W.I.R.E.
(Women’s Information and Resettlement for Ex-offenders)

"A burden shared is a burden halved"

Evaluation report – a narrative summary
St Giles Trust’s WIRE project is a service run by female ex-offender staff and volunteers that works closely with female ex-offenders to guide them from release, assist with resettlement and reconnect them with the community.

The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) carried out an evaluation into WIRE to understand the impact it has on re-offending and explore the interventions it offers to support desistance.

TSIP undertook five key activities:

1/ Evaluation framework – a mixed method approach was designed, focussing on a client reconviction study and a qualitative study of those who had been assisted by, worked with or delivered WIRE.

2/ Programme assessment – analysing data on 364 cases dating from April 2010 (the project’s start) to April 2012, the referral log and reporting mechanisms to gain an emerging picture of the client group and the WIRE team’s main activities.

3/ Interviews - 25 interviews with staff (5), clients (8) and service delivery partners (12).

4/ Reconviction study - an analysis of client conviction rates and trends through securing access to data from the Police National Computer and NOM’s OASys system.

5/ Analysis and reporting – the programme was analysed and client profiles considered around needs, services accessed and offending patterns.
Findings from the programme assessment

- **Clients** - The profile of WIRE clients were on average prolific, complex and chaotic. The nature of their offences and needs was broadly in line with the female prison population overall, suggesting that WIRE does not ‘cherry pick’ easy cases. In fact, most clients were identified to be coming from a prison that is known for its revolving door cases involving women with complex needs.

- **Work of team** - A review of the programme found that there was a very high demand on WIRE’s small team. It was found that WIRE was achieving more outcomes with clients in the early stages of the service rather than further on in.

- **Due to the heavy demands on caseworkers**, there were administrative shortcomings in capturing and recording the work of WIRE, suggesting some under-recording.

Findings from interviews

- **Clients** – clients were difficult to engage but the researchers successfully interviewed a small number. None of these women had re-offended and most said WIRE had contributed to this. Of key importance was: being met at the gate, help with accommodation, breaking away from drugs and receiving support at a crucial time.

- **Partner agencies** – WIRE was best known amongst partner agencies for its ability to house women offenders who are generally difficult to find accommodation for. There was consensus that WIRE workers *built strong relationships with clients and particular recognition of WIRE’s effectiveness at helping clients achieve housing outcomes*.

- **Staff** – staff identified operational challenges in the size of the team and constant demand for the service. WIRE staff also ranked housing as the most pressing need for their clients and ability to access suitable housing (typically private rented) is key to WIRE’s success. Staff also considered it positive that women who had re-offended still returned to the service as it showed trust in WIRE.

- **Overall WIRE is seen as an effective service** which gets vulnerable women housed on release from prison and can quickly establish rapport with clients. Better resourcing was perceived to be a key to future success of WIRE.
**Sentencing history:**

- Over 50% of WIRE clients have a conviction history that has more than 10 offences. The national re-offending rate for this group is 88%.
- WIRE women were more likely than the national average (at 80%, against the national average of 60%) to have received custodial sentences of six months or less in their offending career. A third received one month or less.
- The WIRE sample of 165 had an average of 32 offences per woman.

**Re-offending after WIRE intervention:**

- The reconviction rate amongst WIRE clients was 42%. This figure was based on an evaluation of available data for 104 women who engaged with the WIRE (out of a total of 342 women).
- The average number of offences per participant halved for 12 months after compared to the 12 months before.
- Acknowledging caveats (eg, around sample size; see full report for more information), the evaluation found that just over half of those categorised as at a high risk of re-offending at a two year point had done so in the first year, just one third of those categorised as at a very high risk had re-offended.
- Overall, WIRE was seen as having a substantial impact on reducing re-offending and offending frequency amongst those who are deemed as being at high risk. Comparison group data from the Police National Computer was unavailable in time for this research and could have provided further support. However, these national comparison data and qualitative findings indicate in WIRE’s favour.

*NB: For additional information about the program review see the separate client reconviction study. It should be noted that the ‘client reconviction study’ element of this evaluation relates to a sub group of WIRE clients (104) when in fact 342 women were referred to the service and 240 were engaged. The lack of consent forms, sourcing data from the MoJ, and the 12 month at liberty rule meant we could only conduct analysis for 104 clients. The results of this study must be understood in this context, which means further analysis of both of the 104 and 342 clients is required to make more definitive statements about impact, and effectiveness of the service.*
Summary of recommendations

- **Improve evidencing of work and outcomes.** This should be implemented from the start of projects and will help evaluate the programme’s effectiveness in the future. The researchers acknowledged that there has already been progress in this area partly as a result of the team continuing the TSIP’s suggested data collection practices.

- **Ensure WIRE is sufficiently resourced** – this includes the appropriate use of volunteers and ensuring that clients are prioritised according to risk when referrals become capped.

- **Refine and regular review WIRE’s processes** – this is essential for such a busy project to ensure it does not lose its focus. Regularly checks should be carried out to ensure it is maintaining its objectives.

- **Raise the profile amongst partners** – engage further with key partner organisations so they gain a better understanding of WIRE’s offer. Of particular importance was trying to establish and maintain a regular prisons presence and other services that can provide assistance to WIRE clients.

Next steps

- **St Giles Trust to use similar practices learned from this experience to evidence outcomes throughout St Giles Trust services** to prove evidence for the value of its services. This will support fundraising activities for them.

- **St Giles Trust to ensure that teams have enough staff and resources** – both paid and voluntary – to assist with administration of projects.

- **St Giles Trust to look into the option of establishing WIRE Plus to meet the needs of clients needing long-term support.** This will free the time of caseworkers on the main team to deal with the high level of demand.

- **Work with prisons to establish a regular presence for WIRE** so that early contact is made with clients.

- **Work with partner agencies to raise the profile** and understanding of what WIRE offers.
For further information about the work of the WIRE project, this summary or full report, please contact us:

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