

# Women's Lives Leeds Operational Learning

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## Executive Summary

The Women's Lives Leeds (WLL) Project was borne out of partnership arrangements consisting of eleven women's centred organisations that were successful in being funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BLF). WLL has developed significantly since then (May 2016) in establishing front line services that aimed to meet the needs of vulnerable women and girls who have multiple and complex needs in the city, which until then had been identified as a gap in provision.

The organisations, partners and staff have credibly worked together to develop a concept that was written on paper, into an operational service that has been delivered since February 2017. The WLL Partnership agreed it would be useful to take stock and review service delivery to capture the learning to date. (February 2018).

## Purpose of this report

This report presents the learning gained from the completion of a first year review and focussed on the Complex Needs Service (CNS), which offers one to one intensive support over a prolonged period of time, the Community Development Service (CDS), offering, regular drop in and signposting, awareness raising and group capacity building support; including policies, procedures and learning of these from the partnership.

## Methodology

An on-line survey, followed by peer led one to one interviews and focus group conversations that involved frontline delivery staff, Line Managers and Chief Officers/Directors took place. Information taken from an External Evaluation report (completed by Leeds Beckett University) and the Projects achievement in gaining "Foundation Level" of the "Improving Quality", Quality Assurance scheme has been used to shape this learning too.

## Learning and action taken

The emerging learning from the review has been split into the following areas;

- Project Delivery Model
- The Complex Needs Service
- The Community Development Service
- Communications, including the engagement of, service users, staff and line managers

## Project Delivery Model

One of the major successes and learning that the project can celebrate is it's unique delivery model. Having a model that pulls the partnership together has been crucial in supporting service delivery and partnership development.

***"The partnership is extremely focussed on inclusiveness and activity and this has been evidenced in partnership developments to date. These strong core values run through the veins of all that the partnership delivers and represents and are considered in the design of all partnership activity".(Chief Officer)***

It is through a model that is co-ordinated by a central team and delivered by frontline staff based with partners which has demonstrated its value. The model places staff that are either seconded or employed by host organisations, who provide the specialist provision of their particular role. Each of the Complex Needs Workers have a particular specialism and by having them based within an organisation that delivers that Women's Lives Leeds Operational Learning

service, they are able to draw from a wider range of skills and experiences, that would not have been available if they were all centrally located in one team at the same location. For example : WLL has a specialist Mental Health Complex Needs Worker, who is employed by and based at Women's Counselling Therapy Service, who are an organisation who have over 40yrs experience in supporting women who have mental health needs.

***"I think working within their own specialisms is extremely important but this is also where issues can arise as it does mean that there needs to be acknowledgement that different client groups can require very different approaches".(Chief Officer)***

We have gained considerable learning whilst developing a "concept" in the form of a bid to the Big Lottery in to reality and service delivery. We have learnt that the proposed targets (set out within the initial bid) in terms of number of cases that workers could carry to be effective was too high. We have learnt that to be effective in providing that one to one intensive support as projected, the numbers of cases carried by each worker, depends on the complexity of each case and that they are not all the same. We quickly changed the number of cases to reflect this complexity and workers now carry a range of caseloads that reflect the complexity of the service users.

***"Due to the broad spectrum of complexity that workers are working with, acknowledgement of this helps as a one size fits all approach across such different services is quite difficult".(line manager)***

It is also through this design to delivery stage that we quickly learnt that the Community Development Service, was not quite right and it needed to be revisited, which is covered in the Community Development Section.

It was whilst going through the processes of achieving foundation level of "Improving Quality" (Quality Assurance scheme), which involved an initial self assessment followed by an external independent assessment, we learnt that although there is a lot of paperwork, the project has established good foundations and created the relevant policies and procedures, however once in to service delivery we have also learnt that these needed to be changed to be more concise and effective. (See Complex Needs Service and Community Engagement sections)

## **Complex Needs Service**

The Complex Needs Service is offering a unique service for the city, that is making a difference, yet we have learnt that some of the policies and procedures and initial targets set, were too high, cumbersome or could be streamlined or worded better to be more efficient.

We have learnt that some of the documents required by staff to complete in terms of supporting women, were time consuming, which includes the referral form and process and through conversations with staff and line managers we have now refreshed and refined those to help make the service more effective. We also saw that the established monitoring and evaluation documentation and the "Outcomes Monitoring" didn't use language that service users understood, so we changed it by asking service users what would be better to use.

***"Due to the complexities of the roles and the women/girls that are being supported, yes the paperwork is essential and appropriate but there is quite a lot for staff to do. The referral form has changed on numerous occasions, which has helped staff and the allocation process"(line manager)***

Another point of learning for the project from design to delivery was the omission of "activity" to support the development of peer evaluators once women were exiting the service. We have taken that learning and are now implementing a Peer Development Group, which is designed on a short term basis to equip women with

confidence and self esteem skills, signpost them to other services, but as it's primary focus to support those who are interested in finding out more about "giving back" through peer evaluation by attending sessions with the central team to discuss opportunities to stay involved with the project.

## Community Development Service

The Community Development Service achieved its projected outcomes in its first year, yet we learnt that it needed to change the way it operates to reflect an ever evolving city, whose communities and their needs continually change. We learnt that as the project moves forward and to ensure WLL continually meets those needs and reaches out to those smaller minority communities, a service redesign was required. A redesigned, renamed "Community Engagement Service" has now been implemented, which is less restrictive in terms of delivery and based more on the skills of the team (similarly to the Complex Needs Service) and on community needs.

***"Everyone has worked hard to make the service effective but the area wedges have created red tape between workers and, in my opinion, the service would be more effective if CDW staff worked together to compliment each other's areas of expertise. Maybe peoples roles can be changed to better suit the needs of the project; this may include having less CDW's and having staff dedicated to outreach work?"(staff)***

For example: The Community Engagement Service no longer uses a wedge based delivery model and now has a city wide strategy and plan, which all staff deliver. It is now designed where staff skills are matched to and they lead on elements, which limits duplication and delivers consistency in a more cohesive way.

## Communications, including the engagement of staff and line managers

Unsurprisingly better and more inclusive communication has been a large area of learning. We quickly learnt from service users, how much they would like to get involved and the importance of having support/accessibility mechanisms in place. There is now funding to support full engagement of services users, who have accessibility needs (transport, childcare or interpreters).

We also learnt that although we were fully involving service users in all elements of the project and had many positive examples to share; that there was an untapped resource of line managers (those who provide the day to day support/supervision at host organisations of staff) and staff who have knowledge and experience that they actually wanted to share and get involved more.

***"using the experience of the host organisation more in those processes"(line manager)***

Internal processes and meetings have changed to be more open to include them, which especially when allocating referrals has been invaluable. We learnt that internally communication needed to be better, so regular full team meetings where both Community Development, Complex Needs workers and line managers meet, share learning, provide mutual support and have the opportunity to shape the project have been established.

***"I think there is lots to celebrate. "I think to say this has been our first year, which has been a massive learning curve for all, the service has done really exceptionally well and I feel positive about being a team member. I anticipate that now we are all more familiar with our roles, procedures, etc that the next year will be even more successful in terms of how many women we support and what positive outcomes we are able to support them to achieve"(Chief Officer).***