



# Bristol Women's Court Support Worker Project

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Year 1 Report  
June 2016

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**Bristol Women's Court Support Worker  
An Exploration of the Role 2015-2018  
First Report June 2016**

**“The humanising bridge between services....”**

**Summary of the Project**

This study builds on a previous shorter project between 'Missing Link' charity, and Bournemouth University (Hean et al. 2009a) which explored a similar support service and worker.

This project runs from 1st June 2015 - 31st May 2018 and is exploring the role of the Bristol Women's Court Support Worker (CSW) considering the impacts the role may have on the experience of women who need support whilst in custody and on bail and related service/agencies. The results of this study may be used to further develop all the agencies who currently may be involved with these women at a local and national level.

**Background**

UK government statistics demonstrate that an increasing proportion of offences are dealt with by courts, rather than through out of court disposals, with an increasing proportion of offences committed by women (Ministry of Justice 2014). The conviction ratio (the number of defendants convicted divided by the number of defendants prosecuted) remains higher for women than for men. For women, thirty-six percent (36%) of prosecutions were for TV licence evasion, representing 64% of all summary non-motoring prosecutions of women (Ministry of Justice 2014).

Whilst fines were the most common sentence issued to both men and women, a difference can be seen in the sentences issued for indictable offences; for men, such offences tended to result in a custodial sentence, whilst for women, this was a community sentence (Ministry of Justice 2014).

Of women cautioned or convicted in 2013, just over one third were first time entrants into the criminal justice system. Of those women receiving cautions for indictable offences, 40% had a previous caution or conviction, and of those receiving a custodial sentence, 86% had a previous caution or conviction. These can be compared with rates for men of 55% and 91% respectively (Ministry of Justice 2014).

Female offenders are more likely than male offenders to be on out-of-work benefits both before and after their caution/conviction or prison sentence, with 54% of female offenders making a claim one month before and 61% claiming in the month following their caution/conviction or prison sentence (Ministry of Justice 2014).

Forty percent of female remand prisoners indicated that they had received help or treatment for mental illness before entering prison, and 23% had received such help since coming to prison (Office for National Statistics 2001). Twenty-two percent of female remand prisoners had at one time been

admitted to a mental hospital, with 6% having had a stay of longer than six months (Office for National Statistics 2001). Eleven percent had been admitted to a locked ward or secure unit. Of the women who had been sentenced, forty percent had received help or treatment for mental illness before entering prison, and 30% had received such help since coming to prison (Office for National Statistics 2001). Fifteen percent of female sentenced prisoners had at one time been admitted to a mental hospital, with 3% having had a stay of longer than six months (Office for National Statistics 2001). Six percent had been admitted to a locked ward or secure unit. The same survey identified that intellectual functioning for women in prison tended to be lower than the population average, with only 16% of those who had been sentenced and 12% of those on remand having test scores equivalent or higher than the population average (Office for National Statistics 2001).

Research indicates that, whilst symptoms of psychiatric illness improved for men undergoing custodial sentences, the same was not true of women (Hassan et al. 2011).

Thus, it can be seen that:

- Women have a higher tendency to be convicted than men, with many prosecutions having an economic factor (TV licence evasion), linking to the high rates of women claiming out-of-work benefits before their caution or conviction
- Many of those prosecuted for indictable offences have a previous caution or conviction
- Many women prisoners have experienced mental ill-health before going to prison, including some who have been admitted to mental hospital, with some admissions of at least six months
- Psychiatric illness amongst women prisoners does not improve over time

### **Summary of the Role of the Women's Court Support Worker**

The Missing Link women's court service provides a court worker who is based at Bristol Magistrates court every weekday morning. As summarised by the Missing Link organisation, the role supports women in custody and on bail and seeks to reduce the high number of women who appear before the magistrate for minor offences who may also be experiencing violence and intimidation in the home. In supporting these women there is also the opportunity to ensure that the women remain connected to their children and the latter's safety is made certain. The above is achieved through the CSW's permitted access to the women in the cells whereby she works with them assessing their current situation and offering support.

