

## Changing Futures – Learning Report – Barriers for women experiencing multiple disadvantage

### November 2022

<b>Women’s needs are hidden in Sheffield</b>	<p>Reports by <a href="#">Fulfilling Lives Islington and Camden</a>, <a href="#">National Commission on Domestic and Sexual Violence and Multiple Disadvantage</a> and <a href="#">CFE &amp; NECG Evaluation of Fulfilling Lives</a> all highlight the importance of focusing on women when exploring multiple disadvantage.</p> <p>This work informed our cohort identification process as women were highlighted as being a ‘hidden need’ cohort who we focused on identifying and engaging. This led to half the programmes cohort being female which is unusual for similar programmes in the sector.</p> <p>The additional barriers women navigate to access services emerged through our practice-based learning within the core team, our coproduction workshops with women with lived experience, intelligence from partner organisations and the Sheffield multiple disadvantage community of practice.</p>
<b>Women feeling unsafe drives non-engagement in support</b>	<p>Gendered violence is a large driver for women needing to access support and women consistently reported that they often felt unsafe when accessing services which impacted upon their capacity to engage. Buildings which often had groups of men outside, had large waiting areas or those which required a journey across the city centre risked women encountering an abuser and contributed to a hesitancy to attend appointments. Shared accommodation, even with other women, was cited as a barrier on safety grounds for women who need to access accommodation.</p>
<b>A trusting relationship is key to engagement</b>	<p>To meaningfully engage in support, women need a trusting relationship with their support worker. Experiences of stigmatisation around domestic and sexual abuse and sex work continues to create barriers for women. When compounded with a fear of involvement of statutory agencies, such as Children’s Social Care, women reported they felt unable to give a full picture of their needs and as a result did not access the appropriate services. A trusting relationship was cited as one of the main ways women could begin to overcome this fear and see support as realistic.</p> <p>Over half the women in the Changing Futures cohort have children under 18 that are not in their care, all of these women have been in abusive relationships. The compounded trauma and link to their multiple needs is apparent, and the lack of support for women who’ve had children removed from their care is consistently reported by both professionals and women.</p>
<b>Flexible service delivery and engagement approaches are highly effective for ‘hard to reach’ women</b>	<p>Flexible approaches to service delivery were seen as necessary to not only build a trusting relationship but maintain engagement. Co-location has been evidenced as an effective approach for women who are ‘hard to reach’ and need to address multiple needs in a ‘one-stop shop’. Early learning from Framework, SWWOP and Primary Care co-locating in a van to facilitate sex workers access to housing advice and healthcare is positive, as women did not need to attend multiple city centre appointments that they felt were unsafe. Women state that SWWOP and Chocolate Box’s model, where women are never closed to service, provides a consistent safe space to build relationships and foster engagement.</p> <p>Learning from the engagement approach used by Changing Futures, found it took 14 days longer to make contact with women, however once contacted, they consented to support quicker than men. Evidencing that ‘hard to reach’ women could be engaged through persistent, assertive, and targeted outreach. Our sustained engagement rate is 88%.</p>
<b>Better intelligence and data are needed to understand how women use services</b>	<p>Data on women’s contact with services is patchy and inconsistent and it has been difficult to develop a reliable picture of local need. Negative data, i.e., tracking why women do not attend appointments or engage, could be collected to evidence what system change is needed to enhance service provision for women experiencing multiple disadvantage. As a programme we are facilitating the development of a wider gaps analysis and discussions around how organisations can provide safer spaces for women.</p>