. Firstly, many women, including some whose relationship with the project eventually broke down, have been very pleased to be housed in good quality and safe accommodation when they were released from prison. Re-Unite provides an alternative to temporary and unsuitable accommodation and gives many families the opportunity to establish a settled life. The project helps to address the particular housing disadvantage faced by mothers in prison, although the general shortage of social housing continues to hamper the process of moving-on from Re-Unite tenancies into permanent homes. The new Re-Unite projects either have a key role in providing support for mothers and children in specialist housing (Threshold, Greater Manchester) or in facilitating the application process for suitable accommodation (Together Women in Yorkshire and Humberside). In Anawim, Birmingham, the Re-Unite work means speedier access to suitable family accommodation too and the strong support to help women to maintain their tenancies is critical.

Secondly, there is evidence that the project supports women with a range of issues that have been associated with their offending behaviour as well as with wider social problems. Re-Unite workers have helped women access services and sustain behaviour change in areas such as financial management, substance use and mental health. Re-Unite has provided a base from which women have been able to attend training courses, enter employment and focus on parenting.

Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, for the children involved with the project, Re-Unite has provided the opportunity to return to their mother's care with additional support at a time of transition and change. For some children, the existence of Re-Unite has certainly prevented them from being taken into care or remaining in care - which, ultimately, can be shown to be detrimental to quality of life and life chances.

Whilst it is reasonably straightforward to describe the work done by Re-Unite and produce case vignettes of success, it is not easy to quantify the outcomes of the project. This is a particular challenge at a time when ideas like 'payment by results' and 'evidence-based commissioning' are prominent in the Coalition Government's thinking about service delivery. This is an issue that Re-Unite shares in common with other small voluntary sector projects working holistically with service users. Such projects challenge evaluators in a number of ways: small numbers of service users make statistical analysis difficult, the aims of the project are often broad and hard to measure, data which could contribute to evaluation are sensitive or confidential and there is no prospect of assembling a control or comparison group.

All of these issues are relevant in the case of Re-Unite. It is not possible to provide a simple answer to the question about whether being a Re-Unite service user makes a woman less likely to re-offend: reducing re-offending is not the sole aim of Re-Unite; the likelihood of re-offending varies considerably between service users; re-offending rates are affected by many factors outside the control of the project and there is no way of knowing what would have happened to anyone without the support of Re-Unite. Similarly, it is not straightforward to measure the impact of Re-Unite on the children of service users. Testing the hypothesis that the Re-Unite model improves the children's circumstances and so reduces their future criminal behaviour, future problems with drugs and risk of being unemployed as adults is beyond the scope of a small-scale evaluation since it would require a longitudinal approach.

6.4 Does Re-Unite Offer Value for Money? : A Cost-benefit Analysis of Re-Unite in South London

Another way of assessing a project like Re-Unite is to undertake a cost-benefit analysis and this approach has formed part of the previous evaluation of Re-Unite South London (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe 2010) as well as the current evaluation.

The costs of delivering Re-unite are fairly straightforward to identify and are made up of the costs of securing, maintaining and managing properties along with the costs of staff salaries and project administration and publicity. The cost of the replication projects is lower as there are no dedicated properties for the project.

The financial benefits of Re-Unite are much harder to quantify. This task depends on the making of assumptions about the likely impact of the project on areas such as offending, health, employment, substance use and homelessness for both women service users and their children. These assumptions can be based as thoroughly as possible on evidence from research, but still depend on complicated judgments about the extent to which Re-Unite is responsible for the future outcomes of service users. The findings from the cost-benefit analyses that assessed Re-Unite South London suggest that there is a strong argument that the project provides benefit to society in simple financial terms: the costs of providing the housing and the support is outweighed by the financial savings, even if estimated conservatively.

This conclusion was reached from systematic consideration of cost benefit factors using a standardised and recognised approach. The overall financial benefits and costs are shown in the table below, expressed as a unit cost/benefit per service user (based on ten service users and their sixteen children). The largest savings occurred in less use of emergency housing and local authority child care. However, this excludes any financial benefits due to reduced re-offending as the nature of the offences committed by some service users were extremely costly (for example, drugs offences and fraud). This does not mean there is no benefit, on the contrary, the evidence is very promising in terms of showing how Re-Unite helps women to establish stable lives - and this in itself is likely to have positive impact on reoffending rates. Even if adopting a conservative perspective therefore, the savings are well worth noting.

Table 1: Costs and Benefits

Costs and Benefits	Costs and benefits per service user in short term (£)	Costs and benefits per service user over 10 years (£)
Total financial benefits without reduction in re-offending	32,554	53,320
Running cost of Re-unite Two for one year in 2011	14,677	14,677
Net financial benefit without taking reduction in re-offending into account	17,877	38,643

7. Conclusions

This section summarises key achievements regarding Re-Unite, but also raises some questions about sustainability and highlights the importance of continuity in provision.