The key actions of the role are to reduce the number of women who are given custodial sentences with concurrent impacts on both on their lives and the public purse, and to prevent reoffending behaviour by creating a sustainable future for female offenders. In doing so, the court worker raises awareness of the lived experience of female offenders within the justice system, attempts to change

the practice of magistrates towards female offenders and to reduce the number of female custodial sentences.

### **Broad Objectives of the Project**

1. To look into, and describe the reasons as to how women come into contact with, and choose to access the support of the Court Support Worker.
2. To collect the thoughts of those involved about the effects of using the court support service. The questions used will be drawn from the literature primarily, through discussion and feedback with the women involved, and also through informal discussions with key 'Missing Link' staff (eg. the support worker) and key court personnel.
3. To explore the anonymous numerical data on a monthly basis that is collected by 'Missing Link' capturing eg. the numbers of women it can offer the service to.
4. Identify measures that may help enhance the Court Support Worker service for women eg. offering different support, or signposting to other agencies not previously included.

### **Outcomes of the Project:**

- Raise awareness of the lived experience of female offenders within the Criminal Justice System (CJS)
- Explore possible changes in Magistrates behaviour towards female offenders
- Explore a reduction in the number of female custodial services
- Consider the suggested evidence that female offenders are also 'victims' within society

### **Methodology part 1 – qualitative data collection and analysis**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) broadly describe qualitative research as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 3). The Principal Investigator (PI) became aware very quickly that, during pre-project meetings, hearing *narratives* as to the role of the CSW and the women supported facilitated a greater understanding of the staff involved with the role, and the service user's experience of it, than would be gained from numerical data analysis/quantitative approaches alone.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also state "[qualitative research] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.....they turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self."

(Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 3). Underpinning the project was the desire to ensure that not only was the role of the CSW made more 'visible' but the experience and voice of the service users' was heard also. Denzin and Lincoln summarise their propositions as "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 3). It was felt that adopting this approach would enable the project to report the lived experience of the CSW role both from the worker herself and the women supported.

When considering the tools to be used Denzin and Lincoln (2005) highlight that qualitative research embraces the collection of a variety of empirical materials including eg. Case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, interactional and observational texts "...that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives....Accordingly qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand." (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, pp3-4).

The PI therefore concluded that this interpretative paradigm would be an appropriate approach to gather the necessary data for the project, the tools used to be interviews with key identified individuals ie. the women themselves and staff closely involved in the work of the CSW including the CSW herself alongside the use of interview notes and a reflective diary including 'memos to self'.

A very light framework of open questions were identified to be used to thus allowing respondents to answer in their own words and allow for "richer and fuller information" (Polit et al. 2001, p.267). It was also felt to be key for this study to ensure that the PI (also the interviewer) use open ended questions to explore issues *identified by the respondents as important* in their own words and using the resulting narrative dialogue to consider and articulate further.

The introductory phase of the project confirmed that the potential respondents were willing and happy to take part in telling their story. Less specific open questions sought to explore the reasons as to how respondents came into contact with the CSW, the practical pathways involved, and the impacts.

Using a narrative (story-telling approach) can be argued to have many limitations not least that the researcher reports the 'heard story through' their own meanings therefore with a narrative enquiry approach there is a need to offer supporting evidence for what is reported (Polkinghorne 2007, p.476), this is done within this project in sharing the findings with the organization (experts) at regular intervals and considering the quantitative data also collated whilst mindful of the literature on an ongoing basis. This process also allows for comparing the individual stories with a wider group of similar stories to identify patterns and possibly enhance trustworthiness. The approach overall allows for a knowledge base to emerge whilst allowing individual voice of respondents to still be heard.

In summary, this project draws from quantitative and qualitative paradigms utilising the opportunity to speak with the women and staff (CJS and 'Missing Link') involved as well as review the routine collected data from 'Missing Link' (anonymous monthly audit report) to perform a descriptive analysis and advise as to additional data that could easily be collected. This informs as to

biographical and demographic details of the women being supported and offers insight into the trajectory these women follow from their initial contact with the project.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analysed thematically by the PI (interviewer). The manifest level (basic level of analysis with a descriptive account of the data: eg. what was actually said, documented or observed with no assumptions made) of analysis began with the transcription and note taking. This was followed by interpretative analysis (higher level of analysis and is concerned with what “may be meant by the response” inferences and implications) whereby the data was read and re-read for an initial intuitive grasp of the themes seen as emerging. The raw data was therefore organised into themes, concepts and patterns.

