

## **RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE SCRUTINY PANEL**

### **POLICY REVIEW 2012/13: REDUCING RE-OFFENDING – ACCOMMODATION ISSUES FOR WOMEN AND ARMED FORCES VETERAN OFFENDERS**

**12 NOVEMBER 2012**

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide the Responsive Services and Customer Care Scrutiny Panel with background information on the subject area prior to the Panel meeting.
- 1.2 The debate at the Panel meeting will form the evidence for the Scrutiny Panel's policy review for 2012/13 into Reducing Re-offending.

#### **2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 19 July 2012, the Panel agreed the scope of the Policy Review, Reducing Re-offending. One element of the review is to investigate the challenges and opportunities in regard to tackling accommodation issues, one of the Safer Sunderland Partnership's key priorities.
- 2.2 During the course of the Scrutiny Panel's evidence gathering, areas for further consideration have been consistently highlighted; including housing and support for armed forces veterans and women.
- 2.3 Graham Hall (Chair of the Armed Forces Network) and Phil Thompson (Norcare's Veteran's Centre) in Newcastle will attend the Panel meeting to provide evidence and answer questions regarding issues for veteran offenders and Maureen Gavin (Northumbria Probation Trust) will attend to provide evidence relating to both veterans and women.

#### **3. WOMEN**

- 3.1 The Corston Report (2007) concluded that women had been marginalised in a criminal justice system built for men. The differences between male and female offenders and those at risk of offending indicate a different approach is needed for women:-
  - Most women do not commit crime;
  - Women with histories of violence and abuse are over represented in the criminal justice system and can be described as victims as well as offenders;
  - Proportionately more women than men are remanded in custody;
  - Women commit a different range of offences from men. They commit more acquisitive crime and have a lower involvement in serious violence, criminal damage and professional crime;

- Relationship problems feature strongly in women's pathways into crime;
- Drug addiction plays disproportionate role in the reasons for offending by women;
- Mental health problems are far more prevalent among women in prison than in the male prison population or in the general population;
- Women prisoners are far more likely than men to be primary carers of young children; and
- Because of the small number of women's prisons and their geographical location, women tend to be located further from their homes than male prisoners.

### ***Accommodation Issues for Women***

- 3.2 Baroness Corston recommended that the accommodation pathway was in urgent need of gender-specific reform. In particular, she suggested more supported accommodation should be provided for women on release to break the cycle of repeat offending and custody. It is important however that women offender's issues as a whole are considered as they are fundamentally linked; for example mental health problems and family issues will add to the difficulties of securing or keeping a tenancy.
- 3.3 Research suggests that nationally, 30% of women in prison lose their accommodation while in prison. The effect of this loss can often have a significant impact upon the individual concerned, children they may have and the wider family.
- 3.4 In Sunderland, in October 2012, there were 181 women offenders out of a total 524 (34.5%) on Northumbria Probation Trust's Sunderland Local Delivery Unit caseload. It is worth noting women offenders are often more resource intensive than men and therefore require a greater level of support. Of these women, 59 (32.6%) were identified as having an accommodation need. Of the third of women offenders identified as having an accommodation need, the vast majority will also have one or more other issues, such as mental health or drug/alcohol dependency.
- 3.5 The picture for women offenders in Sunderland largely mirrors the more general, national picture; however it is identified as a key issue for the Safer Sunderland Partnership as part of the Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Network. Work to date includes gaining more understanding on the levels of women in Sunderland who offend identifying barriers and ensuring access to a range of services. Future work will also concentrate on assessing the current levels of support for women offenders who have been abused, raped, experienced domestic violence or have been involved in prostitution.
- 3.6 Northumbria Probation Trust have developed a Project Group to identify and work with those women who offend or are at risk of

offending. After some difficulties community premises at St Mary's Church in the city centre have been identified to host a Community Hub or 'one stop shop' for women. Resource has been identified for one year for the Hub which will be staffed by Probation but will also involve input from partner organisations. It will provide a space and support to women and their friends and family during and after their court order has finished. Support will include debt and finance advice, addressing substance misuse, relationship issues, and education training and employment.

