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# **Re-offending analysis of women offenders referred to Together Women (TW) and the scope to divert from custody**

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## **Disclaimer**

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy)

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# Summary

## Introduction

Together Women (TW) was a community-based intervention which aimed to reduce re-offending among female offenders and address the needs of women 'at risk'. TW also aimed to divert some women from prison custody. A total of five TW centres were established in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside National Offender Management Service (NOMS) regions, located in Liverpool, Salford, Doncaster, Leeds and Bradford.<sup>1</sup> The centres helped women identify and address a variety of needs thought either to be linked to their offending or to heighten their risk of becoming involved in offending (e.g. substance misuse, accommodation, finance, mental and physical health, and experiences of domestic violence or other forms of abuse and trauma). Attendance at TW was predominantly voluntary. Service users were referred via a number of routes and attended TW when, and as many times, as they wished.

While described as a 'national demonstration project' the TW delivery model encouraged each centre to develop provision in relation to local demand, utilising existing services where available. The nature and range of support therefore varied. Processes for assessing needs and progress against them also differed as these were similarly developed locally. TW was available to both female offenders and those 'at risk' of offending, however neither group were prescriptively defined at the outset. Previous research (Hedderman et al., 2008, 2009) identified that the lack of standardised measures and systems for recording data, together with a lack of consistency in how service users were defined along with the differing nature of support provided, would present challenges for any future evaluation, unless addressed. These issues continued, and as a result the evaluation of TW reported here represents a limited quantitative assessment of impact.

This evaluation covers the national demonstration period which ran from December 2006 until the end March 2009. Since the end of the demonstration period the TW centres have implemented changes to their service delivery. As such the service delivery models described here are not necessarily reflective of current practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Together Women centres were delivered by three providers: Salford Foundation delivered the Salford TW centre, the Lighthouse Project delivered the Liverpool TW centre while the Leeds, Bradford and Doncaster centres were delivered via a consortium of voluntary sector partners led by Foundation Housing. To reflect the delivery of the TW centres, data has been grouped into three areas for this analysis (referred to as Areas 1, 2 and 3).



The evaluation aimed to identify:

- the impact of TW on proven re-offending<sup>2</sup> among women with a recent<sup>3</sup> criminal conviction referred to a centre; and,
- whether TW encouraged sentencers to divert women offenders from custody.

## Approach

### Data availability

TW records showed a total of 3,466 women were referred over the research period (December 2006 to March 2009).<sup>4</sup> However, grounds for recording a referral were inconsistent, and information from TW centre managers indicated that sometimes a record was only made when a woman arrived for her first appointment. Therefore, the 3,466 figure is likely to be an underestimate of the number of women actually referred to TW.

Records held by TW centres were examined to identify, where possible, details about assessments, needs and support received by women referred to TW. Availability of data continued to decline across all three areas as cases moved from referral to receiving support, as shown in Figure 1.1:

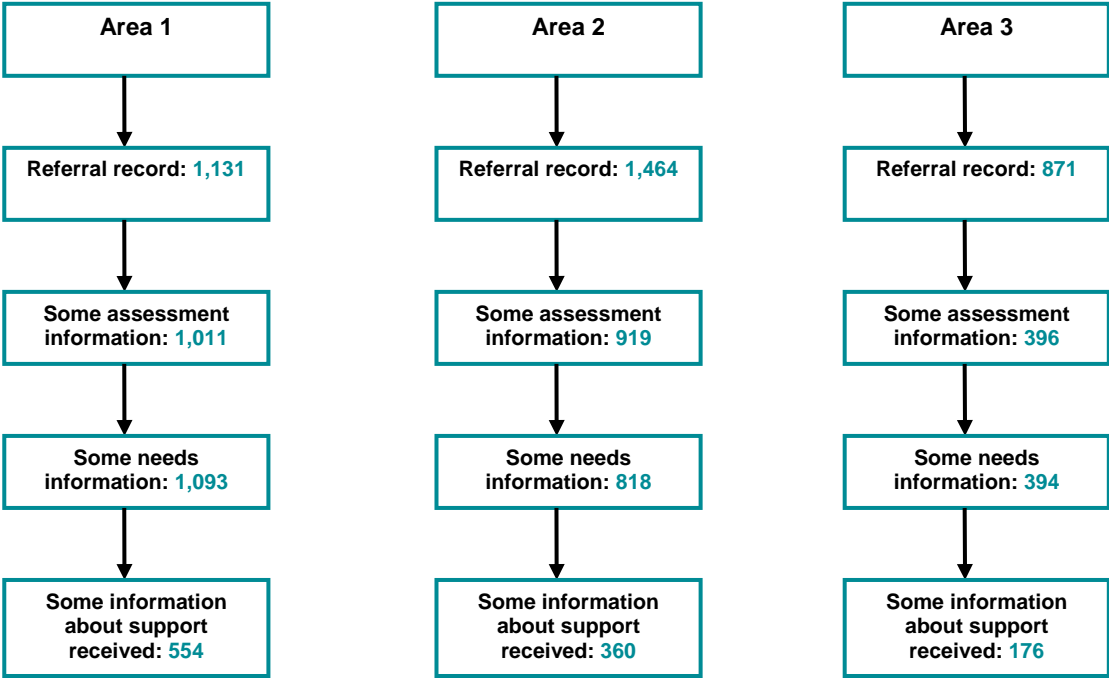
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<sup>2</sup> A proven re-offence is where an offender is convicted at court or receives some other form of criminal justice sanction for an offence committed within a one-year follow-up period and disposed of within either the one-year follow-up period or within a further six months waiting period, which is to allow time for the offence to be proven at court.

<sup>3</sup> A recent criminal conviction is defined as the presence of a verified index offence (with a recorded conviction) in specified police force areas within 30 days before or up to seven days after the date of referral to TW.

<sup>4</sup> Together Women began operating in December 2006 in Doncaster, January 2007 in Salford, February 2007 in Leeds, March 2007 in Bradford and April 2007 in Liverpool. The demonstration phase ended in March 2009.

**Figure 1.1: Availability of TW data, by area**



**Measures of impact**

The impact of TW on the proven re-offending of service users with a recent criminal conviction was explored using propensity score matching (PSM). This technique matched 660 women identified as having a recent criminal conviction to a group of female offenders serving a community order who had not been referred to TW. They were matched as far as possible on a set of relevant variables for which data was available. The resulting model was not as well specified because information that might have influenced the propensity to be referred to TW was not available. However, the matching process successfully equated the two groups on demographic and criminal history variables. Re-offending data was sourced from the Police National Computer (PNC).

Although both female offenders and women considered ‘at risk’ of offending were referred to TW, this analysis of impact did not include those ‘at risk’. This is because the definition of ‘at risk’ was not clear (and would have required an index offence to be located on the PNC) as well as the lack of data on a suitable comparison group, i.e. women not referred to TW but who matched those who were in terms of ‘risk’ (Hedderman et al., 2008, p.22). Results from this evaluation are therefore not representative of all those referred to TW.

The impact of TW on diversion from custody was explored qualitatively through interviews with 20 local sentencers.

## Findings

### Characteristics of women referred to TW

- Available data showed most women were White and aged between 32 and 35 and had an average of two dependents.
- Almost half were referred from a criminal justice agency; others came via another agency (e.g. health, housing, women's clinic) or had self-referred.

### Needs identified and support received

Records suggested that of the 3,466 recorded referrals, approximately one-third (31%, n=1,090) were recorded as having received any support. However, discussion with local TW centre managers indicated that not all referrals were recorded. Data on assessments, needs and support were missing for a large number of cases that were recorded as referred. As identified by Hedderman et al. (2008) this was due at least in part to the lack of a common assessment framework or system for data collection. The absence of analysable data on assessment, needs and support received by women referred to TW does not necessarily mean their needs were not assessed nor that they did not receive comprehensive support.

It was not possible to aggregate the data on needs and support across all five centres because of differences in what was counted as a need and in how support was defined. The limited data available suggested a poor correspondence between assessed needs and support recorded as received, although this apparent mismatch is more likely to reflect poor data recording than actual practice.

### The impact of TW on proven re-offending over one year

- Results suggested TW did not have an impact on proven re-offending among those women referred to a centre with a recent criminal conviction (N=660).
- Restricting analysis to women referred who were also serving a community order (N=262) showed no impact on proven re-offending.
- Analysis of women referred who were recorded as having received support from TW (N=169) similarly showed no impact on proven re-offending.
- These findings should be interpreted cautiously given the limited number of TW service users included in the proven re-offending analyses (as a proportion of those referred), the limited number of TW service users recorded as having received support from TW, and the reliance on demographic and criminal records data to equate the TW and comparison group.

## Sentencers' views of TW and its potential to divert from custody

- While TW had a low profile at most courts, sentencers interviewed generally welcomed this development. They felt it focused on addressing women's social and personal problems and expected it to reduce re-offending through attempting to deal with its causes.
- Those familiar with TW were keen to see colleagues made aware of its perceived benefits. They suggested the most effective way to do this was via the Probation Service, trusted to select useful options from what were viewed as a succession of short-lived voluntary sector projects of variable quality.
- TW had rarely prompted a decision to divert a woman from custody, primarily because both offenders and non-offenders attended the centres and attendance was rarely mandatory. Being enforceable, and exclusively available for convicted offenders, were therefore seen as prerequisites for wider employment of TW.

