

# Exit closed?

Assessing the policy landscape for services seeking to support women to exit prostitution

## Full Report

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## Chrysalis Project Evaluation: 2 years on

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## **Summary of Chrysalis Report**

The Chrysalis Project is a partnership between Commonweal Housing and St Mungo's. It was developed to respond to the very real need for support for women leaving prostitution who are at a stage where they are able to move on from hostel accommodation. Practitioners reported that many women returned to their former lives and were unable to sustain their lifestyles beyond the support of the hostel and intensive service provision. In response, Chrysalis developed a staged model of exit that included a phase of mixed independent and supported living, where women moved on into independent accommodation but were supported in the running of their daily lives with a gradual move into total independence. The project was evaluated in 2013 and some important findings were documented that indicated the need for a more general change in the way services are provided to sexually exploited women and suggested that the Chrysalis model and the key principles could and should be replicated elsewhere.

The Chrysalis Project provides three phases of accommodation and support for women who have a connection to the London Borough of Lambeth and who have experienced trauma, abuse and sexual exploitation through their involvement in street prostitution. Lapses and reversals are considered a normal part of the exiting journey and accommodated within this model. The three phases consist of:

- Phase 1: provision of emergency accommodation and formal assessment of needs
- Phase 2: hostel accommodation and stabilising treatment, projects, and support
- Phase 3: independent accommodation with key worker support

## **Purpose of this Report**

The aim of this two-year review is to examine where the issue of exiting prostitution sits within the wider scope of women's services. A 2013 evaluation of the Chrysalis Project found that issue based support for women involved in prostitution that takes a holistic approach to addressing individual and complex needs is most effective. However, it was also found that many women were a) not being specifically identified as being involved in prostitution through mainstream service provision and b) not being given the opportunity to exit, not least because of ignorance relating to the

possible pathways for exit or a lack of understanding of the need for exiting support. This review aims to ascertain the policies, practice, and attitudes that underpin the approach of services to the issue of prostitution and to promoting or providing opportunities for exit. Specifically, the review will interrogate:

1. The ideologies underpinning service provision relating to prostitution, including in particular mainstream services that come into contact with women involved in prostitution but are aimed at some other form of intervention
2. Whether women are being identified as involved in prostitution and asked if they want to exit
3. What support is made available if they do express a desire to exit
4. Whether services have an understanding of/are adopting the key principles that arose out of the 2013 evaluation in relation to exiting services

### **Key Principles from 2013 Chrysalis Evaluation**

The 2013 Evaluation presented a model for service provision that would be effective in helping women to make sustainable changes in their lives. This model is underpinned by a number of key principles from which others can draw in order to replicate the Chrysalis model. The key findings were:

- A clear strategic policy approach to prostitution as a VAWG issue and a move away from punitive or criminalising approaches
- Inclusion of prostitution in Violence Against Women Strategies with a view to eradicating commercial sexual exploitation
- A proactive approach to exit and open discussion of the options – not simply an ad hoc, informal ‘add-on’
- Holistic exiting focussed support that can accommodate women at every stage of the exiting process
- A staged approach to exit that allows for lapses and reversals
- Provision of specialist residential support that includes a final stage of independent living that includes on-going engagement with a key worker
- Influencing local authorities to support the provision of accommodation for women who have left prostitution and who may not have a connection to the area/be intentionally homeless through fleeing violence

- A client centred model that involves working with one key worker throughout the exiting process
- Developing referral mechanisms that enable direct referrals to exiting support services
- A consistent but flexible approach that is able to respond to individual needs
- Provision of beds and accommodation that is suitable to each stage of the model

As such, the report found that effective service provision depends upon a comprehensive policy approach to underpin it and significant support from a number of key stakeholders. There are a number of policy approaches to prostitution that have been adopted internationally. Only one of these policies puts service provision relating to exit as central to the overall approach, this is the Nordic Model that criminalises demand, decriminalises sale and helps women to exit prostitution. It must be borne in mind that policy change and implementation may be affected by different ideologies, as well as practicalities and funding. The exiting research has found this to be the case and it appears that exiting projects have the most success when underpinned by an ideology that promotes a combination of prohibition and decriminalisation (tackling demand and pimping while and decriminalising women) and doesn't see prostitution as inevitable (Poland et al 2008; Lawrence 2007; Ward 2007; Matthews and Easton 2011; Matthews et al 2014; Manchester Prostitution Form 2007; Scottish Executive 2004). The available policy agendas and their relationship to exit are explored further below.

## **Prostitution, Politics and Policy**

### **Policy Approaches**

In general, there are four potential approaches to prostitution policy, of which many countries will adopt a combination; these are regulation, decriminalisation, legalisation and prohibition (Matthews 2008, p95-115). Regulation involves state control of prostitution that is mainly centred on the activities related to prostitution (such as pimping and running brothels) as opposed to criminalising the actual sale and purchase and attempting to control it through policing associated activity, such as violent incidents and other forms of criminal activity. Many parties argue for decriminalising prostitutes and/or clients on the grounds that criminalisation tends to perpetuate the vulnerability of an already vulnerable group of women. Legalisation involves the creation of state-run brothels and/or managed zones designated for street prostitution activity. This differs from decriminalisation in that the practice is state-run, regulated and legitimised. The option of prohibition, making both sale and purchase illegal (in the US) or simply purchase (in Sweden) can also be followed.

### **The UK's Policy Approach**

The approach in the UK and Scotland is a combination of prohibition (outlawing solicitation and kerb crawling) and regulation (selective policing, intervening when there is trouble) in relation to street prostitution. In relation to indoor prostitution, there is a combination of regulation (intervening when other factors are present, laws against pimping), decriminalisation (it is not illegal to sell sex indoors) and prohibition (brothels – it is illegal to sell sex in groups). Overall, the UK and Scotland's approach to street prostitution appears to be predominantly concerned with nuisance, while acknowledging the context of VAW. Tolerance of street prostitution is not an option for either Government and prostitution is generally seen as a negative practice. The policy literature is relatively silent on the issues of indoor and male prostitution. Further, there is little understanding of prostitution as a whole; issues of trafficking, child prostitution, indoor and street prostitution are dealt with as separate issues.