Modified inductive content analysis was also used where themes and constructs were derived with no former framework or counting- latent level analysis. This process identifies and forms emerging categories. This approach was used as the PI wished to explore the rich data to search for any new themes that may have emerged (true inductive content analysis would use absolutely no previous framework, however, the literature search, broad interview framework, combined with the knowledge gained from meeting Missing Link staff during the introductory phase impacted on the PI’s “knowing and knowledge” therefore the process could not be seen as inductive in its purest form).

Throughout the data analysis, the PI became aware of the emerging themes. A degree of immersion in the data was necessary for this process. A modified constant comparative strategy was therefore subsequently used. This analysis method focused on a process whereby categories emerged from the data via predominantly inductive reasoning rather than through coding from predetermined categories (Maykut et al. 1994) with the overall interpretation “confirmed” using either data findings from the other methods used or from the literature and prior research. Although not a pure (true) constant comparative strategy as is described within the theory and process for grounded theory, the PI used it as a means of addressing the quality issues. Table 1 below summarises the data analysis process.

**Table 1 Working with the Data - Overview**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>1. Preparation</b>	Selecting a unit of analysis which may be a word or a theme (eg. skills of the court worker)
<b>2. Organisation</b>	Open coding, creating categories and abstraction. Notes and headings written in the text whilst reading it. Written material re-read, adding further headings to ensure

	capture of all content.
<b>3. Identifying Emerging Themes</b>	Revisiting the data, codes and themes to elucidate emerging themes and ensure consistency

### **Methodology part 2 - statistical data collection and analysis**

Data collection and analysis: Statistical data was collected through a standard proforma sheet, which had been previously developed in an evaluation of a liaison scheme in the same area (Hean et al. 2009a, 2009b). This was completed by the worker at the time of each consultation, based on information she collected from the client. The questions were closed category questions, which enabled the worker to select one of several set responses. It should be noted that, as the worker changed partway through this year, there may be some inconsistencies in the way in which the proforma was completed. These have not been evident in the data, but the possibility should be noted nonetheless. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics (Hinton, 2014), which enabled analysis and presentation in a format which is appropriate to the data collected.

Service users/sample The Women’s Support Service is aimed at supporting women defendants post arrest, and who are negotiating their trial appearances. The women’s specialist worker providing the service collected data from each client seen over the duration of the study (excluding December 2015 – February 2016, when no court worker was in place).

For the purposes of this report, the data presented cover the months of April to November 2015, and March 2016, as this was the only data available at the time of writing.

### **Ethical Approval**

Approval was granted via the Bournemouth University Ethics processes following minor recommended amendments in 2015.

### **Context of the Project at June 16**

All parties were aware that the project may grow and develop organically over the 3 years with the potential for change and impact as with any organisation. Indeed the CSW appointed (key to this evaluation) started in April 2015 and was a new role/appointment albeit building on a previous role. This individual left the role in November 2015 with a new appointment made at the beginning of 2016. The Operations Manager for Missing Link also left in the Spring of 2016, with a new

appointment already in post to ensure a smooth transition. Although personnel changes were evident, the CSW role remained clearly integrated into the CJS – in a connected yet definitely separate voluntary sector role within the service.

At this time in the project, for this first report, the data reflects the routinely collated quantitative data, and interviews with the Court Support Worker, one service user who recently used the service and an Enforcement Officer plus the PI also reflected upon ongoing field notes and a reflective/reflexive journal (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005) from her time spent over 2 days with the Missing Link used to record observations and reflections, which also provides an interpretive trail (Steubert et al. 2003) this process to be continued throughout the life of the project. The report provides some early conclusions concerning the service, and recommendations for both the service and the remaining two years of the study.

As a result of missing data during the time when no CSW was in post, this report is separated into two sections, the first comprising data to November 2015, and the second from the time the new support worker started, in March 2016; however, at the time of writing, data was not available for April 2016 onwards.