## Lessons learned

This research project suggested a number of lessons for such future evaluations, particularly in light of recent government strategy which encourages localised approaches to developing interventions for offenders.

- The lack of standardised assessment measures and data monitoring systems severely limited the data available. While prescribing such tools may be at odds with a premise of local autonomy, doing so is likely to offer substantial benefits in terms of better enabling service providers to collect data which can evidence the work they have done and support robust evaluation.
- Tools for assessment and collection of monitoring data should be in place before an intervention or project goes live. The distinction between monitoring information and data required for evaluation should be made clear to those delivering services where they are responsible for their collection.
- Minimum demographic data should be collected to facilitate measurement of outcomes and matching to statutory datasets. For example, a key outcome for TW was proven re-offending, which relied on PNC data. Accurate information (e.g. name, date of birth, ideally PNC number) is necessary to collect this but was missing in much of the TW data.
- Local variation in service implementation and delivery may limit the scope of evaluation. If, as in the case of TW, delivery is designed and managed at the local level, and variation encouraged by way of utilising existing resources and priorities, it will not always be realistic to combine data from different areas as they will not be

comparable. Achieving a sufficient sample size to support robust testing of impact on outcomes is thus unlikely: results would be indicative at best.

- Measures of impact should be matched to the aim of an intervention. TW offered a range of services to address a range of needs, only some of which were known to be directly related to re-offending. To reduce re-offending, interventions should focus on these needs. While focusing on others might be justified, it is important to be clear how doing so would support a reduction in re-offending, i.e. clarifying the model of change. As Hedderman et al. (2008) suggested previously, in the case of TW the alternative was to consider it as a support programme for any severely socially excluded woman, where crime prevention and reduction remained objectives, but not primary objectives in most cases.
- Expectations about the scope of (robust) impact evaluation should also be matched to the nature of the service users. In the case of TW, for example, it was not possible to evaluate offending outcomes for those considered 'at risk' of offending because this was not clearly defined and a suitable comparison group was not available.

## Conclusion

The data available to support this evaluation was not sufficiently robust to allow firm conclusions about the impact of TW on proven re-offending or other desirable outcomes (e.g. reduced drug/alcohol use). This does not mean TW was not successful in achieving these, but that any success (or failure) cannot be reliably demonstrated using the data recorded by the centres and PNC data. These data limitations have been identified and discussed previously (Hedderman et al., 2008, 2009).

Generally TW had a low profile amongst sentencers, but those aware of it perceived it to fill an important gap in local services. However, TW was reported to be rarely used to divert from custody because it mixed offenders and non-offenders and because attendance was rarely made mandatory. Given the limited sample size, the views expressed in this research may not be representative of sentencers more widely.

# 1. Introduction

Together Women (TW) began operating between December 2006 and April 2007 at five centres in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside National Offender Management Service (NOMS) regions.<sup>5</sup> The development of TW was supported by government investment of over £9 million over three years. The initiative had five aims: (i) To develop, disseminate, and demonstrate good practice through support, guidance, and referral to services and other specific programmes/interventions to meet the needs of women offenders and women at risk of offending; (ii) To support prevention, rehabilitation, and resettlement work with women offenders and those at risk of offending in the community using an ‘end-to-end’ model to complement offender management and other services in the community for women; (iii) To influence decision making by criminal justice system (CJS) partners to reduce the number of women given custodial sentences and remanded in custody, and increase the number of women diverted from prosecution; (iv) To increase the number of women offenders and women at risk of offending accessing and being sustained in community services; (v) To reduce the number of avoidable family breakdowns (specifically relating to children) and children going into care.

A key element of the TW approach was that the support plan for the level and range of services an individual woman received was determined by assessment of need. Service users were fully involved in the design and review of their plan, enabling and encouraging them to take a degree of control over their lives.

TW was concerned with addressing a broad range of needs, including accommodation, domestic and sexual violence/personal safety, education, training and employment, finance, mental health, parenting, relationships, preventing family breakdown, physical health, substance use (both alcohol and drugs), and life skills. These areas of need are associated with risk of offending among women (Blanchette and Brown, 2006; Hedderman, 2004; Hollin and Palmer, 2006).

Based on their initial assessment and regular reviews, each service user could be offered mentoring, general support which ranged from talking through issues with a project key

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<sup>5</sup> Together Women centres were delivered by three providers: Salford Foundation delivered the Salford TW centre, the Lighthouse Project delivered the Liverpool TW centre while the Leeds, Bradford and Doncaster centres were delivered via a consortium of voluntary sector partners led by Foundation Housing. To reflect the delivery of the TW centres, data has been grouped into three areas for this analysis (referred to as Areas 1, 2 and 3).

worker to being accompanied to an appointment with another agency, a self-esteem course, support in tackling domestic violence, debt advice, support in finding training and employment, and counselling. The service users could also be referred to partner agencies such as drugs and mental health services.

The outcome evaluation reported here forms the final stage of a three-phase research strategy which included action research exploring the early implementation of TW (Hedderman et al., 2008) and an outcome feasibility study (Hedderman et al., 2009).

TW's records showed that at least 3,466 women were referred during its first three years of operation. This report describes the case management information which was available about such women's needs and the support they received; the results of a one year proven re-offending<sup>6</sup> study commissioned to assess the impact of TW's work with the 666 women who could be identified in a criminal records search; and the results of 20 interviews with local sentencers about whether they saw TW as playing any part in the decision not to impose a custodial sentence, and how it might do so in the future. Originally the study was expected to report on the link between women's needs, the support they received and non re-offending outcomes (e.g. substance misuse, mental and physical health, accommodation and employment status), but data quality issues about needs and support made this impractical. Thus, this report examines only some aspects of what TW was designed to achieve. This is discussed further in the 'Lessons learned' section.

This evaluation covers the national demonstration period which ran from December 2006 until the end March 2009. Since the end of the demonstration period the TW centres have implemented changes to their service delivery. As such the service delivery models described here are not necessarily reflective of current practice.

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<sup>6</sup> A proven re-offence is where an offender is convicted at court or receives some other form of criminal justice sanction for an offence committed within a one-year follow-up period and disposed of within either the one-year follow-up period or within a further six months waiting period, which is to allow time for the offence to be proven at court.

## 2. Methodology

The data for this study comes from the five TW centres in two NOMS regions. (grouped into three areas for this analysis). Data from two TW areas was held by the Ministry of Justice at the commencement of the project. For one of these areas (covering three centres) the data was held in a MS Access database which was created using the Filemaker Pro Database. For the second area, the data comprised a series of MS Excel sheets which included the referral logs and caseworker files. The data for the third TW area was held in paper files. After developing an electronic coding protocol a team of research assistants entered these paper records directly into SPSS. Data from all areas was then de-duplicated and validated so that there was only one entry for each individual on the electronic data per area. The Ministry of Justice took the lead in securing a comparison group from two probation areas in similar geographic regions to the TW centres.<sup>7</sup> Although it had been anticipated that this might include assessment information about needs and support provided (e.g. Offender Assessment System (OASys) data), this proved not possible.

### 2.1 Using Police National Computer records

One of the main purposes of the current research was to evaluate the impact of TW on proven re-offending using Police National Computer (PNC) data about criminal records. Unfortunately, the information that would have facilitated identification of TW clients on the PNC was not consistently available in the TW data (e.g. PNC number, date of index offence). Moreover, the TW data did not include a consistent or functional indicator of which individuals were 'offenders' and which were 'at risk' of offending. For this reason all individuals referred to TW were checked against the PNC. In order to ensure the correct criminal records were identified (with a sufficient degree of confidence) and to enable matching on offence type information, the PNC search criteria required the presence of a verified index offence (with a recorded conviction) in specified police force areas within 30 days before or up to 7 days after the date of referral to TW. Table 2.1 illustrates the results of the PNC searches for each of the three TW areas.

The first column of Table 2.1 shows the number of individuals (by area) with a recorded valid date of birth (indicative of the minimum background information required for inclusion in the evaluation) and the second column shows the number of individuals that had an index offence in the 30 day before/7 day after window. For example, 1091 individuals in Area 1 had

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<sup>7</sup> Comparison data was obtained from two areas but because a large proportion of those from one area contained missing data values only one area was used as the comparison group in the reconviction analysis.



valid dates of birth and of these 181 (16.5%) were identified as having an ‘index’ offence; that is an offence that could be associated with the referral to TW (even though that offence might not have led to the referral). This means women with an older history of offending, and those who had no official record of offending prior to this, were excluded from the reconviction analysis.

**Table 2.1: Background and PNC data availability for women referred to TW, by area**

|                  | <b>Women with valid date of birth</b> | <b>Offenders with index offence</b> |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Area 1           | 1091                                  | 181                                 |
| Area 2           | 1383                                  | 300                                 |
| Area 3           | 829                                   | 185                                 |
| (Total TW areas) | 3303                                  | 666                                 |
| Comparison area  | 2836                                  | 2594                                |

Table 2.1 indicates the number of women in the TW and comparison areas who had an index offence. The re-offending analysis (Chapter 4) was based on the proven re-offending of individuals in these groups in the 12 months post referral to TW (for the TW group) or commencement of order (comparison group).