In March 2014, the Government reviewed the efficacy of the law relating to prostitution in England and Wales through the All Party Parliamentary Group of Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade. In their report, '*Shifting the Burden*', they recommend a shift in the burden of criminality from those who sell sex – and are

most marginalised and vulnerable – to those who create the demand. This approach, they recommend, should be combined with services to prevent entry into prostitution by those most at risk and to support women to exit. This approach is strongly in line with the Nordic model and reflects similar pressures in Scotland to do the same. In Europe, there is a growing expansion of the Nordic model, for example, on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014 Lithuania adopted a resolution for the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services and in June 2015 Ireland passed a law criminalising demand. France is also moving to change the law and Norway and Iceland changed theirs in 2008 and 2009 respectively. The European Parliament Women's Rights and Gender Equalities Committee supports the Nordic model and calls for EU member states to adopt it.

The APPG report was comprehensive in hearing evidence from 413 interested parties, from whom only 7% were satisfied with the current operation of the law in England and Wales. The report focused on legislation, policing and enforcement, entry, exit, and cultural attitudes, finding that the legal framework in the UK did not support the attainment of good outcomes in any of these areas. The issues that arise within this report are reflected in the general debates around prostitution that will be discussed below – namely, whether a Nordic model of challenging demand is preferable to a regulatory or legalisation agenda. One of the major findings of this report is that the existing legislation related to 'coercion' under s14 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 is insufficient as coercion is too ambiguous and difficult to prove. Other difficulties include the lack of a centralised police strategy, lack of consistent policing, and the lack of support for exit services coupled with creating legal barriers to exit by criminalising women involved in prostitution.

This growing acknowledgement in the UK and Europe that prostitution forms part of the continuum of Violence Against Women and Girls, is reflected not only by the APPG and European Parliament but also at a local level. In London, the Mayor's Office launched a Pan-London Strategy on Violence Against Women and Girls in November 2013, which included a strong focus on prostitution and trafficking. This led to the development of a new unit to disrupt trafficking and prostitution, the development of a '*Know Where to Go*' directory that sets out pathways for women affected by VAWG to find the support they need and includes a list of exiting services, and the development of a strategic framework for London Boroughs that includes guidance on addressing prostitution. The Pan-London Strategy includes the specific aim of developing a more holistic response to trafficking and prostitution to

support women to exit, including the provision of holistic exiting support, addressing demand, and policing that protects women and clamps down on kerb-crawlers, pimps and traffickers. They committed to developing a pan-London protocol to inform stakeholders of how to respond to prostitution, a pan-London exiting model, and good practice guidance for professionals across all relevant sectors (such as health, criminal justice and housing). The strategy also included measures for responding to trafficking. Additional guidance that is available includes the End Violence Against Women Coalition *Template for an Integrated Strategy on Violence Against Women*.

On a local level, The Safer Lambeth Partnership has been held out as exemplary when addressing issues of prostitution. They provide specialist support and outreach services, an approach that seeks to divert women from the criminal justice system, mapping of referral pathways to support services, and measures to tackle demand in the form of kerb-crawling. Central to their approach is the Chrysalis scheme, which adopts a three-stage model of service provision including supported housing as well as tailored interventions to address a range of complex needs. Another example of local authority success is in Glasgow, where a pro-active approach to exit via the 'Routes Out' scheme has reduced street based prostitution by significant numbers (Matthews and Easton 2011), and Ipswich, which developed a comprehensive exiting strategy as a result of the tragic murder of a number of women working in prostitution by a trusted regular (Poland et al. 2008).

The approach to exit and prostitution in general varies significantly across local councils and has a significant impact on whether support is made available to women. Whereas some have expressed an interest and support for developing stronger exiting provision, such as LB Southwark, others have actually removed funding from exiting services, such as in LB Tower Hamlets, or failed to address the issue altogether, as in LB Islington, which is nevertheless home to one of the more successful exiting programmes – the NIA Project (having managed to secure adequate funding from a range of sources). The situation with regard to Borough level and pan-London funding is discussed in the 'VAWG' and 'Funding' sections of the findings.



## **The Nordic Model**

Scandinavian countries are world leaders in developing and implementing progressive policies in relation to prostitution that are underpinned by a VAW perspective. In Sweden, this understanding of prostitution as a VAW issue has led to the decriminalisation of the sale of sex and a criminalisation of the purchase of sex (Eckberg 2004). This is contrasted to full prohibition, which is the predominant policy approach in the USA and keeps women marginalised within the criminal justice system. The Swedish law does not specify gender and is intended to reflect the power imbalance and structural inequalities between purchaser and seller, with a focus on exit for those who sell sex (Farley 1998). One rationale behind the criminalisation of the purchase of sex is that trafficking cannot be stopped unless demand is tackled, which involves undermining the commercialised sex industry in its entirety (Hunt 2009). Because of the links to trafficking, other Scandinavian countries are looking to Sweden, which was once thought of as radical (Moustgaard 2009). It must be emphasised that exit is a key element of this approach in light of the fact that when reducing the industry alternatives and routes out are a key element of ensuring the wellbeing of the women within the industry.

## **Legalisation, Regulation and Decriminalisation**

A number of countries take the alternative approach of legalising some, or all, aspects of prostitution; an approach that is typically underpinned by a Sex Worker Rights perspective. Very few countries have followed the Dutch approach of legalising all aspects of prostitution, which even funds visits to prostitutes for disabled people (Graveson 2005). Many prefer a combination approach. For example, in Denmark selling and buying sexual services are legalised and supported by the government but there are offences relating to trafficking (UNODC 2008, p105) and legislation regulating activities relating to pimping and brothel keeping (Denmark 1999). Nevada in the USA also has a legalised system, as do Germany and a number of states in Australia. An alternative approach is to effectively legalise prostitution through the removal of any laws that criminalise purchase or sale, or otherwise infringe on the practice of exchanging sex for money. This approach of 'decriminalisation' differs little in practice from legalisation, though is thought of as a removal of the harms associated with criminality without fully supporting the practice at Government level. In 2003 New Zealand became the first country to adopt a model

of total decriminalisation of prostitution for both sale and purchase, which is enshrined in the Prostitution Reform Act.

