



# Review of Women with Low Level Mental Health Needs in the North West of England and Merseyside

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## 1. Background

The overall aim of the National Offender Management Service Co-financing Organisation (NOMS CFO) programme is to improve offender education, training & employment opportunities and increase access to existing resettlement provision. Rather than deliver education and training programmes directly, the NOMS CFO Programme is designed to motivate participants and remove barriers that prevent them from progressing into mainstream provision delivered by other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus employment services, Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) funded provision or further education/training. Not all these services are directed specifically at offenders and NOMS CFO links into services in prison/community for offenders and those available to everyone. Effective engagement with offenders in custody or in the community will also more adequately prepare them for employment, training, education and other mainstream activities. The NOMS CFO provision enhances existing activity within prisons and the community by identifying the gaps in delivery for the harder to help groups, which includes prisoners serving short term sentences. NOMS CFO aims to complement existing delivery activity by bridging the service gaps experienced by offenders.

The purpose of the current report is to provide a follow up on the progress of the 'hard-to-help' sub-group project in the North West and Merseyside since a period of initial evaluative fieldwork was performed. The targeted 'hard-to-help' sub-group cohort for the North West and Merseyside is women with low level mental health needs. The original fieldwork was carried out from August 2012 to March 2013. This current report aims to give a written update on how that sub-group project has progressed since that work was carried out.

Conducted over a period of months from August 2012 to March 2013, the initial fieldwork aimed to gain an understanding of the provision offered to participants on the women with low level mental health needs sub-project which is part of the wider Achieve North West programme. The Achieve North West project is run by a consortium of Probation Trusts located in the North West of England headed by Merseyside Probation Trust who is the Prime Provider for the region. The purpose of the sub-group project is to help participants by offering them an intensive support service that takes account of their personal needs, issues and barriers to employment. Merseyside Probation Trust has identified the issues particular to this offender group and as such has provided a service that meets these needs. It was identified that these women often exhibit a range of very complex and challenging barriers including low self-esteem, confidence issues, childcare problems and instances of domestic violence; these are in addition to typical barriers faced by any offender, e.g. debt, housing, lack of educational attainment. Due to the complicated nature of the sub-group, Achieve North West had to set out very measured provision, linking up with specialised support agencies, in order to effectively help these women.



The fieldwork previously conducted aimed to explore the support that is offered to participants of the sub-group project and how it was developed. Firstly, it was discovered how suitable delivery locations for provision were selected; they were HMP Styal, Adelaide House and Edith Rigby Approved Premises and a number of women's centres located throughout the North West. Achieve North West also decided not to label this a specific women with low level mental health needs sub-project in order to protect the participants from the label of mental health and the associated stigma surrounding it; as such it is not identifiable as a specific sub-group project. In terms of provision, Achieve North West offer a variety of services to these women in order to help stabilise their lives. Examples of support that is offered include: a bespoke Action Plan for every participant, signposting to specialist services, peer/mentoring opportunities, confidence/motivation boosting sessions and workshops, dedicated, understanding and non-judgemental Case Managers, regular reviews of progress made to increase feelings of self-belief and extensive links with organisations solely focused on aiding women. In order to meet the needs of this challenging sub-group, Achieve North West have strived to provide a high quality, bespoke service that promotes their well-being and encourages progress in slow, manageable steps with an emphasis placed on boosting confidence and self-esteem.

## 2. Context and Approach

This report adopts two methodologies in order to give a complete overview of progress made; qualitative results that will be supported by quantitative statistics. Qualitative data was sourced from communications with the Project Director for the Achieve North West Programme regarding the status and developments of the sub-project. Quantitative data was taken from the CATS database, a tool used by Case Managers to record and log the details and progress of participants, in order to provide the latest statistics on participant numbers, their identified needs and the outcomes achieved. Data was split to gain an analysis for each sub-provider specifically; Cheshire Probation, Cumbria Probation, Greater Manchester Probation, Lancashire Probation, Merseyside Probation and HMP Styal. The figures were then assessed for statistical significance using Pearson's Chi-Squared with Yates' Correction for Continuity. By utilising these methods, it is anticipated that a comprehensive answer can be provided for each of the following research aims:

- i. How has the sub-group project progressed since the initial fieldwork was conducted - how has it developed, has it expanded, what has worked well and have there been any problems.
- ii. What are the current figures for the sub-project – how many starts, how many outcomes, what outcomes have been achieved and what are the implications.