Ultimately, the 660<sup>8</sup> women in the intervention group cannot be considered representative of all those who attended TW. This places significant limitations on the scope of this research. This research should be considered an evaluation of the impact of referral to (but not necessarily support from) TW on those who offended shortly before or after a referral was recorded (i.e. recent offenders) rather than an evaluation of the overall impact of TW on proven re-offending. Additional analyses explored the impact of receiving support from TW on proven re-offending of recent offenders and the impact of the combination of referral to TW and community supervision on proven re-offending amongst recent offenders.

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<sup>8</sup> Comparison offenders could not be identified for six TW offenders. Thus, while 666 individuals from the intervention areas were identified on the PNC, only 660 individuals were included in the proven re-offending analyses.

## 2.2 Data from TW centres to support outcome evaluation

Although TW was described as a national demonstration project (NOMS, 2006) and overall objectives were set nationally, no common process of assessment or measures of needs or outcome were defined at the outset. The two regions in which the five TW centres operated were given free rein to make their own arrangements on what information was collected from the women referred to them and the work that they undertook with them. Naturally they were focused on collecting information which was needed to manage cases rather than data which might be used for an outcome evaluation. This was identified by the earlier action research (Hedderman et al., 2008) as an issue which needed to be addressed in order to facilitate a robust evaluation of TW.

Aside from local projects agreeing to collate information about outcomes other than re-offending to support the national demonstration project, no other steps seem to have been taken to address the type and quality of data that the TW centres were collecting. This severely restricted the ways in which the impact of TW could be evaluated. For example, TW was expected to provide support to women 'at risk' of offending, but what 'at risk' meant was not clearly defined. Data from the TW centres suggested that some women were classified as 'at risk' because of the risk posed to the women by themselves or by others (e.g. domestic violence), and other women were classified 'at risk' because they were perceived to be 'at risk' of offending. In both interpretations of 'at risk' the women could either have had a documented criminal history (i.e. offence in the past) or not, and also have a recent criminal offence (i.e. index offence) or not.

This wide interpretation of the term 'at risk' meant that it was not possible to evaluate the impact of TW on later proven re-offending (or offending) for those labelled in this way. This also made it impossible to construct a suitable comparison group, i.e. an equally 'at risk' group of women not in receipt of support from TW.

**Figure 2.1 TW data attrition, by area**

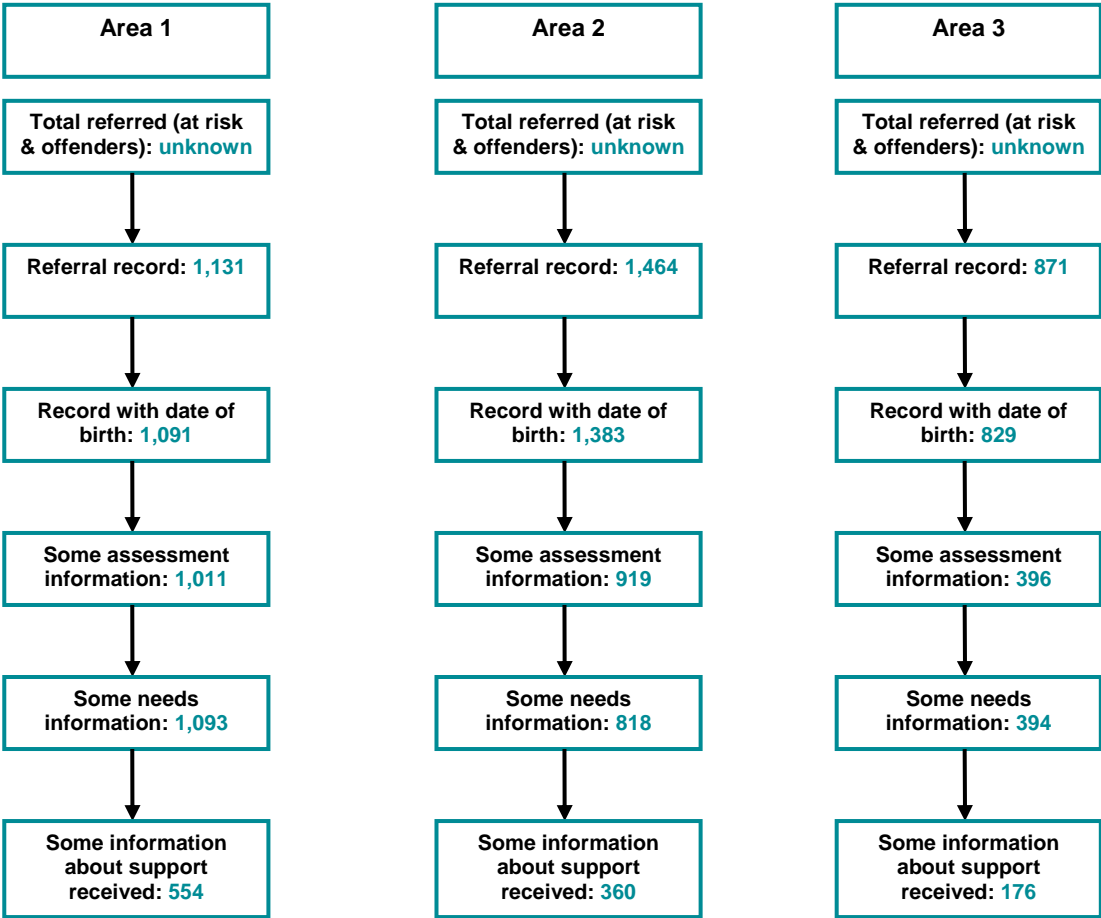


Figure 2.1 shows the way the availability of data in TW areas declined as a case moved from referral to receiving help. The first box (total referred) relates to all women who were referred to TW but who may not have attended any appointments, or who attended but no record was created. In theory a file should have been opened for every woman referred to TW, but discussions with local managers indicated that sometimes a file was only opened when a woman turned up. This makes sense if the object of the exercise is to manage caseloads and assist service users with their problems, but the consequence for the evaluation was that we could not establish how many women were actually referred to TW. There were, however, records indicating referrals for a total of 3,466 women. The date of birth was missing for a proportion of those for whom referral information was held. This presented a problem for the evaluation as date of birth is a key piece of information needed to locate criminal records on the Police National Computer database and ensure that the individual identified is the person of interest.

How the women's current and past circumstances were assessed varied between TW centres (i.e. different questions, different recording formats) (see Needs information stage of Figure 2.1).

A small proportion of women were noted as having actually been assessed or having attended appointments, yet outcomes were recorded for some of the women without this information, suggesting that they had attended and been supported. Similarly, although it might be expected that all those who had one or more assessments had some needs evaluated, the data available suggests that this was not the case, or at least it was not always recorded.

The absence of analysable data on assessment, needs and support received by women referred to TW does not necessarily mean their needs were not assessed nor that they did not receive comprehensive support.

However, only those women whose records showed that they had received some support for any of their needs can be said to have actually received the TW intervention, and this is a very small proportion of those who have a referral record. For example, Figure 2.1 shows that of the 1,464 individuals in Area 2 only 360 were recorded as having received any form of support (25%). Visits to the centres and discussions with local managers led the research team to believe this to be an undercount, but the extent of such under-recording cannot be assessed.

The inconsistency with which referrals were recorded had implications for interpreting an intention-to-treat analysis. This is because a referral could vary from a file opened in response to a fax/telephone call (but where the individual never passed through the doors of TW), to a woman who received considerable support. Arguably, the impact of TW should be evaluated using only those who were recorded as having received support, with the understanding that this group is unlikely to represent all the women who experienced some assistance from TW.

### **2.3 Variation in TW data**

Ideally an analysis of the impact of TW would explore the relationship between important features of the individual (e.g. type, number and seriousness of needs) and the outcome of interest such as a reduction or cessation of substance abuse or offending. However, there was considerable variation in what a need actually meant and how this was recorded even within areas (Hedderman et al., 2009). For example, while Area 1's database had fields for

recording substance abuse, information on this was not always completed on cases where records showed work on substance use had been conducted. In some cases, these fields were not completed but a substance misuse problem was recorded elsewhere in the case record. Even when the substance misuse fields were completed, the categories available did not distinguish the actual level of use (units of alcohol, type and quantity of drug) from the extent to which a service user defined themselves as having a problem. Thus, records showing 'problematic' use could include those who consumed a relatively small amount of alcohol or drugs but found this problematic (e.g. because they were trying to hold down a job or they had mental health problems) and exclude others who did not regard consuming very high quantities of illegal substances as problematic because it was such a routine and longstanding feature of their daily existence.

The lack of clear criteria about what constituted a serious or minor problem, and inconsistencies in record keeping may not have affected the help women received, as individual workers tended to know their clients very well, but this created major difficulties when trying to conduct a post-hoc evaluation which linked a need to assistance received and need-related outcome achieved.

This unstandardised method of assessing needs within areas also had implications for the expected relationship between needs and re-offending. In one instance (e.g. large amounts of substance use, but no need recorded) an increased likelihood of re-offending might be expected, but in the other (e.g. small amounts of substance use, and need recorded) it may not. Unfortunately, this differing interpretation of need was not only restricted to drugs and alcohol at one TW area, but was evident across TW areas and for all needs assessed (Hedderman et al., 2009).