### Study findings at June 2016

The findings presented herein provide some detail about the way in which the service provided by the Court Support Worker operates, from the perspective of the CSW herself, the service user, an Enforcement Officer and through quantitative data collected between May and November 2015 and in March 2016. Before offering this detail, some comments from the service user are provided, in order to demonstrate the value of the service to those using it. The respondent indicated that the CSW input had transformed her life and helped her move on towards her future, a future she had not recognised existed before.

*"I've got a life again!...I couldn't even open my door or answer the phone [before]"*

*"I got the courage to move to X, back to family....even a job, a flower arranging job!"*

*"[the CSW] has been a lifeline to me."*

### The Court Support Worker

The Court Support Worker is central to this project, and so this report will first consider the skill set the individual brings to the role. This will be followed by an analysis of the way the CSW works with the women, then consideration of the way the CSW works with the court system and other services. Outcomes are considered, and the risks of removing the role.

Emerging clearly from the data was the wide skill set of the CSW and the need for regular support. The CSW was educated to degree level, achieved qualifications and experience in counselling and group facilitation plus had worked within mental health settings prior to taking up post as well having previously worked for the charity in other similar roles.

- Recognition of the skill set and support requirements may help to inform current and future training needs for the Court Support Worker Role.

The summary of the skills as identified in Table 2 (Appendix 1). Other key dimensions were also evident as outlined below.

### **a) Flexibility**

The need for flexibility was raised both with the practical aspects to support women (contact medium and appointment times) and also recognising the limitations of the role and what can be achieved, especially when mindful of working collaboratively and in an empowering manner.

*"...Of course, you've only just met them and in the real world things aren't just resolved in a week you know, so that's where the flexibility in how you work with someone"*

### **b) Diligence**

Diligence can be viewed as crucial both in the practical sense (maintaining accurate records and completing required forms effectively) and also in maintaining trust with the women, many of whom perceived they had been let down by services in the past – often due to a broken or missing link in communication between the chain of agencies and services, indeed it could be suggested that the Missing Link Court Support Worker Role, offers that extra link in the chain of agencies and services ensuring that no woman is left unsupported.

*" [I] make sure they have been referred on to someone who is working with them, that to me would a positive outcome .....I would do follow up checks just to check that that person has got the support in place"*

This is supported by the comments of the service user, who, at the outset of the interview, stated the key importance of trusting the CSW. She felt safe allowing her into her home which was an uncommon practice and felt comfortable in her presence. The CSW made her feel relaxed and able to speak freely with her. Of note, was that it was felt that the CSW listened. It was also felt that she could trust the CSW with her personal and sensitive information.

*"she made me feel comfortable.....she was the first person to listen to me...listen to my problems, actually listen....."*

The respondent appreciated the CSW making the home visits to work with her as she, for a time, was reluctant and unable to leave the home. She felt there was significant value for her in receiving this home, 1:1 service, because as well as the rationale outlined above, it brought the realisation as to how isolated and lonely she had become, not least due to no contact with other service/agencies.

*"...[I felt] she had gone out of her way to help me...coming here...."*

The respondent felt that the consistent optimistic approach of the worker enabled her to see a future for herself.

*"Her words of encouragement like 'that was great', or 'you were great' were, you know,...I got to see a future.*

*"...she said, think of your future. Never thought I had a future!!!"*

The respondent felt that the CSW professionally cared about her and showed genuine concern, again this was suggested as a new experience for her when receiving input from services based on her past history.

*"...like a bond, yes, a bond...."*

### **c) Quality Assurance**

The quality of the input (assessment and follow up actions including engagement) was seen as an important factor and therefore effective discernment required as to managing time and the number of women that could be seen in one day and followed up effectively. This also reflected following up referrals to other agencies to ensure links had been made and actions taken. The fact that the CSW worker was mindful as to the number of women to be managed effectively on her caseload in this way perhaps indicates that the worker very successfully manages to effectively engage with the women and maintain that engagement ie. offers a 'quality service'.

*"...if there's only one of you, and you're having to be realistic about how many you can fit in and about, how many you can do some quality work with."*

Effective linking with other agencies and organisations was seen as very important to ensure appropriate referrals and actions for follow up were both taken forward and in a timely manner. Good working relationships were enabled via regular contact either in person or on the telephone and being viewed as responsive and available. Trust was an important feature of these relationships given the often required sharing of sensitive and confidential information. Other staff may include cell security staff, solicitors, MH Liaison staff and solicitors/magistrates.

