

HMP Holloway 1st Night in Custody Project

Jackie King summarises the CCJS evaluation of the project.

The Prisoners Advice and Care Trust (PACT, formerly the Bourne Trust) 1st Night in Custody project at HMP Holloway was proposed in response to a number of reviews which highlighted gaps in the service provided to women when they enter custody for the first time. Various reports by the Home Office on women in prison showed the vulnerability of those going through the reception process. Within this context, the project's aim is to work with the most distressed women who come into HMP Holloway to spend their first night ever in custody. The main objectives are the reduction of anxiety felt by this group, and to ensure that information about all the resources available to new prisoners, both inside and outside of the prison, is given at reception. The project also refers women onto appropriate prison and community services.

The CCJS research was essentially a needs-based evaluation to determine whether clients' needs were being met by the project in terms of reducing anxiety, providing information and making referrals. However, as the research progressed, there were a number of changes in the direction of the project, which caused the research to evolve into a developmental model, helping the service develop rather than merely providing formal statistical feedback.

The research was undertaken in three stages over 18 months. The first stage was a baseline survey of inmates in September 2000, and independent discussions with the project coordinator and various prison departments. The second stage consisted of in-depth interviews with 13 inmates in December 2001. The third stage was undertaken throughout February and March 2002. It was made up of interviews with ten reception staff, five wing staff, the project coordinator, three project staff and volunteers, six governors and heads of departments, as well as a focus group of prison department representatives and telephone interviews with six community organisations that take referrals from the project. Furthermore, the project provided their internal monthly statistics for the quarter ending September 2001 and the results of a questionnaire completed by 50 inmates in August 2001. The case notes of seven of the women interviewed were provided by the service and analysed.

The research concluded that there were strong indications that the 1st Night in Custody Project has been successful in reducing the immediate anxiety of women upon their arrival in custody, and

resolving a number of immediate concerns during their first night in custody. It is also clear that the service provides increased information to women and speeds up the referral process to prison and community services. In particular:

- The project reduces the anxiety felt by women about coming into prison by making phone calls on their behalf to their children and relatives and by explaining aspects of the prison regime;
- The project provides information to the women about a variety of issues, but needs to make a clear distinction between information that is merely being passed on and referrals that are made on the woman's behalf;
- The quality of the referrals to services are generally suitable, timely and appropriate;
- There are a number of issues that affect women's access to services. These are primarily a result of staffing in the prisons and are beyond the control of the project;
- Communication and coordination with the reception staff, befrienders and women's families are excellent, but communication with volunteers, wing staff, nurses and referred services needs some improvement;
- The project requires more funding for increased working hours for current staff and increased staff numbers;
- The project has learnt from its experiences and has evolved in a positive manner.

All parties felt that the project is an inherently valuable one and should be continued, either in its current or in an expanded form in the future. It was seen as a pilot of best practice in relation to helping women in custody for the first time and was also seen as contributing towards the humanising of Holloway Prison at a time where very little positive action occurs within the female estate.

Copies of the full report are available from PACT on tel: 020 7582 6699.

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