In addition to variation within the TW areas, there was also evidence of considerable variation between TW areas in how information was collected. For example, one of the goals of TW was to reduce the number of children going into care and to increase the number of children returned from care. In order to assess the success of this goal, information would be required about how many dependents a woman had, but this was assessed differently at each TW site. Table 2.2 shows the percentage of women with dependents and the average age of these women by centre. A much larger proportion of women in Area 3 was recorded as having dependents compared to Areas 1 and 2. Given that women from all three areas were similar in age and there were no differences in referral policies concerning women with children, it seems likely that the higher number of women recorded as having dependents in Area 3 was an artefact of recording practice rather than a real difference.

**Table 2.2: Selected demographic characteristics of women referred to TW, by area<sup>9</sup>**

|                     | Area 1 | Area 2 | Area 3 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|
|                     | %      | %      | %      |
| Has dependent(s)    | 38     | 51     | 85     |
| Average age (years) | 35     | 32     | 33     |

The data quality issues described had three important consequences for the subsequent analyses:

- It was not possible to identify the number of women referred to TW, so it was not possible to conduct an intention-to-treat analysis.
- Because no consistent criteria was employed to judge the severity of a need combined with variations in recording of needs and support received, it was not possible to analyse the link between needs, support received and outcomes related to those needs.
- The reconviction analysis was restricted to those women who were referred to TW (but may not have received any support), and who had also committed an offence shortly before or after their referral.

**2.4 Interviewing local sentencers about their views of TW**

Interviews with local sentencers were undertaken to explore how much they valued TW and how far they used TW to divert women at risk of custody. Ten courts were approached and 20 sentencers from eight courts were interviewed individually or in groups as follows:

- 2 individual interviews with judges;
- 2 paired interviews with judges;
- 5 group discussions, involving 14 magistrates.

The sample was biased to those who knew most about TW because this was one of two explicit sampling criteria. The only other criterion was that those interviewed should have been working in the area since TW began.

<sup>9</sup> Complete demographic data was not available for all women referred to TW (see Figure 2.1) as a result the percentages reported in Table 2.2 do not relate to the overall number of women referred, rather to the subset of individuals for whom each data item was available.

One local Crown Court and one magistrates court declined to take part as sentencers did not know enough about TW to comment. Also, two of the judges who were interviewed explained that they had never heard of TW prior to receiving the interview request. They agreed to be interviewed in order to discuss the sentencing of women more generally and to find out about TW. A request for further information on the project was passed to TW following an interview with another judge. These responses were a research finding in that they indicated that, despite the work TW had put in to ensuring that those working in the criminal justice system were aware of them, their visibility at some courts was very low even after TW had been operating for three years.

All of those interviewed had many years sentencing experience. On average, the judges had 12 years experience (range 5–26 years) and the magistrates had 15 years (range 5–37, 1 unknown). An equal number of men and women, and one respondent from a Black or Ethnic Minority background, were interviewed.

Interviews were conducted around a topic guide rather than a fully structured questionnaire to ensure that all interviews covered the same range of issues while allowing interviewees to express their views without being constrained by a particular format. The magistrates' version of the topic guide is included in Appendix A. Slight differences were made to the version used with judges to reflect their somewhat different role. The results were analysed manually rather than using analytic software such as NVivo because of the small numbers and because the results were analysed thematically using the topic guide headings. To ensure anonymity, each respondent in the current report is referred to by a code J1 to J6 for judges and M1 to M14 for magistrates. The suffix M or F shows the sex of the respondent.

### 3. Descriptive analysis of the sample

This section presents the demographic characteristics of those recorded as referred to TW, and explores the subset of women recorded as having received support. The data presented includes those ‘at risk’ and offenders. However, given the issues that were previously discussed regarding the variation in how features were recorded, these findings should be interpreted with caution. That is, any differences identified between TW areas are as likely to be the consequence of recording practices as real area differences in the characteristics of women receiving help.

**Table 3.1: Demographic characteristics of women referred to TW, by area<sup>10</sup>**

|                                | Area 1 | Area 2 | Area 3 |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
|                                | %      | %      | %      |
| White ethnic background        | 93     | 87     | 94     |
| Living with partner            | n/a    | n/a    | 17     |
| Has dependent(s)               | 38     | 51     | 85     |
| Average age (years)            | 35     | 32     | 33     |
| Number of dependents (average) | 2      | 2      | 2      |

Table 3.1 provides basic demographic information on those referred to TW:

- It can be seen that most women referred to TW were in their early thirties and were White.
- Information about marital status was not available in the data held in Areas 1 and 2, but it was possible to determine that 17% of those in Area 3 were recorded as living with a partner.
- There appeared to be some variation in the percentage with dependents (with Area 3 having considerably more), but as discussed in the methodology section this may be a recording artefact.

<sup>10</sup> Complete demographic data was not available for all women referred to TW (see Figure 2.1): as a result the percentages reported in Table 3.1 do not relate to the overall number of women referred, rather to the subset of individuals for whom each data item was available.



Women were referred to TW from a variety of sources. These included (but were not limited to) Probation, Police, Courts, Prison, Housing agencies, Women’s clinics, and Health Service agencies. Some women self-referred. For ease of exposition referrals were classified into three categories: Criminal Justice Agencies (Probation, Police, etc.), Other Referral Agencies (housing, health) and self-referrals. Table 3.2 shows the prevalence of the different types of referrals by TW centre. Referrals from Criminal Justice Agencies made up the largest proportion, followed by Other Referral Agencies.

**Table 3.2: Referral source of women referred to TW, by area<sup>11</sup>**

|  | <b>Area 1</b> | <b>Area 2</b> | <b>Area 3</b> |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|  | %             | %             | %             |
| Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) referral | 51            | 54            | 55            |
| Self referral                          | 16            | 17            | 19            |
| Other agency referral                  | 32            | 28            | 26            |
| <b>Total (women referred) (N)</b>      | <b>1008</b>   | <b>1399</b>   | <b>716</b>    |

As only some of those who were referred to the TW centres were recorded as having received support,<sup>12</sup> the demographic characteristics of this group are considered separately (Table 3.3). Generally those who were recorded as having received support appeared to be similar to all those referred in terms of age and ethnicity. There were slight variations in the proportion with dependents (higher in Area 3, but lower in Areas 1 and 2) and a slightly higher average number of dependents compared to those referred.

<sup>11</sup> Percentages in this and subsequent tables do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

<sup>12</sup> It is possible that individuals received support but that this was not recorded in the records that were available.

**Table 3.3: Demographic characteristics of women supported by TW, by area**

|                                | Area 1     | Area 2     | Area 3     |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                                | % (n)      | % (n)      | % (n)      |
| White ethnic background        | 93 (515)   | 92 (331)   | 93 (164)   |
| Has dependent(s)               | 62 (343)   | 40 (144)   | 75 (132)   |
| Average age (years)            | 36         | 36         | 34         |
| Number of dependents (average) | 2          | 2          | 3          |
| <b>Total (women supported)</b> | <b>554</b> | <b>360</b> | <b>176</b> |

Table 3.4 shows the referral route for those recorded as having received support. There was little difference in the prevalence of referral route for those supported (compared to those referred) in Area 3. In the other areas, those who were supported were slightly less likely than all those referred to TW to have been referred by Criminal Justice Agencies and (Area 2 only) slightly more likely to be referred by other agencies. In Areas 1 and 2 a greater proportion of those supported were self-referred compared to the proportion of all referrals, perhaps indicating the importance of self-motivation for pursuing and subsequently receiving support.

**Table 3.4: Referral source of women supported by TW, by area**

|  | Area 1     | Area 2     | Area 3     |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
|  | %          | %          | %          |
| Criminal Justice Agency (CJA) referral | 49         | 43         | 54         |
| Self referral                          | 27         | 20         | 20         |
| Other agency referral                  | 24         | 38         | 26         |
| <b>Total (women supported) (N)</b>     | <b>342</b> | <b>504</b> | <b>142</b> |

It was possible to determine what kind of support was provided in some instances, but it was not possible to determine this for Area 3. In Areas 1 (49%) and 2 (20%) the most common form of support recorded was non-specific. This included counselling, photography, cooking, using the crèche, and arts and crafts. The next most common form of support was to address life skill needs (e.g. household maintenance) in Area 1 (37%) and Area 2 (6%). Some support was recorded as being offered for alcohol/drug needs (16% Area 1; 1% Area 2).

Those who were recorded as having received any support had, on average, done so on 39 separate occasions in Area 1 and 13 separate occasions in Area 2.<sup>13</sup>

As noted in the methodology section, the needs of the women were assessed and recorded in different ways in each area so caution should be taken when interpreting these results. The most prevalent need in Area 1 was classified as ‘other’ needs (this included current offending, antisocial behaviour, peer offending), followed by drug and alcohol needs. The most prevalent need in Area 2 was found to be education needs (e.g. would you like to take up a training course in the future?), followed by health and other needs. The most prevalent need in Area 3 was found to be life skill needs (needs related to personal well being), followed by health needs (not registered with either a GP or dentist).

### 3.1 The link between needs and support

One of the purposes of TW was to match an individual’s assessed needs with appropriate support, but as previously mentioned, the assessment and recording of needs and support were not standardised. Overall, 49% of those in Area 1 who had their needs assessed were recorded as having received some form of support (541/1093), as were 40% of those in Area 2 (330/818). In Area 3 this figure was 85% (176/205). Unfortunately, however, there was not a good match between the specific need assessed and the type of support provided. For example, Table 3.5 shows the relationship between individuals recorded as having a drug or alcohol need in Area 2 and receiving support for drugs or alcohol.

