

# **The Re-Unite Project**

## **Early Development Phase**

### *Evaluation Report*

**February 2010**

*Dr Loraine Gelsthorpe and Dr Gilly Sharpe*  
Institute of Criminology  
University of Cambridge

#### **Acknowledgements**

We are most grateful to Jenny Roberts, Dr Judy Renshaw, Dr Allison Morris, Dr Sarah Tait, *Commonweal Housing*, *Housing for Women*, and *Women in Prison* for their important contributions to the evaluation, and to Joanne Garner for her general help and support in relation to the project. Most of all, we are grateful to the service users and their children who kindly agreed to let us intrude upon their time in a context where they had (and have) other more pressing matters on their minds.

## **Preface**

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

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**The Re-Unite Project**  
**Early Development Phase**  
***Evaluation Report***  
**January 2010**

## **1. The Origins of the Re-Unite Project**

The Re-Unite project stems from a partnership between *Commonweal Housing* (*Commonweal*), *Housing for Women (HfW)* and *Women in Prison (WIP)*. The aim of the Re-Unite project is to provide housing and support for women and their children who might otherwise be homeless upon the mothers' release from prison. This is an exciting and innovative initiative which fills a gap long since identified by prison and probation managers, third sector providers, and offenders and ex-offenders themselves.

*Commonweal Housing* is a registered charity which creates housing projects that incorporate bespoke services for occupiers experiencing social injustice in order to demonstrate how these injustices can be compassionately resolved and also provide an acceptable social return on investment (SROI). The charity provides the housing for such projects, which is specifically procured for each project to ensure that properties exactly meet the needs of the client group. In 2007, around £2 million and in 2008, £1.5million was allocated for such projects.

*Commonweal Housing* has, to date, been funded by Grove End Housing Association, and chooses specialist partners to deliver bespoke support services aimed to match the identified needs of people suffering social injustice. *Commonweal* commits to promoting a project for up to ten years so it can be developed to its full potential. One distinctive feature of *Commonweal Housing* is the willingness (and both the material and social capital) to take risks in creating partnerships with other organisations in order to address issues relating to social justice. As the Director of *Commonweal Housing* put it: '*Commonweal* is a vehicle that aims to show the importance of good stable housing as a catalyst for achieving personal change, particularly in the recovery from injustice'. To this end, houses have been leased from Grove End Housing Association, *Commonweal* has then granted an under-lease to *Housing for Women* for a period of ten years.

This evaluation provides feedback at an early stage of the project's lifespan in order to assist Re-Unite in making a step change towards developing its full potential. If and when procedures and practice are developed enough for the housing project to be regarded by others as proven, there will be promotion of replicate projects throughout the UK, as well as lobbying to change public policy. *Commonweal* takes its name from philanthropic intentions to promote public housing and to facilitate the public good: 'for *Commonweal* and Liberty'. *Commonweal* sees the concept of 'home' as fundamental to the establishment of both roots and safety, matters which are critical to women leaving prison with dependent children. The concept of 'home' is thus fundamental to the Re-Unite project and has resonance on a commonsense level as well as being theoretically grounded in literature on resettlement and psychological well-being.

*Housing for Women (HfW)* is a registered charity and a London-based housing association registered with the Housing Corporation committed to providing housing for vulnerable women in particular (including those subject to domestic violence), and also women more

generally. Conscious of the economic disparity affecting women, *HfW* provides good quality accommodation at affordable rents. It has over 650 properties. It operates mainly in South-east London and West London, and works in conjunction with a range of housing associations and local authorities (Lewisham and Southwark in particular). The central ethos of the organisation is the empowerment of women to take charge of their own lives by providing a secure home.

*Women in Prison (WIP)* is a registered charity that was established in 1983 (by ex-prisoner Chris Tchaikovsky) as a support and campaign group for women prisoners. *Women in Prison's* mission is to promote the resettlement, personal development, education and training of women prisoners and ex-prisoners, to educate the public and policy makers about women in the criminal justice system, and to promote alternatives to custody. *Women in Prison* works with women in all women's prisons across England. Distinctive initiatives include: a peer-mentoring scheme for women studying by distance learning in prisons in Northern England, a bursary fund for course fees and other education-related materials for prisoners and ex-prisoners, a national magazine for women prisoners, and an independent advocacy service for women using the Prison Service CARE programme.

The idea for the Re-Unite project emerged in 2006 as *Commonweal* researched ideas for their next project and a chance meeting between the Director of *Commonweal* and an academic interested in housing, who advocated in favour of housing women ex-prisoners, resulted in an introduction to *HfW* who happened to be exploring similar ideas. The compatibility between the two organisations soon became apparent so they decided to enter into a partnership agreement to develop the idea together over a period of ten years. Coincidentally, whilst this consideration progressed, Baroness Corston was producing a review of women with particular vulnerabilities within the criminal justice system (Corston, 2007), and her findings, when published, strongly endorsed the direction that *HfW* and *Commonweal* were taking in shaping the aims of the Re-Unite project, and in the provision of housing to be procured by *Commonweal*, the management of that housing by *HfW*, and the nature of the service level agreement with *WIP* to provide support services. After considering a range of potential providers *HfW* considered that *WIP* might be the most suitable provider of support services, and fruitful discussions with *WIP's* then Director, Cathy Stancer confirmed this. Although Cathy Stancer left the organisation at the inception of Re-Unite, the idea for the project was by then firmly embedded in *WIP's* aims and objectives. The three parties entered into agreements to define their roles, and expressed a desire to deliver a solution based on:

- delivering caring with passion rather than merely a process;
- delivering with excellence;
- taking a holistic approach to the needs of the mother and her children;
- demonstrating how mothers facing homelessness on their release from prison face considerable injustice and hardship and what needs to be done to resolve this.

As indicated, *WIP* was chosen and contracted by *HfW* to provide support services for the women on the Re-Unite Project until September 30<sup>th</sup> 2010 (see Appendix 1). The service level agreement specified the support services to be delivered in some detail, as well performance indicators.

## 1.1 The Re-Unite project

As indicated, the Re-Unite project is essentially an attempt to provide homes for women and their children who might otherwise be homeless. The project involves two linked initiatives: a programme for mothers and a programme for mothers and children. The Mothers' Programme involves the provision of a small flat or studio which serves to settle women so that they can work with various agencies towards the return of their children to their care. The Mothers' and Children's Programme provides family housing for women leaving prison facing homelessness so that they can quickly be reunited with their children, reducing the deleterious effects of imprisonment on them and their children alike. In the first initiative it can take six months or more for women to establish that they can regain the custody of their children. In the second (and major) initiative women are reunited with their children usually on their release from prison but there have been exceptions to this (see Section 4.1.2).

Women who were selected for the Re-Unite project during the first two years of its existence came from a range of prisons. They were provided with accommodation for up to two years (with supplementary help to find accommodation beyond this period). At the time of writing this report, only one service user had moved on, although we were told that there were plans for five more to move on by early 2010. By 15<sup>th</sup> January, a further service user had received notice that she had been successful in a local authority housing bid, and she was pleased to know that she would be moving on at the end of the month. Other service users are actively bidding for local authority housing.

The service level agreement between *HfW* and *WIP* specified the services to be provided under four key headings (see Appendix 1) 'pre-release preparation', 'establishment', 'preparation for independent living', and the 'move-on' phase, with additional services concerning 'void management', the setting up of a service user forum and co-operation with any evaluation. Thus *WIP* organised individual support by project workers (key workers)<sup>1</sup> for the service users and aimed to help them to retrain and enter employment, although the priority was firstly to re-establish the women and their children in a comfortable relationship and integrate them in the community. This can take some time because the children may be at new schools or may have 'settling down' issues of their own. As described below, it is not uncommon for children to have particular needs because of the problems which possibly led to their mothers' offending in the first place (some have witnessed or been subject to domestic violence, for instance). The programme of support provided by *WIP* has included regular individual meetings, or key work sessions with the women, and, in the early and later stages of the project, group meetings and coffee mornings where women might gain support from one another and discuss issues such as welfare benefits and 'coping with adolescent children' with local experts, and finally, activities involving both the women and their children (walking excursions, visits to the zoo, and other everyday family activities).

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<sup>1</sup> In October 2009 *WIP* indicated that they would not be continuing this service beyond December 2009. In view of this, *HfW*, in conjunction with *Commonweal*, arranged to continue the project by employing their own support worker whose designated duties would include a specific focus on the Re-Unite service users. As in the early stages of the project, this continuation project, which will run for the remaining eight years set for Re-Unite, will have the benefit of a designated project manager and will incorporate all the learning from this evaluation as well as any other necessary improvements and aspirations identified by *Commonweal* and *HfW*. A new *HfW* project worker was in post by January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010. (The postscript in Section 11.5 gives more detail in regard to the next phase of the project).



What is distinctive about Re-Unite is the focus on the women service users *and* their children, and the intensity and practical nature of the support so that there is help in moving belongings to the provided accommodation, advocacy with accommodation service providers (electricity companies and the like), help with money management or facilitated access to debt counselling, and tangible personalised advice and support. Project key workers are thus advisors, facilitators, practical supporters, and perhaps above all, mentors.

## **2. The Context for the Project and for the Evaluation**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The unprecedented increase in the women's prison population in recent years - a rise of 126% between June 1995 and June 2005, for instance - has been widely commented on. The principal reasons for the increase revolve around changes in sentencing, rather than any significant change in offending patterns<sup>2</sup> and reflect a 'punitive turn' in society. There has also been a substantial rise in the number of women entering prison on remand awaiting trial. In June 2009 there were 4,242 adult women in prison in England and Wales (although the total number of women in prison constitutes just 5.7% of the prison population). Paradoxically, there are strong indications that the public are in favour of community alternatives rather than imprisoning female offenders: an ICM poll commissioned by Smart Justice (Hanks, 2007) found that 86% of the British public support community penalties for non-violent women offenders.

The most common offence for which women receive a custodial sentence is theft and handling (one third of receptions); the two most common offences for female and male *sentenced* prisoners in custody in 2007 were drug offences and violence against the person. Drug offenders accounted for just under one third of sentenced female prisoners (31%), and a fifth of women (21%) had been sentenced for violent offences.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-eight per cent of women in prison, compared with 12% of men, have no previous convictions (Ministry of Justice, 2009), and a large proportion serve short sentences.<sup>4</sup> Consequently most women leaving prison do so free of licences and conditions and there is no statutory duty to provide them with assistance on their release, resulting in unmet resettlement needs.

The number of children affected by parental imprisonment has grown in tandem with the overall (male and female) prison population: an estimated 127,000 children under 18 each year in England and Wales have a parent in prison – around one per cent of all children (Murray, 2007).<sup>5</sup> Many more infants are *born* in prison: between April 2005 and July 2008, 283 children were born to women prisoners in England and Wales – a rate of almost two per week.

The living arrangements of at least 8,000 children are estimated to be affected by the

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<sup>2</sup> Despite some increases in lower-level violence and increases in drugs-related offences (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Drugs-related offences are the most common offence type amongst the resident female prison population due to longer average custodial sentences for drugs offences.

<sup>4</sup> The average custodial sentence length for females in 2007 was 9.4 months, and three quarters of women receive sentences of less than one year, with almost two-thirds (63.3%) sentenced to six months or less, and 10.6% sentenced to between 6 and 12 months; 19.4% sentenced to between 12 months and 4 years (under four years), and 4.3% to 4 years or more, and a tiny number (0.9%) to indeterminate sentences (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> A review of children of offenders by The Ministry of Justice and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) gave a rather higher estimate of 160,000 children annually.

imprisonment of their mother (Prison Reform Trust, 2000), and just five per cent of prisoners' children remain in their own home when it is their mother who is sentenced to custody (Codd, 2008: 124). A high proportion of imprisoned mothers are lone parents.<sup>6</sup> The majority of imprisoned women's children lose their primary carer and around one third lose their *only* carer when their mother is incarcerated (Caddle and Crisp 1997). Wolfe (1999) estimated that over 60% of women prisoners are mothers and that 45% had children living with them at the time they were imprisoned. A Home Office study of 1,766 women in prison found that sixty-one per cent of imprisoned mothers had children under 18, whilst almost one third of their children were under five years old. Three quarters of these children were living with her mother immediately prior to her imprisonment, and the vast majority (85%) of the mothers entering prison had never previously been separated from their child(ren) for a significant period of time (Caddle and Crisp, 1997).

The small number of women's prisons, relative to men's, means that women in custody are more likely to be held some distance from home, making family visits difficult, if not impossible. Moreover, women prisoners may choose not to have their children visit them in order to protect them from the distress of witnessing the prison environment. Family members caring for prisoners' children may of course already have children of their own, and having additional children to care for may cause, or aggravate, financial and emotional strain. Furthermore, substitute carers may be reluctant to allow the child(ren) to return to their mother upon her release, in order to retain child benefit payments or because they do not consider the mother to be a good parent.

## 2.2 The effects of maternal imprisonment on children

*"It's not you that does the prison sentence but your kiddies outside"* (female interviewee, Morris *et al.*, 1995: 17)

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

Few studies have focused on maternal imprisonment specifically (see Appendix 2 for a review), and mixed samples of imprisoned fathers and mothers typically include too few women to allow for separate analysis by gender. In Caddle and Crisp's (1997) research for the Home Office, referred to earlier, problems with children's behaviour following the imprisonment of their mother were reported by 44% of the mothers surveyed, whilst almost a third (30%) said that their children had become withdrawn. A quarter (27%) said that their children were experiencing sleep difficulties or health problems (26%), and many of the children's problems were thought to be inter-related. These reports were of mothers while they were still in prison, and the researchers did not follow up the mothers or their children post-release.

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<sup>6</sup> In Morris *et al.*'s study of 200 female prisoners, for example, 40% were mothers of dependent children, and half of these were lone parents. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) reported that a least a third of mothers entering prison were lone parents prior to their imprisonment. These figures may well be underestimated, since women prisoners may not reveal that they are parents for fear that their children will be taken into local authority care.

No studies have rigorously compared the relative effects of maternal versus paternal imprisonment (Murray and Farrington, 2008). However, maternal imprisonment may be 'worse' in terms of outcomes for children for a number of reasons. Research about other types of mother-child separation suggests that maternal separation is more damaging to a child than paternal separation (Juby and Farrington, 2001); indeed, studies of maternal imprisonment have suggested this to be the case (e.g. Caddle and Crisp, 1997; Richards *et al.*, 1996).

The high proportion of lone parents amongst female prisoners (and imprisonment itself and the associated stresses may lead to marital/partner breakdown) means that there are fewer partners to maintain housing in their absence (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). According to research conducted by Nacro, 38% of women prisoners report losing their homes as a result of imprisonment, although less than one tenth receive help with housing (Nacro, 2001). In addition to being forced to live in a new home, children may have to change schools, such that their education, and perhaps also existing friendships, are disrupted. Women's imprisoned status is, by implication, often accompanied by the label of 'bad mother' (Codd, 2008), and this stigma may extend to their children, who may be subjected to bullying or teasing at school. However, the fact that women, on average, receive shorter prison sentences than men may mediate the negative effects of parental imprisonment, as least for some children and, as Codd has highlighted, whilst a mother's imprisonment "may lead to despair at separation from children [it may] also promote hope and a sense that a woman's life is not over; that she is a valued person even if the only person viewing her in that way is the child" (2008: 132).

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

### **2.3 Policy initiatives concerning women offenders**

Recent policy developments, reviewed in more detail in Appendix 2, show that the messages are beginning to be taken on board. The Women's Offending Reduction Programme (WORP) was launched by the Government in 2004 to help co-ordinate departments and sensitise them to women's needs. The intention is to draw together services in the community which provide support for issues such as mental health problems, drug misuse, domestic violence, childcare, education, employment and housing. Moreover, drawing on evidence from Glasgow's 'one-stop shop' Centre 218 for women offenders who have experienced custody (Loucks *et al.*, 2006), the then Home Secretary announced in March 2005 that there would be provision of £9.15 million for the Together Women Programme (TWP) for two demonstration projects for women offenders and those at risk of offending. The TWP framework proposed a combination of one-stop shop type provision with linked 'Women's Offending Action Teams', which should provide a 'floating service' from point of arrest to release from prison, helping to locate resources in the community that support diversion from the criminal justice process or from custody, or support resettlement. The idea is that the one-stop shops provide a focal point for the delivery of services. Responsibility for delivering these projects was allocated to the newly formed National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Further, *The Offender*

*Management Guide to Working with Women Offenders* was formally launched in December 2008, and complements the National Service Framework for Women Offenders by identifying good practice.

From these policy and other developments (see Appendix 2) we can see that the potential for change in the delivery of effective resettlement services for women and their children is considerable. However, the reality may be very different. The capacity of agencies to attend to gender-specific needs is questionable; the quality of inter-agency co-operation is variable; and the position of the voluntary sector in a supportive role may be stronger in some geographical areas than others. There is also a need to examine whether or not the seven pathways identified under the Reducing Re-Offending National Action Plan adequately take account of women's needs, in the light of Corston's recommendation that two further women-specific pathways are necessary. The two TWP demonstration projects for women set up under WORP are clearly important, but they are limited in scope: the work revolves around women only and not women offenders' children.

There have been subsequent developments in terms of government funding for further one-stop-shop services at women's centres and other specialist provision. In February 2009, Maria Eagle<sup>7</sup> announced that the Ministry of Justice would provide £15.6 million of new funding over two years, to invest in additional services in the community for women offenders who are not a danger to the public, and for women at risk of offending. Following the £3.1m that was awarded in July 2009, in November 2009, the Ministry of Justice announced that there would be a further £6.8m for voluntary organisations to provide extra and enhanced community support for women at risk of offending. There has been no specific mention of women's post prison accommodation needs, but there is emphasis on the need to reserve custodial sentences for serious offences and, where appropriate, to make alternative sentencing provision for drug offences (including drug couriers)<sup>8</sup>.

### **3. Evaluation of the Development Phase of the Re-Unite Project**

#### **3.1 The evaluation process**

Beginning in October 2007 the researchers followed up the women as they were released and housed, looking at indicators of resettlement for them and their children. This small-scale study has involved a series of interviews with the women themselves, their children, project workers, probation officers, and other relevant service providers, as well as analysis of other indicators of progress (e.g. in case file documentation).

The number of children experiencing parental imprisonment in Britain has risen significantly in recent years. These children are often 'forgotten victims'. However, since parental imprisonment is a risk factor for child anti-social behaviour, offending, school failure, drug misuse and mental health problems, it is important to give special attention to

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<sup>7</sup> Minister of State at the Government Equalities Office and at the Ministry of Justice, and sponsor Minister for Equalities and Human Rights and the Women's National Commission, otherwise known as the 'women's champion in government'

<sup>8</sup> This is relevant insofar as Re-Unite service users include drug offenders. The Sentencing Advisory Panel's consultation on sentencing issues, which included the principles for sentencing of women, closed in the Autumn of 2008, and the Sentencing Guidelines Council will publish a draft guideline on overarching sentencing principles for women next year (2010). The Sentencing Guidelines Council itself is to be replaced by the 'Sentencing Council' which was introduced in the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

how far settled housing and the provision of other support can help children overcome the trauma of parent-child separation, stigma, and social and economic difficulties. This evaluation therefore addresses children's needs, and, where possible, includes measures of their progress, such as changes noted in school or nursery reports.

From the outset, *Commonweal* intended that by evolution and improvement during the first third of its ten year lifespan, Re-Unite would serve as a 'demonstration project' to show that the provision of stable accommodation and concomitant support assists women and their children to 'resettle' in the community to good effect. Innovative action research projects of this kind – with direct policy implications – are hugely important.

### **3.2 Aims of the evaluation**

In the Invitation to Tender the three partners involved in the project envisaged that the evaluation process would:

1. include a longitudinal evaluation of the benefit of the project for mothers;
2. identify any benefits for the child;
3. measure any benefits to society (in terms of costs and savings);
4. identify lessons for future housing providers;
5. contribute to a change in public policy via the evaluation;
6. establish a 'blueprint' for the viable replication of the Re-Unite project.

These six strands were interpreted by the evaluators as meaning that they should evaluate project activities in a way that would be relevant to the identification of 'best practice' and contribute to evolution of the project. Thus one key question at this stage, is how close Re-Unite has got to achieving best practice in the resettlement of mothers on their release from prison. Our aim has also been to provide academic assessment of the Re-Unite project with a view to informing discussions about possible replication, and providing supporting evidence for changes in public policy on the resettlement of mothers leaving prison.

One key change emerged part way through the project. This involved the creation of the Mothers' Programme, which accepted its first service user in February 2008. The researchers were not involved in the discussions which led to this change and learned of the development only in conversation with the then Re-Unite project co-ordinator. We nevertheless adapted the evaluation to accommodate this new initiative.

The chief mechanisms employed by the researchers to achieve their aims have included:

1. Tracking the 11 women accepted onto the project over two years and collecting data about them. We had anticipated that we would be able to track 12 women during a two year period, but only 11 were accepted onto the project in this initial phase;
2. Interviewing the women at regular, usually three-monthly, intervals;
3. Providing a detailed description of the lives of the women and their children, as well as different parties' perceptions of the impact of the project. These parties included service users – both the women and their children, Re-Unite key workers and probation officers;
4. Providing a preliminary estimate of risk of re-offending and reconvictions, based on self-report and probation officers' assessments;
5. Detailed discussions with other interested parties and stakeholders;
6. Evaluation of different partners' activities with Re-Unite service users;
7. Comparisons with other similar service providers and consideration of alternative

models of provision.

### 3.3 Reflections on the evaluation process

In essence, the aim has been to try and measure the impact of Re-Unite on the lives of a small group of mothers and their children, identify strengths and weaknesses and give the evaluation sponsors, *Commonweal*, an independent evaluation that might assist them in learning how best to take Re-Unite forward. The small-scale nature of the research should not detract from its innovative intentions. Mary Eaton's (1983) follow-up of women leaving prison included 34 women, but was based on single interviews and no attention was given to the women's children. Thus this is the first study of its kind and it provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of the project. Whilst there are a number of learning points relating to the evaluation which are discussed later in the report and recommendations for future evaluation in the final section of the report we should note a number of practical adjustments that were required in the evaluation process at this stage:

- Our initial intention was to interview women one week prior to release, at the point of release itself, and then at three-monthly intervals following release. However, whilst we had anticipated that we would be able to enter the prisons with *Women in Prison* project workers, this proved to be unfeasible for a number of reasons. Firstly, *WIP* were unable to provide access clearance for us to go into the prisons with them because of prison service rules, and secondly, release dates were often uncertain. This factor, combined with our increasing sense of the possible insensitivity of interviewing women *immediately* after release when experiences were perhaps bewildering and overwhelming (a fact which was highlighted by the Re-Unite project co-ordinator in our early discussions with her), meant that we decided to focus on interviews within three months after release, and at regular intervals thereafter.
- In reality, changes in probation personnel, drugs intervention project staff, social workers, and so on, meant that it was extremely difficult to achieve more than a single interview (if any) with these agencies. In some cases more than twenty telephone calls and email contacts were made to try and make contact with relevant personnel in order to arrange interviews. Re-Unite service users also had much less contact with these agencies than we had anticipated.
- The small number of offenders involved in this project and the absence of Police National Computer (PNC) numbers collected in the initial assessments of suitability for the project meant that we were not able to consult the national offenders' index regarding reconvictions. However, our close involvement in monitoring the women's progress and involvement with Re-Unite project workers meant that we were in any case in a reasonably good position to be able to record any reconvictions.
- We had anticipated that we might be able to 'shadow' key workers in their work with women, but this proved to be impracticable from the outset when we came to realize that much of the work conducted by the project workers was 'work on the move', crisis intervention, and changeable in light of competing and often heavy demands. More than this, we came to appreciate that the service users were extremely vulnerable and that it would have been both insensitive and unethical to make further demands on them – beyond our own separate interviews.
- In terms of interviews with the service users, it sometimes proved difficult to establish immediate contact and to set dates for interviews with some of the women. There were relatively few 'no shows', but there were instances of the service users not being where they thought they would be (at home) at the time of the interview -

in which case we waited for them to return home or agreed to meet them elsewhere (in a coffee shop or similar sort of venue). Difficulties in making direct contact with some of the women were compounded by changes in their mobile 'phone use.<sup>9</sup> However, we managed to interview most of the women on a regular basis. On two occasions we resorted to telephone interviews because of the repeated difficulty in finding a convenient date to meet.

