



WRC Case Study: Partnerships

Interview with Rokaiya Khan, CEO, Together Women Project , and the Together Women Project Management Team

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About Together Women Project

The Together Women Project, Yorkshire Humberside (TWP) was established in 2006 as a government demonstration project to provide holistic support for women ex offenders and those at risk of offending. Importantly, TWP services were gender specific and the centres would operate as 'one stop shops'.

There are TWP centres in Leeds, Bradford, Doncaster, and outreach posts in Keighley and based at New Hall Prison. New centres in Sheffield and Hull were opened in April 2010 and two new outreach services have recently been opened in Barnsley and Rotherham.

Women can access advice in relation to health, education and training, housing, substance misuse, domestic violence, finance and family issues. All the centres provide crèche facilities so that customers can focus on the issues they need to address while their children are in a safe environment.

TWP was originally delivered by a consortium of voluntary sector agencies and in April 2009 became an independent charity.

How they got to this position

The original consortium secured funding from the Ministry of Justice as part of the implementation of the recommendations in the Corston Report. The consortium was made up of a five different charities each with a specific area of expertise. These were:

- Foundation Housing (lead agency) which specialises in supporting offenders particularly in relation to housing
- Doncaster Young Womens Centre Association (YWCA) which specialises in supporting vulnerable women
- Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities (DISC) which specialises in providing education and training
- Touchstone which specialises in providing support in relation to mental health issues
- Shelter which specialises in providing support in relation to housing, particularly upon release from prison.

The partnership approach brought together a broad spectrum of skills, experience and services to deliver the TWP government demonstration project. The range of expertise that the consortium was able to offer was critical to delivering the one stop shop service to women offenders.

Since becoming an independent charity in April 2009, TWP continues to deliver a service which enables women offenders and women at risk of offending to tackle all of their needs under one roof.

TWP continues to work in partnership with a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies such as Probation, Police, Courts, Prisons, Social Services, Health Services and agencies which provide specialist support in relation to domestic violence, substance misuse, housing, education and training. TWP works in partnership with all these agencies to deliver high quality outcomes for women.

TWP believes its success is due to a number of factors which include:

- Identification of TWP 'champions' within key partner agencies, particularly probation and the police to establish clear referral routes and information sharing protocols and to coordinate the effective delivery of services.
- TWP was able to demonstrate the positive impact of this unique service to key stakeholders such as Probation. TWP was able to show that the service achieved better outcomes for women offenders such as increased compliance rates on community orders, reduction in reoffending, and improved engagement with a woman's community.
- TWP meets its contractual targets and enables other organisations such as Probation to meet theirs- the partnership is a mutually beneficial arrangement.
- Sharing of 'best practice' with all strategic and operational partner agencies.
- TWP worked closely with senior commissioners and strategic leads within the local authority to demonstrate the importance of providing gender specific support to women offenders. As a result TWP received a great deal of support and 'buy in' from these key decision makers.
- National and regional recognition through being awarded the National Criminal Justice Award, the Howard League for Penal Reform Community Award, and the Partners of Prisoners Crystal Heart Award.

Challenges faced and lessons learnt

The Women's Sector has not historically worked closely with the criminal justice system (CJS). The ideological frameworks are very different. However, the unique selling point for TWP is the close partnership between a voluntary organisation and statutory agencies within the criminal justice system. TWP has been able to provide an inclusive, women centred service in partnership with probation, the police, prisons and the courts. Developing these partnerships is the key to TWP's success.

TWP needs to be able to demonstrate that the partnership between the statutory and the voluntary sector can work effectively. Each organisation that TWP works in partnership with has different communication systems, decision making processes and organisational culture. All of these need to be understood and taken into account. Having clear information sharing protocols is very important.

Data gathering system established in the pilot phase had limitations – so TWP developed their own database to ensure that they are were collecting the right information to demonstrate impact and ‘added value’.

“Must Do’s” for good partnerships

- Have a clear idea about aims and objectives for the partnership
- Have clear roles and responsibilities
- Identify where potential conflicts of interest might be
- Have written protocols/ agreements especially about sharing information
- Keep everyone in the organisation informed
- Collect and collate data that demonstrates you can add value and achieve your aims and objectives
- Maintain relationships- involve partners in celebration of success/ keep communication lines open/ keep partners updated and informed

Future Plans

The project was established with generous funding from the Ministry of Justice. In the current economic and political climate, the same level of funding is no longer available. While the initial levels of funding enabled important systems to be established such as the database, the challenge now is to continue to deliver the service with less funding yet maintaining the same quality of service.