**Table 3.5: Correspondence between drug/alcohol need and support received, Area 2**

|  |     | Need identified for drug/alcohol misuse |                  |
|--|-----|---|------------------|
|  |     | No                                      | Yes              |
|  |     | % (n)                                   | % (n)            |
| Support received for drug/alcohol misuse | No  | 99 (483)                                | 97 (321)         |
|  | Yes | 1 (4)                                   | 3 (9)            |
| <b>Total (N)</b>                         |     | <b>100 (487)</b>                        | <b>100 (330)</b> |

<sup>13</sup> It is not possible to determine if these were discrete visits (i.e. attending two support sessions) or two instances of support received concurrently (i.e. using the crèche while attending a support session).

Taken at face value, the results suggest that 4 out of 487 (1%) individuals received support for drugs and alcohol when they were not assessed as having that need, and 9 out of 330 (3%) individuals received support when they were identified as having a drug and alcohol need. In Area 1 the corresponding figures for alcohol/drug need and support were 0.4% (individuals receiving support when assessed as not having a need) and 24% (individuals receiving support when need identified).

There was evidence of similar levels of mismatch between the other specific needs assessed (e.g. health needs) and the other specific support provided (e.g. support for health needs) for all TW centres. Given the issues previously discussed this mismatch likely reflects the non-standardised approach to recording needs and support rather than appropriate support not being provided.

## 4. Re-offending analysis

TW was aimed at both women offenders and those 'at risk' of offending; however, the re-offending analysis is restricted to those who were known offenders. The analysis compares the proven re-offending of those referred to TW who had an identifiable index offence near to their recorded date of referral to TW (n=660), and those from a comparable group commencing probation support (n=660). The re-offending analysis is based on data extracted from the PNC.

### 4.1 Propensity score matching

Propensity score matching (PSM) was selected by the Ministry of Justice as the best method to address the differences between those referred to TW and the comparison group. PSM involves using relevant information to predict the probability of being in one group as opposed to another, in this case TW vs. comparison group, using logistic regression. For a comparison of the sample characteristics of the unmatched intervention and comparison groups see Appendix B.

Propensity score matching was undertaken using demographic, criminal history and index offence variables. Only those variables that were significant were included in the model. For a full list of matching variables see Appendix C.

The model correctly predicted group membership at 80% overall. The model was not well specified in that information that might have influenced the selection for TW was not available (e.g. court of sentencing, proximity to TW centre). The area under the curve (AUC) of the receiver operator characteristic curve (ROC) was used as a way of testing the PSM model. The AUC is a measure that is unaffected by sample size and is generally accepted as the best measure of predictive efficiency of a risk score (Fergusson et al., 1977). The AUC is scored from 0.5 (prediction at chance level) to 1 (perfect prediction), and assesses how well the prediction score predicts at every possible cut off point. Most risk prediction devices predict future re-offending at about AUC = 0.75 levels (Farrington, Jolliffe and Johnstone, 2009). The AUC of the PSM model was 0.64.

Using the probability scores developed from the selected variables, individuals from the TW group were then matched on a nearest-neighbour one-to-one basis (without replacement) to those in the comparison group. The maximum distance between the matches (the calliper) was 0.05. This strategy enabled 660 TW individuals to be matched with 660 comparison individuals. For full details of the matched intervention and comparison groups see

Appendix D. The standardised mean difference (d) was used to assess the difference between the two groups. As a rule of thumb a d value of less than +/- .20 suggests a good match (e.g. Wermink et al., 2010).<sup>14</sup> All of the values except index offence robbery and other motoring offences were below this value, and given the number of comparisons (23) and the level (p<.05), this might have been the result of chance.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the matching process was successful at creating two groups (TW and comparison) similar on most of the measured demographic and criminal history variables available.

Table 4.1 shows the prevalence and frequency of proven re-offending for the two groups (TW and comparison) matched on the available demographic and criminal history variables. Of the 660 individuals who were in the TW group 233 (35.3%) re-offended within 12 months compared to 238 (36.0%) in the comparison group. This difference was not statistically significant. Also, the 233 individuals from the TW group committed an average of 3.2 proven offences compared to the average of 3.5 for those from the comparison group. Again, this difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that TW did not reduce the prevalence or frequency of proven re-offending of those referred to TW with a recent criminal record when compared to those commencing probation supervision.

**Table 4.1: Impact of TW on proven re-offending**

|                                  | One-year proven re-offending rate<br>% (n) | Average number proven re-offences per offender |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| TW group (N=660)                 | 35.3 (233)                                 | 3.2  |
| Matched comparison group (N=660) | 36.0 (238)                                 | 3.5  |

Table 4.2 shows the type of first proven re-offence for both the TW and the comparison groups. The results suggested that, after controlling for demographic and criminal history variables, the comparison group was significantly more likely to commit domestic burglary and the TW group was significantly more likely to commit public order offences. There were no other significant differences, although the TW women had a higher prevalence of other burglary, absconding, and criminal damage while the comparison group had a somewhat higher prevalence of fraud/forgery, handling stolen goods, and other motoring offences.

<sup>14</sup> d values that are negative are those in which the comparison group is higher (e.g. older, more previous offences, more likely to be convicted of absconding, criminal damage, etc.).

**Table 4.2 Type of first proven re-offence<sup>16</sup>**

|                                       | TW<br>(N=233) | Comparison<br>(N=238) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
|                                       | % (n)         | % (n)                 |
| Serious violence                      | 0.4 (1)       | 0 (0)                 |
| Violence                              | 7.7 (18)      | 11.3 (27)             |
| Robbery                               | 0.9 (2)       | 0.8 (2)               |
| Public order                          | 17.2 (40)     | 7.6** (18)            |
| Sexual                                | 0.4 (1)       | 0 (0)                 |
| Soliciting/prostitution               | 1.7 (4)       | 3.4 (8)               |
| Domestic burglary                     | 0 (0)         | 3.4** (8)             |
| Other burglary                        | 1.3 (3)       | 0.4 (1)               |
| Theft                                 | 46.4 (108)    | 52.1 (124)            |
| Handling                              | 0.4 (1)       | 0.8 (2)               |
| Fraud/forgery                         | 1.3 (3)       | 3.4 (8)               |
| Absconding or bail offences           | 3.4 (8)       | 2.1 (5)               |
| Taking and driving away               | 0.9 (2)       | 0 (0)                 |
| Other motoring offences               | 1.7 (4)       | 3.8 (9)               |
| Drink driving offences                | 0.9 (2)       | 0.8 (2)               |
| Criminal/malicious damage             | 5.2 (12)      | 2.9 (7)               |
| Drugs (import/export/prod)            | 0.9 (2)       | 0.8 (2)               |
| Drugs (possession/small scale supply) | 3.9 (9)       | 3.4 (8)               |
| Other                                 | 5.6 (13)      | 3.8 (9)               |

In order to test the robustness of the finding that TW had no statistically significant impact on the prevalence and frequency of proven re-offending for the subset of cases referred to TW and located on the PNC, the matching process was replicated for those within TW who were also under community supervision by the Probation Service following a court order. This was therefore a comparison of those on a community order plus TW to those on a community order alone.

<sup>15</sup> At the p<.05 level about 1 in 20 comparisons would be expected to be significant by chance alone.

<sup>16</sup> Statistically significant differences between the intervention and comparison groups are indicated in this and all subsequent tables using the following notation; \* p<.05, \*\*, p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001.

There were 262 individuals who were in TW and had received a community order for their index offence. Again, a propensity score model was developed using the available demographic and criminal history variables to predict the likelihood of being in TW. Only those variables that were significant were included in the model. The model was found to have an AUC of 0.64. It was possible to match all individuals from the TW group to a corresponding individual in the comparison group (n=262).

**Table 4.3: Impact of TW on proven re-offending among women on community orders**

|                                    | One-year proven re-offending rate<br>% (n) | Average number proven re-offences per offender |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Community order + TW group (N=262) | 35.9 (94)                                  | 3.1  |
| Matched comparison group (N=262)   | 32.1 (84)                                  | 3.0  |

Table 4.3 shows that neither the prevalence nor the frequency of proven re-offending was statistically significantly different when those who received a community order and were referred to TW were compared to those who received only a community order. These results suggested that referral to TW was not associated with a statistically significant reduction in the prevalence or frequency of proven re-offending when it accompanied a community order.

Arguably, neither the overall proven re-offending analysis nor the analysis restricted to those on community orders provided information about the impact of TW on later proven re-offending. This was because these analyses were based on those referred to TW rather than those necessarily supported by TW. However, only a very small proportion of those referred to TW were recorded as having received support (see Figure 2.1), and an even smaller proportion of those were located on the PNC (i.e. had been convicted of an offence around the time of referral to TW). Only 169 of the 666 individuals in the TW group who had index offences close to their referral data were recorded as having received support. A PSM method was employed to assess the impact of TW on proven re-offending for this group. The model developed using the available demographic and criminal history variables had an AUC of 0.66. All 169 individuals in the TW were matched with a member of the comparison group.



**Table 4.4: Impact of TW on proven re-offending among women receiving TW support**

|                                     | One-year proven re-offending rate<br>% (n) | Average number proven re-offences per offender |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| TW + recorded support group (N=169) | 30.2 (51)                                  | 3.0  |
| Matched comparison group (N=169)    | 31.4 (53)                                  | 3.3  |

Table 4.4 shows that neither the prevalence nor the frequency of proven re-offending of those who were recorded as receiving support from TW were statistically significantly different in comparison to those in the comparison group.