- By the time we came to be involved in the project (some months after it had started), assessment and data collection processes had already been established in relation to the service users which meant that we were reliant on gaining access to these data. (Needless to say, it would have been insensitive to have asked the service users for additional information which only repeated what they had already been asked by Re-Unite project workers). However, access to service users' files was sporadic because of the difficulty in identifying dates when the project workers would be in the *WIP* office; some of these difficulties were perfectly understandable of course in the context of the nature of the work being undertaken. The series of self-assessments ('problem and progress wheels' for instance) and regular reports established by the initial project co-ordinator, were not routinely continued as far as we are aware, or at least, we not always find these within the files. This made it difficult to systematically follow through any documented analysis of progress. In terms of the content of meetings and telephone discussions, however, the information recorded was very helpful.
- The evaluation has also highlighted the difficulty of gaining the informed consent of service users in regard to access to drug intervention agencies, probation service personnel, social services departments and other agencies. We sought consent for access to agencies along the way where this seemed appropriate and not insensitive to the service users, but there is a more fundamental issue at stake here because to have pressed for access at the outset (when the women were possibly at their most vulnerable) could be construed as unethical. Moreover, expecting service users to consent to the evaluators contacting agencies to which they were linked may have been counter-productive or resisted by them. It is important to note, however, that the ten Service users whom we interviewed did all consent to us contacting their probation officers.
- The issue of access and ethics is also relevant to the service users' children. Again, although we had much less access to schools than anticipated, we learned that in some cases the schools did not know that the children's mother had been in prison. It would have been highly insensitive and unethical to have contacted the schools in these circumstances. In other cases, the children had changed schools as a consequence of moving to another area in order for the family to be involved in the project and this also limited the use of the school and teachers' reports on behaviour and progress before and after involvement in the project.
- It proved impossible to interview one service user - who after a series of incidents was rehoused and then recalled to prison. We learned of *WIP*'s difficulties to engage the service user in the project in the midst of various crises.
- Notwithstanding the realisation that we would not be able to enter the prisons with *WIP* project workers for reasons outlined above, we applied for direct access to the prisons in order to interview housing resettlement staff. Unfortunately, it took nearly eight months to gain formal access to the prisons via the Prison Service's national research committee. Moreover, approval from this committee was no

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<sup>9</sup> We subsequently learned that the women had had no credit to be able to use their 'phones or indeed that they had changed their 'phones in order to maximize free credit opportunities.

guarantee of approval from each prison governor and we were reliant upon the area prison psychologist in each case to bring our application to the governors' attention. We did eventually gain access to two prisons (Holloway and Styal). Access to a third prison (a private prison – Bronzefield) was arranged in straightforward fashion because the resettlement officer was known to one of the evaluators (LG).

- Finally, the evaluation is limited by the fact that only one service user out of the 11 'moved on' during the period of the data collection which ended on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we were able to gain an in-depth understanding of the way in which the project was operationalised and the way in which it functioned, as well as gaining clear insights into the impact of the project on the mothers' and children's lives. We make recommendations with regard to future evaluation of the Re-Unite project in the final section of this report. In the next section we describe the findings in some detail.

## 4. Evaluation Findings

### 4.1. Facts and figures

#### 4.1.1 Referral patterns and referral sources

In December 2008, the Re-Unite project referrals database recorded 109 referrals from the project's inception to 25 November 2008. Nine referrals had been accepted at that point, 64 refused and 18 were 'pending' (i.e. waiting assessment by Re-Unite or the women's release date was not yet known). A further 18 women had not responded to the project's written response to their initial referral for reasons unknown to the project. Table 1 details the primary reason why women were turned down by the project (by 25 November 2008).

**Table 1: Reasons why applications to Re-Unite were unsuccessful**

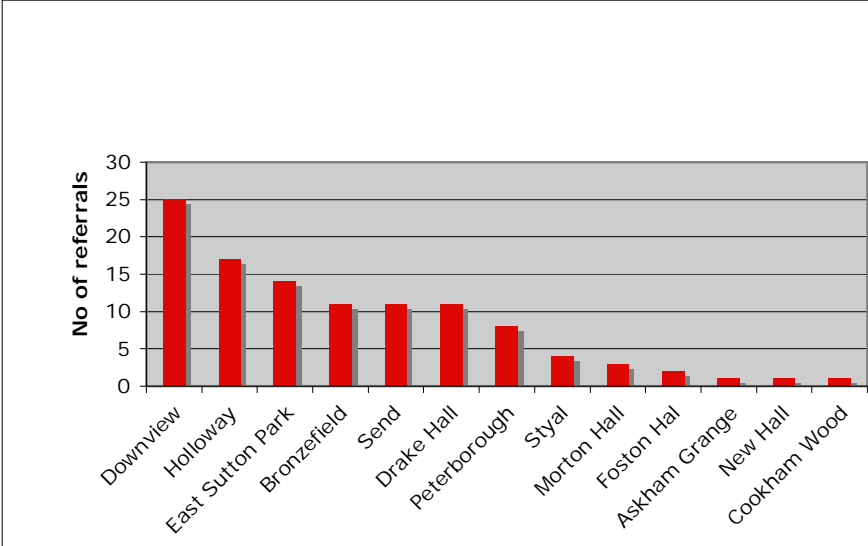
Not possible to re-unite mother and child(ren) within 6 weeks	9
No local connection or domestic violence	8
Does not want to live in London/changed mind about living in Southwark or Lewisham	7
Deportation or immigration issues (i.e. not eligible for housing benefit)	6
No suitable Re-Unite property available	6
Had other housing options available	5
Children not in UK	4
Changed mind about the project	4
All children over 18	2
Adoption proceedings in progress	3
Does not have children	3
Parole refused	2
Needs more personal support than Re-Unite can offer	1
Other/reason not stated	4
<b>Total applications turned down</b>	<b>64</b>



Referrals to Re-Unite have come from a variety of sources, the most common being postcards (29<sup>10</sup>), referrals by named professionals (28), letters from prisoners (23), and referrals from Vision Housing<sup>11</sup> and other housing advisory groups (11). A number of Re-Unite service users were clients of *WIP* prior to the existence of Re-Unite, and trusted the ‘name’ of the organisation, which appears to be important with regard to the high level of referrals received initially. It is of note that just two referrals are recorded as being initiated by probation officers. These early referral patterns suggest that efforts to publicise Re-Unite were successful. Awareness-raising included distributing Re-Unite postcards to all women’s prisons, and an article and advertisement was included in *WIP*’s magazine distributed to all women’s prisons in the summer of 2007. Intensive prison in-reach was also undertaken by the Re-Unite co-ordinator to raise awareness of the project amongst resettlement staff and to identify potential applicants. However, it appears that awareness of Re-Unite amongst probation staff has been very limited (see also Section 6).

To November 2008, referrals had been received from women in 13 prisons, as shown in Figure 1, below. More than three quarters of referrals were received from women’s prisons in the South East of England.

**Figure 1: Re-Unite referrals sources (prisons): April 2007-November 2008**



The eleven mothers who have been accepted onto the Re-Unite project were released from HMP Holloway (four women), HMP Downview (four women) and HMP East Sutton Park (three women).<sup>12</sup>

The picture regarding referral patterns is much less clear since December 2008. Notwithstanding the fact that *WIP* covered aspects of the role in other ways from existing

<sup>10</sup> Postcards advertising the Re-Unite project and its eligibility criteria were distributed in women’s prisons by the project co-ordinator in 2007. Women expressing an interest in the project were invited to return the freepost postcard to *WIP*, who would then contact individuals directly to provide them with further information about the project and an application form.

<sup>11</sup> Vision Housing, a small voluntary sector agency, supports ex-offenders six months prior to, and on their release from, prison to assist them to access suitable and sustainable accommodation. See <http://visionhousing.org.uk/>.

<sup>12</sup> Three of the service users had served their sentences in both Holloway and East Sutton Park prisons. Another was released from Holloway but had spent an earlier part of her sentence in HMP Send, and a fifth was released from East Sutton Park, having spent the earlier part of her sentence at HMP Drake Hall.

staff resources, the loss of a dedicated Re-Unite project co-ordinator from January 2009 and other organisational changes within *WIP* has meant that it has been difficult to obtain updates on the database. Moreover, in September 2009, one of *WIP*'s managers indicated that referrals had more or less come to a halt because women had been staying in the properties and not moving on as quickly as had been expected. However, service users 10 and 11 started the project in December 2008 and March 2009 respectively. SU10 referred herself to Re-Unite whilst in Downview prison and SU11 was accepted onto the project after spending a short period in her own home following her release from East Sutton Park. She contacted Re-Unite on the advice of a Vision Housing worker at East Sutton Park, having decided to flee the domestic violence she was enduring whilst living with her partner.

The slowing down of referrals from the beginning of 2009 was confirmed in interviews with housing advisors in private prison Bronzefield and in both HMP Holloway and HMP Styal (in July, October and November 2009 respectively). Advisors in each of these prisons perceived *Women in Prison* as an organisation which is well established and held in high regard by prisoners in the female estate. However, none of the housing advisors interviewed had anything specific to say about the Re-Unite project either in general terms, or in respect of referrals specifically. At the time of the interviews with the housing advisors the existence of the project appeared to have lost momentum within the prisons. This may be understandable in light of other developments, the co-existence of other housing providers and projects and - in HMP Holloway if not in HMP Styal - changes in personnel in the resettlement unit of the prison. In both prisons housing advisors were able to list other housing providers and projects known in the region, whereas the Re-Unite project seemed to have declined in significance.<sup>13</sup>

The eleven service users who were accepted had mainly referred themselves (n=6). Other referrals came from housing staff within prisons (n=3), a drug interventions programme (n=1) and from *WIP* (n=1).

There is no clear pattern to referrals insofar as several women seem to have been 'rushed' into Re-Unite accommodation without a full assessment taking place (i.e. they have been rescued from a crisis situation or prison to a Re-Unite property in a matter of days, when others appear to have been on the waiting list for some time). It is not clear what happened to the November 2008 list of 'pending referrals', but we presume that they were notified at some point that they were no longer being considered for Re-Unite or that they moved on to other housing as arranged by housing advisors within the prisons.

#### **4.1.2 The extent to which Re-Unite service users met the project's eligibility criteria**

In order to be eligible for inclusion in the Re-Unite project applicants had to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- a) Have an existing connection with the London borough of Southwark or Lewisham
- OR
- Have previous experience of domestic violence and a desire to relocate to Southwark or Lewisham;

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<sup>13</sup> Resettlement staff in HMP Styal (in Cheshire) told us that the majority of their prisoners return to the North[west of England on their release, and only rarely to the London area. Re-Unite in London is therefore likely to have a limited, if any, impact on prisoners released from Styal.

- b) Need suitable accommodation and support in order to be re-united with children EITHER on release from custody (Mothers' and Children's Programme) OR within 6 months of release (Mothers' Programme);
- c) Be over 18;
- d) Have less than 12 months left to serve in custody;
- e) Have no diagnosis of severe mental health problems;
- f) Be motivated to change.

All of the mothers accepted onto the Re-Unite project have been over 18 years old and all have at least one dependent child. All eleven of the women had previously experienced domestic violence, but most had no existing connection with the London boroughs of Southwark or Lewisham. This is perhaps unsurprising: most of the women have been keen to make a 'fresh start', and moving to a new area may well facilitate this. Moreover, two of the service users joining Re-Unite on the Mothers' Programme had substantial histories of heavy Class A drug use. Moving to a new area is thus likely to have aided them in distancing themselves from previous friends and associates who continue to be involved in drug dealing and drug use. In all cases there was clear evidence of motivation to change and some supporting documentation in *WIP's* case files, although we were not able to locate complete assessments in all cases.

Two service users (SU1 and SU11) were already re-united with their children prior to moving into Re-Unite accommodation: SU1 and her three children were in (inadequate) hostel accommodation, whilst SU11 and her two children were living in their own home, which SU11 owned jointly with her abusive partner. SU1 and her children moved into a Re-Unite house nine months after SU1's release from prison, whilst SU11 moved in two months after her release. Neither woman was referred to the project whilst in prison and thus neither met all of the eligibility criteria. In these cases, the Re-Unite project did not in fact *re-unite* mothers and children who would not otherwise have been re-united. Indeed, it was not clear why these two women were fast-tracked onto Re-Unite - both waiting only a few days between referral and acceptance by the project - in view of the fact that the project apparently had an existing waiting list. However, the project did provide these two families with safe, stable and pleasant accommodation, and avoided them having to move multiple times between hostels, with the possible attendant temptation to offend in order to pay rent, or alternatively being offered alternative accommodation in unsafe circumstances.

It is important to note that Re-Unite service users have not been 'typical' women ex-prisoners (see section 2.1), either in terms of their offence histories (almost half having been convicted of drugs offences) or the length of their custodial sentences, which were, in most cases, significantly longer than average.<sup>14</sup> However, the fact that the Re-Unite mothers had been separated for their children for relatively long periods of time whilst in custody – two years, on average (see below) – might be taken as evidence that the project has targeted a group of mothers and children with high levels of need who had much to gain from the accommodation and support provided by the Re-Unite project.

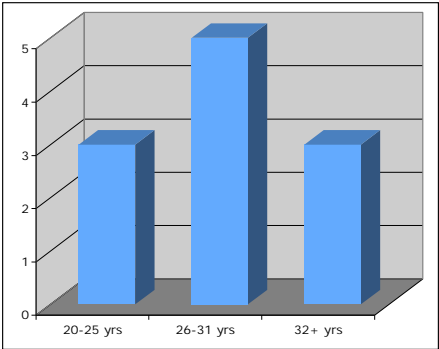
#### **4.1.3 The service users and their children**

Eleven service users have been involved in the Re-Unite project up to the time of writing. Their ages ranged from 23 to 36 years when they began the project, the mean age being 30 years. The age distribution of the service users is shown in Figure 2.

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<sup>14</sup> Sixty-three per cent of women in prison receive custodial sentences of six months or less, whilst under a quarter serve sentences of one year or more (Ministry of Justice, 2009: 49).

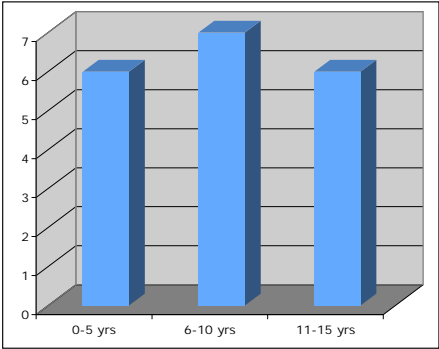
**Figure 2: Age distribution of Re-Unite service users**



Five of the mothers were of black British ethnicity (African and/or Caribbean origin), four were white British, one was ‘white other’ (of British and Eastern European descent) and one was dual heritage (white and black British). There have been no mothers of Asian or other BME origin on the project.

The 11 service users had a total of 22 children, and 19 dependent children,<sup>15</sup> and one baby was born to a service user whilst on the project. Each service user had between one and three dependent children. The ages of the 19 children when they joined the Re-Unite project ranged from 11 months to 14 years (mean = 7.5 years) and they were fairly evenly distributed across this age range, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Age distribution of Re-Unite children**

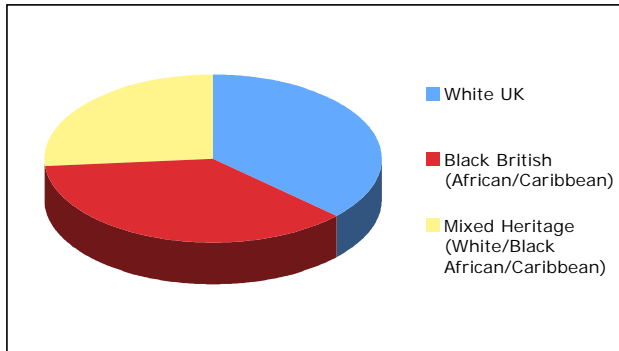


The Re-Unite children were less likely to be white than their mothers and more likely to be of dual or mixed heritage. Seven were white, seven black, and five of dual heritage or mixed race, as illustrated in Figure 4, overleaf.

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<sup>15</sup> One child was permanently adopted and another two were in long-term foster care. There was no intention of re-uniting these three children with their respective (two) mothers, both of whom had at least one more dependent child. Two Re-Unite infants were born in Holloway prison shortly before their respective mothers were accepted onto the Re-Unite project.

**Figure 4: Ethnic background of Re-Unite children**



#### 4.1.4 Care of children while their mothers were in prison

The 11 mothers had a total of 16 dependent children living with them when they entered custody on remand or sentence. One child – the daughter of SU7 – was placed in the care of maternal grandparents several months before her mother went to prison. One child was born in Holloway prison three weeks before his mother’s release, and he remained with his mother. Another boy, who was born in Holloway while his mother was on remand, was removed from his mother and placed in foster care when he was just three days old. The care arrangements of the 18 dependent children who were separated from their mothers during her time in custody are represented in Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Care arrangements of children while their mother was in prison**

Primary carer while mother in prison	Number of children
Maternal grandmother/maternal grandparents	8
Paternal grandmother/paternal grandparents	6
Maternal cousin (private fostering arrangements)	3
Foster carers	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>

The majority of the children lived in greater London while their mother was in prison, apart from one child, who lived with maternal grandparents in Surrey, and two who lived with maternal grandparents in West Sussex.

#### 4.1.5 Location of children on mother’s release

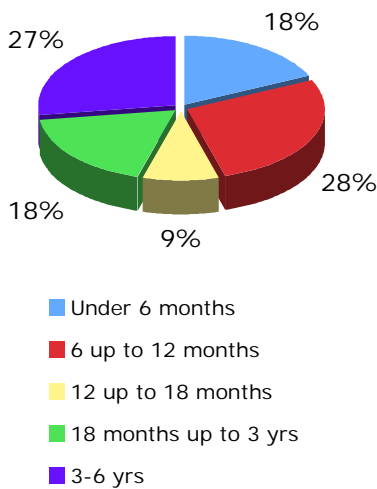
The majority (15) of the children were re-united with their mother as soon as she was released,<sup>16</sup> the children moving into their new Re-Unite accommodation with their mother. Three of the mothers were accepted onto the Re-Unite Mothers’ Programme. One of these, SU6, successfully ‘graduated’ to the Mothers’ and Children’s Programme and was re-united full-time with her infant son seven months after starting the Mothers’ Programme. (He was looked after by foster carers while SU6 was in prison and during the five months she spent on the Mothers’ Programme). The two others, SU7 and SU9, were not successfully re-united with their children. SU7 was recalled to custody and SU9 was deemed to have disengaged with the project due to her chaotic lifestyle.

<sup>16</sup> Several service users and their children stayed with relatives for short periods of around a week following their release, pending the Re-Unite property being decorated or otherwise prepared for them to move in. We were not aware of this short wait causing significant difficulties for anyone.

#### 4.1.6 Service users' criminal and custodial histories

The length of service users' most recent custodial sentence ranged from 9 months to 12 years. The mean sentence length was 4.38 years. One service user had spent 4.5 months in custody on remand, after which the case against her was discontinued.<sup>17</sup> Five of the women were separated from their children for more than two years before starting the project. The period of time actually spent in custody by the service users ranged from two months to six years (see Figure 5) and the mean time served - which, in most cases, equated to the period of time the service user was separated from her children - was 2.0 years.

**Figure 5: Time service users spent in custody**



The offences for which the nine services users were imprisoned are shown in Table 3, below:

**Table 3: Service users' offences leading to their imprisonment**

Offence	Number of service users
Drugs importation/supply	5
Fraud / theft	3
Manslaughter	1
Possession of a firearm	1
Robbery	1 (remanded then case discontinued)

For seven service users,<sup>18</sup> their recent sentence was the first time they had been to prison and been separated from their child(ren). Three were serving their second custodial sentence and one woman was in prison for the third time.

<sup>17</sup> This woman had a number of previous convictions and had previously spent time in prison, separated from her children. She thus met the eligibility criteria which make no mention of exclusion from the project of women prisoners who are not ultimately convicted and sentenced.

<sup>18</sup> This figure includes SU6, who was not sentenced, but spent 4.5 months time in custody on remand. Her criminal record states that she had previously been sentenced to one day in detention, but it is not clear whether she actually went to prison. Consequently we have not included this previous 'custodial sentence'.

#### **4.1.7 Service users' previous offending histories**

Four of the 11 women (SU3, SU5, SU8 and SU11) had no previous convictions prior to their recent custodial sentence, whilst seven had one or more previous convictions.

One service user, SU7, who was first housed on the Mothers' Programme in May 2008, was not successful and is no longer on the project. We learned from the *WIP* project worker that she proved difficult to engage initially and soon disengaged entirely with the support offered by Re-Unite, after contacting old friends and associates from her pre-prison days. In July 2008 SU7 was the victim of domestic violence at the hands of a new partner. She also received threats from the family of the victim of her offence (SU7 killed her partner after suffering years of violent abuse by him). Unfortunately, as reported by the project co-ordinator, SU7 jeopardised her accommodation place by harassing her neighbour and behaving in an anti-social manner. Despite considerable evidence of Re-Unite key workers helping SU7 to access new, non-Re-Unite, accommodation, SU7 was soon recalled to prison for breaching the conditions of her licence. It would, however, be hard to claim that SU 7's failure to engage with the project can be seen as lack of suitability from the outset. The exceptional nature of this 'unsuccessful' service user underlines the complexity of the women's needs and the project's 'success' with the majority of the other service users, insofar as no others have been recalled to prison. We understand that SU9 disengaged with the project and was asked to leave her Re-Unite property, and that she had been charged with several offences (but not yet tried) by the end of the fieldwork period.

#### **4.1.8 Service users who would have required emergency housing without Re-Unite**

It is difficult to estimate how many of the women and children would have been homeless and would have required emergency accommodation if the Re-Unite project had not existed or had not accepted them. As discussed above, two service users (SU1 and SU11) were already living with their children immediately prior to moving into Re-Unite accommodation. However, the majority (seven) of the service users, when we asked them in interview, told us that they would probably have had to go to a hostel or to other temporary accommodation were it not for the Re-Unite project. Two women thought they would not have been granted parole, since without the Re-Unite project they would have had no fixed address to which they could be released. Importantly, one service user highlighted the 'Catch 22' situation of prisoners, who are frequently deemed by local authorities to have made themselves intentionally homeless upon entering prison and are thus deemed a very low priority for accommodation on their release. The quotations below illustrate service users' responses when we asked them in the first interview post-release where they think they might have gone if they had not been accepted on the Re-Unite project:

"If it weren't for them [Re-Unite], I think to myself, where would I be?" [SU1]

"This [Re-Unite] is like a major breakthrough for me. It's *one* positive thing about coming out of prison." [SU4]

"There ought to be more projects like this, to give women a lift. There is so much discrimination when you've got a record...So this project is good because it gives a bit of stability." [SU11]

#### **4.1.9 Service users' patterns of employment and training**

The eleven service users had very varied employment histories and had achieved varying levels of qualifications prior to their imprisonment. Whilst two of the women had no history of paid employment, most had worked in a range of sectors, from retail to investment banking. Two service users had defrauded their respective employers, preventing them from finding similar employment in the foreseeable future.

Just two of the service users were employed at any point during the time they were on the Re-Unite project, as evidenced by information in their case files and what they told us in interview. SU2 was working as a part-time administrator for a football agency when we first interviewed her three months after her release from prison; unfortunately, we learned in a later interview that she had lost her job shortly afterwards when the agency went into administration. SU3 completed several external training courses, and received a substantial amount of support and training from *WIP* whilst on Re-Unite. She set up her own business in IT training, support and web design. When we last spoke to her, the business was getting off the ground, albeit more slowly than she had hoped. She had run a pilot computer training course at Clean Break, a London-based theatre and arts organisation for women (ex-)offenders. Clean Break hope to employ SU3 to run regular computer courses in the near future, and SU3 hopes to have her own training facility/premises in a few years' time.