### 3. Results

The following results are written with the purpose of answering the first research aim: how has the sub-group project progressed since the initial fieldwork was conducted - how has it developed, has it expanded, what has worked well and have there been any problems.

#### Sub-group project status

The sub-group project has continued to progress in a similar vein; not deviating from the central focus of effectively helping these women. Achieve North West have maintained the same core principles with regard to the provision for women with low level mental health needs; that it should be on a local scale as opposed to region-wide, that it should be bespoke, understanding and sympathetic to the participants and finally that it should be continuous service from prison to community. Provision has been maintained in the same locations; HMP Styal, Adelaide House and Edith Rigby Approved Premises and a number of women's centres located throughout the North West and Merseyside CFO regions. In terms of the work conducted with the participants, this has also continued in a similar manner. Provision remains participant-directed to empower women, sympathetic to them by striving to source and offer specific women's services where possible and encouraging and promoting success to boost the women's confidence and self-esteem. However, Achieve North West have also identified some areas where provision could be further developed and have made the necessary steps to do so; all done in order to offer the best possible provision for the women on this sub-project.

#### Developments

The main development that was made focused around improving offered provision in a specific region of the North West CFO area. It was identified that there was a slight gap in sub-group provision in Lancashire, so Achieve North West made plans to remedy this. To bolster the support offered to sub-group participants in this locality, a sub-contract was formed with a women's centre in East Lancashire. Initially, this was to provide support only to participants in East Lancashire. However, this was slowly expanded and as a result, this women's centre now offers a range of services to participants in the community across Lancashire. Achieve North West also sought to improve their 'Through-the-Gate' service for Lancashire so they placed a Case Worker in Styal prison whose role was to focus specifically on women returning to the Lancashire area; this was done with the aim of strengthening this service and better offering women in this locality that intense, hand-holding support that is given to women in other regions. Due to these changes, the Lancashire area is more balanced in terms of support provided compared to that of the other areas in the North West and Merseyside CFO regions. Now that these gaps have been filled, participants in this area have increased access to the specialised support that they need; as opposed to having to possibly travel out of area which could present difficulties and subsequently affect their motivation.



### What has worked well

Achieve North West have continued to respond to what they have found works well for this group and have adapted their provision accordingly. Achieve North West have had particular success with their incorporation and utilisation of the women's centres in the North West and Merseyside regions. Achieve North West stated that they work with the women's centres in more of a partnership way rather than a contractual way and this has had many benefits for participants. The Case Workers spend the vast majority of their time working out of women's centres rather than Probation offices. It was decided that offering the majority of community provision out of women's centres would be preferable to Probation premises because they were considered to be more open and welcoming to the women. Achieve North West deemed that supplying provision out of women's centres would encourage participants to also explore what services the centres offer and would give them the confidence to access such services of their own accord when they felt ready. This way was thought to be more preferable opposed to the women being directed by Probation to access specialised services.

Another aspect of provision that Achieve North West has found to work particularly well is the use of peer mentoring. Participants can sign up to become mentors whilst in prison or out in community settings. Participants who agree to be mentors whilst they are in prison are then encouraged to continue when they are released into the community. Achieve North West have been able to effectively manage having participants continue on their programme in a voluntary capacity, ensuring that boundaries are set and the peer mentor knows what is in their remit and what is not. Peer mentors tend to be used more for activities such as job club rather than one-to-one support. Achieve North West have found peer mentoring to be beneficial to both the mentors and participants; for the mentors it has been found to boost their confidence and for the participants it gives them a sense of comfort to work with someone who has had similar experiences to their own and allows them to open up more. This serves to encourage participants to further engage with the project and is yet another way that Achieve North West have made their provision reflective of this offender group.