## **Impact**

There are mixed reviews relating to the effectiveness of the Swedish approach (Matthews 2008, p112-115) as compared to other policy approaches. Despite political support for New Zealand's decriminalisation approach, scratching the surface of the evidence presented suggests that, at best it has made very little difference (Kelly et al. 2009), and at worst that it has completely failed to protect the wellbeing of the women involved (Penk 2007). It is undeniable that the approach in the Netherlands of legalising the industry has been a complete failure and led to increased illegal activity and trafficking (Raymond 2013). In contrast, the Swedish approach appears to have been successful in a number of respects. Bindel and Kelly (2004) state that there does not appear to have been an increase in violence in Sweden since the introduction of the law, despite fears that this would be the case and Eckberg (2004) states that there has been a decrease in trafficking, a decrease of 75-80% in the number of sex buyers, and a notable shift in culture. Nevertheless, state that there are problems with implementation and enforcement, poor wording of the law, poor police guidance, not enough resources, and a lack of knowledge about what has happened to the women who were previously on the streets and those working indoors (MJP, 2004), although Eckberg (2004) denies that negative consequences have occurred. Overall, the potential of the Nordic Model as a policy approach depends upon successful implementation, one branch of which is effective exiting support.

## **Significance for this research**

Supporting exit appears to be part of the most effective policy approach available at present – that of challenging demand and decriminalising sale. However, such a policy approach can only be successful where exit is fully supported, funded and comprehensive. As such, its location within a Violence Against Women Agenda, clear and available pathways, and support from mainstream organisations and policy makers must be prioritised. This research therefore seeks to understand whether exit is supported by policy makers and service providers, whether it is made available to women, and whether there are clear pathways to support for those who wish to exit.

## Methodology

Key stakeholders, including service providers, funders and policy makers, were interviewed for this project. Semi-structured interviews were framed around the following questions:

- Whether prostitution is framed as choice/legitimate work or VAWG
- Where VAWG, prostitution, and more specifically exiting, fit within their policies and strategies
- Whether women are being invited to discuss a) their involvement in prostitution, b) the possibility of exit and c) whether they wish to exit
- What happens if a woman is in need of support to exit
- What are the barriers/challenges to helping women to exit
- Any successes or examples of good practice – whether on a policy, funding, or practical level
- Their understanding of the effective forms of service provision
- Their understanding of the benefits of taking an exiting approach
- Whether there is financial and ideological support for the Chrysalis model
  
- Whether the key principles identified in the 2013 evaluation are being adopted, such as:
  - Acknowledging the need for exiting services placed within a VAW context
  - Openly discussing exit and encouraging women to engage with this
  - Accommodation based support
  - A staged approach to the exiting process
  - Supporting women to transition into independent lives through ‘moving on’ accommodation
  - Tailoring support to individual needs and addressing multiple and complex needs
  - Making room for relapse and set-backs

## Interviewees

Interviewees have been anonymised, in particular to protect identity in relation to funding and relationships to other organisations. They fall into the following categories:

- Women's Services: generic and mainstream services for women that do not focus on prostitution
- Exiting Services: services that have an exiting element to their work – this does not necessarily represent an ideological abolitionist stance
- Government Departments and Local Authorities
- Research and Policy Specialists
- Housing Services: both mainstream and specialist housing provision
- Funders
- Chrysalis: people working directly within the Chrysalis project
- NHS and other mainstream statutory services

1	Women's Service 1: Domestic Violence
2	Women's Service 2: Sexual Violence
3	Exiting Service 1: Work Placements
4	Exiting Service 2: Exit and VAWG
5	Government 1: MOPAC
6	Housing Service 1: London Housing Partnership
7	Research and Policy 1: Research Consultants
8	Exiting Service 3: Harm Reduction with Exit
9	Women's Service 3: Women in the Criminal Justice System
10	Housing Service 2: Specialists in Trafficked Women
11	Funder 1: Bank Fund
12	Chrysalis 1
13	Exiting Service 4: Exiting and VAWG with Christian Roots
14	NHS and other 1: Gynaecology
15	NHS and other 2: Sexual Health
16	NHS and other 3: Occupational Therapy
17	NHS and other 4: Social Work
18	Funder 2: Non-Governmental
19	Funder 3: Non-Governmental Trust for Women

20	Government 2: London Borough
21	Housing Service 3: Specialist in Trafficked Women
22	Chrysalis 2
23	Chrysalis 3
24	Housing Service 4: Women Focus
25	Exiting Support 5: Second Tier

## Findings

### Summary and Key Recommendations

Overall, it was found that where people were familiar with the Chrysalis model – or made familiar with the model – there was a tremendous amount of support for it and an acknowledgement that there is a need for these kind of services that take an innovative and effective approach to exit. In addition, a number of services had been influenced by the model and some were interested in replicating it subject to funding. However, it also became clear that both mainstream and specialist services are still reluctant to a) enquire about involvement in prostitution and b) discuss options in relation to exit (for fear of being seen as stigmatising or forcing exit). A related problem is that there is a lack of appropriate developed pathways to support for exiting and a lack of comprehensive dedicated exiting strategies. In addition, a number of service providers mentioned that even emergency accommodation is a difficult issue and therefore adding third stage provision to their repertoire is not a priority and/or is difficult to fund.