It is worthy of note that several service users, as lone mothers of small children, did not yet feel ready or able to find paid employment. Importantly, several women highlighted the benefits trap – namely the fact that they may be worse off financially if they were engaged in part-time (low paid) employment.

#### **4.1.10 Service users' mental health problems**

The majority of the service users reported having mental health difficulties of varying degrees of severity, most commonly depression. Given their substantial collective histories of domestic violence victimisation, together with the fact that many of them were abused as children, this is unsurprising. The confidentiality of information meant that we were unable to pursue any independent checks on mental health via GPs or counsellors. We were aware that at least two service users were receiving counselling. Several others told us that their Re-Unite key worker had recommended counselling for them, but they felt unable to cope with 'bringing up the past' at that time.

#### **4.1.11 Substance misuse histories**

Two of the service users – both of whom joined the Mothers' Programme - had problematic substance misuse histories,<sup>19</sup> both being long-term users of heroin and crack cocaine. One of the women (SU6) joined Re-Unite after completing a three-month residential drug rehabilitation programme, and both received support from drugs intervention programmes whilst on the Re-Unite project. SU6 seems to have done well, while SU9, who was on a methadone prescription, quickly reverted to drug use, as well as all sorts of other chaos.<sup>20</sup> None of the women is recorded as having problems with alcohol.

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<sup>19</sup> Two more service users told us that they used cannabis, sometimes to excess, when feeling stressed, but they did not generally consider their drug use to be problematic, nor was there any evidence that substance (mis)use had been related to their offending.

<sup>20</sup> We ended the fieldwork regarding the service users at the end of September 2009. It is possible that SU9 has now been recalled to prison since when we last spoke to her: the Re-Unite project worker was concerned that this might happen. As indicated, we understand that she had been charged with several offences by the



#### 4.1.12 Children’s involvement with social services

Just one of the children was on the child protection register - under the category of ‘neglect’. This child’s mother (SU7 who had killed her ex-partner) has learning difficulties and, as a child, the mother attended a residential special school. She suffered from severe post-natal depression following the birth of her daughter. Table 4, below, details patterns of (non-)involvement with social services of the Re-Unite families at the point when they began the Re-Unite project.

**Table 4: Families’ involvement with social services**

	Number of mothers
Current involvement with social services	3
Previous (but no current) involvement with social services	4
Neither previous nor current involvement with social services	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>

Several of the Re-Unite children had been referred to counselling or other therapeutic services, in most cases by their Re-Unite key worker or by another professional whilst they were on the Re-Unite project. Such referrals were generally related to the effects of the child(ren) having witnessed domestic violence perpetrated against their mother in the past.

#### 4.1.13 Children’s health and schooling

Various attempts were made to monitor the children of the service users. We tried to use tried and tested clinical assessments of children’s health and well-being (for example the Goldberg and Williams (1988) General Health Questionnaire and Goodman’s (1997) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), but for the most part this was not practicable, and two children did not wish to complete the forms at all. For ethical reasons we did not press the case. Similarly, ethical considerations prevented us from making independent assessments of the children’s progress at school since we discovered that many of the service users had not told the schools or nurseries concerned that they had been in prison. Where possible, we looked at school or nursery reports, accessed via mothers. These reports varied in detail. Several reports indicated that the children were happy and thriving in their new school; however, some mothers reported significant anxiety about when and where they would be moving on, and these concerns seem to be at least as significant for their children. Reports on SU1’s twins suggested improvements in social behaviour and language skills over time since they were registered at the nursery, but there were later reports from her Re-Unite key worker that the service user was struggling to get her children to the nursery and that there had been complaints from the school about this.

Some of the mothers reported behavioural difficulties in their children shortly after they had re-united, but this is not surprising, given the length of time some spent apart during their mother’s prison sentences. Some of the mothers also reported that their children had become more calm and thus better-behaved a year or so into the project. However, others reported ongoing psychological problems due to previously witnessing domestic violence, anxiety about having to move on, and to disruption following changing schools when beginning the Re-Unite project.

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end of the fieldwork period, shortly before which she was asked to leave the Re-Unite property and taken off the project.

As stated earlier, 19 children have been involved in the Re-Unite project. Of these, 13 were of school age prior to their mother's release from prison, two were small babies and four were aged four years or under. Of the 13 children who were attending school whilst their mother was in prison, nine had to move to a new school due to the family's relocation on being accepted onto the Re-Unite project, whilst just four children remained at the same school. Whilst on the Re-Unite project five children had started, or were about to start, year 10 at school, when GCSE options are chosen. These choices, and more importantly, the exams themselves, are likely in some cases to have been affected by the change of school and by the anxiety caused by not knowing whether, or when, the child would have to move house (and, by implication, school) again. One 14 year-old girl was determined to remain at the same school, where she was mid-way through her GCSE coursework (her younger sister moved to a school closer to their new home), despite having to commute an hour and a half to get there, which she found very tiring, and as a result of which her attendance deteriorated. Her younger sister stopped going to school over a year after the family started Re-Unite due to long-standing mental health problems relating to witnessing domestic violence perpetrated by her father against her mother, problems which were compounded by her being bullied at her new school. Whilst her mother felt that her daughter would be better off socially if she changed schools, she decided to tutor her daughter at home, rather than compel her to start a new school knowing she would soon have to change schools yet again when their Re-Unite tenancy came to an end.

Other children, by contrast, were reported to be very happy and thriving in new schools they had started since being on the Re-Unite project, and the mothers of these children (SU5 and SU11, in particular), were concerned that their children would have to leave these 'good' schools when they move on from Re-Unite. SU10's son had to undergo surgery shortly after the release of his mother from prison; this led to long-term absence from school which seemingly exacerbated concerns about him settling in at school. SU8's son experienced ongoing difficulties and specialist needs; at one point his mother indicated that these had been exacerbated by his having to travel to a school at distance from home, at another point she indicated that these difficulties were largely due to him wanting to be at the same school as new found friends, and at yet another point she indicated that the school was at fault for being inconsistent in its attitudes to difficult behaviour and that a transfer to another school had been resisted precisely because her son was better behaved than many others at the school.

#### **4.2 Service users' perspectives**

Throughout the evaluation we elicited the service users' views of the Re-Unite project, in terms of the accommodation and support provided by the project and the activities that have been offered to both mothers and their children, as well as the perceived benefits, if any, of the support of other mothers on the programme. Service users were also asked about their hopes, fears and expectations for the future, particularly the period following their involvement with the project, when they are expected to move on to live in unsupported (or at least non-Re-Unite) accommodation. Each of these themes is addressed in the sections below. Where possible, we talked to the children service users to ascertain their views directly, although this was not possible in the case of very young children. Moreover, in order to fit in with the service users' daily schedules, the majority of interviews were conducted during the school day; consequently, few children were available at these times.

### 4.2.1 Accommodation

“The Re-Unite programme has given me my life back, really. Helped me to get stable.” [SU6]

All ten of the women we interviewed were generally happy with the Re-Unite property in which they and their child(ren)<sup>21</sup> were living. Indeed, there was a general feeling, in early interviews with service users, of significant relief and gratitude at having been offered a place on the project. For most of the women, the Re-Unite house or flat was more spacious than where they had lived prior to their imprisonment, and several children were able to have their own bedroom for the first time in their life. SU4, for example, commented that her three daughters were “ecstatic” when they moved into their Re-Unite house, and that friends and professionals had reported that the girls looked happier since moving there.

Those who had a garden (as most of the properties did) were very pleased about this, since their children had a safe place to stay. The majority of the properties were newly decorated and fully furnished when the mothers moved into them, although one service user reported that her house was undecorated when she moved in and that no beds were provided for her two children.

Every service user felt that the amenities – shops, sports and leisure facilities and public transport – in their local area were at the very least adequate, and some found local services very good.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, frequent repair and maintenance issues arose during the course of the two-year evaluation period. In most cases these were relatively minor, although a number of women complained that repairs that *were* carried out were, in their view, to a low standard. Maintenance and repairs were generally reported to be carried out quickly, however. Three of the women had problems with their boilers, and in two cases, families had intermittent or inadequate heating and/or hot water for around a year.

In terms of the location of their Re-Unite property, service users were initially, on the whole, very positive about the local area and could list numerous benefits. However, when we re-interviewed them on subsequent occasions, three of the women housed in Lewisham expressed progressively more negative opinions about the local area. Their complaints focused variously on racism and visible ‘BNP attitudes’, the unfriendliness of established residents towards newcomers, visible drug dealing on the streets and feeling unsafe as a consequence, and the poor performance of local schools.

Whilst the majority of the mothers had wanted to re-locate from where they previously lived – in most cases in order to feel safe after fleeing domestic violence – two of the women felt ‘uprooted’ now that they were far from existing support networks, usually family members, whom it was now either impractical or unaffordable to visit on a regular basis.

### 4.2.2 The Re-Unite properties

In consideration of the specifications for the properties used in the project (see Appendix 1 of the Re-Unite Project Agreement, 2007, p.16) we paid particular attention to the location,

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<sup>21</sup> SU9 was never re-united with her children, but, on the one occasion we interviewed her, she spoke very positively about her Re-Unite flat.

access to mainstream services, access to public transport, food shops, and other amenities (e.g. parks, and children's playgrounds). In our assessment, all of the properties are in good residential areas with access to shops, transport, and so on. All appear to be in 'child friendly' areas (that is, not near busy roads, and near to schools and nursery schools). Service users were not prevented from participating in home detention curfew as a result of the location in which they were living.<sup>22</sup> The areas gave the appearance of being both racially mixed and 'racially tolerant' areas. However, as explained above, three service users living in Lewisham all stated that they were unhappy there and wanted to relocate elsewhere. However, all of their children were experiencing other difficulties, including learning difficulties, emotional difficulties, and, in the case of one girl, having been the victim of sexual abuse by other pupils at her school. Certainly the schools themselves may have exacerbated existing problems, but the children's problems cannot all be attributed to the schools, or indeed to the local area, in a clear-cut way. (See Appendix 3 for details of the areas in which the properties are located.)

#### **4.2.3 Support whilst on the Re-Unite project**

##### *a) Professional support*

After the provision of accommodation, the professional support received from Re-Unite key workers was the most significant aspect of the project discussed by the service users. When we first interviewed them shortly after they began the project, the service users were unanimously extremely positive about the personal support they received from their Re-Unite key worker, and some stated that this was far better than they had anticipated. Both moral support (having someone to talk to and, in many cases, to encourage and motivate them when they were feeling low) and practical support (including advocating for them with the benefits agency, sorting out bill payments and researching courses they might be interested in) were highly valued. SU1, for example, stated that "I would contact them [WIP key worker] before any of my family", and most of the women praised the support worker for being helpful without being intrusive and the project not feeling "like it's heavy duty". The high and welcome level of support contrasted markedly with that received from probation officers. Indeed, probation was widely perceived to be a "waste of time" or "just like clocking in". SU4's account of probation was typical: "They only see me for, like, five, ten minutes and say, 'hello, how are you?' If you tell them you haven't got any problems, they just make an appointment for the next month."

Unfortunately Re-Unite underwent several changes in staff employed by WIP during its first two years. Consequently all of the service users - with the exception of SU2, who moved on after 11 months, and SU10 and SU11, who started the project after these staffing changes - experienced a change of key worker, and several had a total of three key workers.<sup>23</sup> Several service users were understandably upset about these changes, noting that, in the words of SU8, "you have to begin again with each person."

Moreover, following the departure of the co-ordinator early in February 2009, as well as problems recruiting new staff, the project had just one key worker and no co-ordinator. Several of the service users - notably those who started the project in its early days - were very unhappy about these changes and felt 'let down' by the project as a result. The fact that the mothers seem to have been informed *by letter* of the original co-ordinator's

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<sup>22</sup> One service user reported some technical problems which meant that the signal from the electronic ankle bracelet could not be detected on occasion, but this was not due to the location of the property.

<sup>23</sup> The Re-Unite project co-ordinator also acted as key worker for some of the women. After the departure of the first key worker after just a short time with the project, the co-ordinator acted briefly as key worker for all service users to bridge the gap before a new key worker was recruited and in post.

departure perhaps did not help. (Although it should be acknowledged that there was a social event in a café/restaurant shortly after the letter had been sent, to properly mark the project worker's moving on from the project, and for the project worker to be able to say goodbye to the individual service users and their children). One service user, who understood that staff move on, highlighted that women suffering from depression and who have experienced domestic violence in the past, as most of the Re-Unite women had, often find it difficult to trust people, and that staff changes can therefore be quite detrimental.

Following the departure of the Re-Unite project co-ordinator, a number of service users told us that they thought the new key worker was 'overstretched', and that this had led to the level of support and contact with the key worker they now received being significantly lower than it had been previously, as well as sometimes sporadic or unreliable. This gap between expectation and reality, combined with anxieties about moving on (see below), affected several service users' overall ratings of the project.

Whilst we understood from interviewing managers at *WIP* that the level of support provided to service users had been deliberately reduced to discourage dependency (and indeed several of the mothers highlighted that they appreciated the fact that the support they received was not "intrusive" or "in your face"), it was not clear that this decision had been communicated to service users. Such communication, as well as discussion with service users regarding the level of support *they* felt they needed, would, we believe, have been of significant benefit to the service users. Service users had varied amounts of support from friends and family, and some had very little. Despite some complaints about the perceived inadequacy of personal support a year or so into their involvement with the Re-Unite project, the majority of the service users were very anxious that this support would terminate when they moved on and into new accommodation.<sup>24</sup> This fear, as well as anxiety about having to relocate and be unsettled yet again, was part of the "dread of moving on", as SU11 referred to it. SU4 explained:

"To take that [support] away will be like taking a lifeline away and I'll probably just go and plummet."

Towards the end of the fieldwork period several of the mothers had been referred to in-house counselling services at *WIP*, which they welcomed. We did not interview service users again after this point, so were unable to follow this up. Other service users were involved with *WIP*'s education and training services, which were also deemed useful.

#### *b) Peer support*

The degree to which service users socialised with mothers on the project varied considerably. Whilst some mothers spent a lot of time together, talked regularly on the telephone, and helped each other with childcare, others associated rarely or never with the other mothers. This appeared to be very much a personal choice. However, Re-Unite had clear benefits in this respect for some individuals – and indeed their children.

Re-Unite coffee mornings for the mothers took place in a centre in one of the residential areas from the start of the project. The service users generally attended these and enjoyed them. However, attendance seems to have dwindled with time, and the coffee mornings tailed off from February 2009 onwards due to staff shortages. They were later started up

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<sup>24</sup> Recommendations for extended support are discussed in Section 11.

again, this time from *WIP*'s new offices in Islington. However, we do not know how well-attended these proved to be; service user and *WIP* perspectives on this differed rather. The view from the service users we interviewed was that Islington was too far for them to travel, especially with small children, and that it could take up to *six hours* to attend the coffee morning, including travel there and back. Service users also reported that although they could claim their bus fares for travelling to Islington, this would be *after* the event, whereas they needed money for the initial outlay for bus fares before making the journey.

#### *c) Financial support*

In addition to the key work support, service users valued the financial support that both *HfW* and *WIP* had provided. There was evidence that four women had received a grant from *HfW*, enabling them to each purchase a computer, which was beneficial both for mothers doing college courses, as well as for their children's homework. Several women were doing training courses thanks to funding from *WIP* (crèche provision for children, where required, was also funded by *WIP* or *HfW*). There was evidence that four of the mothers<sup>25</sup> had successfully obtained grants from other sources to fund baby equipment, rent arrears, and to set up a business.

#### **4.2.4 Project activities**

*WIP* sought additional external funding for work with the children. Such funding created opportunities for 'family visits' to London Zoo and to Brighton, for instance. The majority of the mothers and their children had taken part in some or all of the Re-Unite trips and activities, and had enjoyed them. The activities which took place during the summer holidays were especially popular, as service users told us that they could not afford frequent (or expensive) outings for their children out of their own pocket. Those women whose children were teenagers, felt that the activities were more appropriate for younger children. This was not framed as a complaint, as the older children preferred to do other (non-Re-Unite) pursuits instead. There were some indications in the summer of 2009 that several service users had 'fallen out' with each other, and that going on the trips created an unpleasant atmosphere for the other mothers and children. In addition, two mothers complained that the trips around this time had been to places with free entry: they thought the purpose of the trips was to enable them to take their children to places they would not otherwise be able to afford to visit. On balance, however, the trips were deemed a success and children – particularly younger ones – were reported to enjoy them very much.

#### **4.2.5 The children's views**

We interviewed all of the (six) children of service users 2, 3 and 4, who were aged between five and fifteen.

SU4's children, and particularly her five-year-old daughter, spoke *extremely* enthusiastically about the Re-Unite trips they had been on, which they had evidently enjoyed greatly. SU2's teenage son also said that he would recommend Re-Unite because "they take you on trips". SU4's three daughters were very happy to be living in a bigger house than they had before, with a garden and with views from their bedroom windows.

The children's experiences of schooling and related social contact were rather less positive. The youngest child of SU4 told us that she missed her old friends, who she could no longer see because they lived too far away from their Re-Unite house. SU4's eldest daughter was unhappy at her new school, which she referred to as the "worst school in London". SU3's

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<sup>25</sup> It may be the case that more mothers received funding; in some case files there were evidently gaps in recording contacts with service users.

younger daughter, who was a pupil at this same school, also felt unhappy there, and eventually dropped out, due primarily to mental health problems relating to having witnessed domestic abuse in the past. She was subsequently home-schooled by her mother. Both she and her older sister said they did not feel safe in the local area (Lewisham).

SU2's son was very happy that the location of their Re-Unite flat had meant that he was able to stay at the same school, where he had already done a lot of GCSE coursework. Moreover, the school was near to his grandmother's house, with whom he had lived while his mother was in prison. By contrast, SU3's elder daughter, who was also doing her GCSEs exams that year, chose to stay at the same school, despite it being an hour and a half's journey each way by bus, which meant that she was very tired by the end of the day. She wanted to apply to sixth form college but was reluctant to do so, as the family did not yet know where they would be living after their time with Re-Unite came to an end.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2.6 Moving on

As highlighted earlier, the Re-Unite service users were unanimously happy, relieved and grateful to have been provided with accommodation through the project. Indeed, a house or flat for themselves and their child(ren) was the most highly and consistently valued aspect of the project. Even from the first time we met service users, however, there was evidence of anxiety about having to move on and a level of ambivalence about not getting attached to, or settled in, the Re-Unite house or flat – namely that they would have to move again in the not-too-distant future. For the women we re-interviewed during all or most of the two-year evaluation period, their anxiety and sense of impermanence or being 'in limbo' at their current address heightened progressively as time went on, as illustrated by the quotes below:

“The more I stay in [the] house, the more it's my home, and then I don't wanna go.”  
[SU1]

“It's kind of like living in a holiday home...But it's been an extended period.”  
[SU3]

“I just want somewhere we can settle and decorate and make it into a home.”  
[SU3]

A number of women wanted to remain in the Re-Unite property indefinitely, although they understood that this was not possible. Half of the mothers believed, or perhaps assumed, that *HfW* would offer them permanent accommodation after Re-Unite, and the fact that SU2, the only woman to move on during the first two years of the project, moved into a *HfW* house in the same area as the Re-Unite property she had occupied, may well have raised others' expectations. The majority of the women were telling us that they felt ready to move on around a year into the project (although, as highlighted above, some wished to retain a degree of personal support after moving on).

It is of some concern that few of the women knew or understood what the move-on procedure actually was, and several mothers were, understandably, distressed and confused about this. A key issue was that they wanted their children to remain in the same school, as the children felt settled there and it would be detrimental for them to change schools twice in a two-year period. This was a particular concern for the mothers of older children who

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<sup>26</sup> We telephoned SU3 after the end of the fieldwork period, and she informed us that her elder daughter had recently started college.

were taking exams. Moreover, the majority of the children were experiencing some kind of emotional or behavioural difficulties relating to having been separated from their mother during her time in prison and also to witnessing domestic violence in the family home. For these reasons, stability (in both domicile and professional support) was considered extremely important, as SU5 explained:

“My children were so unsettled when I moved in here! It was a nightmare when I got them back!...They were so angry. They was unhappy at being moved. And now we’ve, like lived here for 18 months. We’re settled down. The kids are in school, settled. The school is good. The teachers help with any problems they might be having....For my children to have to leave this area and go to another school and be housed in another area and start again would, like, have really bad effects on them...I don’t want to leave here, because we’re settled in the area. And I’m gonna be unsettling them again. And I will be unsettled again. And I’ve never been settled before in my life.”

Towards the end of our fieldwork period, several service users expressed annoyance that they had not been placed on housing waiting lists as soon as they began the Re-Unite project, since finding a new property was likely to take some considerable time. Of greatest concern was the fact that several of those service users who neared the end of their two years on the project feared that they would now have to register as homeless (in order to be re-housed). As they felt that they could have done this anyway on their release from prison, these women questioned the purpose of Re-Unite, and feared that they had simply ‘delayed the inevitable’ (i.e. of being homeless). The service users’ comments below illustrate the view that other ex-prisoners they knew had in fact moved into permanent, stable accommodation before they themselves had:

“I feel like I’m in limbo. I feel like other women who I was in prison with...have got permanent accommodation now.”

“I know loads of women who have been released from prison that was, like, parolees or not, and they went into temporary accommodation with the council upon their release to get their parole, and have their permanent places now.”

This said, it is clear that communication difficulties between *WIP* and *HfW* perhaps contributed to the women’s anxiety about moving on. From *HfW*’s perspective they were waiting for information from *WIP* that the women had achieved stability and could show appropriate money management and had achieved other measures of success according to the performance indicators that had been established as part of the service level agreement (SLA) between *WIP* and *HfW*. From *WIP*’s perspective, they were waiting for information about other housing possibilities in order to prepare the women for ‘moving on’. Notwithstanding these communication issues and differential perceptions of the problem, it is clear that stability and permanence are of central importance, both emotionally and practically, to women ex-prisoners who have experienced domestic violence and often multiple enforced changes of residence in the past, and especially to their children.



#### 4.2.7 The delivery of Re-Unite services

One key question of course is how far *WIP* delivered services according to the SLA (see Appendix 1). As previously indicated, the SLA was designed to cover all stages of the project. Performance measures were to be based mainly (but not exclusively) on:

- Project workers identifying mothers with housing needs that will prevent them being reunited with their children on release and who are also interested in relocating to Lewisham and Southwark (1.1);
- Ensuring that the mother and children have the goods and services they need to be able to live in that home and are registered for the correct benefits, utilities etc. (2.3);
- Ongoing regular visits to provide guidance and support, including such issues as budgeting, debt management, healthy eating etc. (3.4);
- Providing appropriate emergency telephone support cover (3.5);
- Reinforcing tenancy obligations in order to sustain the tenancy and avoid arrears and anti-social behaviour (3.6);
- Assisting the family with access to specialist services as necessary such as counselling, mentoring, substance misuse and mental health services etc. (3.7);
- Preparing the women for independent living within two years of their arrival in the properties (4.1);
- Ensuring continuity in the letting of the houses by establishing procedures to re-let the properties to minimise ‘voids’. (In this instance a void is defined as a property with no named nominee who could move in within 12 weeks.) The task was thus to identify a suitable successor ahead of time (3-6 months) in order to minimise the time that properties remain void between tenancies. *HfW* target time for a new tenant to be in situ was six weeks after the last tenant had left, including any redecoration and refurnishing (5.4).

The other key factors include: arranging support with parenting skills and connection with local services such as Sure Start; agreeing with the mother the level of support, information, advice and guidance on education, training and employment opportunities that she could expect to receive; on agreement with the mother identifying resettlement opportunities, through *HfW*, to a permanent home with continued outreach support as required and identified; *HfW* monitoring the waiting list held by the support provider (*WIP*) periodically, and *WIP* setting up a ‘service user forum’ to comment on *WIP*’s procedures. (See Appendix 5 for a detailed list of the support services to be provided.)