The next set of results are written with the purpose of answering the second research aim: what are the current figures for the sub-project – how many starts, how many outcomes, what outcomes have been achieved and what are the implications.



### Identified needs and implications

The following table highlights the prevalence of resettlement needs for women with low level mental health needs compared to females in the main cohort on the North West and Merseyside programmes. The following figures and statistics are accurate as of March 2014.

Resettlement Need	Women with Low Level Mental Health Needs (n = 624)			Main Cohort Female Participants (n = 736)		
	Has Need	No Need	Percentage with Need	Has Need	No Need	Percentage with Need
Alcohol	242	382	39%	155	581	21%
Attitude & Life Skills	599	25	96%	686	50	93%
Drugs	227	397	36%	203	533	28%
Education	563	61	90%	611	125	83%
Employment & Training	624	0	100%	736	0	100%
Financial Status	260	364	42%	320	416	44%
Health	500	124	80%	201	535	27%
Housing	201	423	32%	220	516	30%
Relationships	268	356	43%	290	446	39%

As the above table demonstrates, women with low level mental health needs have a varying degree of each of the resettlement pathways. The variation of needs demonstrates the necessity for having a range of specialist services for this group. Using Pearson's Chi-Square with Yates' Correction for Continuity significant differences were found for the alcohol, drugs and health resettlement pathways. This means that women with low level mental health needs are more likely to have these resettlement barriers.



Breaking down the statistics further, it was found that there were differences in significant findings between the localities in the North West and Merseyside CFO regions. The following table gives an example of this using the resettlement pathway alcohol:

Area by sub-provider	Women with Low Level Mental Health Needs (n = 624)		Main Cohort Female Participants (n = 736)		Significant Finding (Y/N)
	Alcohol Need	No Alcohol Need	Alcohol Need	No Alcohol Need	
Cheshire Probation	13	16	15	27	N
Cumbria Probation	20	12	3	16	Y
Greater Manchester Probation	43	107	27	93	N
Lancashire Probation	28	25	41	87	Y
Merseyside Probation	55	74	24	76	Y
HMP Styal	83	148	45	284	Y

This is also applicable to other resettlement pathways. A significant difference was found with regard to relationships for Cheshire and Cumbria Probation but not for Greater Manchester. In another example, a significant difference was found for the resettlement pathway drugs for Cheshire, Merseyside and HMP Styal but not Cumbria, Greater Manchester or Lancashire. The difference in significant findings supports Achieve North West's core principle that the provision for this sub-group should be on a local level as opposed to being region wide.

When developing this sub-group project and throughout the duration of supplying provision, one of the cornerstones of the Achieve North West sub-group project was to source support on a local level. Experience showed that having a local support system worked best as it allowed access for participants to the help they needed without having to travel long distances and it meant that sub-contractors were not stretched in order to provide across the entire region; as opposed to delivering what they are used to in their immediate area. Another reason for sourcing local provision was the sheer geography meant it was far too



difficult to sub-contract across the entirety of the region. For these reasons and more, Achieve North West sourced provision on a local scale and the statistics from the current report justify the action. The current figures show a difference in the needs of the sub-group participants between regions therefore sourcing local support is more beneficial as something that may be prevalent in one area may not be an issue in another; the support can be more tailored and can reflect the individual needs of a specific area. Achieve North West ensure that, despite the local focus, the quality of the provision does not differ between regions and that all participants are guaranteed the best service regardless of which area they are located.

## Outcomes

The majority of outcomes claimed were soft outcomes for services, this is to be expected for the provision of services for this group. The most common soft outcomes claimed were for motivation, disclosure, accessing women's services and mentoring. However, it should also be noted that there are a significant number of hard outcomes for employment, education or training; which, for the women of this sub-group, is an excellent achievement.