Some key recommendations emerge from the data:

- Focus on educating mainstream services about identifying and offering exiting support to women in prostitution – particularly within the NHS
- Support the development of networks and pathways of support for exit
- In particular, lobby MOPAC to develop stronger guidance and directives to London Boroughs
  
- Look into models of research and evaluation that capture the financial savings associated with offering this kind of support (in particular reducing cycling through the system)
- Develop a template for funders that makes the case for the Chrysalis model, including its financial benefits
- Support service providers to use their existing infrastructure to provide statutory provision (a strategy of combined commissioning with the statutory sector) and generate income

- Develop a feasible model for offering third stage provision – and support to prepare for this third stage – as a separate entity to be accessed by other housing providers
- Review the definition of sexual exploitation with a view to including young women in exploitative relationships who do not define themselves as involved in prostitution

### **Prostitution as Violence Against Women**

Amongst services that do not explicitly address prostitution, there was a tendency to use the language of 'sex worker'. However, frequently these services were not aware of the politics within this policy area and were motivated more by a desire to be respectful. Despite using the language of harm minimisation, they were likely to simply acknowledge the harms associated with prostitution and to acknowledge the need for support to exit:

*'I've never thought about it but it is obvious that people would need help to leave and we should be helping them. I don't know why we don't ask but we don't' (NHS 2)*

However, many services – both mainstream and specialist - were concerned about stigmatisation and 'pushing' people to exit, which contributed to an overall reluctance to bring this up without the women themselves taking the lead – in contradiction to what we know is the most effective approach. For prostitution related services their ethos towards prostitution still has a clear impact on whether they discuss or encourage exit. Many people who offer effective exiting programmes discussed the fact that those services taking a harm minimisation approach remained hostile to exit – even when they used the language of exit – assuming that most of the time women do not want to leave and creating a culture that does not really see it as possible or desirable and that wishes to normalise the industry rather than to address harm and exploitation. These services expressed concern at this because in their experience women may not express the desire to leave until they see it as a realistic option and feel supported to do so. In addition, overall it makes women more vulnerable.

In fact, even within the Violence Against Women sector, it is an unfortunate finding that prostitution has not been a priority within VAWG. Partly, it is suggested that this is because some people are pushing the SWR approach and partly because other areas that are deemed less 'complex' are being pushed instead. In addition, a number of organisations continue to support a strong distinction between prostitution and trafficking and have not explicitly focussed on prostitution more generally despite the known links. It was pointed out that trafficked women need a different kind of support to exiting women as usually their escape into support services means that they are effectively exited. However, this distinction also meant that organisations who were in a position to support wider issues in relation to prostitution nevertheless limited their own research and development remit to including only trafficking.

A related issue is that many mainstream services and statutory bodies are not even interested in looking at prostitution as an issue:

*'The other challenge that's there is certain Boroughs that have taken more of a sex worker rights approach, they're not interested... Whether you're seeing it as exploitation or not makes a huge difference.'* (Housing Service 1)

This overall lack of commitment - at both a political and third sector level - to addressing prostitution makes any coordinated approach difficult and also means that organisations that are interested in tackling the issue are put off due to its complexity and have therefore chosen to focus on other issues:

*'Prostitution hasn't been a main policy focus. We're entering a phase of taking a breather and that's when we hope to take up prostitution in a more full-on way. There is also another strand of work, which is female offenders, not strictly exit but prostitution forms part of that.'* (MOPAC)

Interviewees compared this current lack of awareness and 'hands off' approach as being similar to many years ago when domestic violence was deemed 'just a domestic' – this has a direct impact on whether there is appropriate provision for women:



*'We don't have any specific schemes here, we are applying for some dedicated workers. We tend to work with London groups. It's a huge issue here but because it is so underground, it's similar to domestic violence years ago, when you are trying to evidence prevalence there is little direct evidence and information. We are now finding that young women are contacting us because they are in very unsafe situations, it's definitely a growing need'* (Women's Service 2)

*'It's the worst area for us in terms of buy-in, if you look at FGM everyone is horrified what can you do to stop it? But we don't get that response with prostitution and we're trying to say it's neither empowering choice or total victims but they need support.... One of the sad things is that people don't ask the right questions so that if someone hasn't said oh I'd like to exit then they assume they don't want to. But they need to know that there is an option'* (MOPAC)

## **VAWG in London**

Due to a lack of a) commitment to prostitution as part of VAWG strategies and b) lack of understanding of effective models for exit. Amongst London Boroughs, support for exit is patchy. Boroughs such as Lambeth and Camden take a strong and committed approach to tackling prostitution and supporting exit. On the other hand, a number of Boroughs take an SWR approach and, seeing it as an empowered choice, do not acknowledge the need for support beyond meeting health needs:

*Some boroughs work with organisations that are more angled towards harm reduction and they don't really support exit. They do talk about exiting but for them they see it as wanting to make women feel comfortable in their work so because of that it's not going to be exiting focussed. We find that after a while women do start to contemplate alternatives, although they might not at first.*  
(MOPAC)

MOPAC is strongly supportive of exit but acknowledges that developing a pan-London approach is difficult:

*'It was a really well-run service, gold standard, very difficult for us to replicate on a pan-London basis... We tried to get the boroughs together to have a pan-London approach because some of the stories about how women were being looked after were worrying... The barrier is money but not only money but also different boroughs are at different levels of seeing this as an issue. If you talk about domestic violence no-one is going to question that but we are not in the same place around prostitution.'* (MOPAC)

It was confirmed by a London Borough that has been actively involved in engaging with other Boroughs on Prostitution and VAWG that there is ideological fragmentation within London. However, she stressed that a large number of Boroughs are hungry for more guidance from MOPAC and a push to ensure that a pan-London approach is developed. At present, although MOPAC stresses that prostitution is a VAWG issue, many Boroughs remain ignorant of the extent of the problem in their area and are not aware of – and have not developed - support services for women who are in need of exiting support. As with domestic and sexual violence, the London Boroughs feel that MOPAC is best placed to provide a template of policy and practice for London Boroughs. This is particularly necessary because of the need for moving women into new Boroughs in order to ensure that they are safe and able to sustainably exit. Borough-specific approaches cannot address the complexities of exit in the same way that a pan-London approach would be able to. In addition, stronger leadership from MOPAC would ensure that those ideologically opposed to exit were nevertheless obligated to address the issue.