The findings here are as follows:

- 1) Two of the service users were already reunited with their children prior to moving into Re-Unite accommodation. However, it could be argued that *WIP* identified women who were in danger of not being able to sustain the relationship with their children because of housing difficulties and in this way, fulfilled the broader aims of the SLA and the project as a whole.
- 2) There was every indication that project workers endeavoured to ensure that the service users received appropriate goods and services, and that they were correctly registered for benefits and so on. Indeed, examination of records suggests that project workers were assiduous in accompanying the service users on visits to benefits offices in order to support the women in dealing with these agencies.

- 3) Again, there was evidence that the project workers endeavoured to establish regular visits to the service users especially in the early stages of their resettlement, and particularly in the early stages of the Re-Unite project when there was both a project co-ordinator and a project worker. Changes in staffing and emerging emphasis on the need to encourage the women to be self-reliant (via a process of empowerment) meant that there were perhaps fewer visits during the second year of the evaluation period, but contact was maintained. A working analysis of contacts (telephone calls and visits over a one year period) for a selected sub-sample of service users suggests greater contact in the initial settling in period when there were benefits to sort out and utility contracts to arrange, and less contact later, except for crises in confidence or practical problems. Some service users felt that there was too little contact from the project worker in the latter part of their involvement (see section 4.2); this could in part reflect their increasing anxiety about moving on. In September 2009, the case file records of three of the 'early starters; in the Re-Unite project indicated that key work sessions (i.e. face to face meetings, usually at the service user's home) took place between once and twice a month, compared with weekly sessions at the beginning of their involvement in Re-Unite.
- 4) Emergency telephone cover was provided via *WIP*. Successive project workers also made out of hours contact with the service users with the aim of being supportive, and we are aware that *WIP* managers raised this as an issue in order to protect the project workers from excessive demands.
- 5) Most SUs seem to have posed no problems in respect to their tenancy obligations. SU5, however, was in rent arrears. SU9 was ultimately asked to relinquish her tenancy by *HfW* (after protracted negotiations), but this was complicated and there is no clear story within the records examined. SU7 engaged in 'anti-social behaviour' before she was recalled.
- 6) There was evidence, from case files and interviews with service users, of *WIP* referring both the women and their children to specialist resources, including counselling, child and adolescent mental health services and mentoring. During the later stages of the fieldwork, and helped by *WIP*'s expansion following the receipt of a large Ministry of Justice grant, several service users had been referred to counselling and employment training and support services delivered in-house by *WIP*. We do not know whether these services have continued to be offered following *WIP*'s withdrawal from the Re-Unite project.
- 7) In regard to the aim to prepare the women for independent living the evidence suggests that attempts were made in this direction, but the documentary evidence of improvement, validated by service users, was patchy. The ultimate proof of success here of course concerns the service users being assessed as suitable to be moved on to more permanent accommodation. However, the assessment processes were not clear, and in nine cases out of the ten relevant cases (one person having been recalled, and only one having 'moved on' at the time at which we concluded the evaluation period) the women's capacity and readiness to move had not been systematically recorded. Moreover, communication difficulties between *WIP* and *HfW* meant that there were different perceptions of readiness. As indicated earlier in this section, a number of service users themselves felt ready to move on, but lacked information on what they would need to do to accomplish this. On this measure it is clear that there were manifest failings.
- 8) Just one service user moved into permanent accommodation during this two year stage of the project. The Re-Unite property she vacated remained empty for nearly seven months before a new service user moved in.

Overall, some of the aims concerning the delivery of services were met, but some were not according to the schedule of services set out.

## 5. Case Studies

In this section, we provide two case studies to illustrate in more detail the lives of two Re-Unite service users and their children during their involvement in the project. Service User One was selected because she was the only woman to have moved on and left the project during the evaluation period and Service User Two was the longest-serving mother on the programme. The choice of these two women should not be assumed to mean that they are 'typical' Re-Unite service users, any more than the service users collectively are 'typical' women ex-prisoners. Basic demographic details relating to all 11 service users can be found in Appendix 4.

### 5.1 Service User One

Service User One (SU1) and her three small children, all under four, were living in woefully inadequate emergency accommodation in North London following SU1's release from prison. SU1, aged 23 and White British, had served 10 months of a two-year prison sentence for importing cannabis. Her co-defendant was her ex-partner and the father of her children, and he had been violent towards SU1 in the past. SU1 was referred to Re-Unite by a support worker at *WIP*, having worked with *WIP* for a number of years. She and the children moved into a two-bedroom Re-Unite house 8 months after SU1's release from prison. SU1 told us that had she not been offered the Re-Unite property, she had been seriously considering raising the deposit for privately-rented accommodation by illegal means.

When we first met SU1 in late 2007, she was very positive about the Re-Unite project, and particularly her key worker, whom she said she could not rate highly enough. Probation, by contrast, had featured very little in SU1's life post-release, and probation staff had, she felt, treated her rudely, offered her no support, and threatened her with recall to prison.

SU1's twin daughter and son, aged almost four, started pre-school around the corner from their Re-Unite house, and the family attended several Re-Unite trips, which they all enjoyed. SU1 and her one-year old son were regular attendees at Lewisham Newpin. In 2008, SU1 obtained a grant from *HfW*, with which she bought a computer. She also completed a short computer course funded by *WIP*.

As her youngest children grew bigger, SU1 soon felt ready to move into a bigger property (although she was keen to retain the moral and practical support from Re-Unite that she found so helpful). However, she felt that she was being told by Re-Unite project workers that she was not ready to move on yet. SU1 was very badly affected by a change of key worker, following the resignation of Re-Unite's project co-ordinator. She indicated that she felt "very let down" by this change, which, she thought, had resulted in a rapid decline in the level of personal and practical support she was offered, at a time when she felt she needed it most, her children's father having been released from prison and deported.

When we last interviewed her in September 2009, SU1 was still living in the same property, where her three children were now sharing one room. She was frustrated that she had still not moved on. SU1 remained positive about the Re-Unite project, but felt strongly that the project needed a co-ordinator. She was by now not sure whether she would

recommend the project to other women leaving prison, although she felt that the project was perhaps best suited to women with children who had been in care whilst they were in prison, for whom getting their children back could be particularly difficult.

## **5.2 Service User Two**

Service User Two (SU2) and her 14-year-old son moved into a Re-Unite two-bedroom flat in 2007. SU2, aged 30 and black British, had served half of a nine-year sentence for conspiracy to supply Class A drugs. SU2, who had no history of drug use herself, had referred herself to Re-Unite whilst in custody, having seen a poster about the project in the prison. Her son lived with his maternal grandmother in South London while SU2 was in prison.

SU2 was happy to have had the opportunity to move to Lewisham with Re-Unite: whilst she felt that area where the Re-Unite property was located was “in the heat” to some extent, it was close to her mother’s home, and she was glad not to be further out of London. Importantly for her son, he was able to remain at the same school, where his friends were and where he had already completed a lot of coursework. Shortly after starting the Re-Unite project, SU2’s son started football training twice a week with a well-known London club.

SU2 consistently spoke very positively about her Re-Unite experience. Whilst she welcomed the encouragement and practical support provided by her female key worker, she felt that the support and contact she received was not too intrusive and “didn’t feel like a chore”. This contrasted markedly with her experience of probation, which she felt was “just like clocking in”. Moreover, SU2’s male probation officer had told her that he knew very little about women offenders, since he supervised so few of them! SU2’s son told us that the Re-Unite project had allowed him to spend more time with his mum and that he enjoyed the Re-Unite trips.

Whilst on the project, SU2 received financial support from *WIP*, enabling her to complete part-time university access courses in sociology and health and social care. A grant from *HfW* meant that she could buy a computer which both she and her son used for their homework. Reports from SU2’s son’s school and from SU2 herself indicated that his school work had improved since they started Re-Unite. SU2’s son told her that he doesn’t have to worry about her being in prison any more. When we last talked to him, he was planning to stay on at school to do ‘A’ levels. SU2 volunteers regularly for a young people’s organisation. She was employed part-time by a friend after her release from prison, but was unfortunately made redundant when her friend’s business folded.

After just 11 months with Re-Unite, SU2 and her son successfully moved on and became *HfW* tenants in a two-bedroom terraced house close to their Re-Unite flat. Re-Unite staff helped SU2 to furnish and decorate her new home.

## **6. Probation Perspectives on the Project**

It was possible to complete interviews with seven probation officers (offender managers) for service users (SUs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10). SU2’s probation officer (PO) proved to be elusive (at least fifteen attempts were made to arrange an interview). For SU6 an interview was planned with the drugs intervention project (DIP) worker (as the relevant external agency), but then the DIP worker discontinued her work with the agency and the Service

user ceased to use their services. The PO for SU7 was not interviewed because SU7 was recalled before we heard about the events which led to her being recalled. There was no PO for SU 11. Attempts to reach the PO concerned were not successful, despite repeated attempts to make contact. Out of the seven POs interviewed: two indicated that they had received a leaflet or letter from *WIP* and that that had been their main source of information about the Re-Unite project; a third indicated receipt of a leaflet but acknowledged that it had not been read, rather the PO had asked a probation colleague about the project and about *WIP*. Four POs indicated that they did not know much about the project (POs for SUs 3, 5, 8 and 9 respectively). But in one case – SU4 – the PO knew a little about the project from the service user herself, and the move from Re-Unite housing to a flat had involved a transfer of probation responsibility from another area.

Probation perspectives on the Re-Unite project were clearly very positive. As the PO for SU1 put it:

“[The Re-Unite project] is a very good idea. I home visited [SU] recently and her key worker happened to be there, and they seem to have a very good relationship. [SU] is really moving on thanks to the support she is getting. I think it is really important for women who’ve been offending to get this support when they come out of prison”.

*SU1*: When asked about the risk of re-offending, the PO thought that the SU needed to “build up her self esteem in that she has to deal with her former partner.” The PO noted that the SU was ‘working on how to avoid contact with him but also how she would cope if she went back to him [a drug dealer]. Thus the PO viewed the work that Re-Unite were doing with the SU towards gaining employment as a positive move, since her education, training and employment needs were important. In terms of risk (where 1 is low risk and 10 is high risk) the PO placed SU1 at 3-4. Overall, the PO thought that the Re-Unite project had benefited the service user in providing her and her children with accommodation since the local authority refused and would have made her homeless: “the actual support she is getting is helping her and therefore the children. I suppose too that if she is improving her employability that will help the children.”

*SU3*: SU3’s PO was similarly impressed with the project: “It is well needed. A right good project.” The SU was not considered a high risk in terms of re-offending (risk at level 2 on a scale of 1-10), although it was recognised that she suffered from depression. It was thought that there might be increased risk if she established a relationship with another controlling partner or if she had financial difficulties. Overall, it was thought that the Re-Unite project had “got her back in the community. She lost her job. It is helping her to build back her relationship with her children.” SU4’s PO reiterated positive assessment of the project:

“I think it is good, I really do. [SU] said it was very helpful for her. At present she is getting help with building her CV so that she can apply for jobs. She had no friends or family in [area of London] and she was a bit anxious at first about how her child would settle at school. Her [Re-Unite] key worker is working very closely with her and she is starting to improve.”

Interestingly, the PO indicated that the project worker was perhaps doing what she herself would wish to do [as the PO] especially in terms of home visits, which, as an overstretched probation officer, she was not able to do regularly. In terms of risk of re-offending the PO thought that the SU was about 3-4 on a scale of 1-10.

*SU5*: The PO for SU 5 suggested that the Re-Unite project made the PO's work easier: "It's good [the project]; in terms of my own work it means less risk of re-offending. *SU5* is not too strong (as a decision-maker) or financially, and getting the housing helped her to become stable." The PO went on to say:

"[Re-Unite] has helped to stabilise her. Housing has really helped her to stay with her children and that has had a wider effect. She has had to manage her finances, and I have helped her with advice on negotiating over making payments to reduce bills."

In terms of future risks, the PO did not view *SU5* as entirely 'risk free'; the PO did not think that she would repeat the offence, but thought that she might be vulnerable if a former partner who is in prison came back into her life. The PO thought that there was "a long term risk, but not necessarily in the next two years." The PO put the long-term risk at 4. *SU5* was expecting another child at the time, with a third father; the two existing children already having different fathers. The probation officer considered that the boy child had not really bonded after the separation of imprisonment; an assessment for hyperactivity was in progress. The PO had advised *SU5* that bonding would take time.

Overall, the PO concluded:

"I am very pleased that *WIP* have a very positive relationship with *SU5*. Re-Unite is contributing by providing housing. *WIP* supported my case to get funding for furnishing her flat (the post Re-Unite accommodation). It is a good example of partnership."

*SU8*: Initially, the PO for *SU8* claimed that he did not know about the Re-Unite project and had no comments about the project at this stage. The PO had limited contact with the service user – about once a week. Also, the PO had negotiated a relaxation of *SU8*'s curfew so that she could attend an event at her son's school. He considered the *SU* to be low risk: "she knows what she wants, she is very articulate – if she has the right opportunities and assistance she should be on top." Later in the interview the PO recalled the key worker who was supporting *SU8* and felt that it was helpful that housing had been provided so that they could be reunited when she was released. In conclusion, the PO commented that the Re-Unite project "was why we are all working as a team in criminal justice to make sure that offenders can settle in the community...We are an effective partnership. That is what we are all trying to do, it is a positive thing."

The probation officers for *SU 9* and *10* were similarly pleased about their clients' involvement in the Re-Unite project.

## **6.1 Probation issues**

A number of issues arise from consideration of probation perspectives:

- 1) Awareness of the Re-Unite project seemed variable, but this could be to do with caseloads and the difficulty in recalling details for specific clients; the probation officer who at the outset of the interview stated so clearly that he did not know anything about the Re-Unite project later recalled that there was a project worker, for instance;

- 2) The provision of housing was perceived to have been an important aid to resettlement;
- 3) The project workers were seen by probation officers to be actively supporting the service users and they could see tangible improvements in lifestyle and well-being;
- 4) The Re-Unite work was seen to supplement other work that the probation officers were doing. At the same time, there is at least some evidence to suggest that the Re-Unite project was doing some of the work that probation officers might be doing or would wish to do (for example, home visits);
- 5) The probation officers with whom we spoke alluded to ongoing risks or long term risks (or vulnerabilities that might lead to re-offending). This highlights a possible need for continued support beyond completion (i.e. two years) of the Re-Unite project. However, when asked to give a 'risk score' for their clients, these were invariably low (i.e. low likelihood of re-offending). Probation officers were asked to inform us if any service users were breached for re-offending; we received no such reports.
- 6) In any attempt to attribute 'success' to the Re-Unite project it is important to recognise other statutory help (probation officer support included). It is quite possible that Re-Unite support makes the work of probation officers 'easier' since problems that the women might take to Probation were being addressed by the Re-Unite project workers.
- 7) Despite *WIP's* attempts to explain the project to Probation Officers it was not clear that the information was getting through. This could reflect workload issues within probation, of course, but it may be worth reviewing how best to ensure that probation officers know about the project. This point is relevant to the low number of referrals from probation officers too (see above).

## **7. Perspectives on the Partnership**

### **7.1 Shared vision but different lens?**

Drawing on interviews with each of the partners (noting again that *Commonweal* and *Housing for Women* were the key partners as such, with *Women in Prison* operating under a service level agreement) it is clear that whilst there was a shared vision at the outset, differential conceptions of how the project might develop, and the exigencies of everyday organisational practice, have led to some searching reflections on how things might have been done differently and on the appropriate future direction of the project. The present situation is that *WIP* ended the contract to provide services to Re-Unite, originally planned to end in September 2010, on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009 and will have no further connection with Re-Unite. A revised partnership agreement between *Commonweal* and *HfW* has been established to incorporate both the learning identified in this evaluation and improvements developed by the two organisations. *HfW* will continue to manage the properties, which have been leased from *Commonweal* for the project for a period of ten years (with approximately eight years remaining) and they now employ their own specialist project worker to provide the improved range of services. *Commonweal* will take responsibility for raising and administering funds for the new project concept as well as helping with quality control and measuring social return on investment. The new project format also allows for

*HfW* to employ in-reach workers to, inter-alia, visit prisons, re-settlement organisations and probation services to develop the project as current service users move on. A publicity campaign started in December 2009 to support these efforts, although word of mouth communication and posters in prisons will continue to be promoted because these methods are still considered to be the key channels through which the project became known to the present service users.

For *Commonweal* the Re-Unite project is a second substantive innovative experimental project to provide housing for offenders, an earlier project involving young offenders being a two year project only.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, studio and small flats purchased for that project were brought into use for the Re-Unite project for the Mothers' Programme. For both *HfW* and *WIP*, the Re-Unite project has represented an opportunity to diversify and create specialist provision.

A key question here is whether or not the original structure of the project was the best formula. *HfW*, in consultation with *Commonweal*, created a service level agreement with *WIP* (see Appendix 1) to provide support services. In essence, *HfW* were the contractor/employer of *WIP*, although this has not involved payment to *WIP*; rather, *WIP* chose to generate their own grants for support services (from the Lloyds TSB Foundation and other sources). Our understanding is that *WIP* chose to do this at the outset, under their previous directorship. It could be that this choice to pursue independent funding for the support services made *WIP* feel more in control of what they could offer or would wish to offer. Certainly, a service level agreement without a transfer of money has limited its binding power. One result has been that *HfW* have felt constrained to push *WIP* to deliver services in full accordance with the key performance indicators set out in the agreement. It could be that their own experience of working with disadvantaged women has alerted them to the need to play things flexibly and in responsive, rather than pro-active, mode. Equally, as the expert support service, *WIP* may have felt that their knowledge about women's needs should have taken precedence over any service level agreement which sets out precise expectations in relation to service delivery. These different perspectives notwithstanding, elements of the partnership have not worked as well as expected. The difficulties appear to revolve around the service level agreement and how much *WIP* has been able to deliver not only to the service users, but to the other two partners, in terms of information about planning, income and expenditure in relation to the Re-Unite project, responses to evaluation action points, risk planning, and operational manuals. In particular, there have been concerns about the absence of documented information on progress measures which would facilitate a move on from the Re-Unite premises. *HfW* told us that they expected to receive written progress reports on the service users from *WIP*, which would trigger their own referral procedures to local authority housing. *WIP* it seems, have felt the unequal partner in the venture, not least because of the expectation that they would fundraise for the service provision (despite the choice to do this by the previous director) and yet be contractually beholden to *HfW* in terms of the service level agreement. *WIP* have felt constrained by what they perceived to be *HfW*'s seeming inactivity in regard to 'move ons'. Interviews suggest that *WIP* staff expected *HfW* to take the lead in arranging future accommodation whereas *HfW* were waiting for relevant information from *WIP* as to the women's readiness to move on. *Housing for Women* do appear to have been very successful in brokering special arrangements with the London borough of Lewisham, for example. This said, some staff within *WIP* seem to have been operating under the misapprehension that *HfW* would be able to offer all the service users property from their own stock once they had made good progress on the Re-Unite project. Service users

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<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that *Commonweal* have considered participation in a number of projects over the years.



themselves, having seen one early service user re-housed by *HfW* perhaps similarly misunderstood the role of *HfW* and expressed strong concern that that particular option has not been offered to everyone who might be eligible.

As we understand things, the service level agreement was worked out between the three partners from the early inception of the project, when it was still known under the working title of ‘Mother’s Coming Home’, but it is important to be cognisant of the different professional and working cultures of the partners involved in Re-Unite, all of which may have contributed to a breakdown in communication about progress in relation to the service level agreement. Certainly there is a perception that there have been some significant inconsistencies in the way that the service level agreement has been fulfilled.

*Commonweal* has perhaps viewed the project through the lens of a professional business operation, with firm governance, regulation and expectations of working practices. *HfW* has perhaps seen developments through the lens of a professional expert housing association well used to negotiating or brokering agreements with a range of authorities and providers in order to create the best deals for women. *WIP* has perhaps seen things through the lens of a well-established and highly respected advocacy service for women offenders and provider of support services to them. In this connection *WIP* have deep knowledge and experience of working with disadvantaged women. But the advocacy role was sometimes perceived by the other partners as getting in the way of service delivery according to the service level agreement. Also, as a third sector organisation, vulnerable to changes in funding streams and staffing changes and answerable to the bodies who fund their work, as well as to their board of trustees, there may have been a flexible approach to the service level agreement within *WIP* that was never clearly explained to the other two partners nor agreed with *HfW*. A change in directorship has also meant that *WIP* has, perhaps understandably, wished to develop new priorities. The move to new premises in Islington with long sought-after crèche facilities has perhaps brought with it a wish to use the building rather than holding ‘outreach’ group meetings elsewhere in London, with associated costs for room hire and so on. A wish to integrate service users on the Re-Unite project with other *WIP* service provisions, even though these were different from the provisions defined in the Re-Unite service provider contract, is maybe also understandable in terms of the general thrust of *WIP*’s work, especially in a context of new national developments which place emphasis on holistic provision. If *WIP* is able to make available other services to the service users (e.g. employment training) – and there is indeed evidence that this has happened - then one can see that it makes sense for them to have sought to draw the women into activities in the Islington Centre, rather than putting *all* energies into outreach and external activity in south London.

## **7.2 Potential and pitfalls of new partnerships**

These brief references to differences in perspective are telling of the emerging differences in professional culture and working practices of the partners, all of which have featured in acknowledged difficulties in communication within the Re-Unite project and in a perceived failure to deliver services according to the service level agreement. New partnerships create energy, as this one did, but sometimes marriages of convenience bring unexpected difficulties, not least that *three*, as opposed to *two*, partners, can lead to perceptions that one partner is ‘siding’ with another. In terms of unanticipated difficulties, small changes in initial understandings combined with the exigencies of everyday life in small-scale organisations which serve a large constituency with complex needs can so very easily result in seismic shifts in operations. The Re-Unite project staff changes were not anticipated, and yet there were two within the first year of operation, including the critical loss of the

project co-ordinator whose widely acclaimed energies and skills set a high standard, and concomitant high expectations amongst service users. This said, there is also a perception from within *WIP* that having promoted and set up the project, there was perhaps no need for a new co-ordinator to have been appointed. This view makes sense, but so too do the views of the two other partners in the initiative, that failure to appoint another project co-ordinator was in itself a major failure in a service delivery aimed to be personalised and delivered with the required passion.

One of the clear lessons from all of this was that this particular partnership structure did not work at all well. There is little need to dwell on the difficulties in the partnership further. Some of the points raised here are naturally raised tentatively, although we did conduct multiple interviews with each of the partners and thus have detailed understanding of perceived failures in different directions. We include these points here as a way of emphasising our stance of ‘appreciative enquiry’ and our wish to convey an understanding of the complexities of practice. We also include the detail because of the aim to capitalise on learning points from this early phase of the project and identify the best ways forward. We do not dwell on the difficulties in a negative sense because this detracts from the importance of the lessons learned and from the very obvious benefits of the project.

### **7.3 Partnership agreements and the project manual**

Partly with a view to replication of the project in the future, a ‘Project Manual’ was developed by *HfW* and *Commonweal* during the course of the first two years of the project. In the first part of the Manual, there is an outline of the partners, model agreements between the different partners, a note on the spirit of service provision, a description of the types of properties chosen (with standard house specifications and potential property report), and notes on maintenance controls, furnishing and setting up, and security and house sitting. The second part of the manual is devoted to ‘keeping on track’. Here there is discussion of project programmes to keep all partners aware of the deadlines, a copy of the invitation to tender and evaluator’s scorecard, and a description of measures of performance – where the project wishes to be after two years (this is reproduced at Appendix 5). Such a manual has obvious benefit – if it is used. We mentioned the project manual a number of times in interviews and gradually built up a picture of what it contained, though we did not receive a full copy until November 2009, which rather limited checks on how it was used. This said, it was clear from discussions that *HfW* used elements of the manual as an operations manual. The Standard House Specification (procurement and fitting out) for example, seems especially useful. We are also aware that adjustments were made to one property during these first two years in response to a service user’s fears about safety.