#### **4. VETERANS**

- 4.1 The exact number of former Service personnel in prison in England and Wales is at present unknown. Despite a number of attempts to produce a reliable figure, the most accurate figure appears to have resulted in study carried out by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice. This asserts that approximately 2,820, or some 3.5% of all those currently in custody in England and Wales, had served in the Forces. 51% of ex-servicemen in prison are over the age of 45 years and 29 % are over the age of 55, which compares to 9 per cent of the general prison population being aged 50 years or over. These statistics suggest that many veterans offend long after their date of discharge.
- 4.2 According to figures, the average age of veterans in prison is older than the average of the general prison population suggesting that, the time spent in the Forces reduces the likelihood of offending from an earlier age. The figures also suggest that 25 % of veterans are in prison for sexual offences, compared to 11% of the civilian prison population, whilst 32.9% of veterans are in prison for offences categorised as 'violence against the person', compared to 28.6% of the non-veteran prison population.
- 4.3 According to research veteran offenders largely fall within the following groups:-
  - Those who have experienced traumatic and difficult lives during childhood or adolescence, and had witnessed or suffered extreme violence, problems with drugs or alcohol prior to enlisting, and negative associations with peers;
  - Those who experience difficulties arising in military service, sometimes the reason for discharge. Some of the problems were mental health related, or physical injury; and
  - Those who experience post-Forces problems and that they had difficulty in adjusting to civilian life.
- 4.4 Three factors are prevalent in the majority of offending; social isolation and exclusion, alcohol, and financial problems. Two case studies provided by Norcare's Veteran's Centre can be found at **Appendix 1**.

## ***Accommodation Issues for Veterans***

- 4.5 Young single men are particularly vulnerable on discharge because they often have nowhere to live when their military service ends. They may rely on relatives or friends for immediate accommodation, but very often such arrangements are fragile and time limited. A lack of stable accommodation can lead to a social exclusion.
- 4.6 In Sunderland, in October 2012, there were 27 veteran offenders out of a total 524 (5.1%) on Northumbria Probation Trust's Sunderland Local Delivery Unit caseload, however this is very likely to be an under-reporting. Of these only 4 (14.8%) were identified as having an accommodation need, which can be viewed positively. More starkly, 22 (81%) had an identified alcohol need, which could jeopardise a stable tenancy, and there are significant links to the use of alcohol and issues of domestic violence.
- 4.7 The identification of veterans in Sunderland has only taken place in the last 12 months; therefore the picture is a developing one. Northumbria Probation Trust has a Veteran's Champion within each of its Local Delivery Unit; this group meets on a regular basis to share information and progress. Sunderland's Veteran's Champion is ex-armed forces himself and he also sits on the Sunderland Armed Forces Network. Probation have an education, training and employment programme specifically targeted at veterans.
- 4.8 The needs of veterans will be considered by the Reducing Re-Offending Delivery Network throughout the 9 re-offending pathways and in particular relating to suitable accommodation.
- 4.9 Sunderland's Armed Forces Network (SAFN) was set up by Veterans to bring together local and national statutory bodies, agencies, and charities who are involved in delivering welfare and support for our armed forces personnel, Veterans and their families.
- 4.10 The SAFN works to resolve the problems that the armed forces community can face, and signposts individuals to bespoke help. Since World War 1 the armed forces have been involved in many conflicts, and it has increasingly apparent that more specialised care and support is needed for all service personnel, Veterans and their families.
- 4.11 The network meetings are an opportunity for support providers to exchange information and it has been an invaluable resource for providers to participate in partnership working to maximise support and care. The SAFN offers the armed forces community a strong voice on their concerns and it is represented on the Regional Armed Forces Network. It has the 15 (North East) Brigade Civil Integration Officer as an advisor, they regularly brief the network on the continual changes in various aspects of care and support and the latest MOD initiatives. Uniquely the SAFN is managed by Veterans who use their own

experiences to identify the issues and objectives that need to be addressed.