Interviewees indicated that the following Boroughs take an interest in exit as part of their VAWG work:

- Lambeth
- Tower Hamlets (who have recently re-established a focus on this)
- Redbridge
- Camden

- Kensington and Chelsea

In addition, the following Boroughs have new VAWG strategies or are creating interesting approaches in other areas and may be amendable to further discussion:

- Southwark
- Lewisham
- Waltham Forest
- Barking and Dagenham (has a new employability project)

Overall, there is work to be done to push prostitution higher up on the agenda and to educate and transform attitudes to exit, the reality of harm and exploitation, and the need to openly discuss exit.

Recommendations:

- Targeting mainstream services who are not entrenched in the existing politics of prostitution
- Communicating the need for exit to people responsible for VAWG strategies
- Working with and lobbying MOPAC for the development of a pan-London response to prostitution and better guidance of policy and practice in relation to this

## **Disclosure**

In general both mainstream and specialist services indicated that they did not specifically ask women about involvement in prostitution. In sexual violence services disclosure does happen but they do not directly ask; these disclosures are likely to occur because of the nature of their work in discussing sexual assaults. Similarly, social workers and those working in the NHS were likely to come across women involved in the industry. However, only those working in sexual health centres would explicitly ask about involvement in prostitution as part of their risk factor screening. It was pointed out in relation to this that some women would still choose not to disclose.

Overall, there is a culture of not really asking women whether this forms part of their lives, partly due to not wanting to stigmatise the woman and partly due to not having a great deal of knowledge about how to work with women involved in prostitution :

*'Some agencies will find it a bit difficult – domestic abuse, drug agencies, HMP, housing – but we do a lot of hand-holding. If they've got the leaflets there and things like that and if someone is accessing a drugs services then it's always worth asking the question... Sometimes I think they think the women come from space or something. It's just a woman for God's sake, a woman who's had a different lifestyle.'* (Exiting Service 3)

More than one service also mentioned that as well as involvement in prostitution, there are a number of women – particularly young women – who are being sexually exploited in ways that could be considered less direct. A sexual violence service mentioned a growing need for support for young women and girls who are being exploited within relationships and a need to widen our understanding of sexual exploitation to incorporate circumstances where women might not identify as being in prostitution but nevertheless be in exploitative situations. In fact, they stated that they have never looked at Commonweal before because they 'couldn't find an entry point' even though there are increasing concerns about these young women:

*'It could be things like their boyfriend is prostituting them with their friends, it could be family members, a woman supplying drugs to members of quite a big gang, we worked with the police to identify some of the risks she was in and we moved her.... (There is a) difference between some women who would identify as working in prostitution and other women who wouldn't identify as that but are in complex and dangerous relationships'* (Women's Service 2)

This failure to discuss involvement in prostitution also means a failure in identifying women who are ready to exit:

*'Things haven't really changed. People don't ask the question, don't know how to ask the question and wouldn't really know*

*what to do if the woman did disclose. I'm afraid for me that doesn't seem to have changed very much... Usually they don't really know if women in their services are involved in prostitution, wouldn't know what to do and even if they do often ignore it because they assume they have made the choice. But we do get referrals from people who have been through our training... Our referrals are coming from self-referral/word of mouth' (Exiting Service 2)*

Recommendations:

- Expand on the definition of sexual exploitation and, in particular raise awareness of the problem of 'boyfriends'
- Educate and encourage identification of women involved in prostitution in combination with developing stronger support pathways (below) – particularly focussing on the NHS

### **Pro-active approach to Exit**

Amongst both mainstream and specialist provision, there is a strong culture of not 'pushing' exit. Although specialist services state that they will help women to exit, they were often very emphatic that they would not bring this up to a woman unless she brought it up first. As such, they are likely to be failing to help women who would otherwise benefit from support as many women do not engage with the idea of exit until they understand that this is a realistic possibility for them:

*'There is a postcode lottery in terms of provision – part of perception about not needing routes out – that it's been chosen – or because it is not attached to any particular funding stream if not under the trafficking umbrella.'* (Exiting Service 4)

Interestingly, a sexual violence service has found that a proactive outreach and advocacy approach has been extremely effective in their own work – where working holistically with women ensures that they feel safe. This supports the Chrysalis findings that proactively discussing exit and reaching out to women is essential in ensuring that women access the services they need. Simply being available at their

discretion is not as effective and this has been found to be the case with other forms of sexual violence provision.

In addition, there is an issue relating to the kind of services that women are accessing and whether they feel safe to disclose in that environment:

*'A lot of the drug treatment services and others are not environments where the women would feel safe so they may not use them or they wouldn't disclose even if they do... if you are going for drugs, alcohol, housing, or something for your kids and you're worried your kids will be taken off you. We are trying to target these places. Some people are saying oh no, we can't ask that. Meanwhile some women are left believing there aren't any options. If you don't hold out the option, they don't come in saying they want to exit. That's rare. You have to ask the question. Give them a whole range of options and when they are ready you can take the option that works for you' (Exiting Service 4)*

MOPAC points out the need for a change in culture:

*'It's about finding a hook that everyone agrees with. We have to say 'if people choose to do so' because we've been accused of 'forcing' people to exit. Then we get the stories about people who make great money and get taken to nice places and we have to say well that's great but many people need support. It's the least developed area... It's like the old days with domestic violence and the police and people would say 'it's just a domestic', they didn't want to get involved.'*  
(MOPAC)

One service stated that the approach of a referral organisation could have a strong impact on whether women would successfully engage with the programme, with women from harm minimisation organisations being noticeably less ready for the opportunity:

*'The women who have taken the opportunity and flourished the most have come from a service that prepares people... It's possible that it's not communicated in the same way (with women who have dropped out) or if it is the readiness... You can tell where someone has come from in the way that they take to the opportunity.'* (Exiting Service 1)

This suggests that not only is exit not being proactively discussed but also where it is engaged with there may still be a culture of exit not really being possible and sustainable, meaning that supporting women to do so ultimately fails:

*'With a very harm reduction service they don't address the underlying issues about why they are involved. What we want is to engage them first and then when they're at a stage where they are willing to look at the other issues then we talk about exiting.'* (Housing Service 1)

There is also a suggestion that people are not identifying the stage a woman is at and what kind of support she needs at any one moment. For example, it may be inappropriately assumed that a woman is 'not ready' to exit until everything else in her life is sorted out, not realising that exit may in fact be a precursor to other changes. On the other hand, some women may be encouraged to engage with programmes that are not appropriate for them while attempting to exit due to a lack of understanding of this process.