Whilst sections of the manual may need to be revised in light of this evaluation (in terms of service level agreements and so on), the value of the manual is clear in regard to replication of the project. As an everyday operations manual, one needs to guard against setting targets so precisely as to make things unworkable. In projects of this kind the exigencies of practice are such that prescriptive requirements may be overtaken by crisis intervention. These documents seem sufficiently flexible, however. The main observation we offer concerns their accessibility and use. Copies of service user agreements were on the *WIP* files, but there was little (if any) mention of the documentation otherwise. As indicated elsewhere, measures of progress for individual service users were certainly in mind, but it is not clear that there was consistency and continuity in the paperwork. One suggestion is that the project manual could include some simple measures of progress and success, so as to promote their consistent use.

## 8. The Costs and Benefits of the Re-Unite Project

### 8.1 Financial cost of the project

How much did the project cost and what were the cost benefits in terms of potential savings elsewhere? What follows is a description of the costs (with set-up and running costs being taken separately) and discussion of potential savings which can be attributed to the project. The unit cost has been worked out on the basis of a standard two-year stay in the project and all costs have been adjusted to 2008/09 prices. It is anticipated that replication of the project would incur running costs similar to those of Re-Unite or to one of the comparison projects presented below; however, set-up costs could provide for a larger number of clients with little increase in cost.

### 8.2 Capital costs<sup>28</sup> of the properties

Grove End Housing purchased the houses for an average of £232,524 for each property, including legal, conveyance and survey costs, which they expect to recoup at the end of 10 years.

### 8.3 Running costs: rent

Ownership of the houses remains with Grove End Housing, to whom *Commonweal* pays an average annual rent of £10,200. A realistic market rent has thus been included as part of the project's running costs, as this would be a cost to any housing scheme. *Housing for Women* then pays *Commonweal* an annual rent of £2,500 per property. This represents the net income from housing benefit per service user, after subtracting the estimated costs of managing the properties. Therefore the net annual rent, contributed to the project by *Commonweal*, is £7,700 per property. ***The cost per unit for a two-year stay on the project (£7,700 x 2 years) is £15,400.***

### 8.4 Running costs: maintenance, administration and support

At any one time *HfW* works with nine properties and clients, so unit costs shown in Table 5 have been calculated on this basis.

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<sup>28</sup> Legal and refurbishment costs have not been included in the total project costs, as the investment is expected to be repaid at the end of the project.

**Table 5: Running costs, maintenance, administration and support (£)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Total annual cost</b>	<b>Unit cost per property for two years</b>
<i>HfW</i> director of property services (1, 2)	7,264	1,614
<i>HfW</i> director of housing services (1, 2)	7,265	1,614
<i>HfW</i> finance staff (1, 2)	4,444	988
<i>HfW</i> housing management (3)	300	67
Caretakers	96	21
Management overheads (4)		331
Legal costs (5)	1,800	400
Refuse removal etc.	1,080	240
Maintenance (6)		800
White goods and furnishings (7)		1,000
Projects meetings and PR costs		100
Rent payment to <i>Commonweal</i>	22,500	5,000
<i>Commonweal</i> administration costs (8)		2,444
<b>Total</b>		<b>14,619</b>

*Notes relating to Table 5*

1. Includes N.I., pension contributions and office costs
2. Estimated as 12.5% of an officer's time for 2 years
3. Checking standards, 2 days per year
4. Line management, HR, payroll etc. Estimated at 10% of total salaried staff costs
5. Dealing with disputes over move-on, payment of rent, anti-social behaviour etc.
6. Includes regular maintenance only
7. Some goods and furnishings are changed each time a tenant leaves
8. Covers staff, administration, office costs and travel

***The unit cost per property for two years is £14,619.***

**8.5 Running costs: personal support**

Although the project has nine properties in use at any one time, the support provided through *WIP* is sufficient for 12 users, so the unit cost per client, detailed in the right hand column of Table 6, overleaf, assumes support for 12 clients.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Support worker costs include liaison with prisons, attracting and assessing referrals and providing in-reach support to service users prior to their release from prison.

**Table 6: Running costs: personal support (£)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Total annual cost</b>	<b>Unit cost per client for 2 years: 1 of 9</b>	<b>Unit cost per client for 2 years: 1 of 12</b>
WIP project co-ordinator (inc. NI and pension)	31,795	7,066	5,299
WIP project worker (inc. NI and P)	28,851	6,411	4,808
WIP line manager (1, 2)	8,561	1,902	1,427
Project office costs and overheads (3) <sup>30</sup>	9,900	2,200	1,651
Staff and client travel, childcare, staff training	6,176	1,372	1,029
Activities, outings, meeting rooms etc.	3,000	667	500
Staff recruitment (4)	667	148	111
<b>Total</b>	<b>88,950</b>	<b>19,766</b>	<b>14,825</b>

*Notes relating to Table 6*

1. The line manager spends 20% of her time on Re-Unite. Salary and on costs are £37,857 plus 20% of office costs and overheads of £4,950.
2. The line manager covered much of the work of the project during a period of staff vacancy from January 2009. This cost was offset by savings on the salary of the project worker.
3. Office space, desk, heat, light, insurances, phone, printing etc., payroll, HR.
4. Annual cost, assuming 3-yearly recruitment in London.

*The running cost for 2 years for personal support (£88,950 ÷ 12 x 2 years) per service user is £14,825.*

**8.6 Income**

HfW receives an average annual income of £7,100 per property, paid by the Service users and funded through housing benefit. When adjusted for an 11% void rate, this comes to £6,319. *The unit income per client over two years (£6,319 x 2) is £12,638*

**9. Total Net Two-year Running Costs Per Client**

These estimates represent the total cost to the public purse for each client. The costs to *Commonweal* have been included as they would be provided through a public body such as the Housing and Communities Agency in an equivalent scheme. Rent paid through housing benefit has been subtracted, as this would be available to all individuals in these circumstances and does not represent a cost to the project.

<sup>30</sup> These are based on costs provided by WIP. The office costs appear comparatively cheap for a London-based project.

**Table 7: Total net running costs per client (£)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Unit cost per client for 2 years</b>
Rental of property (contributed by <i>Commonweal</i> )	15,400
Housing maintenance etc. ( <i>HfW</i> and <i>Commonweal</i> )	14,619
Personal support ( <i>WIP</i> )	14,825
Total cost per client	44,778
<i>Less user income through housing benefit</i>	-12,638
<b>Net cost of the project per client</b>	<b>32,206</b>

*The total net cost of Re-Unite for 2 years is £32,206 per service user.<sup>31</sup>*

### 9.1 Set-up costs

The *HfW* costs shown in Table 8, below, are for developing nine properties, but the *WIP* costs provide for 12 clients. The same level of set-up costing (excluding property furnishing and maintenance) could provide for a larger number of clients if the project were extended or replicated.

**Table 8: Set-up costs (£)**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Total project cost</b>
<i>HfW</i> chief executive (25 days)	8,750
Director of property services (9 days)	2,012
Director of housing services (78 days) (1)	17,433
Project developer (legal matters and developing procedure manual, 33 days)	8,029
Caretakers	240
House sitters (2)	6,000
Legal costs (3)	20,000
<i>HfW</i> initial upgrading/maintenance costs (4)	2,250
<i>HfW</i> white goods, fixtures and furnishings (5)	18,000
Meeting and PR costs	500
<i>WIP</i> chief executive and senior officer time (6)	7,500
<i>Commonweal</i> costs (7)	40,000
<b>Total set-up costs</b>	<b>130,714</b>
<b>Set-up costs minus property furnishing and maintenance (4, 5)</b>	<b>110,464</b>

#### *Notes relating to Table 8*

1. Includes 4-5 days per property to view, measure, purchase and check equipment. Also includes meetings, liaison with partners, interviewing prospective residents, report writing and liaison with local authorities regarding letting arrangements.
2. House sitters were paid £333 per week to stay in vacant properties, at an average vacancy rate of 2 weeks per property during the set-up period. There should not be significant future vacancies if moves are anticipated and well managed.
3. Covers agreement between the three partners and property lease arrangements. Fees would be lower under a Housing and Communities Agency arrangement.

<sup>31</sup> and her child(ren)

4. The cost of replacing boilers (£9,000) was recharged to *Commonweal* and is included in purchase costs.
5. The properties cost £4,500 (£500 each) to furnish and equip. The cost of white goods and floor and window coverings has been added. These were recharged to *Commonweal* but this represents a realistic cost to the project and would not be provided by the property owner in equivalent schemes.
6. Assumes an equivalent number of senior officer days by *WIP* to those spent by *HfW* on developing the project.
7. These cost estimates were provided by *Commonweal*. They cover legal costs, meetings, staff and administration time, office costs and travel. If there were more properties neither these nor the *Commonweal* running costs would be significantly higher, except for the actual purchase of the houses.

## 10. Comparison with the Costs of Similar Projects

Cost information has been gathered relating to two other projects, the Asha Centre in Worcester, and the Evolve project in Calderdale. Each is based within an existing support scheme for vulnerable women, including offenders. Costs of these projects are compared only with the *WIP* element of Re-Unite, since no costings are available for housing in either project.

### 10.1 The Asha Centre, Worcester

This is one of three such centres in Worcestershire, and provides advice, support and assistance into employment/training for vulnerable women. Asha serves around 110 women at any time, including some who are supported by a specific worker for ex-offenders.

A replication of the Re-Unite project is under development by Asha, with support from *Commonweal* and *HfW*, to identify suitable local housing providers. To date there have been no clients on the project, so cost comparisons are necessarily speculative. The model of support is somewhat different from Re-Unite in that all group activities are provided from a main centre, and projects clients mix with other women who are not offenders. When provided, it is expected that housing will be available on a long-term or permanent basis after the project support has ceased. It is likely to be in areas suitable for the women to live permanently, as the housing associations involved have a wide range of properties in the area.

A support worker is already in place. She will work with 10 clients in the new housing, as well as around five women in prison or in other settings. The unit costs represent only the support costs (equivalent to the *WIP* element in Re-Unite), and assume a caseload of 15 for the support worker out of a total of 110 women supported by the Asha Centre. Thus the core costs of the centre are included at 13.6% of its total. This includes line management and office costs for the support worker and assumes an average stay in the project of two years.

**Table 9: Costs of the Asha Centre, Worcester (£)**

Item	Annual cost for Re-Unite replication	Unit cost per client for 2 years
Centre manager, deputy and administrator (inc on-costs) (1)	11,442	1,526
Other staff (support and training coordinators, driver, childcare coordinator, cleaner) (1)	8,291	1,105
Other costs (recruitment, training, travel, office costs, insurances, fees, marketing etc.) (1)	7,426	990
Support worker employed for Re-Unite replication (inc on-costs)	18,800	2,507
<b>Total (2)</b>	<b>45,959</b>	<b>6,128<sup>32</sup></b>

*Notes relating to Table 9*

1. 13.6% of the total costs for the Centre.
2. Unit cost per service user for 2 years = annual cost (£45,959) ÷ 15 cases per support worker x 2 years.

## **10.2 The Evolve Project, Calderdale**

Evolve has been in operation as a demonstration project for two years, funded by the Tudor Trust, and has involved providing intensive individual support to women offenders, (only) some of whom have been in prison. The element of the project presented here has provided intensive individual support, usually one to one, later supplemented with activities and other contacts through the Calderdale centre. Some women have received intensive support for a limited period such as three months, followed by ongoing advocacy and other kinds of support.

On average, the women have stayed one year in the project, although this has varied widely. Seventy per cent of them have needed intensive support for at least part of that time. A total of 216 women have been supported over the two years of operation - 108 per annum. In order to make the comparison as close as possible to the Re-Unite project, an average stay of two years has been assumed. So the unit costs shown below are higher than the true unit costs for Evolve, but the level of assumed dependency is also higher than the average of Evolve clients thus far. Costs have been calculated on the basis of 108 clients per annum, supported for an average of two years by a staff team of five plus administrative support.

<sup>32</sup> Some of the difference in costs between Asha (£6,128) and the *WIP* (support) element of the Re-Unite project (£14,759) may be accounted for by lower salary levels outside London and lower turnover and recruitment costs. The use of an existing centre for much of the support and group activities means that less time is needed from an individual support worker. The link to the centre may also provide some reduction in the need for individual line management support for the worker.



**Table 10: Costs of the Evolve Project, Calderdale (£)**

Item	Total annual cost	Unit cost per client for 2 years
Project manager (1)	43,142	799
3 Caseworkers (1)	113,491	2,102
Support worker (1)	28,246	523
Administrator 7.5 hours per week (1)	5,231	97
Staff training	1,500	28
Staff travel	4,800	89
Childcare costs	11,355	210
Publicity	500	9
Recruitment costs	2000	37
CRB checks	100	2
Meetings and venue costs	1615	30
Volunteer expenses	1580	29
<b>Total (2)</b>	<b>213,560</b>	<b>3,955</b>

*Notes relating to Table 10*

1. The staff costs in this element include National Insurance, Pensions and office costs such as desk, phone, heating, insurances, payroll, and HR.
2. Unit cost per service user for 2 years = annual cost (£213,560) ÷ 108 service users x 2 years.

**10.3 Comparing the running costs**

The appropriate comparison is between the two-year unit cost of the Re-Unite personal support provided by *WIP* (£14,825) and each of the other projects: Evolve (£3,955) and the Asha Centre (£6,128). The unit costs of both Evolve and Asha are considerably lower than those of *WIP*, for a number of reasons, largely the different staffing levels. *WIP* had two officers fully employed on the project (plus back-up support and overheads), working with up to 12 clients. The Asha Centre has one support worker for a group of 10 clients and Evolve incorporates support for the women leaving prison with a service to a large number of other women offenders.

In addition, the salary levels in London are considerably higher than in Calderdale or Worcester and the associated costs of employing staff, including office rental, are higher as well. Staff turnover is notoriously high in London, leading to further recruitment costs and the need for senior staff to both cover absence and spend time on recruitment.

Another difference lies in the locations and ways of providing support. In Re-Unite, *WIP* support workers spend much of their time visiting women in their homes and providing *individual* support and advocacy. The group activities they run are largely or exclusively for Re-Unite women, so Re-Unite-specific arrangements have to be made for premises, travel, staffing and childcare. In contrast, both Asha and Evolve make use of a centrally-located base for activities and support and make fewer home visits. Most group activities at Asha and Evolve take place jointly with other women and are not exclusive to women ex-prisoners. This model may have both advantages and disadvantages, in terms of the quality effectiveness of support. At a purely financial level, however, Re-Unite's model of support in the first two years of its existence is more expensive than the two alternative models looked at here. But the comparison is a difficult one because housing and individual support are intrinsic to the Re-Unite model, not just support and activities. New

developments in relation to the project – with *HfW* employing its own Support Worker – and *HfW*'s centre being located nearer to where the service users are living will undoubtedly reduce the costs in the next phase of Re-Unite's development.

A key point to note however, is that according to the New Economic Foundation (NEF) report *Unlocking Value* on how we all benefit from investing in alternatives to prison for women offenders (published in November 2008), the stated cost of a female prisoner place in local prisons, 2006-7, excluding building costs, was £41,084; £32,529 in closed prisons.<sup>33</sup> On this basis, £14,825 indicates excellent value for money for the Re-Unite Project if it serves the purpose of helping to reduce the future risks of reoffending and imprisonment.

## 10.4 The financial benefits of Re-Unite<sup>34</sup>

### 10.4.1 Reduction in re-offending

On the basis of the views of *WIP* and interviews with probation officers and service users, we have assumed that most women will not re-offend either during or after their involvement with Re-Unite. Those who do re-offend are most likely to do so within two years of leaving the project. For this reason, the two-year and 10-year savings have been assumed to be identical. Most of the mothers may have been at a low risk of offending anyway, as they are older than average for women ex-prisoners and had served long custodial sentences and most were re-united with their children within six weeks of release. One woman failed in the project and was considered quite likely to re-offend. One woman was considered to be at risk of committing further theft or fraud offences, and another of drug trafficking under the influence of a male partner. We assume a substantially reduced likelihood of further offending for most, as detailed in Table 11, below.

**Table 11: Crimes committed by Re-Unite service users and anticipated savings from cessation of offending (£)**

Crime type	No of crimes known to be committed by group	Total cost to public (£)	No of crimes likely to be committed in future (4)	Mean cost saved per service user due to reduction in offending (£)
Drug trafficking/supply (1)	7	473,970	1	40,627
Fraud/ forgery (2)	5	2,904,775	1	232,382
Theft	5	5,000	2	300
Robbery	1	8,628	0	863
Assault/weapon	2	50,762	0	5,076
<b>Total (3)</b>		<b>3,443,135</b>		<b>279,248</b>

<sup>33</sup> The source given for this information is HM Prison Service (April 2006-March 2007) Annual Report and Accounts, London: House of Commons.

<sup>34</sup> All costs are in 2008/09 prices (National Statistics, 2009). Savings are considered in the short to medium term (over two years) and over approximately 10 years or over a lifetime. Information is available for 10 of the 11 total users of the project, as one woman left at an early stage.

### Notes to Table 11

1. The total cost of drug offences in 1998 was £1,200m (Brand and Price, 2000). This includes only police and criminal justice system costs (including prison), not costs to health and rehabilitation services and loss of productivity. The total number of offences (excluding possession) in 1998/9 was 23,369 (Home Office, 2008). Unit cost in 1998/9 was £51,350. Adjusted to 2008/09 prices = £67,710.
2. The costs of fraud and forgery are notoriously difficult to estimate as little information is available. The total cost of fraud offences in 2000 was £13,818m for an estimated number of 9,212,000 offences (Brand and Price, 2000), making a unit cost of £1,500m. Adjusted to 2008/09 prices, this is £1,948m. Brand and Price provide a lower and a higher estimate. The lower estimate is half the figure above, which may be more appropriate to the offences committed by this group, but still far too high. For this reason, a lower estimate for the unit cost of fraud is used here, based on the £55,000 theft by one user, £680,000 by another and forgery by a third user (estimated £1,000,000), making a mean of £578,333. Other costs to criminal justice system, insurance, victims etc of £2,213, updated (at 2008/09 prices) to £2,622, have been added, making a total of £580,955.
3. Total mean cost saving per service user = cost to public ÷ 10 years ÷ no. of known crimes x estimated reduction in crimes.
4. We understand that SU9 had been charged with theft of a wallet, possession of cannabis and receiving stolen goods (but not yet tried) shortly before the end of the fieldwork period. Estimates here do not include these offences, but if found guilty, any additional such offence(s) would reduce the estimated savings attributable to the Re-Unite project.

The calculation of financial benefits is based on the difference in offending rates before and after the project intervention. This does not necessarily attribute a reduction in crime to the project as service users might have ceased offending anyway, without the support of Re-Unite. As highlighted elsewhere, the reconviction rates for women are lower than those for men, and women who have served long custodial sentences have a low likelihood of being reconvicted, regardless of what, if any, post-release support they receive. We must enter a strong caveat here that the actual difference made by the Re-Unite project can only be speculative in the absence of a robust comparison group.

Previous crimes committed by the service users included drug trafficking (seven women at a unit cost of £67,710, fraud (three women at an average unit cost estimated at £580,955) and benefit fraud (one woman); assault and possession of a firearm, costed as assault with serious wounding (two women at a unit cost of £25,381); robbery (one woman charged although the case was discontinued, and one other user also had a previous conviction for robbery, at a unit cost of £8,628); theft (five women at a unit cost of £1,000). Table 11, above, shows the number of crimes of each type known to have been committed in the past by the service users and the anticipated savings from a cessation of offending.<sup>35</sup>

***The estimated average financial saving per service user through a reduction in offending rates is £279,248.***

#### **10.4.2 Reduction in the need for emergency housing**

Emergency accommodation for a homeless woman has been estimated at £28,072 (St Mungo's, 2007, cited in Lawlor, 2008).<sup>36</sup> This assumes that each woman would remain in need of such housing for a year before being re-housed elsewhere. Another estimate by Quilgars and colleagues (2004) estimated the cost of a homelessness application at £764 and a year of emergency housing at £17,022. It is Quilgars and colleagues' estimate that we use here.

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<sup>35</sup> Crimes for which the users were charged but not convicted have not been included.

<sup>36</sup> Lawlor later stated that this estimate was too high and should be revised.

At least four of the service users would almost certainly have needed emergency housing and a further two would have been likely to need it if they were not in the project. The others had alternatives available through family members or other provision. We have speculated that six users would have needed emergency housing. The cost of this is short-term, and assumes that users would need such housing for one year, after which they would be housed elsewhere.

*The mean cost saving per user with respect to emergency housing is estimated at £10,213.<sup>37</sup>*

#### **10.4.3 Reduction in unemployment**

The type of job held by women before imprisonment has been estimated to earn them around £14,000 per annum. If they are unemployed on release, no tax or national insurance contributions are payable to the government and they receive welfare benefits. The taxes and contributions would be 23% of their earnings, or £3,220 per annum. Weekly income support is currently £105, or £5,460 per annum, so the total lost to (or not gained by) the state would be £8,680 for each unemployed service user per annum.

At the end of the evaluation period, one of the service users was working, running a business with help from *WIP*. Seven users had a history of employment at a wide range of qualification and salary levels,<sup>38</sup> while two had no history of employment. *WIP* was helping six of them with applications for jobs and college courses. We assume that, without help from Re-unite or another support agency, these six would be unemployed for one year longer than they will under current circumstances. On average, the cost savings would come after more than two years. Housing benefit at the level of a 'social rent' is paid whether or not individuals are employed, provided that one's income is sufficiently low to qualify. Child benefit is unaffected by income, so this is not included here.

*The mean cost saving per service user with respect to unemployment over a ten-year period is estimated at £5,208<sup>39</sup>.*

#### **10.4.4 Reduction in physical illness**

General health service usage is higher among those with lifetime problems, such as the unemployed (Godfrey et al., 2002)<sup>40</sup>. Depression is high among project users, often in consequence of domestic violence. We have based our estimate on six additional GP consultations and one extra A&E attendance per annum. One emergency treatment in A&E costs £120 (Curtis, 2008). One GP consultation of 10 minutes plus prescription costs £61, and one day in hospital costs £290 (Godfrey et al., 2002). These would total £776 per year per service user.

In the short term, the use of health services is likely to be elevated, as the project would encourage the use of services. After a period such as two years the long-term use of services might then be reduced, in comparison with the level of use that would have

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<sup>37</sup> £17,022 (cost of one year's emergency housing for one service user) x 6 service users ÷ a total of 10 service users on the project. We have excluded from our calculations one service user about whom we were unable to obtain relevant data.

<sup>38</sup> They are arguably rather less likely to obtain be able to obtain a well paid job in the near future, due to their offending histories.

<sup>39</sup> £8,680 (cost of unemployment per service user per year) x 6 service users ÷ total of 10 service users on the project.

<sup>40</sup> Godfrey and colleagues' study makes an assumption of one extra GP consultation with prescription and one extra day in hospital per year.

occurred without the intervention of the project. The ‘break even’ point in the use of these services would occur at around five years. We assume that the effect on use of physical health services is the same for all users. The mean cost saving over two years as a result of an anticipated reduction in physical health problems is £1,552.

Again, much of this is speculative but attributing just half the benefits to Re-Unite on the basis of this analysis would lead to a mean cost saving per service user for treating physical illness over a ten-year period at an estimate at £3,880.

**10.4.5 Reduction in mental illness**

Mental illness is common among women prisoners. Seven out of ten women in prison suffer from two or more mental health problems and nearly four out of ten have attempted suicide. Of the service users, seven were known to suffer from depression and/or stress following their offence and imprisonment or as a result of domestic violence.<sup>41</sup>

A session of cognitive-behavioural therapy for depression costs around £60. A course of treatment might last 25 sessions at a cost of £1,500. As with physical health problems, involvement in a project such as Re-Unite is likely to lead to greater use of mental health services in the short term - perhaps for two years - followed by a reduction. We assume that mental health care provided might be fortnightly contacts, equivalent to cost of 25 sessions per annum. There could be an additional cost in the first two years, followed by a saving, with a ‘break even’ point at around five years. Using the figures quoted above, the cost of treatment for the seven service users with mental health problems over a period of two years would be £21,000.