## Soft outcomes

A vast number of soft outcomes were claimed overall, which varied between region and settings; this is an indication of the nature of the sub-group and the difference in need and required support for the participants. The majority of soft outcomes claimed fall in to particular categories; these being general advice and guidance, signposting and accessing of outside services and improving employment. Firstly, with regard to general advice, 64% of participants received an outcome for disclosure advice, 32% received help with debt management and 38% participants had an outcome claimed for information, advice and guidance. Disclosure advice in particular is a vital aspect of any provision and perhaps more so for this sub-group as it gives the women the confidence to address what is a very difficult prospect; discussing their offence in an interview situation. For sourcing outside services, 65% of participants received an outcome for accessing community based services. As Achieve North West cannot provide certain specialist aid, the Case Managers have an extensive working knowledge of what services are offered in their area in order to help the participant address the more complex barriers. Lastly, with regards to improving employment prospects, 40% of participants had help with C.V's and applications, 31% had an outcome for attending Job Club and 48% received an outcome for an interview, either a real or mock one. Employment may be the end goal for the participants but the majority will need a considerable amount of time to reach that point. By offering employment support, Achieve North West are letting the participants take small steps towards that goal.

Other notable soft outcomes that were claimed were more pertinent to this group specifically. 46% of participants had an outcome for a form of motivational assistance; either motivational training or for a non-accredited motivational programme. Motivation is a noticeable problem for this sub-group. According to the statistics generated by CATS, overall, 76% of participants had red levels of motivation on starting the programme; meaning that although they were willing to join the project, they were not optimistic about their future. Participants typically have associated negative feelings including a lack of self-worth, self-belief and confidence which serve to keep motivation at a low level. Offering motivational assistance



through the duration of programme engagement will help to slowly but continually improve the woman's feelings towards herself which will consequently encourage her to engage more with the services offered. Participants may also be additionally supported by a mentor. As already discussed, there have been noteworthy benefits with regards to peer mentoring for both the participant and the mentor. As of now, 30% of participants have received a claim for mentoring. For those participants who agreed to mentor others, there were apparent obvious visible changes in demeanour; mentoring boosted their confidence greatly and gave them a form of purposeful activity, empowering them as they felt they were making a difference to others by sharing their experiences.

### Hard outcomes

As already mentioned, it was found that there were a noticeable number of hard outcomes claimed for a type of employment, education or training. Throughout the course of the sub-project so far, there have been a total of 181 claims for either a form of employment, full-time, part-time or voluntary, or education in custody or training on release. It should be remembered that this group pose very challenging barriers and for those participants to be helped to the point where they are stable and confident enough to enter employment or start an education or training course is only testament to the support that they have received from Achieve North West. The women on this sub-group project present with a complex array of barriers, including mental health issues which is a prominent barrier in itself; compound this with low self-worth, no confidence and possible issues with childcare and domestic violence so it is understandable why some of the participants on this sub-group will not be ready for employment for a substantial period of time. However, for those participants to be brought to the point where they feel confident enough in themselves, as well as have a stable control over any personal issues, to be able to enter employment or education is a massive achievement for those individuals and for the programme. It demonstrates that the support that Achieve North West offer as part of the sub-group project is of a very high quality and is serving the purpose for which it was designed.

## 4. Conclusion

Since the initial fieldwork took place, Achieve North West have continued to refine their sub-project for women with low level mental health needs. The sub-project has helped a substantial number of participants and achieved a vast number of outcomes with a considerable portion being hard outcomes. Women with low level mental health needs is a challenging sub-group contingent as they require a more intensive and specialised service; especially to find support for the underpinning mental health issues they have. In order to effectively aid participants, Achieve North West have focused on what they have found to work well for this group. They have continued to source provision on a local level, ensuring that no matter where a participant is located they have access to the specialised help they need in the immediate area. When a gap in provision was identified for Lancashire, Achieve North West strived to bring the level of provision back in to balance with other areas by sub-contracting to a local women's centre. The participants are at the core of the sub-project and everything is done to ensure that they are offered the support that they require whilst being mindful of the protection and sympathy that is needed. The quality of provision is reflected in the sheer number of participants worked with on the project and the number of outcomes achieved. Despite women with low level mental health needs being an extremely difficult





sub-group, Achieve North West have managed to provide a service that meets their needs effectively, is directed by the participant to empower them and is understanding of the severity of the barriers that these women face.