There are, however, a number of exceptions. For example, Beyond the Streets are proactive in promoting exit and find this to be an effective strategy:

*'We are proactive about promoting exit and the reception to the idea of exiting depends on where they are at in terms of their story – for example issues with drugs, pimping – we offer routes if they'd like to get out. Once it is a bit clearer many women snap it up and are looking for a way through – often they have to fight through the stereotypes and barriers then look at contacts, options and possibility. It is that working together that works. Reception from the women is fantastic. I've only been told to eff off once in my whole time. Sometimes*

*they say I know I need to but I'm not ready.'* (Housing Service 1)

A related problem is that there is a lack of awareness amongst mainstream organisations of the need for these services, in particular within the public sector where many practitioners – from Occupational Therapy to Sexual Health to Social Services are not confident in raising this issue with women and would not know what steps to take if a woman did wish to leave. It was acknowledged by many mainstream practitioners that there should be a commitment to asking the simple question 'if alternatives were available to you would you be interested in leaving the industry?' but that it does not currently form part of practice. There is considerable scope for influencing practice in this area as many practitioners once alerted to the issue were very supportive of promoting exit:

*'We're not asking that question and we should be. I would have no idea what to do if they said they wanted to leave and yet I will ask people if they are interested in quitting smoking or happy in their job but I know how to help them with that'*  
(NHS 3)

*'If we put into place a policy of asking a standard question and if we were given information about exit it would definitely be handed out. The team that look after that clinic, they are really committed and conscientious and they would be so up for doing that.'* (NHS 2)

Recommendations:

- Develop a strategy for promoting discussion of exit amongst mainstream services
- Support and promote exiting services that take this proactive approach
- Preserve resource by not seeking to influence harm minimisation services with entrenched ideals

**Pathways to support**



A related issue is a lack of awareness of the pathways available to women should they be in need of this kind of support. Even where need is identified it was still often unclear where support can be found and sometimes recourse to harm minimisation services with little understanding of what is actually being offered:

*'There are different levels of intervention from a clinical role, such as vaccinated against Hep B, access to condoms, dental dams, contraception, signs and symptoms of STIs, know where to go if it becomes non-consensual sex. Exit is not being proactively raised – it is totally focussed on sexual health. No-one documents it in the notes and it is not in standard pro-forma questions – I don't know that it's even a concept to be honest. We work with harm minimisation services but I'm not sure many people are clear on what they are offering.'* (NHS 2)

There has been some improvement in recent years, most due to the exiting services themselves who seek to educate people and create links. Some agreed that there did, however, seem to be more receptiveness to the concept of exit once the exiting services reach out to potential referral agencies. Nevertheless, as exit is more favourably looked upon as a concept, some services are saying they offer this when in fact there is no proactive approach, which is then reflected in poorer outcomes. Providers interested in the Chrysalis model noted the need for a specialist pathway that fosters hope:

*'I think what other services aren't doing is saying here is a clear pathway for you. They might help people if they want to leave but they are not providing a clear exit strategy... We would only have people in that programme who make that decision who want to leave. Currently, women will be supported to leave but it's a different offer, they are in our service because of abuse, there is a different motivation. You are creating a culture through the project itself of yes it's possible, of hope and excitement... There isn't a dedicated pathway to exit, a dedicated developed service'* (Women's Service 1)

In addition, some services have found that women involved in prostitution are not ready for the next stage of moving on – for example, people that help them find employment. Often, women involved in prostitution are often one of the most chaotic and marginalised groups and there can be some doubts about how to support women to fully move on and a lack of confidence in this. There was therefore a lot of interest in the kind of support offered by Chrysalis that actually supports women to move beyond their urgent needs and into independent living.

Additionally, a second tier exiting organisations emphasised that one of the most important aspects of ensuring that exiting programmes are effective is to create stronger networks and a voice for those who are developing effective solutions to ending sexual exploitation. At present, the SWR approach has a monopoly and is obscuring the reality of harm and inhibiting the development of proactive approaches that actually eradicate harm. Many services, individuals, policy makers and funders are interested once they hear this alternative voice and this second tier organisation is working on furthering this.

Recommendations:

- Develop stronger pathways of support and raise awareness of these pathways
- Develop a database and information hub relating to pathways to support
- Develop strategy for expanding effective exiting provision

### **Accommodation**

While there was an acknowledgement of the strength of the three-stage model, stakeholders tended to focus on the lack of appropriate emergency accommodation. Housing is a difficult and on-going issue for service providers, in particular for women as those who are in hostels can be surrounded by drugs and exploitative people because of the lack of specialist provision:

*‘The question that gets asked is how does our accommodation differ – we answer that they are self-contained, beautiful flats, away from areas that are detrimental to women exiting prostitution in this Borough. Some of the shared*

*accommodation makes it more difficult to move away from a particular lifestyle.’ (Chrysalis 3)*

Those in a position to adopt the model were not prioritising provision beyond emergency and hostel accommodation. However, there was also a strong acknowledgement that many women were cycling through the system because they were stumbling once no longer accessing emergency provision or other forms of support and were unable to transition into living independently, not least due to isolation:

*‘When they go into independence they’re like oh my god who am I? What am I going to do? Plus they always house them in lousy parts. We could do with a respite place but there’s nothing at the moment....’ (Exiting Service 3)*

It must be acknowledged that there are always reasons that people might return to prostitution even after third stage provision, although those delivering Chrysalis are confident that it remains by far the most effective approach and more likely to result in sustainable change:

*It has happened that people have gone back after stage 3, although I think that’s less common than at the other stages. At that stage the real challenge is for the women not to feel too lonely and part of their community. The risk really is going back to drug use. That’s why the sloping support is really important. You can’t completely guard against that but it is much more effective the way we do it. Also people are less likely to cycle through the system.’*