**Table 12: Estimated reduction in cost of mental health services required (£)**

Number of service users with mental health needs	7
Cost of treatment for this group for 2 years (£)	21,000
Mean saving or additional unit <sup>42</sup> cost per user (£) over 2 years	-2,100
Mean saving cost per user (£) over 10 years	5,250

*The mean cost saving per service user for treating mental illness over a ten-year period is estimated at £5,250. (We should note that not all service users on the project wished to be involved with mental health services, however, partly because they were afraid that once ‘unbottled’ it would be hard to control ensuing emotions.) Again, halving this to what might realistically be attributed to the Re-Unite project the saving would be £2,125 per service user over a ten-year period.*

**10.4.6 Reduction in substance misuse**

The costs to the state from substance misuse are mainly through crime, health problems and treatment and rehabilitation. Crime and health problems are already accounted for separately, so costs under this heading are limited to treatment and rehabilitation. Two service users are known to have used Class A drugs. Whilst on the Re-Unite project, both had weekly sessions with a drug worker for counselling and/or methadone treatment. The average cost of a methadone treatment programme with some professional consultation and some counselling/therapy is £58 per week (or £3,016 per annum), with wide variation (Curtis, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Two had no such problems and one was described as having dyslexia.

<sup>42</sup> See footnote 4.

We assume that involvement in the project and the provision of stable housing leads to a greater chance of success in addressing the drug problem. This might reduce the length of involvement in methadone and counselling treatment, possibly from five years to two years. The cost saving would occur after two years. We assume that the treatment programme would have been provided, possibly by arrangement with probation officers, whether or not clients had been involved in Re-Unite.

**Table 13: Estimated reduction in cost of substance misuse problems (£)**

Number of service users with a substance misuse problem	2
Overall cost saving for these users	18,096
Mean saving per project user over 2 years	0
Mean saving per project user over 10 years	1,810

*The mean cost saving per service user for treating substance misuse over a ten-year period is estimated at £1,810.*

#### **10.4.7 Reduction in local authority child care and support from social services**

Just eight per cent of dependent children are taken into local authority care when their mother is sent to prison. They may nevertheless remain in care for a long time. How long it takes mothers to get their children back depends in part on social services and in part on the mother's housing situation.

The average unit costs for London are £690 a week for foster care and £283 a week for independent support. These costs include external costs, such as social work, health, education, and youth justice. If children are looked after by relatives, the care costs are borne by family, friends and others. However, the state costs would be unchanged, so the costs to relatives have not been included in the present analysis.

Ten service users to date have a total of twenty-one children, and all except one have (or had) children living with them in Re-Unite housing. The children of nine service users were cared for by family members when they were in prison.

Without the support of the project, one infant would still be in foster care. Sixteen children have returned to live with their mothers, after being cared for by family members. Two are still in foster care, and three are still with their grandparents but may return to their mother once child protection arrangements are in place. We assume that, without the project, the one returned child would have remained in foster care for at least one year, which costs £35,880 (£690 per week). The three with their grandparents would also remain there for at least another year, but we assume that this does not incur any additional cost.

We assume that the support of the project has also reduced the involvement of social services with some of the other children. Others, however, may have an increased involvement with social services once they are reunited with their mothers, after leaving the care of their grandparents. Nine children (of four service users) have had some limited involvement with social services. We assume a small reduction in social services involvement overall for this group, equivalent to social services involvement for absent parenting for three months, at the prices listed above.

Since all the savings are within a period of a year, the 2-year and 10-year savings are the same.

**Table 14: Estimated reduction in cost of social services involvement with children (£)**

Social services involvement	Number of children with reduced involvement	Overall costs saved (£)
Reduction in foster care	1 child for 1 year	35,880
Intermittent visits, concerns	9 children for 3 months (13 weeks)	33,111
		(£283 per child per week)
Total saving (£)		68,991
Mean saving per service user, over both 2 and 10 years (£)		6,899

*The mean cost saving per service user for local authority child care and support from social services is estimated at £6,899.*

#### **10.4.8 Reduction in financial costs incurred relating to future problems of the children**

Prisoners' children have been found to be three times as likely to suffer mental health problems in later life as other children (Philbrick, cited in Lawlor et al, 2008). Lawlor assumes that these children are also three times as likely as others to become 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET), become a drug user or get involved in crime. Lawlor adds costs separately of crime (annual unit cost to state £5,302), mental health problems (annual unit cost £5,839), drug use (annual unit cost £7,667) and being NEET (annual unit cost £12,196). The annual costs were discounted over a 10-20 year period, making a total of £310,040.

Scott et al (2001) estimated a lifetime cost of £88,315 for children with a *conduct disorder* at age 10 or £30,680 for children with a *conduct problem* at age 10, compared with £9,363 for normal children. So the extra costs for the disorder/problem would be £78,952 or £21,317.

Godfrey et al (2002) also provide a lifetime cost for the consequences of being NEET at age 16-18 that includes tax foregone, benefit payments, substance misuse and health problems. The lifetime costs to public finance per individual are £65,588 and the current (annual, before discounting) costs to public finance are £6,937 in total. These are lower than Lawlor's estimates and avoid potential double counting of those with multiple problems. Godfrey et al also provide estimates of the 'resources costs' to the individual, which would add a further £56,759 lifetime cost and £6,685 current annual cost per individual. Lawlor's estimates include these, which would explain some of the difference.

WIP considers that the children would avoid the stigma of a mother who has been in prison, as they have moved to an area where they are unknown. The mothers have been supported and taught to help their children with school and other issues, so they would have as good a chance of engaging with positive peers and succeeding as any others in the same socio-economic circumstances. The percentage of 16-18 year olds who are NEET in Greenwich is 12.0%, Lewisham 6.7% and Southwark 11.7% (mean 10.1%). The project should be able to reduce the likelihood of the children becoming NEET down to the average for their borough or even lower as they are receiving extra help that others in the neighbourhood are not.

Nine of the 16 children (56%) living with their mother on the Re-Unite project have already had some issues of mental health such as depression, sometimes following domestic violence, or have demonstrated challenging behaviour. The mean age of the children is 7.3 years, ranging from one to fourteen years.

We assume that, without help from the project, 30% of all 16 children (4.8 children) might be NEET at age 16-18, in line with Lawlor’s assumptions of a risk 3 times as high as ‘normal’ children in the local boroughs (10%). The project may help to improve the life chances of these children to bring the percentage of NEET in line with others in the local area, making a reduction of 20% (i.e. a mean of 3.2 children who avoid being NEET at age 16-18). We assume that the savings would not be made until the mean age of the children has reached 16 years, i.e. in 8.7 years time, and are using the annual costs provided by Godfrey et al (2002) for the present calculation over 1.3 years. In the longer term, the cost savings from avoiding future problems would be greater.

We also assume that any costs due to the mental health and behavioural problems of the children would be balanced out. In the short term, the project is likely to encourage a greater use of support services, incurring higher costs. But in the longer term the benefits of doing so would lead to a reduction in costs. The ‘break even’ point might come after approximately ten years.

**Table 15: Estimated reduction in cost of children being ‘NEET’ at age 16 (£)**

Mean number of children who avoid becoming NEET at age 16	3.2
Cost saving per child from age 16 (£)	9,018
Cost savings over 2 years (£)	0
Total cost savings over 10 years (£)	28,858
Mean saving per service users over 10 years (£)	2,886

*The mean reduction per service user over a period of ten years in the costs attributable to children’s problems is estimated at £2,886.*

**Table 16: Summary of financial benefits or savings attributable to the project (£)**

Source of saving	Saving (or additional cost) per service user over 2 years	Saving per service user over 10 years
Reduction in re-offending	279,248	279,248
Reduction in need for emergency housing	10,213	10,213
Reduction in periods of unemployment	0	5,208
Reduction in physical health problems	-1,552	3,880
Reduction in mental health problems	-2,100	5,250
Reduction in substance misuse	0	1,810
Reduction in local authority child care	6,899	6,899
Reduction in cost of future child problems	0	2,886
<b>Total savings per user (including any re-offending)</b>	<b>292,708</b>	<b>315,394</b>
<b>Total savings per user (excluding any re-offending)</b>	<b>13,460</b>	<b>36,146</b>



The largest saving is due to the assumed reduction in offending, particularly for crimes of fraud, forgery and drug trafficking, which are very costly to the taxpayer. If reduction in re-offending were not taken into account, the savings would be £13,460 per user over a two-year period or £36,146 per service user over a ten-year period. Over ten years, the running costs of providing two years of support (£32,140) would thus be re-couped, although the set-up costs of over £13,000 per user would not.

None of the financial benefits can be attributed directly to the impact of the project, since suitable comparisons were not available. It is possible only to speculate or to make inferences from the interviews with service users, project partners staff and probation officers, and from other qualitative information.

#### 10.4.9 Overall benefits and costs of the Re-Unite project

The overall financial benefits and costs are shown in the table below, expressed as a unit cost/benefit per service user. The net figure is shown as positive for a benefit and negative for an overall net cost. The figures disregard the considerable administrative, legal and organisational costs of setting up the project, namely £110,464 for the nine properties<sup>43</sup>. However, the set-up costs of upgrading and furnishing the properties have been included as these would be similar in any project of this nature. It is assumed that these costs would be greatly reduced in a replication or extension of the project, due to existing knowledge and established procedures for documentation and legal matters.

Two calculations have been made of the financial benefits. One takes into account all aspects with a financial gain. The other excludes the financial benefits due to reduced re-offending as the type of offences committed by the service users were extremely costly<sup>44</sup> and, in our assessment, unlikely to reoccur even without the support of a project such as Re-Unite.

**Table 17: Overall benefits and costs of the Re-Unite project (£)**

<b>Benefit or cost</b>	<b>Benefit or cost per service user over 2 years</b>	<b>Benefit or cost per service user over 10 years</b>
Total financial benefits	292,708	315,394
Total financial benefits minus costs of re-offending	13,460	36,144
Running cost of Re-Unite project for two years	32,206	32,206
Property upgrading and furnishing	2,250	2,250
<b>Net financial benefit</b>	<b>258,252</b>	<b>280,938</b>
<b>Net financial benefit minus costs of re-offending</b>	<b>-20,996</b>	<b>1,688</b>

For all the reasons indicated above it would be difficult to attribute *all* the net financial benefits to the Re-Unite project; we include a strong caveat that many of the figures are estimated. We have given one or two examples where we think that it would be more realistic to attribute half the cost benefits to the Re-Unite project rather than the whole estimate benefit. **Taking a more realistic approach overall, in light of likely**

<sup>43</sup> See Table 8.

<sup>44</sup> These offences are not typical of women prisoners, most of whom commit more minor property offences which do not lead to such a high cost to victims and to the public purse.

reconviction rates,<sup>45</sup> a third of the net financial benefit as a result of being involved in Re-Unite – would be £86,084 per user over two years or £93,646, over ten years.

These lower figures themselves are wholly persuasive of the benefits of the project to society in simple financial terms, leaving aside other potential social benefits.

### Summary:

- **A key component of the costs obviously relates to the housing and set up costs for the project at a unit cost of £14,619 for two years.**
- **The running costs for two years personal support per service user is £14,825.**
- **The total net cost of Re-Unite for 2 years is £32,206 per service user (and her children).**
- **Separating out the housing and support costs, compared with other projects (Asha and Calderdale) the Re-Unite project looks expensive at first glance at a unit cost of £14, 825 per two years (WIP support); the Asha Centre unit costs are £6,128 per two years and Calderdale’s Evolve Project unit costs £3,955.**
- **The Re-Unite costs are higher for a number of reasons: different staffing levels, London weighting in salary costs, office rental costs are higher; staff turnover in London is notoriously high in London leading to further recruitment costs and the need for senior staff to cover absence and spend time on recruitment.**
- **The lower costs of the Asha Centre project and Evolve project also reflects the fact that both make use of centrally-located base for activities and support and make fewer home visits. Most group activities at Asha and Evolve take place jointly with other women and are not exclusive to women ex-prisoners. This may have both advantages and disadvantages in terms of the quality of the effectiveness of support, only time will tell.**
- **The higher costs of the Re-Unite project are therefore justified in terms of the intensity of the support required in this developmental phase of the project (with a high number of home visits) and in view of the particularities of a London-based project. Costs are likely to reduce over time, especially with new arrangements for the support element of the Re-Unite project (see the Postscript: section 11.5). Most importantly, £14,825 for a place on the Re-**

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<sup>45</sup> As highlighted elsewhere in this report and in the Ministry of Justice’s 2007 reoffending study (Ministry of Justice 2009), the reconviction rates for women are generally lower than those for men, and for both sexes, it becomes lower as the time increases. In this sample, three out of 11 women had spent between 3- 6 years in custody, two out of 11 between 18 months and 3 years, one between 12 and 18 months, and five under 12 months. We also know that younger offenders are more likely to reoffend than older offenders (most women in this sample were between 26 and 31 years old; the 2007 cohort reoffending rate is 37-40% from ages 25 – 34 years). It is also clear from the 2007 cohort study that offenders who have between 0 and 4 previous custodial sentences (as was the case for the Re-Unite sample) have seen the greatest reductions in reoffending. Although it should be noted that there is a wide range – from 20% for no previous custody to 64% for 4 previous custodial sentences. We cannot safely extrapolate group findings on to such a small sample with because the margin of error is wide. However, by assuming that the 11 women form a representative sample of the 2007 cohort we might expect a 1 in 3 rate of reoffending without intervention from Re-Unite.

Unite project, which includes support for children, is less than half the financial cost of imprisonment, it certainly offers value for money if it reduces the risks of future offending and imprisonment.

- There are major financial benefits of Re-Unite in relation to an estimated reduction in crime as a result of participation in Re-Unite, reductions in the need for emergency housing, unemployment, physical and mental illness, substance abuse, child care and support from social services, and reductions of financial costs incurred relating to future problems of the children.
- The largest saving from participation in the Re-Unite project is due to the assumed reduction in offending, particularly for crimes of fraud, forgery and drug trafficking which are very costly to the tax-payer. The service users during these first two years were perhaps exceptional in having committed crimes of this nature, though perhaps not so for London service users. This being so, the cost savings work out at £292,708 per service user over two years (£315,394 over ten years).
- If a reduction in re-offending were not taken into account, the savings would be still £13,460 per user over a two-year period (£36,146 per service user over a ten-year period). Thus it is very clear that over ten years the running costs of providing two-years of support (£32,140) would be recouped.
- Whilst the analysis here is inevitably based on estimates and inferences, and whilst it would be difficult to attribute all the net financial benefits to the Re-Unite Project, attribution of a *third* of the total financial benefits to the Re-Unite project (including the costs of reoffending and in light of national reconviction data) suggests a financial benefit of £86,084 per service user over two years and £93,646 per service user over ten years.
- These figures themselves are very persuasive of the benefits of the project to society in simple financial terms, leaving aside all the other social benefits.

## 11. Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has served to highlight both the achievements of the Re-Unite project and particular learning points in relation to its conception, organisation, implementation, delivery, and costs and benefits. We summarise below the overall findings and the issues and recommendations which arise from these. It is important to emphasise that on one dimension, Re-Unite should be seen as an idea or principle, backed by systems that are intended to be used to resettle potentially homeless mothers upon their release from prison, with an ambition that these systems might be suitable for replication in other locations. On another dimension, Re-Unite has been a local (that is South London) demonstration project which has tested specific systems and practices through two service providers: *Housing for Women* and *Women in Prison*. The aim of the demonstration project has been to find out how well a specific model of delivery can work and what the strengths and weaknesses of this particular model of service delivery might be, compared with other possible models. The aim has also been to identify 'best practice'. On this basis, and reflecting the evaluation findings in previous sections of this report, we offer a series of recommendations to help take the project forward.

### 11.1 Re-Unite in principle

In relation to the first dimension of the evaluation, there is clear evidence to suggest that the principle of 'Re-Unite' is an important one which is supported both by the research literature on women's post-prison needs and the needs of children of imprisoned mothers, and through empirical evidence of the accommodation and support needs on their release from prison - both self-reported and independently assessed - of the eleven service users and their children which was collected for the purpose of this evaluation. Numerous reports and studies have pointed to the demand for housing. The high number of referrals to the project in its early phase<sup>46</sup> demonstrates significant demand as did the interviews in private prison Bronzefield, and HMPs Styal and Holloway.

- **Recommendation:** The findings of this report support the principle underpinning the concept of Re-Unite and, based on evidence of demand also, we unequivocally recommend continuation of the project.

### 11.2 The Re-Unite project in practice

#### *i) Benefits to the service users*

A key objective of the Re-Unite project is to provide stable housing for women and their dependent children on the women's release from prison to prevent homelessness and to enable families to be re-united. It is undoubtedly the case that service users and their children have benefited from the provision of accommodation and support. Whilst it is impossible to chart precisely where each service user might have lived without the project, we surmise that at least some of them would have been in temporary or unsuitable accommodation that would have made the process of being reunited with their children more difficult. The majority of the service users reported that they would have been living in a hostel or other temporary accommodation without the Re-Unite project, and several others would apparently have stayed with relatives in cramped conditions. Indicators for positive impact are largely based on self-report assessments however; hard indicators were difficult to achieve because of some gaps in information produced.

Nevertheless, outside agency views were sought (particularly views from probation) which validated the service users' own positive perspectives on the project. But there are some questions as to how far probation officers were simply relieved that there was some additional provision for their clients, especially since probation did not seem to feature very largely in service users' lives, other than representing an additional burden in terms of reporting to their probation officer.

When interviewed shortly after they began the Re-Unite project, service users were unanimously positive about the personal support – including moral and practical

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<sup>46</sup> Towards the end of the fieldwork period prison perspectives (from private prison Bronzefield and HMPs Holloway and Styal) were rather more mixed; the 'idea' of Re-Unite was welcomed by prison resettlement staff, but at the time of our interviews with prison resettlement staff (July, October and November 2009 respectively) housing advisers in each of the prisons appeared to have only a hazy notion of the project. There had reportedly been no active referrals to Re-Unite in either prison for some months. However, as noted earlier, this may be attributable to a halt in prison in reach and in publicity of the project due to all the Re-Unite properties being occupied and none of the remaining resident service users having an identified move-on date.

support and advocacy – that they were receiving from their Re-Unite key worker. After the accommodation itself, this aspect of the project was most highly valued. It is important to note that that service users had varying (and sometimes very little) levels of support from their friends and families, all had previously been victims of domestic violence perpetrated by their partners (usually the father of their children), most had relocated within London to the Re-Unite property where they were now living, and several were making conscious efforts to distance themselves from ‘bad’ friends and associates with whom they had offended or misused drugs prior to their imprisonment. Consequently the presence of a consistent, supportive and friendly ‘helping’ professional was of great importance to them.

It was unfortunate that, in the perception of service users who had started the project in its first few months of operation, the level and consistency of key work support they received diminished following the departure of the Re-Unite project co-ordinator. Moreover, changes in key worker caused distress to some service users, due to having to tell their ‘story’ multiple times and get to know new staff. These undesired changes created anxiety amongst service users and were perceived by them – not least in the light of their collective histories of trauma, separation from their children and instability (both residential and in terms of relationships) – to be a significant weakness of the project.

- **Recommendation:** It is clear that the project has been of major benefit to the service users, but serious thought should be given to limiting the project, or at least the provision of accommodation, to one year (with provision for exceptions to be made where appropriate) or to planning for the ‘move on’ from the outset. For the most part, as indicated in section 4.2.6, service users felt considerable anxiety about moving on after about a year. *WIP* project workers also expressed the view that whilst the provision of ‘settled’ accommodation was intrinsic to the project, a two year period perhaps made it more difficult for service users to think about moving on, especially if they felt settled in the area and the children settled in the local schools, when ultimately, they might have to move to a different area. Planning for the ‘move on’ from the outset itself might serve to reduce the anxiety.
- **Recommendation:** Any reduction in support for individual service users should be a part of a planned tailing off of support, rather than an unintended product of staff changes. Continuity of care is of paramount importance.
- **Recommendation:** Where required, a level of support should be maintained after service users have moved on to more permanent accommodation, so as to minimise anxiety about ‘moving on’ and to assist ‘resettlement’ this second time around.
- **Recommendation:** Probation officers and offices should be sent information about the Re-Unite Project as a matter of routine, and again whenever a new service user takes up the offer of a place on the Re-Unite project. This would help to ensure a flow of referrals from probation and an appropriate flow of information.

- **Recommendation:** Probation officers should be included in the processes of assessment so as to obtain accurate information on risk factors (risk of harm and risk of re-offending). Probation officers should be asked to provide a copy of OASys data which could then be used as a baseline against which to measure progress.
- **Recommendation:** In light of evidence to suggest that selection procedures did not always follow established protocols, we recommend that these be revisited so that it is clear that information has to be sought from outside agencies (social services, probation, drugs intervention projects) prior to a prospective service user being offered a place on the project.
- **Recommendation:** There should be systematic recording procedures to note service users' problems and progress (perhaps using pre-established templates to record different kinds of contact).
- **Recommendation:** There should be systematic recording procedures to note courses completed in prison – so as to ensure continuity in educational and vocational courses in the community.
- **Recommendation:** There should be systematic recording procedures to establish service users' training and employment aspirations and targets.

*ii) Benefits to the children*

As indicated in Section 4, for practical and ethical reasons we were unable to obtain independent measures relating to the children's health, development and schooling whilst on the Re-Unite project. Those children whom we interviewed spoke extremely positively about Re-Unite, especially in relation to the size of their new home and the Re-Unite activities and outings they had been involved in.

All of the children were reported by their mothers to be experiencing emotional and/or behavioural difficulties of some sort. All of the children had been separated from their mother, sometimes for a very long period, upon her imprisonment, and been obliged to move house as a result. Most had witnessed domestic violence – usually perpetrated in by their father against their mother. Complex emotional and behavioural problems are to be expected in such a group. There were numerous reports by service users that their children's behaviour had improved whilst they were on the Re-Unite project, and of the children being referred by key workers to specialist support as well as leisure activities.

A key finding, and an unintended consequence of the project, relates to the children's schooling. The majority of the children had to change schools when their mother relocated to be on the Re-Unite project.<sup>47</sup> Anxiety about having to move again – perhaps to a new area – after two years, when their time on the project had ended, meant that some children were reported to have difficulties settling at school. Those applying to new schools or colleges had to do so without knowing where they would be living.

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<sup>47</sup> We expect that this would have been the case whether or not they had not been offered a place on the project.

- **Recommendation:** Ideally families should either be moved into Re-Unite properties located near to their child(ren)'s school or (given the particularities of this London based project) strenuous efforts should be made to re-house them close to their Re-Unite property after the end of their involvement in project (or both). The essential point is that changes in schooling for the children should be minimised.
- **Recommendation:** Mothers should be asked to access school reports for their children and to make these available to project workers and any future evaluators on a continuing basis. Such reports would help form a base line for the monitoring and measurement of progress. If mothers are made responsible for accessing school reports this would circumvent ethical issues regarding project workers/evaluators direct contact with the school
- **Recommendation:** The children indicated that they greatly benefited from the activities in which they were involved. Such activities should be continued. Moreover, there should be recognition of the differing needs of older and younger children (over eleven year olds and under eleven year olds, for instance, this distinction marking the change in school for children).
- **Recommendation:** Some consideration should be given to establishing a 'children's forum' alongside the planned service users' forum (from January 2010), so as to ensure that their feedback on the project is acknowledged and addressed.
- **Recommendation:** Recording templates should be used to monitor and record contact children's with external agencies (counsellors and similar) or the mothers' contact with such agencies on the children's behalf.

### *iii) Benefits to Society*

In terms of service user re-offending, there were no official reports of re-offending or reconvictions, although SU7 was breached and recalled to prison. SU 9 had also re-offended.<sup>48</sup> However, the Re-Unite women's offences were not typical of the offences committed by most women prisoners (most of whom commit minor property offences which do not lead to such a high cost to victims and to the public purse). Related to this, most had received custodial sentences which were significantly longer than average.<sup>49</sup> Reconviction rates for women who have served a custodial sentence of four years or more are very low: just six per cent of all such women leaving custody in 2006 (most of whom will not have received much in the way of professional support) were reconvicted within a year of their release (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

As far as costs and benefits to society are concerned, the overall financial benefits and costs, expressed as a unit cost/benefit per service user, show a net financial benefit of £258,318 per user over 2 years and £281,004 per user over 10 years. These figures disregard the

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<sup>48</sup> The WIP case file notes indicate arrest in August 2009 for theft of a wallet, a court appearance in October when she was charged with possession of cannabis and receiving stolen goods – whereupon she was bailed until mid-October. She had disengaged from Re-Unite and was *no longer resident* at her Re-Unite flat by the time the evaluation was drawing to an end.