- 4.12 SAFN is seeking to address accommodation for offenders who are ex-veterans by considering what it can do differently to engage with ex-military personnel as the tendency of veterans to disengage from services happens for a variety of reasons and makes it difficult to find stable accommodation.

## **5. KEY AREAS OF CONSIDERATION FOR THE PANEL**

- (a) In the absence of an increase in bed spaces for these categories of offenders, what more can and should be done to improve the chances of accessing stable accommodation?
- (b) How will the continued budget reductions impact upon the ability to improve this issue for women and veterans?
- (c) Is there anything happening nationally that will further impact upon this issue?
- (d) What has been found to work in individual cases?
- (e) Levels of joint working, information sharing and communication between agencies to get the best outcomes for individuals?

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 That Members note the information provided and utilise it in the debate at the Panel Meeting to be held on 12 November 2012.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Home Office; The Corston Report (2007)
- Howard League for Penal Reform; Report of the Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison (2011)

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Soldier Y's Story**

Soldier Y was referred to Norcare through the Veteran's in custody Support Officer within HMP Durham Prison. He was given floating support whilst still in prison, upon release he moved into the Norcare Veteran's Centre as a resident.

Soldier Y served two years in the Army between the ages of 17 and 19. He married soon after joining up, and this contributed to his leaving the service in such a short time.

Despite a second marriage and employment over the years, Soldier Y fell into a peripatetic life style of crime, alcohol and drugs. He moved up and down the country, and served several terms of imprisonment. After many years of this lifestyle, he found it difficult to live in any other manner.

During his last term in prison Soldier Y was given support not only by Norcare, but VIC's officers who are members of the prison service. He says they treated him like "a person" instead of just a number. This combination of support reinforced Soldier Y's wish to finally turn his life around, as it reminded him that there are people who care. His approaching 50th birthday became a watershed moment for him. He felt that if he was ever going to change his life 50 was the time to do it, before it became "too late".

Soldier Y said he sometimes felt a "bit of a fraud" being at the Veteran's Centre because his time in the Army was so short and so long ago. He didn't feel his identity was defined by his Army career, and that he had reason to feel out of place in Civilian life, unlike many of his fellow Veterans.

Soldier Y may not have served a great length of time in the Army, but he was working through the same fundamental difficulties as any other Veteran trying to come to terms with a new way of looking at his life after years of being "different". He along with his fellow residents and Veterans support group members, needed to learn new strategies and skills to cope with significant changes of lifestyle. Rather than being an outsider, Soldier Y was an asset, because whilst he could still relate to other Veterans, he also helped them along with his more familiar view of civilian life.

Due to his lifestyle Soldier Y had completely lost touch with his family over the years, except for very occasional contact from his younger brother when he was in prison. When he arrived at the Veteran's Centre he hadn't seen or spoken to his Mother or any other member of his family for nearly sixteen years.

Soldier Y described a difficult and chaotic childhood, which resulted in a fractured relationship with his Mother, who couldn't cope with his behaviour. Looking back Soldier Y thinks that these days he would possibly be diagnosed with "something". He says he has always felt the odd one out, and it has distressed him over the years.

Therapy sessions through Newcastle Talking Therapies helped give Soldier Y more of an insight and understanding into patterns of behaviour, and how to counteract the ones that had consistently damaged his life. Soldier Y is the first to acknowledge that he had “slips” in his time at the Veterans’ Centre, but after thirty years, even *wanting* to change was a big step forward for him. He may have taken a couple of steps backwards at times, but he was only able to go backwards because he had taken so many steps forward.

Soldier Y was a great ambassador for the Veterans’ Centre with visitors, including being presented to The Princess Royal during her visit to the Centre. He visited his family in Scotland with visits becoming more regular and frequent, and spent last Christmas with them, which would have only been a fantasy a year before. He was able to build up an element of trust with his brother, and even more importantly his Mother, after many years of being seen as a danger and to be avoided. Of course having his photograph taken with Princess Anne helped enormously!