This was also echoed by a housing service that caters to trafficked women but uses a model that is similar to stage 2 and 3 of Chrysalis. This service emphasised that although women may move into independence they are also highly likely to return to dependence. Their holistic approach that addresses the needs of women right up to the moment they are able to maintain independent lifestyles means that while no service can guarantee results because of the complexity of needs and the impact of trauma, women are far better placed to be able to move on. For exiting and other

similar services this ultimately means less of a burden and suggests that a strong financial case can be made for funding these services:

*'When you take the discussions to commissioning teams, if you make the case for the social impact and make that a financial case – there will be a corresponding decrease in methadone, interaction with the criminal justice system. A lot of agencies don't gather data in a way that captures this - number of arrests, number of A&E admissions. – the level of additional cost if you don't take a holistic approach.... One organisation, Resolving Chaos has 10 years funding with the Big Lottery and we are looking at their financial modelling – making a compelling evidence based case. They are making a strong argument for the financial impact of what they do.'*  
(Chrysalis 3)

If third stage provision were offered elsewhere many services would be interested in referring women onto this. This would also avoid the problem of hostility to offering specialist support – with many services becoming more generalist. This, it was explained by those working in Chrysalis, is because funding is often focussed more on need than on particular groups (this is discussed further in the 'Funding' section below). Thus, third stage specialist provision may be easier to fund than the whole programme as it offers the opportunity to make more focussed proposals. However, it was also cautioned that the effectiveness of such an approach would depend very much on the preceding stages of support as the three-stage model is effective because women are prepared for each stage as they move through the programme. However, it was thought that this approach of separate third stage provision may be feasible:

*'We have access to an assessment and support team – we get to know people better before presenting options – the reason that assessment function was brought in was to increase the appropriateness of housing allocation . For separate third stage provision the issue would be the appropriate level of referrals and support; it is feasible but depends on what model you wrap around that. I would ask questions about who would your referral agents be, how well placed are they to determine*

*whether or not that housing would be beneficial to that woman at that stage of her life, what level of support could be offered.'*  
(Chrysalis 3)

A serious issue is the lack of appropriate housing for women in general and an ignorance about what is needed. For example, a sexual violence service stated:

*'Our overwhelming issue is about accessing safe and appropriate accommodation. We are dealing with local authorities policies that don't necessarily understand the urgency or the needs... It's a major problem... A young woman 4pm on a Friday afternoon, it leaves us with either homeless hostels, B&B accommodation or hotels and all of those routes are not safe.... Where there is a push for local authorities to support women who have been sexually exploited, the infrastructure is not there'* (Women's Service 2)

This was echoed by other service providers who noted that more generalist provision can be a difficult environment for women involved in prostitution:

*'There is nothing but the women's refuge and women there can be stigmatised by both staff and service users. Also, the women might not be able to stop drugs immediately and so will not be allowed to stay.'* (Exiting Service 3)

One exiting service put forward the idea that links need to be made with other London Boroughs so that women can be taken out of their area. They stated that women do tend to thrive when they completely get away. However, this can lead to isolation and so links need to be made with support services. Within London, a possible approach is to relocate women to another part of the city – this is currently being done with women in gangs:

*'Just getting them away from London is often really effective but often you get problems with the requirement for a connection to the borough and then you also have the danger that they are really really isolated as well as problems if trying to reconnect with family. There is a balance between getting*

*them away from that context but also people feeling supported and comfortable and familiar. If we had links outside of London you could swap people around – making housing links in completely different environments with support. But we probably need to do more work with women to see how they feel about moving areas and also to find places where they have that support. One thing could be swaps in different parts of London. Getting them out of the postcode like they do with gangs.’ (Exiting Service 2)*

#### Recommendations;

- Develop an approach that offers third stage support and preparation for this as an add-on to existing service provision
- Make the case for incorporating third stage provision based on financial savings by reducing re-entry into support services
- Develop links with services and housing providers across Boroughs and other areas in the UK to support rehousing

#### **Funding**

Despite the above, there are also a number of services keen to adopt and develop the Chrysalis model. However, amongst these services there has been difficulty in accessing funding. In addition, it is reported that a number of London Boroughs are interested in the model and would ideally like to replicate it. However, at present commissioners are waiting for clarity in terms of their own budgets and the Government’s spending review. It is anticipated that they will need to make huge cuts and as such they will be unable to fund any new projects, not least because they will be cutting existing services. For example, one domestic violence service has been unable to find funding for the support element of the third stage:

*“The funding we were looking for would be to cover the support element of it, the bricks and mortar we would be able to find funding for... the second element, looking for ongoing support, that’s where we were really stuck... All the local and health authorities said the same, we have to cut the services we*

*already offer, we are not in a position to fund something new. Trusts and foundations were also an option but they are reluctant to fund anything that doesn't have on-going funding.... We're committed to it philosophically but financially I don't see where we are going to get the funding from'. (Women's Service 1)*

It is clear that the three stage model of service provision makes huge savings in the long term through ensuring that transformations in people's lives are sustainable. However, at present Chrysalis suggest that these long term effects will be overlooked because of the need to simply cut back. This means that many people will be left disenfranchised and ultimately they will show up somewhere else in the system with complex needs:

*'We don't know what will happen to these women if we are unable to help them. The consequences will be severe. At some point in the future the impact of this will become clear and local authorities will have statutory obligations towards these women. So even though not all local authorities are willing to look at the issue of prostitution, it will create demands of their system'*  
(Chrysalis 1)

Chrysalis explained that amongst some Boroughs there is a culture of simply ignoring the issue of prostitution and allowing these women to show up on the radar of other neighbouring Boroughs. However, as provision is squeezed, there will be less and less available. One tactic Chrysalis and other providers are considering is to use their existing infrastructure to support statutory provision – i.e. provision that is not specifically aimed at women involved in prostitution and that Boroughs have a duty to provide. It is cheaper for Boroughs to outsource to existing providers than to house and support people through the statutory system. As such, this would be similar to a Social Enterprise model, whereby in supporting statutory provision, the service is able to self-fund and use the generated income to provide support to exiting women. Chrysalis has been lobbying for the development of such a relationship with statutory services for a number of years and suggests that with the existing changes in financial circumstances of Boroughs, they will be more interested in these money saving strategies.