<sup>49</sup> The mean length of custodial sentence received by service users was 4.38 years; the average custodial sentence for *all* women in 2007 was 9.4 months.

considerable administrative, legal and organisational costs of setting up the project, namely £110,464 for the nine properties. However, the set-up costs of upgrading and furnishing the properties have been included as these would be similar in any project of this nature. It is assumed that these costs would be greatly reduced in a replication or extension of the project, due to existing knowledge and established procedures for documentation and legal matters.

A second calculation which excludes the financial benefits and costs due to estimated reduced re-offending, were calculated. These figures suggest a net financial cost of -£20, £930 per user over 2 years and a net financial benefit of £1,756 per user over 10 years.

Needless to say, it would be unrealistic to assume that all the financial benefits mentioned here were entirely attributable to the Re-Unite project. Taking a more realistic approach in light of national reconviction data, if we were to directly attribute just a third of the financial benefits to the Re-Unite project, this would financial benefits of £86,084 per service user over two years and £93,646 per service user over ten years. These figures are persuasive of the benefits of the project to society in simple financial terms, leaving aside all the other social benefits.

In terms of cost compared with other initiatives, the Re-Unite project is considerably more expensive than services provided by the Asha Centre or Calderdale, for example, but much of Re-Unite's additional cost relates to the provision and management of housing stock, which is a unique element of the Re-Unite project. (There are also costs involving the three partners which the Asha and Calderdale projects don't have). We anticipate that the housing costs would be considerably lower outside London because of the lower cost of housing.

- **Recommendation:** We recommend that in any publicity regarding the project and in any communications with policy makers about the benefits of the project, the cost benefits of the Re-Unite project to society are framed in terms a third of the net costs (including offending); that is, £86,084 per service user over two years or £93,646 per service user over ten years. We recommend this on the basis that whilst the larger figures look exceedingly impressive, they are very rough estimates and in light of national reconviction data we think that it would be realistic to attribute a third of the net benefits to the project. These figures are both impressive and persuasive of the overall benefits of the Re-Unite project.
- **Recommendation:** The cost benefit data should be revisited in light of follow-up data on re-offending and reconviction relating to the sample of women in the early phase of Re-Unite's development. (Evidence of further offending would necessarily reduce the estimated savings attributable to the Re-Unite project.
- **Recommendation:** In any future evaluation it will be important to make costs and expenditure information available to the evaluators from the outset.



- **Recommendation: In any future evaluation it will be important to factor in the possibility of continued support when a service user moves to accommodation independent of the Re-Unite project.**

*iv) Implementation of Re-Unite London*

In addition to benefits or outcomes in respect of the service users, their children and society more broadly, we have attempted to assess how well the project was implemented and delivered during its first two years of operation in London. It is clear that the project began with much enthusiasm and clarity of purpose. The properties and residential areas were well chosen (although some service users began to feel that Lewisham was not a suitable area – despite good schools, a health centre, conveniently located shops, and a meeting place in the nearby community centre). The clustering of properties clearly carried benefits for some of the service users who made informal contact with each other. The assessment criteria for the selection of service users were clear. The mothers did not fit the national profile of female offenders, but were largely within the range of the target group. Moreover, most had a reasonable prospect of being reunited with their children, especially since the children were residing with other family members rather than being in local authority care. On the surface, one possible exception to this case (SU6) had two children in long-term foster care and an infant born in custody. However, the son born in custody was reunited with his mother following her release from prison, and it was never anticipated that the mother would be reunited with the older children. Thus this was a successful outcome.

Emerging differences in view and communication difficulties between the partner agencies, however, means that it is not possible to comment on how well the selection processes were operationalised. Lack of direct access to the selection processes on the part of the evaluators merely compounds the difficulty in making evaluative comment. After the first year of operation, the sources of referrals and waiting lists at any one point became unclear both to *HfW* and to the evaluators. The evaluators were not able to gain direct access to the decision-making processes by which mothers became part of the project. This was partly due to the exigencies of organisational practice within *WIP* and the prisons concerned, with *WIP* receiving relatively little notice of release dates; moreover, there is at least some evidence to suggest that women who had already been released from prison had more pressing housing needs than some of those who were about to be released and for understandable reasons, *WIP* drew them into the project.

Communication difficulties between the partner agencies, perhaps not helped by changes in staffing within *WIP* in terms of project workers, also emerged in relation to the procedures for ‘moving on women’. *HfW* waited for information from *WIP* that service users perceived to be ready to move on had met the established criteria within the service level agreement. *WIP*, on the other hand, perceived the barriers to women moving on to reside within *HfW*, who were thought not to have provided sufficient information on the prospects of moving on to service users – either within borough or out of borough.

This particular delivery model has exposed a number of operational difficulties which revolve around communication. However, we would caution against dismissing the idea of the project on the basis of these operational difficulties. Different delivery mechanisms would potentially resolve the problems. To this end, it is possible to envisage different a different organisational structure and mechanisms of delivery, whilst holding to the original model of housing and support for mothers and their children.

- **Recommendation:** We recommend that the project organisational structure be simplified. What emerges is the need for a closer relationship between service partners. This could be achieved by creating a different sort of service agreement whereby the support provider works to a paid contract for the delivery of specific services to the housing provider, with clear lines of accountability and regular reporting points. An alternative would be for the housing provider to deliver support services in-house. In light of the evidence we think that the latter would carry the greatest potential for effective service delivery, with one agency being responsible for housing management, referrals and the delivery of support. Such a structure would limit the potential for misunderstandings and miscommunication not only in regard to tenancy agreements, but also in relation to service users' readiness to move on. (See the Postscript below). We have considered alternative models of delivery – whereby service users might move into more permanent housing straight after release from prison, but in the London area, where housing is at a premium and housing waiting lists long, this is unrealistic.
- **Recommendation:** In terms of referrals we recommend a new publicity campaign in prisons to ensure a steady flow of applications.
- **Recommendation:** In the context of the above recommendations we suggest that if there is one agency responsible for managing the recruitment process, the housing lets and the delivery of support to service users, then it will be easier to ensure that there are no voids in relation to the properties.
- **Recommendation:** We recommend that the idea of clustering houses continue, although service users might usefully give some feedback on what matters most to them in terms of where they live. It could be that contact with women in other supportive settings (e.g. a women's resources centre of similar) could be as important as being near other Re-Unite service users.
- **Recommendation:** Whereas the evaluation findings suggest that Re-Unite did not always in fact *re-unite* mothers and children who would not have been re-united otherwise because they were already re-united and in alternative (if inadequate) accommodation, the benefits of flexibility within the selection criteria are clear. Thus we would recommend that the selection criteria be amended to make clear that there can be flexibility where there is need, and where this does not disadvantage women already on the waiting list for a Re-Unite property.

### 11.3 Further comments on the evaluation

Finally, include the need for more direct access to data. In any replication project it will be important to set up the evaluation at the same time as implementing the project. This would facilitate better access to the data since there would be clarity in procedures as to who was collecting what data and for what purpose. In this evaluation *WIP* initiated an assessment and data collection process themselves in relation to the service users which meant that the researchers were reliant on gaining access to these data. (Needless to say, it would have been insensitive to have asked the service users for additional information which only repeated what they had already been asked by *WIP* project workers). However, access to *WIP* files was sporadic, and, more importantly, the series of self-assessments ('problem and progress wheels' for instance) and regular reports established by the initial

co-ordinator, were not continued as far as we are aware. This made it difficult to follow through any analysis of progress. The research evaluation has also highlighted the importance of being involved in the drafting of initial 'contracts' with service users – so that agreements to participate in any evaluation can also include access to school reports, and to agencies involved in the children's lives, where appropriate and where not insensitive to the service users and their children's wishes. It would also have been useful to have sought service users' agreement to the evaluation team contacting Drug Intervention agencies, probation service personnel, Social Service Departments and other agencies from the outset, rather than having to seek consent to access following implementation of the project.

- **Recommendation:** Rationalise and confirm the use of data collection instruments from the outset; keep up to date records, and make all data available to evaluators (electronically where possible since it is quite possible to secure data by coding it). (Given the challenges of the tasks involved for project workers in dealing with often pressing demands from and needs of service users, paper records need to be as simple as possible. It may be appropriate to give some thought to hand held recorders and investment in computer software to translate tape recorded notes into text, but this depends on resources of course).
- **Recommendation:** Make clear with service users from the outset any need for access to agencies with which they are involved (including schools and probation).
- **Recommendation:** Evaluators and project workers might access school reports by encouraging mothers to seek such information for themselves (this would circumvent any difficulties in regard to the ethics and sensitivity of making direct contact with schools).
- **Recommendation:** Make clear what access future evaluators will have to selection meetings. Permission for research access to prisons can take several months through the Ministry of Justice and National Prisons Research Committee. This needs to be factored in if evaluators are to consider the selection criteria and how they are applied. An alternative to this of course is to invite the evaluators to attend organisational meetings outside prison where the selection process may be undertaken.
- **Recommendation:** Given that the evaluation period ended at a point when only one service user had been re-housed it will be important to continue elements of the evaluation so as to follow-up women who are successfully re-housed. An exit or similar sort of questionnaire could be used with service users as they move on – so as to measure the impact of the project on their lives and on the lives of their children. We would also recommend that there is a six month (and perhaps even a one year) follow-up after support has ended – for the sake of completeness of information and to learn about longer term impact.
- **Recommendation:** This evaluation was intended as 'action research' so that adjustments could be made along the way. This has been helpful in terms of ensuring that service users' needs have been addressed in timely fashion (for instance in relation to the need for greater home security mechanisms). We

**therefore recommend that any future evaluation continue as ‘action research’ so that there can be appropriate change along the way.**

- **Recommendation: We recommend a system of quarterly reports so as to facilitate the above recommendation, whether these be from an external evaluator or the project manager and project workers involved. A service users’ forum could potentially also make useful contributions to ongoing evaluation.**

#### **11.4 Overview**

As previously indicated, Measures of Success for the Re-Unite project in this early phase were established at the outset (see Appendix 5). The measures revolve around outcomes for both the mothers and their children. As evaluators we have been hampered by the variability and gaps in notes and records held on service users. We have also been hampered by the lack of continuity in the use of the ‘progress wheel’ which was employed with the first service users on the project in the early phases. Moreover, we have been hampered by lack of access to certain forms of information and decision-making. But the key limitation in this regard relates to the fact that only one service user had moved on to permanent accommodation at the end of the evaluation data collection period (September 2009). We have nevertheless teased out enough information to make valid claims about the service users, their involvement on the project and the overall positive impact of the project in this particular format (housing and support). These claims about the positive impact of the project have been reinforced by service users themselves and by outside agencies such as probation.

Notwithstanding the lack of data to confirm outcome measures therefore, the evaluation of this demonstration project has been extremely valuable and it suggest that the approach taken is extremely promising. It is a process evaluation more than an outcome based evaluation and, as such, it provides an important basis for the replication of the idea of a housing and support package for women and their children in other areas. In other words, we have shown that the project *as an idea* is feasible, but we have also pointed to the need for a number of organisational, implementation and delivery changes, whilst holding true to the original idea of providing appropriate housing and support. The benefits of such an idea clearly outweigh the costs. The Re-Unite model put into place carries huge potential for the future and it is a model which should be given very serious attention by other service providers.

#### **11.5 POSTSCRIPT**

- Since the evaluation period ended (September 2009), and as we have already indicated within the body of the report, WIP terminated its contract with HfW at the end of December 2009. In line with the emerging conclusions and recommendation of this Evaluation, the partnership arrangements have now been simplified. From January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, there are now just two parties involved in the venture, *Commonweal* as sponsor and HfW as the housing manager and support provider. The close alignment of housing management and support provision has the advantage of ensuring close co-ordination. There are additional benefits in terms of HfW, as a professional housing association, being fully aware of housing policy developments in London boroughs and therefore being able to assist with the ‘move on’ for service users, following systematic assessment of the service users’ needs and progress. -

This streamlined approach and more straightforward dynamic between ‘partners’ may also help to avoid misunderstandings.

- There has been acknowledgement that a two year resettlement programme may be too long, and a new policy of a one year ‘move on’ has been established. It has also been agreed that there will be efforts to ensure that service users understand the temporary nature of the Re-Unite housing. *HfW* have also recognised the need to address long term housing needs with service users as soon as they begin on the Re-Unite project, even if it also recognised that there is a good deal of work to do with individual women in terms of managing rent payments, budgeting and negotiating with mainstream agencies (including schools) in preparation for a ‘move-on’.

- New performance indicators have been established between *Commonweal* and *HfW* with the proviso that if *HfW* do not deliver accordingly, then *Commonweal* can transfer the support service tasks to another provider.

- A new project worker began duties on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Her caseload is focused exclusively on the Re-Unite project. It has been acknowledged that there will be ‘follow-on’ work once a service user has moved on to more permanent accommodation, but this would be less intensive than whilst on the Re-Unite project and would reflect service users’ capacity to link in with mainstream services and individual needs.

- Outreach work in HMP Downview, Send and East Sutton Park has begun, with new publicity material. As both housing manager and support provider *HfW* will be able to manage referrals, waiting lists, and ensure that there are no voids in terms of occupancy of Re-Unite properties.

- There are plans to re-establish the activities that were routinely arranged by *WIP* in the early stages of the project (coffee mornings for example), and to use such meetings as the basis for gaining feedback from service users. In essence, this will service as a service users’ forum.

- There is awareness within *HfW* of the loss of *WIP*’s broad awareness of criminal justice issues for women, but steps are being taken to address this by increasing conference attendance and making links with other criminal justice support agencies for women.

- In terms of the future, *HfW* plans explore the possibilities of expanding the Mothers’ Programme (and hopes therefore to expand the number of properties for this group).

- All of these developments seem extremely positive; they are all grounded in the evaluation evidence for the need for change in the implementation and delivery elements of the Re-Unite project. That the changes have been executed so quickly is testament to *Commonweal* and *Housing for Women*’s commitment to ensure that the project will continue serve to meet women offenders’ and their children’s needs for both ‘home’ and support.

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## APPENDIX 1

### HOUSING FOR WOMEN [*HfW*]

#### RE-UNITE PROJECT

##### Support Services required from service provider

##### 1. *The 'pre-release preparation' stage will involve:*

1. Project Workers identifying mothers with housing needs that will prevent them being reunited with their children on release and who are also interested in relocating to Lewisham and Southwark.
2. Project Workers fully briefing potential tenants on their obligations within the project and ensure that they are willing to work with Project Workers to ensure the scheme's success and allow monitoring from outside bodies if required.
3. Project Workers confirming to the satisfaction of *HfW* that the mother has a reasonable chance of being reunited with her children and that they will be able to love with her in the project within a reasonable time [say four weeks]. (Evaluators: we were informed in November 2008 that this period had been extended to six months to allow for the mothers' programme where issues relating to being 're-united' with children might be more complex).
4. Acquainting those qualifying mothers with the opportunities and encouraging them to commit to the project by signing up to a Service User Agreement.
5. Working with mothers to identify their and their dependents' overall needs to help them with resettlement and eventual independent living.
6. Liaising with carers or social services on behalf of the mother to evaluate the support that the children will need and to make arrangements.
7. Work with the mother and her children on a customised programme to ensure reunification and eventual independent living.
8. Undertaking a full and frank risk analysis of the overall family situation in conjunction with the mother, social services if appropriate, and providing plans for managing identified areas of risk.
9. Sharing with *HfW* the documentation involved in the selection of the service users, such as the risk assessments.
10. Creating a vision with the mothers of reunification in a potential home which may include supporting them during possible day release from prison.
11. Earmarking a home for the mother on release. Involving mothers in standard tenants' choice issues, for example, choosing colours for the new home where possible.
12. Identifying any special adaptations that are needed to the new home [because of disability or security issues for example] at an early stage.
13. Assisting the mother in setting up necessary goods, services and benefits.
14. Agreeing a resettlement plan with the mother for herself and her children.
15. Working with the mother to identify any protection that the mother may need from unsafe acquaintances/former partners and arranging with *HfW* for appropriate measures to be put in place.
16. The support provider will carry out a risk assessment, before the acceptance by *HfW* of the mother for the project, and identify risks:
  - To the mother and her children;

- To the neighbours by the mother/children;
- From previous partners/acquaintances;
- To the reputation of the project in its early days.

**2. *The ‘establishment’ phase will involve:***

1. Meeting the mother immediately on release and reuniting her with the children at that moment if at all possible.
2. Accompanying the mother and children to their home.
3. Ensuring that the mother and children have the goods and services they need to be able to live in that home and are registered for the correct benefits, utilities, etc.
4. Introducing the family to shopping, transport and mainstream education, health and social care services, faith centres and relevant support groups as appropriate.
5. Ensuring the mother signs *HfW*'s tenancy agreement as well as the inventory for furniture and utensils/linens as listed.

**3. *The ‘preparation for independent living’ phase will involve:***

1. Agreeing with the mother the level of support, information, advice and guidance on education, training and employment opportunities for the mother that will be provided.
2. As necessary, arranging support with parenting skills and connection with local services such as Sure Start.
3. Encouraging peer support between the mothers and children using the project and arranging outings and activities to bring them together.
4. Ongoing regular visits to provide guidance and support, including issues such as budgeting, debt management, healthy eating etc.
5. Providing appropriate emergency telephone support cover.
6. Reinforcing tenancy obligations in order to sustain the tenancy and avoid arrears and anti-social behaviour.
7. Assisting the family with access to specialist services as necessary such as counselling, mentoring, substance abuse and mental health services etc.

**4. *The ‘move-on’ phase will involve:***

1. Preparing the mother for independent living within two years of her arrival in the house.
2. On agreement with the mother, identifying resettlement opportunities, through *HfW*, to a permanent home with continued outreach support as required and identified above.
3. Where possible and appropriate, *HfW* may allow a permanent tenancy of the home if another property can be provided for the scheme.

**5. *Void management:***

1. *Start-up lets:* Identifying a suitable successor ahead of time in liaison with the property purchaser.
2. *Re-lets:* A void is defined as a property with no named nominee who can move in within 12 weeks. Identifying a suitable successor ahead of time (3-6 months)

in order to minimise the time that properties remain void between tenancies. *HfW* target time for a new tenant to be in situ will be six weeks after the last tenant has left, including any redecoration and refurnishing.

3. If departure of tenant is sudden and unexpected, then allowances may be made.
4. *HfW* will monitor the waiting list held by the Support Provider periodically.

#### **6. *Service User Forum***

A service user forum will be set up by *WIP* to comment on Re-Unite's procedures.

#### **7. *Evaluation***

1. Be subject to and co-operate with regular, independent evaluation set up by *Commonweal* Housing and other monitoring.
2. Performance measures to be based mainly but not exclusively on paragraphs 1.1, 2.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1, and 5.2 (voids) above.

Version dated 15.03.07

## APPENDIX 2

### Women prisoners and their children

#### Women's patterns of offending

Women are significantly less likely to offend than men and males remain disproportionately involved in more serious crime (although there appears recently to have been a degree of convergence between men and women in regard to less serious offending (Ministry of Justice, 2009)). The majority of female prisoners are young and criminally unsophisticated.<sup>50</sup> When women are cautioned for or found guilty of indictable offences the key offences committed are theft and handling stolen goods (55% of all crime committed by women) followed by violence against the person (22%) and drugs offences (10%). Generally, fewer women than men are reconvicted at a one-year follow-up,<sup>51</sup> and when convicted are convicted for fewer offences than men.

Most women in prison under sentence are in the 30-39 years age category (30%), with the next age groups being 25-29 (20%), 40-49 years (18%) and 21-24 years (14%).

In 2006, 45% of women who received a custodial sentence were reconvicted within one year, compared with 30% of women serving a community penalty. For both women and men, rates of reconviction have been consistently and significantly higher for those who have served custodial sentences of less than 12 months than those serving longer sentences.

#### The children of women prisoners

Whilst the children of male prisoners are generally looked after by their mother, women prisoners frequently rely on other relatives, particularly grandparents, to care for their children during their time in prison. In Caddle and Crisp's (1997) study, 41% of the women prisoners' children were cared for by grandparents or other relatives, and fathers cared for the children in just nine per cent of cases, whilst eight per cent of the children were placed in local authority or foster care. One tenth of those children who had lived with only their mother before her imprisonment were placed in care as a direct result of her being sent to custody. Ten per cent of the mothers who had lived with their children before prison did not expect to do so on their release.

#### The effects of maternal imprisonment on children

Several North American studies, reviewed below, have considered child outcomes following maternal imprisonment by comparing the children of women in prison with a control group, although there are no comparable studies in England and Wales, where imprisonment is used less frequently and custodial sentences tend to be shorter.

Huebner and Gustafson (2007) compared rates of offending in adulthood of 31 children of (previously) imprisoned mothers and 1,666 children of mothers who had never been imprisoned, using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a nationally representative US study of males and females who were aged 14-22 in 1979, together with the children of the women in the sample. Huebner and Gustafson's study design controlled for child characteristics and other risk factors, including demographics, maternal delinquency and parental supervision. Over a quarter (26%) of the children with

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<sup>50</sup> Among British nationals, 16% of female prisoners were from ethnic minority backgrounds in 2007 (Ministry of Justice, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Reconviction rates are now measured over a 12-month period by the Ministry of Justice, compared with earlier measures of two years, making change over time difficult to interpret.

imprisoned mothers were convicted as adults, compared with 10% of controls, a difference that was statistically significant.

A Californian study by Stanton (1980) compared the children of 54 mothers in county jails with the children of 21 mothers on probation. The mothers had a total of 166 children aged between four and 18 years, all of whom had been living with their mother prior to her arrest; none had been separated from their mother prior to her imprisonment. Half of the children of the jailed mothers were rated by teachers as showing poor or below-average school behaviour, compared with 22% of controls, and seventy per cent of the children of jailed mothers had below-average academic performance, compared with just 17% of those children whose mothers were on probation. On interviewing the jailed mothers one month after their release, 42% of the eligible children of the jailed mothers had been in trouble with the police, their school or with neighbours (according to their mother), compared with 24% of the children of mothers who had been on probation. Stanton's research also found significantly lower levels of self-esteem (as rated by the children's teacher or a counsellor) amongst children of the jailed mothers. Stanton's study has various methodological shortcomings, including a small sample size, as well as the fact that several of the 'probation' mothers had previously been jailed. Moreover, children of mothers on probation are likely to experience negative outcomes more often than children in the general population. Consequently, the study may have underestimated the association between maternal imprisonment and child antisocial outcomes.

Trice and Brewster (2004), in a study of mothers in state prisons in Virginia in the US, reported that 34% of the children of imprisoned mothers had been arrested during the previous year (according to their mothers' reports) compared with 15% of controls.<sup>52</sup> Children of imprisoned mothers were also more than twice as likely as 'controls' to have failed academically (that is, received one or more 'fail' grades at school during the previous year), and to have dropped out of school.

Whilst firm conclusions cannot be drawn, on the basis of the available evidence, that maternal imprisonment *causes* negative outcomes amongst children (rather than simply being associated with them), the evidence is nonetheless strong that children of imprisoned mothers are highly likely to fare considerably worse, in terms of their health and development, than children who have not experienced parental imprisonment.

### **Accommodation and other resettlement needs of women after prison**

It is well-known that offenders (both women and men) experience significant difficulties upon release from prison, and these challenges are exacerbated for primary child carers, most of whom are women. Many women in prison were living on state benefits prior to their imprisonment, few have been in paid employment, many have large debts, and around two in five will have experienced the local authority 'care' system prior to imprisonment. A high proportion of women have experienced sexual and/or physical abuse. When women are asked why they offend, the most common reasons given relate to the use of drugs and/or alcohol, the need for money for these substances, or lack of financial support more generally (see McIvor, 2004, and Carlen, 2002). A key characteristic of women offenders is the likely presence of *multiple* presenting problems, most commonly domestic violence victimisation (affecting 39% of a sample of 158,161 women offenders, according to recent

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<sup>52</sup> The fact that the 'control' group in this study consisted of the best friends of the children whose mothers were in prison is a serious methodological weakness: the prisoners' children and their best friends may have been co-offenders, for example.

analysis of data drawn from Oasys, the national offender assessment tool), accommodation needs (affecting 33% of the same sample) drug misuse (32%), education and training needs (29%), financial needs (28%), alcohol misuse (24%) and employment needs (16%) (NOMS/NPS, 2006).