The results of the re-offending analyses suggested that there was no difference in the prevalence or frequency of proven re-offending among women referred to TW and comparable women who were supported by the Probation Service. However, the findings are open to interpretation. The fact that TW was generally attended on a voluntary basis suggests that there may be scope to divert women from community orders into schemes like TW. Alternatively, women may have been prioritised by high-needs as opposed to high-risk. That would be legitimate if TW was an intervention intended for socially excluded women including offenders but not if it was intended for women offenders who also had other social exclusion needs. As noted previously (Hedderman et al., 2008), this lack of clarity was an issue from the outset, and the distinction between socially excluded women and women offenders is important. Research has suggested that it is a common error when working with women offenders to equate a high level of need with a high-risk of re-offending (e.g. Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2000). This could have led to resources being allocated away from those at high risk of re-offending to those of a low risk of re-offending (but with a high number of needs).

The fact that only 666 (19%) of the 3,466 individuals recorded as being referred to TW were located on the PNC makes it difficult to generalise from this result. Although not all would be expected to have criminal records, had PNC numbers been recorded by the TW centres it is likely that a higher number of individuals would have been identified and subsequently included in the analysis. In combination with this, had support received been recorded more consistently it might have been possible to locate more than 169 individuals who both had an index offence and received support from TW.

Also, propensity score matching (PSM) is traditionally used to predict the conditional probability of being assigned to a particular treatment given a vector of observed covariates (Rosenbaum and Rubin, 1984). However, because the TW and comparison group only had PNC data in common it was not possible to include a number of potentially relevant variables. For example, recent research by Huebner et al. (2010) found that drug use and low education attainment were strongly and significantly related to re-offending by female offenders. It could be that those in the TW group had substantially higher levels of drug use and lower education than the comparison group, thus accounting for the null finding.

Even if record collecting at TW centres had been consistent and based on clear and standardised measures, the only way that it would have been possible to match on these variables would be to have had a comparison group where this information was available as well. In the future it would be useful to replicate these analyses including additional relevant variables from additional data sources such as OASys (where available) or other case management information (e.g. Delius).

## **5. Local sentencers' views and experiences of TW**

The magistrates interviewed in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside NOMS regions during the set-up phase in 2007 (Hedderman et al., 2008) doubted that TW would operate as an alternative to custody. In the current study six local judges and 14 magistrates were asked for their views on the visibility and value of TW, including how far they used it to divert women at risk of custody.

### **5.1 The visibility of TW and how this might be improved**

TW had a low profile at most courts. One magistrates court and one Crown Court centre refused to be interviewed on the grounds that they knew too little about TW to comment. Those who were familiar with TW were keen to see their colleagues made more aware of its benefits. They suggested that the most efficient and effective way to inform them about this, and other initiatives, was via the Probation Service whom they trusted to select useful options from what they viewed as a succession of short-lived voluntary sector projects of variable quality. A probation endorsement was most likely to lead to an intervention being considered and utilised.

TW was most visible and best understood in Community Justice Courts (CJC). As sentencers in CJsCs adopted a problem solving-approach, they were most comfortable with the idea of using options which did not fit straightforwardly on to the sentencing tariff. Those who had referred women to TW said they did not receive feedback about success and failure in individual cases unless the case came back for review or the referral had been made on adjournment. They were keen to receive such feedback on individual cases, preferably via probation. They were generally less keen on seeing aggregate success rates as this would not reflect their individual sentencing decisions but those of the court in general.

### **5.2 The value of TW**

The sentencers who were most familiar with TW thought its holistic, client-centred, and individually tailored approach were key features. They saw its focus on tackling the range of a woman's social and personal problems, including being victims of crime themselves, as central to addressing the underlying causes of offending and thus preventing future offending. The personal commitment of the staff and the fact that centres were 'women only' were also considered important. This matches the views previously expressed by sentencers during the set-up phase. (Hedderman et al., 2008) and Together Women's service users (Hedderman et al., 2011).

Where attendance at TW was not mandatory, sentencers' views were most divided. Some thought this would conflict with the client-centred ethos which was at its heart, thus enforced attendance would undermine its effectiveness. Others thought that making attendance enforceable might lead to some women benefiting from TW who might not initially attend voluntarily, so the end might justify the means.

### **5.3 Diversion from custody**

Only one judge interviewed described using TW on a number of occasions to divert women from custody. Here it was used as a specified activity and women could be breached for non-attendance. Two other judges had each used a referral to Together Women once when diverting a woman from custody. Because they did not think TW could be made a formal part of an order, or had not referred anyone to TW, the other judges and magistrates refuted the idea that TW had played any part in decisions to divert women from custody, although the fact that it was available as an optional extra when passing a community sentence was welcomed.

While mixing offenders and non-offenders may increase the range of services available, some sentencers saw this as problematic. They doubted the value of offering TW to women 'at risk' of offending, arguing that preventing someone from offending in the first place required a quite different approach to prevent re-offending. They were also concerned about how non-offenders might be affected by mixing with offenders; and they questioned the appropriateness of sentencing women to an option that was freely available to non-offenders. The latter was mentioned frequently by magistrates when explaining why TW did not influence them when diverting women from custody.

In sum, TW was considered to be a welcome development by most of the sentencers interviewed because they felt it focused on addressing women's social and personal problems. They expected it to reduce re-offending by dealing with its causes. However, some of the courts where TW was available had little or no knowledge of its existence prior to being interviewed. Also, the novelty of its approach meant that it did not fit comfortably on a given place in the sentence tariff. Being enforceable and being exclusively available for convicted offenders were seen as prerequisites for TW being employed more widely by sentencers. Even then, only judges and those working in Community Justice Courts were open to the idea that the availability of TW might influence a decision to divert a woman from custody. The fact that judges seemed to view the custody/community sentencing barrier as more permeable is interesting given that they routinely deal with more serious cases than magistrates.

In considering the representativeness of these views it is worth noting that only a small number of the sentencers in TW areas were interviewed, and the sample was selected to focus on those who were most familiar with TW. Given the limited sample size, the views expressed in this research may not be representative of sentencers more widely.

## **6. Lessons learned**

### **6.1 Specific lessons about TW**

It is hard to draw lessons from the quantitative analysis about the impact of TW because of the data quality issues encountered. These are discussed in the section below on general lessons about evaluation.

The interviews with sentencers raise some important issues about how community interventions need to be presented if they are to be used to divert from custody rather than being used only to supplement community interventions.

If sentencers are to be encouraged to divert women from custody, attendance at TW needs to be mandatory. This is problematic as it goes against the TW ethos of putting women in charge of their own futures. The alternative is that TW continues to be regarded as a low-tariff option.

Sentencers do not want nor remember presentations or material from individual projects because these come and go and are of variable quality. They expect the Probation Service to perform an intelligent customer role for them so they can be sure that any option they consider has passed a certain quality assurance threshold. This is a particularly important finding given the recent Green Paper's (Ministry of Justice, 2010) emphasis on encouraging new providers into the field of community interventions.

### **6.2 General lessons about evaluation**

TW was designed to be a locally planned and delivered intervention. This meant that local areas were free to create their own approaches to defining what constituted an 'offender' and how to define a woman 'at risk of offending; they were free to determine which needs they would seek to address and to devise their own measurements of what constituted a problem; and to decide what help to provide. However, TW was also designated a 'national demonstration project' by the Ministry of Justice, which was expected to model best practice in diverting women from custody and reducing their offending and re-offending. To this end they commissioned the University of Leicester to assess what information should be collected in order to assess these objectives. The action research (Hedderman et al., 2008) made it clear that a number of changes would be required if the demonstration element was to succeed. These included: agreeing a clear definition of what was meant by 'offender' and 'at risk'; agreeing objectively measurable definitions of needs to be addressed and related

outcomes; and keeping separate records of case workers' and service users' subjective judgements about how serious women's problems were, which needs should be prioritised and judgements about progress made. We also queried the fundamental nature of TW: was it primarily a social exclusion project or an intervention for offenders? The extent to which these issues were resolved determines whether it is reasonable to assess the impact of TW by measuring re-offending.

Although the initial study, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, was entitled 'Action research', which implied that the changes recommended would be made, this did not happen. Additional (unfunded) efforts were made by the University of Leicester to help the local projects to devise better outcome measures. The centres were very receptive to this assistance and subsequently tried to assiduously collect that information, but the University of Leicester had no further formal contact with the projects until commissioned to conduct the outcome feasibility study. The subsequent outcome feasibility report (Hedderman et al., 2009) reiterated many of the initial concerns and provided examples of the sorts of problems any evaluation would encounter. The current very narrow evaluation of TW is a consequence of earlier findings not being acted upon. This is an important lesson for future evaluations as the current government has expressed a desire to encourage a localised approach to developing interventions with offenders; and because the 'payment by results' initiatives will require a much clearer understanding of what interventions are designed to achieve a much more consistent measurement of needs, interventions and impact.