Service providers also discussed a move in focus to generalist provision based on need rather than on specialist provision based on group identity. In these circumstances, accommodation may be mixed gender or single sex but with a focus on complex needs that may include prostitution. As argued by Chrysalis, this risks failing to address the psychological impact related to prostitution in particular, and is also concerning considering the number of women who are not being identified as in need of exiting support:

*'Many of the barriers to exiting prostitution draw many parallels with the way many people who are changing their lifestyles in other areas – what for me is the emotional and psychological impact on women and their exposure to abuse and violence is quite astonishing. So there are specific needs but there are also ways of offering that support within general provision. However, I can only see it as really working within an exiting pathway. The sad truth of it that otherwise exiting isn't really discussed.'* (Chrysalis 3)

The need for a specialist, non-generic approach is also echoed by Women's Service 3, which works with ex-offenders and, being non-statutorily funded, has been able to develop an effective and creative response to need:

*'The emotionally intelligent side is what we do ourselves in the programme at the moment. The way the government and prisoners do it is very generic and we had to find a new way of doing it. We use the comedy school, trauma therapy, lots of different ways of doing things. To actually get their attention you have to do it very differently'* (Women's Service 3)

In general, the funding environment has been squeezed in recent years. This means that where prostitution is not a priority it is likely to be ignored by funders and commissioners. Nevertheless, non-statutory funders invariably stressed that their main concern is in understanding how what they fund will meet their priorities and is more effective than other approaches. They remain open-minded about who and what they will fund and interested in innovative approaches. Many of these funders stated that they had not noticed a huge increase in applications and that their funding processes remained unchanged – in other words, although they are aware of the



current financial climate they did not see it as a barrier to obtaining funding through them. Communication, it was suggested, is key and a focus on how and why this approach is most effective must be communicated in an accessible way. These funders were sympathetic to exit and this kind of provision in theory:

*'We look at the information as it comes in. We're quite broad in terms of what our priorities are. We're not a particularly prescriptive funder.... The volume of applications remains the same as it always has... Statutory funding is a different story... We look for projects that are particularly interesting, that provide new solutions, can be scaled up, and are not currently carried out. Statutory funding is a different story. Put together a case that best represents the organisation and the work that you do and demonstrates why that approach is effective.'* (Funder 3)

Relatedly, despite difficulties with funding, exiting does appear to be more on people's agendas than previously when it wasn't happening at all. Because of this, some organisations are using the language of exit without providing quality service provision. It is vital that this distinction is made to funders:

*'Now that funding supports exit you are getting organisations that would never even look at it tacking it onto what they do but actually how they offer it is another question. They aren't really using effective exiting strategies or fostering that hope. Commissioners needs to be asking how you do exit, scrutinising the service and understanding what works and what they are actually funding.,, Also they need to understand how exit works – that it's not just a case of counting 'exited' women, that it is a process and complex'* (Exiting Service 2)

- Target specific boroughs to incorporate prostitution into their VAWG strategy
- Support service providers to engage with Boroughs on making use of their existing infrastructure to provide statutory provision and generate income
- Develop a strong, evidence-based template for funding proposals and disseminate amongst those interested in replicating the model

## **Conclusion**

For the majority of service providers who come into contact with women involved in prostitution, the need for dedicated, holistic and sincere exiting support is unquestionable – whether there is a conscious awareness of this or an unconscious

understanding. The Chrysalis Model has provided inspiration for a number of service providers and is understood as the gold standard of provision for women exiting prostitution. However, there are huge barriers to funding for those who would otherwise seek to replicate the model and a reluctance on the part of commissioners to fund any new ventures in the context of rolling back their funding more generally. There is therefore a need for firstly, developing a strong case for funding based on the financial benefits of this kind of support and secondly, looking into offering aspects of the model combined with existing support and/or developing new models that make use of existing infrastructure (as in combining exiting support with statutorily funded support).

Aside from the issue of funding, this research has shed light on the need for greater awareness of exit at a mainstream level. Many non-specialist practitioners and policy makers are reluctant to even address the issue of prostitution because of both its complexity and a reluctance to stigmatise or challenge women involved. This means that conversations on the possibility of exit are not being held and therefore these choices are not being made available. It also means that many services are unaware of how to go about identifying women in need of support and of where to send them for the support if that is what they choose. Further research is needed into the existing support pathways available and work is needed to expand awareness within mainstream services of how to address exit and why this is important.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

### VAWG Strategies

- Targeting mainstream services who are not entrenched in the existing politics
- Communicating the need for exit to people responsible for VAWG strategies
- Working with and lobbying MOPAC for the development of a pan-London response to prostitution and better guidance of policy and practice in relation to this

### Disclosure

- Expand on the definition of sexual exploitation and, in particular raise awareness of the problem of 'boyfriends'

- Educate and encourage identification of women involved in prostitution in combination with developing stronger support pathways (below) – particularly focussing on the NHS

#### Pro-active approach to Exit

- Develop a strategy for promoting discussion of exit amongst mainstream services
- Support and promote exiting services that take this proactive approach
- Preserve resource by not seeking to influence harm minimisation services with entrenched ideals

#### Pathways of Support

- Develop stronger pathways of support and raise awareness of these
- Develop a database and information hub relating to pathways to support
- Develop strategy for expanding effective exiting provision

#### Accommodation

- Develop an approach that offers third stage support and preparation for this as an add-on to existing service provision
- Make the case for incorporating third stage provision based on financial savings by reducing re-entry into support services
- Develop links with services and housing providers across Boroughs and other areas in the UK to support rehousing

#### Funding

- Target specific boroughs to incorporate prostitution into their VAWG strategy
- Support service providers to engage with Boroughs on making use of their existing infrastructure to provide statutory provision and generate income
- Develop a strong, evidence-based template for funding proposals and disseminate amongst those interested in replicating the model

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