7.1 Seven Signs of Success

1. All Re-Unite providers offer excellent support to service users and their children. The work of skilful and committed staff is key to achieving this.
2. Whether by providing tenancies, partnerships with housing associations or acting as a facilitator and negotiator with housing providers, Re-Unite has enabled service users to access accommodation and begin the process of resuming or creating a settled life in the community.

3. The work of Re-Unite through new providers extends far beyond housing support, giving service users and their children access to a wide range of resources at Women's Centres and in the wider community.
4. All Re-Unite providers can produce evidence of positive outcomes for women and their children: successfully managed tenancies, children no longer subject to care proceedings or improvements in mental health, for example.
5. Whilst the small-scale nature of Re-Unite and the newness of the replication projects mean that it is not possible to produce outcome data about re-offending by service users, case studies clearly illustrate the way that Re-Unite impacts on social problems that are linked with offending.
6. The work of Re-Unite is of value to the community because it improves the circumstances of a vulnerable group of women and children in ways which have the potential to reduce the future prospect of offending and social exclusion.
7. As the cost benefit analysis regarding South London shows, spending money on this vulnerable group of women and children pays dividends in terms of estimated reductions in the long term costs of emergency housing, health and other care.

7.2 The External Policy and Commissioning Environment

The work of Re-Unite plays a small but significant part in improving the circumstances of children and the aftercare of women prisoners by offering the stability that comes with adequate and secure housing. However, Re-Unite is operating at a time when money is limited in both the public and voluntary sectors in the UK. The Government's commitment to payment by results as a funding mechanism puts further pressure on organisations whose work does not easily produce evidence of the successful achievement of simple and short-term targets. There are concerns that these policy developments will have deleterious effects on the development of practice with female offenders (Gelsthorpe and Hedderman, 2012). The Re-Unite project is vulnerable to cuts in the funding of Women's Centres and faces the challenge of presenting its 'results' in a way that finds favour with commissioners.

Quite simply, it would be a matter of huge regret if the excellent work of Re-Unite could not be continued. There is a moral imperative to make provision for women offenders and their children and Re-Unite already makes positive contribution to the Government's Rehabilitation Revolution agenda to ensure that people who offend are given the services that they need to rebuild their lives away from crime.

References

Cabinet Office (2002) Reducing Re-offending by ex-offenders. Social Exclusion Unit Report. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).

Caddle, D. and Crisp, D. (1997), Imprisoned women and mothers, Home Office Research Study 162, (Home Office: London).

Codd, H. (2008) In the Shadow of Prison. Families, Imprisonment and Criminal Justice. (Cullompton, Devon: Willan).

Corston, J. (2007) The Corston Report: A Report by Baroness Jean Corston of a Review of Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System. London: Home Office.

Dominey, J. and Gelsthorpe, L. (2011) Re-Unite South London. Evaluation Report for 2011. University of Cambridge/Institute of Criminology/Commonweal.

Hansard, House of Commons, 25 Nov 2009, c 238W.

Hansard, House of Commons, 10 May 2011, c 1072W.

Home Office (2004) Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP) Action Plan. London: Home Office.

Gelsthorpe, L. and Sharpe, S. (2010) The Re-Unite Project. Early Development Phase Evaluation Report. London: Commonwealth Housing. <http://www.re-unite.org.uk/our-success/evaluation>

Gelsthorpe, L., Sharpe, G. and Roberts, J. (2007). Provision for Women Offenders in the Community. London: The Fawcett Society. (See www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)

Gelsthorpe, L. and Dominey, J. (2010) Re-Unite South London. Evaluation Report for 2010. University of Cambridge/Commonweal Housing

Gelsthorpe and Hedderman (2012) 'Providing for women offenders. The risks of adopting a payment by results approach'. Probation Journal, 59, 4, pp374-390.

Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) Children of Offenders Review.

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/youth-justice/prevention/ChildrenofOffendersReview2007.pdf>

Ministry of Justice (2013a) Strategic Objectives for Female Offenders.

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/policy/moj/strategic-objectives-for-female-offenders>

Ministry of Justice (2013b) Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform published on 9th May 2013.

Murray J (2007), 'The cycle of punishment: Social exclusion of prisoners and their children' Criminology and Criminal Justice 7(1):55-81.

Murray J, Farrington DP, Sekol I, Olsen RF (2009), 'Effects of parental imprisonment on child antisocial behaviour and mental health: a systematic review'. Oslo, Norway, Campbell Collaboration (<http://campbellcollaboration.org/>).

Prison Reform Trust (2000) Justice for Women. The Need for Reform. (Chaired by Lady Wedderburn). London: PRT.

Prison Reform Trust (2011) Reforming Women's Justice. Final Report of the Women's Taskforce. London: PRT.

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Women's%20Justice%20Taskforce%20Report.pdf>

Social Work Services and Prisons Inspectorate for Scotland (1998) Women Offenders: A Safer Way: A Review of Community Disposals and the Use of Custody for Women Offenders in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.