As a result of data limitations this evaluation was limited to assessing the impact of TW through the measurement of proven re-offending. However, TW offered offenders and non offenders a broad range of services, only some of which appeared to have a clear theoretical basis to support their potential to reduce re-offending. Services offered included mentoring, general counselling (i.e. talking through an issue with a key worker), attending an appointment to another agency, self-esteem courses, support in tackling domestic violence, debt advice, and support in finding training and employment. Service users could also receive support from partner agencies to which they were referred by TW. Given the range of services offered it is questionable whether TW can be appropriately evaluated using only official measures of proven re-offending. Again, this raises issues around what interventions are designed to achieve, and the expected impact which will require thoughtful consideration with the emergence of 'payment by results' initiatives.

In the future, the early engagement of researchers is of critical importance if the value of any intervention is to be demonstrated. In this instance, by the time advice was sought on TW

data requirements, decisions about what information to collect had already been made locally by centre managers who were highly skilled in delivery but untrained in devising monitoring systems on which to base a national evaluation.

Involving researchers who understand the field will inform strategies for gathering information that will be needed further down the line (such as PNC data), as well as agreeing what style and type of data analysis is feasible and will be most informative, and what ethical issues are likely to arise in the course of the evaluation.

Any evaluation depends on the reliability and validity of the data so the involvement of researchers in the management of data collection, including data sampling and data audit, over the duration of an evaluation will produce better quality data than if the data gathering is left unattended.

Similarly, the use of consistent, and preferably standardised, assessment tools to measure need and outcome is important, not just for evaluation purposes, but for accurate case management records. Beyond evaluation, the use of standardised measures allows for clear comparison between areas and also with other populations. On a practice level it would also provide TW with clear information that could be disseminated to courts and other local agencies. At first sight, this suggestion may seem to conflict with the move towards local autonomy. In fact, such standardisation would relieve local projects from wasting resources (i.e. collecting information that would not be useful for evaluation) and even increase their chances of making successful bids for funding, by providing potential funders with stronger evidence on needs profiles and local impact.



## 7. Conclusions

The data that was available from TW centres was not sufficiently robust to allow firm conclusions about the impact of TW on later proven re-offending or other desirable social exclusion outcomes (e.g. reduced drug/alcohol use). This does not mean that these projects were not successful at achieving these, but it does mean that they can not be demonstrated with the data that was recorded by the TW centres and with PNC data. These data limitations were the focus of two previous reports funded by Ministry of Justice (Hedderman et al., 2008; Hedderman et al., 2009).

Using a select sub-group of those recorded as 'referred to TW and identified on the PNC', the results suggested that there was no difference in the prevalence or frequency of proven re-offending among women referred to TW and comparable women who were supported by the Probation Service. This was true when the analysis was restricted to those from TW on community orders, and also when restricted to the very small group recorded as having received TW support.

Generally TW had a low profile amongst sentencers, but those who were aware of it recognised that it filled an important gap in local services. However, TW was reported to be rarely used to divert from custody because it mixed offenders and non-offenders and because attendance was rarely made mandatory.

In future projects it is essential that greater forethought is put into developing a shared understanding of project objectives and measurement for assessing outcomes. Trained evaluators should be involved at the initial planning stages to assist in developing the measurement tools and specifying the data monitoring requirements. This will be essential for projects funded under the payment by results method.

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# Appendix A

## Magistrates interviews topic guide

### Introduction

- Our status as independent researchers from University of Leicester
- Reasons for the research – to understand how TWP has been used by sentencers
- Confidentiality of interviews, use of tape recorder, nothing said in interview will be attributed
- Pass over information sheet and ask for consent, including consent to be recorded.

### Who they are

- How long has each interviewee been a magistrate?
- Have they been sentencers at this court throughout the life of TWP (2006/7)?
- When did they become aware of TWP? How did this happen?

### Women offenders

- How often would you say you dealt with women offenders (every time they sit, very rarely)?
- Do you have any sense that women have distinctive needs or do you think that they are broadly similar to those of men? What are their needs from your perspective?
- It has been suggested that women are more troubled than troublesome? Is that helpful, simplistic or just as true for men?
- How often would you say that you dealt with women who were at risk of custody?
- What are the main factors you consider when contemplating imposing custody? Do these differ in any way when the offender is a woman?

### The value of TWP

- What are its primary objectives?

- Which of these objectives is the most important in your view? Prompt at this stage if only some aims are mentioned to ensure interviewee has considered its role in diverting from the criminal justice system, helping 'at risk' and 'known' offenders, diverting from prison and meeting needs.
- What (if anything) has TWP added which is distinctive to the local response to women who offend?
- Can you explain how TWP is intended to make a difference to the chance of a woman offending?
- What is your sense of who has been most helped by TWP?
- Is there anyone that TWP has proved unsuitable for?

### **Place on the sentencing tariff**

- How does the possibility of using TWP arise when sentencing? Is it mainly through pre-sentence reports (PSRs)? Any other ways?
- What information are you told about the help TWP provides? Is there any additional information it would be helpful to have?
- How can women best be encouraged to attend? What should happen if they don't attend?
- Can you describe how you decide whether it is necessary to make attendance at TWP a condition of a community order (with the threat of breach) rather than simply recommending a referral?
- Have you ever used a referral to TWP as part of a Suspended Sentence Order (SSO)? If so, in what sorts of circumstances? If not, why not?
- What are/would be the advantages and disadvantages of making TWP enforceable as part of a court order for those referred by criminal justice partners?
- Has the possibility of attendance at TWP ever led you to decide against using custody? If so, in what sorts of circumstances? If not, why not?

- Is there any way in which TWP could be developed which would encourage you to use it more often to divert women from custody?

***Interviewer instruction: You must only ask the next two questions after the previous ones under this heading to guard against biasing replies.***

- Magistrates who were interviewed as TWP was beginning said that, as custody was a sentence of last resort, they would not use TWP as an alternative to custody. Does that represent your views? If not, how do your views differ?
- Does the fact that TWP can be used pre-court as well as at court preclude its use as an alternative to custody?

### **Future provision**

- Do you ever see a woman in court and think, if only 'X' was available, she needn't go to prison? What would 'X' be?
- Do you receive any formal feedback on the success (or otherwise) about the women who attend TWP? If so, what form does this take and what general picture does it present? If not, would that be something you would appreciate? What information and in what form/frequency?
- If TWP has no impact on reconviction rates will it have been a waste of time and money?
- Would something similar to TWP work for men? If so, why? If not, why not?

**Is there anything you are expecting me to ask which I haven't asked?**

**Do you have any questions?**

***Interviewer instruction: If an interviewee mentions a policy or other document, ask them for a copy and chase afterwards.***

## Appendix B

### Comparison of unmatched sample characteristics

Using criminal history data drawn from the PNC, the features of the two unmatched samples (TW and comparison group) were compared. The results suggested that the TW sample was similar in age (about 33) and ethnicity (approx. 87% White) to that of the comparison group. Also, although the two samples had a similar age at first offence, there was evidence that those from TW had a more extensive criminal history than the comparison group. This included significantly more previous offences, previous conviction occasions and previous incarcerations. The TW group also scored significantly higher on the Copas score which is a measure of the speed of accruing convictions.

Those in TW were significantly less likely than those in the comparison group to have index offences for drink-driving, fraud/forgery, other motoring offences, and violence, but were significantly more likely to have public order offences, prostitution, and theft as an index offence. Overall, this suggests that:

- Generally, those who were referred to TW (and had an index offence close in time to their referral) had a higher risk of re-offending than a general group of women commencing probation (the comparison group).
- A statistical method was required to equate the two groups so that a valid comparison of the impact of TW could be made.

**Table B1. Demographic features of the sample before matching**

|                                | TW<br>(N=666)  | Comparison<br>(N=2594) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
|                                | <i>M (sd)</i>  | <i>M (sd)</i>          |
| Average age at commencement    | 33.2 (9.6)     | (10.2)                 |
| Ethnicity                      | % ( <i>n</i> ) | % ( <i>n</i> )         |
| White                          | 90 (598)       | 87 (2267)              |
| Black                          | 5 (31)         | 5 (132)                |
| Asian, Chinese, Middle Eastern | 2 (10)         | 2 (53)                 |
| Unknown                        | 4 (27)         | 6 (142)                |
| Total                          | 100 (666)      | 100 (2594)             |

**Table B2: Criminal history for TW and comparison groups before matching**

|   | TW<br>(N=666)  | Comparison<br>(N=2594) |
|---|----------------|------------------------|
|   | <i>M (sd)</i>  | <i>M (sd)</i>          |
| Age at first offence                    | 23.0 (9.7)     | 23.9 (10.5) +          |
| Number of previous offences             | 19.0 (32.5)    | 13.6 (26.8)***         |
| Number of previous conviction occasions | 8.3 (13.8)     | 6.2 (10.6)***          |
| Number of previous incarcerations       | 1.5 (3.7)      | 1.0 (3.1)***           |
| Copas Score                             | (-1.23) (0.91) | (-1.45) (0.87)***      |