Moreover, a considerably larger percentage of female than male offenders have emotional well-being and relationship needs. OASys data from 2007 indicated that 27% of women offenders were thought to be a suicide risk and 27% were thought to be at risk of self-harm. In addition, it was thought that 80% of women in prison had diagnosable mental health problems (the comparable figure in the community being 20%). Women recently released from custody are thought to be 36 times more likely than the general population to commit suicide, as well as being at risk of death from an accidental drug-related overdose in the first two weeks following release (Ministry of Justice, 2008a).

The role of housing in resettlement cannot be overstated. Unmet accommodation needs or unsatisfactory accommodation on release have, unsurprisingly, been found to be associated with re-offending amongst female ex-prisoners (Morris *et al.*, 1995). Research evidence and women's stories relating to their release from prison highlight substantial accommodation problems (Malin, 2004; MacRae *et al.*, 2006, Nacro, 2001). The Social Exclusion Unit's report on reducing re-offending (2002) noted that a third of prisoners is not in permanent accommodation prior to imprisonment, with many sleeping rough, and one tenth having previously experienced homelessness; as many as a third of prisoners lose their housing on imprisonment. It is difficult to obtain accurate estimates of the accommodation needs of women offenders, partly because they may become involved in the provision of sexual services or may tolerate abusive relationships to prevent themselves from becoming homeless. For financial reasons women may have had to relinquish existing tenancies, or they may be reluctant to return to where they lived prior to their imprisonment, hence post-prison accommodation may fall through.

A review of women's views of barriers to resettlement in the North-West of England identified 'substance misuse problems', 'lack of suitable accommodation', 'inappropriateness of social networks' and 'lack of emotional support' as being most prevalent. Difficulties accessing training and employment were also seen as obstacles by prisoners, although, very importantly, the majority stressed that they did not feel ready for education or training in the foreseeable future (Brookes and Leeming, 2005; see also Deedes, 2007).

The accommodation difficulties of women ex-prisoners may be compounded by their experiences of mental health difficulties or by issues relating to ethnicity (Gelsthorpe, 2006; Todd, 1996; Vaughn and Badger, 1995). Supported accommodation for women, particularly in single-sex hostels, is scant (Wincup, 1996). Moreover, the fact that there are fewer women's prisons means that women are likely to be in custody some distance from 'home', making it difficult to contact and negotiate with potential housing providers. Some of the difficulties in regard to the provision of accommodation after prison include poor practice on the part of local authority Homeless Persons' Units (Women in Prison, 2006). Women leaving prison are often considered to have made themselves intentionally homeless by committing offences which have led to imprisonment and the loss of accommodation. On their release, they are often caught in a 'Catch 22' situation: they cannot get their children back from local authority care unless they can provide appropriate accommodation; however, they cannot get appropriate accommodation because they do not have their children with them at the time of application (Corston, 2007: 48). Pat Carlen

draws attention to the fact that many women continue to leave prison with no safe place to live. She cites a prison officer alert to the problems: “‘resettlement’ without a home is just so much hot air. If they haven’t a home (and, in the case of mothers, a home suitable for their children to be with them), what do we resettle them to?” (cited in Carlen, 2003: 34).

Of particular significance for women is the interface between forensic and mainstream services for offenders with mental health problems, which is likely to be hindered greatly if data-sharing protocols between health and penal systems are not in place. Where mental health problems combine with chaotic substance misuse, access to specialist substance misuse services can be hampered by stigma, including women’s fear of child protection proceedings, lack of childcare and transport, and a lack of gender- and ethnically-sensitive provision. A report by the National Institute for Mental Health in England, which anticipated the transfer of responsibility for health in prisons from the Prison Service to Primary Care Trusts in April 2006, highlighted the importance of good liaison and collaboration between criminal justice and health professionals not only in custodial settings, but also in recommending diversion for offenders with mental health problems – both from the criminal justice system into the health system, and from custody into community criminal justice provision (Butler and Kousoulou, 2006).

Research evidence suggests that only around a fifth (Morris *et al.*, 1995) to a third (Hamlyn and Lewis, 2000) of women report having found work at post-release interviews. A study of the educational and employment needs of 100 women in HMP Brockhill concluded that there was high motivation to improve education skills and employment prospects (McMahon and Seemungal, 2003); however, women’s concerns upon leaving prison revolved above all around finding accommodation and resolving child custody issues, combined with the shadow of a potential relapse into drug use. Furthermore there was a gap between the kinds of assistance women anticipated they would need upon release – including stable accommodation, help with remaining drug free, assistance with education and job advice and general support - and the kinds of assistance they believed would *actually* receive: many did not expect to receive any help at all.

The key message from surveys and studies of women's multiple and complex resettlement needs appears to be that a co-ordinated multi-agency response is required, with provision in the community which is capable of being sustained over a long period if necessary (Corston, 2007; Gelsthorpe *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, general provision needs to be ‘gender-sensitive’, taking into account distinctive features of women’s lives and needs in order to be effective. Resettlement support from probation or other agencies may be absent or inadequate. Morris and colleagues’ (1995) survey of women prisoners and prison and probation staff identified a significant mismatch between the (high) level of needs women perceived themselves to have on the one hand, and how prison and probation staff perceived their needs (rather lower) and responded to them, on the other.

### **Women and desistance from crime**

Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983), amongst others, concluded that desistance from crime (leaving aside definitional problems<sup>53</sup>) is first and foremost an age-related, or maturational, phenomenon. However, other factors have been identified in the process of ‘going straight’, including leaving home, family formation, shame at past behaviour, stable

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<sup>53</sup> For example, how do we know when someone has stopped offending? What does ‘desistance’ mean – slowing down, or committing different, less serious, or less frequent offences? How long should the follow-up period be to really test whether or not someone has changed his or her patterns of offending behaviour?



employment and disassociation from a delinquent peer group (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Farrall and Bowling, 1999). Maruna (1999), however, has been critical of explanations of desistance which focus exclusively on external social or structural forces, and instead argues that narrative theories (whereby ex-offenders develop a coherent pro-social identity for themselves) provide a more adequate explanation of the processes of desistance. Whatever the differences in perspective, most contemporary researchers agree that desistance is a *process*, as opposed to an *event*, and that desistance, as well as and the development of quality social bonds that seem to facilitate desistance, are cumulative (e.g. Laub and Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001, Sampson and Laub, 1993).

Mary Eaton (1993) laid the foundations that the notion of desistance cannot be adequately addressed from the perspective of a single issue or life event. Having interviewed thirty-four female ex-prisoners who had managed to transform their lives, Eaton surmised that women can only stop offending when they have access to the multiple structural pre-conditions of social justice, particularly housing, employment and health facilities. Structural factors alone, however, are insufficient, and women offenders need to feel that they are people of worth who have something to contribute, the key to recognition being reciprocal relationships, or mutuality (Eaton, 1993; see also Giordano *et al.*, 2002; Farrall, 2005).

Graham and Bowling (1995) found that for females, social transitions such as leaving home, forming emotional and social relationships and having children, are highly correlated with desistance from crime. However, whilst relationships (with children as well as romantic partners) perhaps have greater significance in female, than in male, desistance, many women ex-prisoners have experienced abusive relationships, including sometimes offending with, or for, men. Some may thus consciously break off harmful romantic relationships on their release from prison and avoid making new ones, at least for a time, in order to facilitate the desistance process and to “re-define their lives as law-abiding people” (Leverentz, 2006: 484).

Whilst female partners, particularly wives, have been found to encourage desistance among male ex-offenders by being a stabilising influence (Sampson and Laub, 1993; Shover, 1996), the converse – that male partners encourage women to desist - tends not to be asserted. Moreover, Giordano and colleagues (2002) have suggested that the ‘traditional respectability package’ of marriage and employment may have a declining impact in terms of desistance from crime by both sexes, due partly to less favourable employment prospects today than previously (and ex-prisoners face particular difficulties in gaining employment), as well as a general decline in marriage rates.

### **Recent policy developments in England and Wales**

The *Supporting People* initiative - a Government programme developed in 2003 - brought major changes to housing-related support for over one million people, including ex-offenders. The programme brings together at local authority level the main partners of housing, health, social services and probation to plan strategically and commission cost effective, reliable, transparent and needs-led services. However, as Malin (2004) amongst others has pointed out, there were concerns about the ambitious nature of the initiative and its budget allocation. Nevertheless, there is evidence of action on this front. Charged with responsibility for inspecting all Administering Local Authority areas (ALAs), the Audit Commission (2006) has reported that some local authorities have initiated joint working with other agencies (e.g. the NHS) and put into practice the principles of *Supporting People*

but disappointingly, the findings suggest considerable geographical variation. In any case, the general perception is that demand for supported accommodation far exceeds supply and the level of support offered is variable.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has published *Developing the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service: the Prospectus* (OLASS, 2008), which sets out the LSC's proposals for developing the learning and skills service to offenders held in English public sector prisons and to those under supervision in the community in England. The document responds to the Corston Report's recommendations that 'life skills' should be given a higher priority within the offender skills and employment pathway and that women must be individually assessed to ensure that their needs are addressed.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps most relevant to the Re-Unite project, and discussed earlier in this report, is the *Together Women Programme* (TWP), which promises an *integrated* approach to service delivery building on *existing* services. However, whilst energies are focused on the two demonstration projects – in Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West of England<sup>55</sup> - there is a need to explore what is available *beyond* these projects and in other geographical areas. Moreover, as Clive Coleman has observed in *the Guardian* (2007), demonstration projects are often 'fabulous' because they are given sufficient resources to show that something can work; roll-out of similar projects is often less well-funded.

The evaluation of the TWP demonstration projects thus far has nevertheless been positive (Hedderman *et al.*, 2008). Local stakeholders see TWP as 'filling an important gap in provision by linking up what was already available more effectively and by adding to the range of services' (*ibid.*: 26). The 'women only' nature of the projects has proved important, as have service users' feelings that staff in the centres seem 'genuinely interested in them as individuals' (*ibid.*: 26). Whilst the pattern of referrals has been varied (with some reluctance amongst younger probation staff to refer women) most of the service users interviewed after several months of contact with TWP reported feeling better able to deal with their problems.

It is important also to note that each NOMS region in England and Wales has been tasked to revise their accommodation delivery plan to ensure that the needs of women are addressed. The NOMS Partnership Unit has published a briefing paper for housing and support advisers in prisons, *The Importance of Housing for Women Prisoners* (NOMS/Ministry of Justice, 2008), which offers practical advice on routes to local authority housing. The National Accommodation Pathway Group (Ministry of Justice and Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)) is also seeking to improve accommodation provision for women by way of three initiatives. Firstly, by funding the 'Preventing Offenders' Accommodation Loss' (POAL) project in 2008-9, identifying best practice between local authorities, prisons and probation. Secondly, the DCLG will commission research to produce guidance for local authorities and others on preventing homelessness and addressing the housing needs of offenders. Thirdly, the DCLG has agreed to explore the issues raised by the Corston report in regard to local authorities'

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<sup>54</sup> The new prospectus was intended to be implemented in August 2009, although this does not yet appear to have happened.

<sup>55</sup> In Yorkshire and Humberside a consortium of voluntary sector partners led by *Foundation Housing* has been commissioned to deliver the TWP in Doncaster, Leeds and Bradford. The delivery of TWP began in Doncaster Women's Centre at the beginning of 2007 and in Leeds and Bradford in the Spring of 2007. In the North West TWP is being delivered via *Alternatives (Lighthouse Project)* in Liverpool and by the *Salford Foundation* in Greater Manchester, although it is not clear that this project is continuing in its initial form.

decision-making on homelessness. POAL is likely to have particular significance for women, since most are short-term offenders. Moreover, part of the plan appears to be to seek agreements with housing providers to re-house women on discharge from prison.

Other initiatives include the Reducing Re-Offending National Action Plan – cross government work on resettlement and rehabilitation. Strategies identified in the plan revolve around seven pathways: accommodation; education, training and employment; mental and physical health; drug and alcohol misuse; finance, benefits and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. All are intended to take account of women’s needs, although evidence that they have done so was found wanting by Corston in her 2007 review, and she recommended that two further pathways be made mandatory in every regional resettlement plan for women: support for women who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence, and support for women who have been involved in prostitution (Corston, 2007: 46).

The *National Service Framework: Improving Services to Women Offenders* (Ministry of Justice, 2008b) draws on the Corston Report, reports from the Probation and Prison Inspectorates and the 2006 Gender Equality Duty to outline a strategy for provision for women offenders ‘at all stages of their ‘journey’ through the criminal justice system, with the aim of breaking cycles of re-offending and keeping socially excluded women at risk of offending out of custody’ (p.4). It is expected that NOMS and delivery partners will use the framework to develop detailed, costed service specifications for women in custody and in the community. In essence, the framework serves as a blueprint for regional action and good practice, although it should be acknowledged that some of the precepts outlined – including the need for women-only provision – are also questioned.<sup>56</sup> We await further developments in the NOMS regions, bearing in mind that they should now also be informed by the process evaluation of the Together Women demonstration projects described above.

Two further developments are worthy of note. Firstly, the Ministry of Justice’s review of progress following the Corston Report (Ministry of Justice, 2008c) outlines recent initiatives, including the setting up of a cross-departmental Criminal Justice Women’s Unit to manage and co-ordinate work, and the establishment of the National Service Framework for Women Offenders (referred to above). Importantly, the Ministry of Justice has committed £300,000 p.a. for three years to develop a demonstration project in Bristol, *Eden House*,<sup>57</sup> piloting an integrated approach to women offenders and providing access to a range of community-based and residential services (not unlike Centre 218 in Glasgow).

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<sup>56</sup> In Annex B (p.26), for example, we find the note ‘...although women only services will be most suitable for many women, this may not be the case for all. In a difficult financial environment, prioritisation also applies to working with women’.

<sup>57</sup> The Eden House Project provides both a day support service and a residential service for women offenders, including, but not exclusive to, ex-prisoners. Service delivery commenced in August 2009, with the first residential service users moving in October 2009. Personal communication with Eden House’s project manager in November 2009 informs us that the project can cater for 12 women *and their children* living in single or shared rooms in a single residential site with 24-hour staff cover. The residential aspect of the project provides a high level of support for women (ex-) offenders at medium or high risk of re-offending and with complex needs, including those with dependent children. No children were involved in the project at the time of writing (by which time five women were resident at the project); although there were pregnant women service users whose babies were expected to reside in Eden House. The project intends gradually to accept women with babies, and then women with dependent children up to the age of 12 years. See <http://www.edenhouseproject.org/>.

## APPENDIX 3

### Information regarding the London Boroughs where Re-Unite properties are located

**Lewisham:** The borough of Lewisham is described as the tenth most densely populated Local Authority in London with average rates of economic activity. Twenty-three per cent of residents are described as being economically inactive, compared with 21% across Britain as a whole, and 24.3% in London (Official Labour Market Statistics, ONS, 2008: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/2038431868/report.aspx>). In terms of unemployment itself, 9.3% of residents in Lewisham are described as unemployed, compared with 5.4% in England and Wales as a whole, and 6.9% in London (ONS, Neighbourhood Statistics Jan-Dec 2007). Lewisham has a disproportionately high number of single people (46% compared with the average of 30.1% in England and Wales), and a disproportionately high number of lone parent households with dependent children (10.5% compared with an average of 6.5% in England and Wales) (ONS, 2001 Census: [www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/00AZ-A.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/00AZ-A.asp)).

There are 91 maintained schools in Lewisham: 70 primary, 22 nursery, 12 secondary, 7 special and 2 independent secondary schools, plus one City Technology College.

#### Public information about Lewisham

([www.lewishampct.nhs.uk/public\\_health/data\\_and\\_information/lewisham\\_health\\_profile\\_2004/socio-economic\\_profile](http://www.lewishampct.nhs.uk/public_health/data_and_information/lewisham_health_profile_2004/socio-economic_profile)) suggests that there are a substantial number of families living on low incomes in Lewisham, higher than the national figures and figures for London as a whole, but lower than most of the other London boroughs. This is relevant given that children's health is significantly affected by parents' socio-economic status.

The Local Authority average in regard to absences from secondary school is in line with the national average of 7.4%, although the rate of persistent absence is higher than the average in England at 7.1% compared with 6.6%.

**Southwark:** The borough of Southwark reflects the complex socio-economic profile of the three metropolitan boroughs from which it was formed in 1965: Bermondsey, Southwark and Camberwell. Peckham – where there is one Re-Unite property – has been subject to one of the most extensive regeneration projects in England. This area of the borough is significantly more multi-cultural than the rest of the borough, with over a hundred different languages being spoken. There is relatively high unemployment in the area (10.1% compared with 5.4% in England and Wales as a whole, and 6.9% in London). Indeed, Southwark is described as the fourth most deprived London borough, with low school attainment and a high proportion of children being in receipt of free school meals (46% of secondary school children, compared with 16% in England).

([www.southwark.gov.uk/uploads/FILE\\_10833.pdf](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/uploads/FILE_10833.pdf)). The rate of absence from secondary school is 8.4% - higher than the average in England at 7.4%, and much higher in terms of persistent absence, 9.6% compared with 6.6%.

**Greenwich:** The range of information for the London borough of Greenwich is not produced in similar format to Lewisham and Southwark, but it is nevertheless possible to create an image of the area from other sources of information. Greenwich is one of inner London's largest boroughs. Central London is within easy reach by public transport. Greenwich has an unemployment rate of 8.7% compared with 5.4% in England and Wales as a whole, and 6.9% in London (GLA Data Management and Analysis Briefing 2003/26,

November 2003). The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for 2007-8 (published March 2009) also shows that the Council has improved and has been assessed as a three star council under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework. The scores for adult social care and housing both increased from 2 (adequate) to 3 (good); however, the scores for children's services decreased from 3 to 2. It is noted that partnership working has led to positive results in regard to community safety where violent crime, criminal damage and motor vehicle crime have all been reduced. Partnership and well-being has also improved as the result of increased co-operation between agencies. In terms of education, Greenwich is below 2008 national performance in Key Stage 1 subjects: reading, writing and maths and similarly below national performance in terms of GCSE results

(<http://www.eteach.com/DataFiles/TalentPool/UserGuides/Greenwich/1.%2520NQT%2520Info%2520Pack%2520-%2520info%2520about%2520Greenwich.pdf> -).

## APPENDIX 4

### Characteristics of the Re-Unite mothers

Service user	Age at start of Re-Unite	Ethnicity	Date joined Re-Unite	Number of children (dependent children, where different)	Ages of children	Main offence	Length of custodial sentence	Time served in custody	Experience of DV?	Moved on from Re-Unite property?	Re-offending whilst on Re-Unite
SU1	23	White UK	20.09.07	3	3 yrs (twins); 11 mths	Importation of cannabis	2 yrs	10 mths	Yes	No	None
SU2	30	Black British	21.09.07	1	14 yrs	Conspiracy to supply Class A drugs	9 years	4.5 yrs	Yes	Yes – on 24.08.08	None
SU3	36	White UK	22.11.07	2	14 yrs; 11 yrs	Theft from employer (£680K over 5 yrs)	3 years	13.5 mths	Yes	No	None
SU4	30	Black British	07.12.07	3	13 yrs; 9 yrs; 4 yrs	Importation of cannabis	2 years	6.5 mths	Yes	No	None
SU5	25	White UK /Eastern European	22.02.08	3	8 yrs; 6 yrs; born April 2009	Importation of cocaine	12 years	6 yrs	Yes	No	None
SU6	30	Black British	29.02.08 <sup>58</sup>	3 (1)	13 yrs, 8 yrs; <sup>59</sup> 6 mths	n/a - acquitted	n/a – on remand	4.5 mths	Yes	No	None

<sup>58</sup> SU6 successfully moved on from the Mothers' Programme to the Mothers' and Children's Programme on 18.07.08, when she was reunited with her infant son.

<sup>59</sup> SU6's two older children were both in long-term foster care. It was planned to re-unite SU6 only with her youngest child, aged 6 months.

<b>SU7</b>	24	White UK	21.05.08 (Mother's prog)	1	4 yrs	Manslaughter	5 yrs + 2 yrs extended licence	3.5 yrs	Yes	No – recalled to prison	Unclear – recalled to prison for breaching licence conditions
<b>SU8</b>	30	Black British	12.06.08	1	12 yrs	Importation of cannabis	2 yrs	7.5 mths	Yes	No	None
<b>SU9</b>	36	White UK	03.10.08	3 (2)	12 yrs; 8 yrs; 5 yrs <sup>60</sup>	Theft, forgery, failure to surrender	3 yrs	2 years 8 months in total (i.e. 18 mths sentence + 14mths recall)	Yes	Disengaged with project; involvement officially ended Sept 2009	WIP records: arrest in Aug.09 for theft of a wallet, ct app. in Sept 09; charged with possession of cannabis and receiving stolen goods - unconditionally bailed until mid-Oct 09.
<b>SU10</b>	28	Black British	22.12.08	1	9 yrs	Possession of a firearm	5 yrs	2 yrs, 4 mths	Yes	No	
<b>SU11</b>	35	Dual heritage (White UK /Black British)	25.03.09	2	6 yrs (twins)		9 mths	2 mths	Yes	No	None

<sup>60</sup> SU9's five year old son is adopted and it was not planned to re-unite him with SU9.

## APPENDIX 5

### MEASURES of SUCCESS for RE-UNITE PROJECT (Housing for Women, March 2007)

#### *Overview*

At any time in a service user's participation in the Re-Unite project, there are records showing progress of her and her children towards achieving the outcomes defined below, which the project aspires to achieve, and a programme to achieve those outcomes is being rigorously applied.

#### *Outcome at the end of two years – Service Users*

- The service user has successfully lived free of dependencies or attended a relevant programme for dependencies, demonstrating improvements which may be tested by the probation service, for at least six months and is likely to continue;
- The service user has a six-month record of self-sufficient good tenancy maintenance, i.e. a clean rent record, appropriate renewal of housing benefit, prompt reporting of repairs, no incidence of anti-social behaviour etc.;
- The service user has a six-month record of appropriate money management i.e. living within her budget, regular saving, keeping to a debt plan, debt management, reducing her debts or no debts.;
- The service user has demonstrated working towards improved life skills e.g. education, training, job etc.;
- The service user rates her relationships (with friends, neighbours, schools, partners, etc.) as healthy and supportive;
- The service user feels that she is ready to move on to a more independent lifestyle outside Re-Unite;
- The service user can identify positive changes to her lifestyle and can genuinely specify the benefits she has got from the Re-Unite project;
- The service user feels that the family unit is functioning in a reasonably happy and healthy way and that she has re-established a working relationship with her children;
- The service user feels that any physical and mental health problems are sufficiently controlled to allow her to have a reasonably comfortable life;
- The service user is able to employ parenting skills to manage the children in her care, applying the lessons learnt, e.g. ensuring that the children attend school and there is no anti-social behaviour;
- She has a good sense of self-esteem and self-worth.

#### *Outcome at the end of two years – Dependent Children*

- The children attend school regularly;
- They are improving that level of education attainment appropriate to their age, capabilities and opportunities;
- They are sociable;
- They are not involved in persistent anti-social behaviour or in trouble with the police;



- If there is a record of persistent disruptive behaviour within the home, they at least have made sufficient progress for the service user to be able to manage their behaviour;
- They feel that there has been an improvement in their lives since coming to live with their mother, e.g. they do joint activities, go out together, their mother communicates well;
- They have a good sense of self-esteem and self-worth;
- They can envisage a positive future.

### ***Evaluation***

The service user will be the best judge of the success of the Re-Unite project.

Other measures of success will be made by:

- The evaluators;
- The user group;
- The key workers;
- Outside agencies such as the probation service.