Over the Christmas period Soldier Y was informed that his application to help at a local charity for the homeless (which he had made use of himself in the past) had been accepted, and his next step forward was being offered time working in their warehouse. This is quite a lot of steps away from HMP Durham.

Unfortunately Soldier Y’s long time friend, who was like a surrogate brother to him, died suddenly whilst staying at his daughter’s house in Nottingham. Soldier Y was naturally devastated; however he stepped up to the plate and was very helpful and supportive to the daughter and her family. He made arrangements so he could attend the funeral despite it taking place in Nottingham, and helped to wind up his friend’s affairs in Newcastle to relieve the pressure on his friend’s daughter. Soldier Y needed support, but coped well with his bereavement, whereas at one time such an emotional event would have sent him into self destruct and may have resulted in another prison sentence.

Soldier Y continued regular visits to his family when finances allowed, and even included a new house mate who had never visited Scotland in one of his trips. They stayed with Soldier Y’s brother and visited his mother, and for the first time in twenty years Soldier Y saw all three of his brothers together. The weekend was considered to be a resounding success.

Several months ago Soldier Y was invited to move back to Scotland to share his brother’s house, and has recently done so.

Not one member of Soldier Y’s family, and certainly not Soldier Y, could have conceived of that happening when he arrived at the Veterans’ Centre. We wish him all the very best in the next stage of his life.

## **Soldier X's Story**

Soldier X joined the Army in 1999 aged 21. He served with the King's Own Scottish Borderers. He was discharged after 9 years, in 2006, having served in Iraq during Operation Granby and Northern Ireland.

In spite of finding a flat and a job quickly, Soldier X found civilian life and independent living difficult and stressful, and an incident which involved alcohol, resulted in a prison sentence.

Soldier X was visited by a Veteran Support Worker whilst in prison, and upon his release was found a place in a Salvation Army hostel, which he describes as, "Like still being in prison". He felt out of place among the other residents in the hostel, and feeling vulnerable and alienated he stayed in his room nearly all the time, becoming more and more withdrawn, which had a negative impact on both his emotional and physical health. In spite of these difficulties Soldier X participated in a fourteen week construction course which he completed and passed with flying colours. He says "going out to his course every day saved his sanity".

Sadly Soldier X's unhappiness and feelings of alienation in his accommodation unfortunately led to another incident involving alcohol, and he was asked to leave the hostel, then becoming homeless. When Soldier X contacted Norcare he was living under Byker Bridge with an occasional night on a friend's sofa.

Thankfully a friend from the Army, who volunteers as a British Legion Case Worker, found Soldier X and told him about the new Norcare Veterans' Centre. Soldier X immediately contacted Norcare himself, and became our first resident, as the paint was still drying.

Soldier X says it was like finding sanctuary when he walked into the Veterans' Centre. At first he concentrated on his health and fitness, enjoying the peace and quiet, eating properly again and going to the gym every day. Apart from having a place to live where he felt safe and understood at last, Soldier X says the best thing was being able to show his Mum where he was living, so she could see things were changing for him and allow her to stop worrying. Since then his relationship with his family has improved vastly.

Within weeks of finding his sanctuary Soldier X was attending a residential course on rural life skills in Derbyshire. He completed the Veterans' Course at Finchale College and attended the Horticultural Course at Finchale which resulted in him being invited to attend the Harrogate Flower Show for two days. Soldier X attended several other courses to help him gain a greater chance of employment.

Soldier X needed a helping hand to start him on his journey, but he has grabbed every opportunity offered to him with both of hands. He returned to Byker 18 months later to help with the garden project at the local Community



Centre. Thanks to his positive attitude and hard work once he felt accepted and safe, Soldier X has come a very long way from living under “The Bridge”. Soldier X found independent accommodation over a year ago, and has regular contact with his daughter who lives in Scotland. He also has a new partner with a daughter of a similar age, and the Veteran’s Centre recently took great pleasure in helping them all move up to a new home in the Borders where Soldier X is hoping to work for the Forestry Commission.