+ N=2593 for this variable only

\* p<.05, \*\* = p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001



**Table B3: Index offences for TW and comparison groups before matching**

|                                       | <b>TW<br/>(N=666)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>(N=2594)</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
|                                       | <i>% (n)</i>          | <i>% (n)</i>                   |
| Serious violence                      | 2 (13)                | 1.6 (42)                       |
| Violence                              | 14.3 (95)             | 22.9*** (594)                  |
| Robbery                               | 0.5 (33)              | 0.3 (78)                       |
| Public order                          | 8.4 (56)              | 4.7*** (122)                   |
| Sexual                                | 0.2 (13)              | 0.1 (3)                        |
| Sexual (child)                        | 0 (0)                 | 0 (0)                          |
| Soliciting/prostitution               | 1.1 (7)               | 0.2** (52)                     |
| Domestic burglary                     | 0.9 (6)               | 1.2 (31)                       |
| Other burglary                        | 0.2 (1)               | 0.5 (13)                       |
| Theft                                 | 35.3 (235)            | 24.6*** (638)                  |
| Handling                              | 1.4 (9)               | 1.9 (49)                       |
| Fraud/forgery                         | 8.7 (58)              | 13.9*** (361)                  |
| Absconding or bail offences           | 3.8 (25)              | 3 (78)                         |
| Taking and driving away               | 0.9 (60)              | 1 (26)                         |
| Theft from a vehicle                  | 0 (0)                 | 0.1 (3)                        |
| Other motoring offences               | 1.2 (8)               | 2.9** (75)                     |
| Drink driving offences                | 3.9 (26)              | 8.1*** (210)                   |
| Criminal/malicious damage             | 2.9 (19)              | 2 (52)                         |
| Drugs (import/export/prod)            | 0.8 (5)               | 1.1 (29)                       |
| Drugs (possession/small scale supply) | 6 (40)                | 3.5** (91)                     |
| Other                                 | 8 (53)                | 6.2 (161)                      |

\*p<.05, \*\* = p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

There was considerable difference between those in TW and those in the comparison groups in terms of their disposals for their index offence. Those in TW were significantly more likely to receive conditional discharges, fines, immediate custody and 'other' disposals.

Comparison individuals were significantly more likely to receive community orders. Including disposal in the PSM improved the model, but this was not considered a defensible variable to include. This is because it was conceivable that the 'other' disposals received by those in TW were in fact being referred to TW. This would make the inclusion of disposal tautological.

## Appendix C

### Matching variables

**Table C.1 Variables related to referral to TW**

|   | B       | S.E.    | sig.   | Exp (B) |
|---|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| <b><i>Criminal history</i></b>                    |         |         |        |         |
| Age   | 0.053   | 0.036   | 0.141  | 1.054   |
| Age (squared)                                     | -0.001  | 0.001   | 0.298  | 0.999   |
| Age at first offence                              | 0.017   | 0.029   | 0.565  | 1.017   |
| Age at first offence (squared)                    | 0       | 0       | 0.494  | 1       |
| Number of previous offences                       | 0.011   | 0.01    | 0.253  | 1.011   |
| Number of previous offences (squared)             | 0       | 0       | 0.453  | 1       |
| Number of previous conviction occasions           | -0.079  | 0.025   | 0.002  | 0.924   |
| Number of previous conviction occasions (squared) | 0.001   | 0       | 0.004  | 1.001   |
| Number of previous custodial sentences            | 0.083   | 0.046   | 0.073  | 1.087   |
| Number of previous custodial sentences (squared)  | -0.003  | 0.002   | 0.148  | 0.997   |
| Copas rate  | 0.448   | 0.120   | .0001  | 1.567   |
| <b><i>Index offence</i></b>                       |         |         |        |         |
| Serious Violence                                  | 0.785   | 0.34    | 0.021  | 2.191   |
| Robbery   | 0.725   | 0.68    | 0.286  | 2.064   |
| Public order                                      | 1.054   | 0.198   | 0.0001 | 2.868   |
| Sexual  | 1.199   | 1.237   | 0.332  | 3.318   |
| Soliciting/prostitution                           | 2.177   | 0.604   | 0.0001 | 8.817   |
| Domestic burglary                                 | 0.111   | 0.461   | 0.809  | 1.118   |
| Other burglary                                    | -0.997  | 1.047   | 0.341  | 0.369   |
| Theft   | 0.72    | 0.142   | 0.0001 | 2.054   |
| Handling  | 0.024   | 0.383   | 0.95   | 1.024   |
| Fraud/forgery                                     | 0.109   | 0.194   | 0.575  | 1.115   |
| Absconding or bail offences                       | 0.615   | 0.259   | 0.017  | 1.85    |
| Taking and driving away                           | 0.467   | 0.471   | 0.321  | 1.595   |
| Theft from a vehicle                              | -19.769 | 23076.3 | 0.999  | 0       |
| Other motoring offences                           | -0.46   | 0.389   | 0.238  | 0.631   |
| Drink driving offences                            | -0.225  | 0.242   | 0.353  | 0.799   |

|                                       | B      | S.E.  | sig.   | Exp (B) |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| Criminal/malicious damage             | 0.802  | 0.291 | 0.006  | 2.229   |
| Drugs (import/export/prod)            | 0.016  | 0.499 | 0.974  | 1.016   |
| Drugs (possession/small scale supply) | 0.939  | 0.222 | 0.0001 | 2.558   |
| Other                                 | 0.743  | 0.203 | 0.0001 | 2.102   |
| <b><i>Ethnicity</i></b>               |        |       |        |         |
| Black                                 | 0.039  | 0.246 | 0.872  | 1.04    |
| Asian                                 | -0.078 | 0.211 | 0.711  | 0.925   |
| Other                                 | -0.347 | 0.357 | 0.331  | 0.707   |
| Constant                              | -2.252 | 0.498 | 0.0001 | 0.105   |

## Appendix D

### Comparison of matched sample characteristics

**Table D1: Criminal History for TW and comparison groups post-matching**

|   | <b>TW<br/>(N=660)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>(N=660)</b> | <b>d</b> |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
|   | <i>M (sd)</i>         | <i>M (sd)</i>                 |          |
| Age at first offence                    | 23.1 (9.8)            | 23.0 (9.6)                    | .01      |
| Number of previous offences             | 18.1 (30.2)           | 19.0 (31.5)                   | -.03     |
| Number of previous conviction occasions | 7.8 (11.1)            | 8.1 (11.9)                    | -.03     |
| Number of previous incarcerations       | 1.5 (3.4)             | 1.6 (3.7)                     | -.03     |
| Copas score                             | (-1.25) (.89)         | (-1.23) (.89)                 | -.02     |

\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table D2: Index offences for TW and comparison groups post-matching**

|                             | <b>TW<br/>(N=660)</b> | <b>Comparison<br/>(N=660)</b> | <b>d</b> |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
|                             | <i>% (n)</i>          | <i>% (n)</i>                  |          |
| Serious Violence            | 2.0 (13)              | 1.8 (12)                      | 0.04     |
| Violence                    | 14.4 (95)             | 14.2 (94)                     | 0.01     |
| Robbery                     | 0.5 (3)               | 0.3 (2)                       | 0.22     |
| Public order                | 8.2 (54)              | 7.1 (47)                      | 0.08     |
| Sexual                      | 0.2 (1)               | 0 (0)                         | 0        |
| Soliciting/prostitution     | 0.9 (6)               | 0.8 (5)                       | 0.01     |
| Domestic burglary           | 0.9 (6)               | 0.9 (6)                       | 0        |
| Other burglary              | 0.2 (1)               | 0.2 (1)                       | 0        |
| Theft                       | 35.5 (234)            | 36.4 (240)                    | -0.02    |
| Handling                    | 1.4 (9)               | 1.8 (12)                      | -0.16    |
| Fraud/forgery               | 8.8 (58)              | 7.7 (51)                      | 0.08     |
| Absconding or bail offences | 3.6 (24)              | 3.9 (26)                      | -0.05    |
| Taking and driving away     | 0.9 (6)               | 0.9 (6)                       | 0        |
| Other motoring offences     | 1.2 (8)               | 1.8 (12)                      | -0.23    |
| Drink driving offences      | 3.9 (26)              | 3.8 (25)                      | 0.02     |

|                                       | <b>TW</b>      | <b>Comparison</b> | <b>d</b> |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------|
|                                       | <b>(N=660)</b> | <b>(N=660)</b>    |          |
| Criminal/malicious damage             | 2.9 (19)       | 3.2 (21)          | -0.06    |
| Drugs (import/export/prod)            | 0.8 (5)        | 0.9 (6)           | -0.10    |
| Drugs (possession/small scale supply) | 6.1 (40)       | 5.9 (39)          | 0.01     |
| Other                                 | 7.9 (52)       | 8.3 (55)          | -0.03    |

\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## **Ministry of Justice Research Series 11/11**

### **Re-offending analysis of women offenders referred to Together Women (TW) and the scope to divert from custody**

Together Women was a community-based holistic intervention aimed at socially excluded women who were 'offenders' (with a recent or past criminal conviction) or 'at risk' of offending, although neither category was prescriptively defined. Issues about data monitoring, the definitions of needs and outcomes which were highlighted in previous reports continued to hamper a robust evaluation of TW meaning only a limited quantitative assessment of the impact of TW could be undertaken. The results suggested that there was no difference in the prevalence or frequency of proven re-offending among women referred to TW and comparable women who were supported by the Probation Service. These findings should be interpreted cautiously given the limited number of TW service users identified (as a proportion of those referred), the limited number of TW service users recorded as having received support from TW, and the reliance on criminal records data to equate the TW and comparison group. Interviews with sentencers, particularly magistrates, suggested that while most considered TW to be a useful supplement to the range of non-custodial options, its availability rarely influenced the decision to divert from custody. There was some evidence that this could change if TW was used as a specified activity on a community order. However, some sentencers thought this would undermine the essential TW ethos of empowering women to take control of their lives.

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