### **d) Challenges of the Role**

The CSW frequently expressed satisfaction and enjoyment of the role as well as a passion for some aspects eg. believing the women's life stories (often of adversity) and belief in the women themselves as being resilient and capable of a great more than they thought possible.

*"...I like the fact that it's problem-solving and thinking ahead.....it's challenging but rewarding"*

There were many challenges within the role, some of which, as outlined earlier, includes the limited input that only one person in the role could do for a such large number of women whilst also

maintaining meaningful contact and offering sustainable support. The CSW however, in efforts to remain inclusive and reach out to as many women needing the service as possible, often left contact details/card inviting those she could arrange time to see make contact.

The CSW also felt that, if appropriate, she preferred to undertake some of the work that could be undertaken by other agencies in order to expedite much needed actions for the women – this impacted on the resource of time and also required a sound knowledge base of the issues and processes to be navigated.

*"...But like I say it's often, it is me, that does a lot of the work myself, just because it is quicker in some respects if I know what I am doing I can sort things out"*

The CSW identified that the role could become stressful and being mindful of workload balance was very important therefore having support and supervision was key. Previous experience was deemed important in personally and professionally recognising the need for this necessary input.

*"...because of the experience I have had and [therefore] being able to measure when things are going to become too stressful or not being able to keep a balance of it being a right amount [of work] if you see what I mean...oh and keeping on top of your targets too...!"*

A further potential challenge was the fact that the role is unique nationally and the only such role within the organisation itself – therefore support from peers in the same role was not possible.

*"Yes it is an isolated role and I think because of the experience I have in other roles and I've been a bit of a lone ranger"*

Curiously the CSW refers to the role as being 'isolated', which arguably often has negative connotations, yet when linked to similar experiences there is some suggestion that this may be a positive feature of such a role eg. 'lone ranger' inferring the positive benefits of working alone and autonomously.

- Although peer support not possible, the CSW valued the support of the team at the organisation and ongoing regular monthly support and the availability of the line manager. Both key for supporting the efficacy of the role.

In terms of the referrals made, during the eight month period of April to November 2015, a total of 112 women were referred to the Missing Link Court Worker Service. Of these, four were referred by the probation service, 57 from the Courts or Cells, 5 from health, 1 from children's and families centres, 1 from a housing provider, 10 from Other/Eden House, 5 women self-referred, and 29 were referred by the Civil enforcement team/Warrants Officer. None were referred from the following sources: Prison, Police, Social Services, Drop-in/Clinic. During March 2016, 18 referrals were made, 12 from the Courts or Cells and six were referred by the Civil enforcement team/Warrants Officer.

- Most referrals, as could be expected, were from the courts or cells, with the second greatest number from the Civil enforcement team/Warrants Officer. No referrals were received from

Prison, Police, Social Services or Drop-in/Clinic; if Missing Link wishes to gain referrals from these sources, they may wish to target promotion of the service specifically at them.

Of the referrals made, some were spread across the time period, whilst others peaked in particular months. Referrals from probation occurred in July, August and September only; however, as only four referrals came from this source, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions from this. Referrals from Health occurred in October and November, potentially reflecting targeting of this source? Self-referrals appear to peak in early summer, but at this point there is insufficient data to determine whether this reflects any pattern in women self-referring to the court worker service. There is also insufficient data, based on only a single referral each, to determine whether there is any pattern to referrals from children’s and families centres and housing providers, though interestingly these also occurred in early summer. Referrals from Other/Eden House are spread across the timeframe, though with no referrals in some months. Most of the referrals came from courts/cells and these were spread across the timeframe. This is to be expected, given the nature of the court worker role and the worker’s time spent in the courts. Similarly, referrals were seen from the civil enforcement team/warrants officers across all months except for April and November, again reflecting the nature of the role. These details can be seen in table format in Table 3.

**Table 3: Sources of referrals to the Court Support Worker in different months – April-November 2015**

<i>Source of Referral</i>	<i>Number referred from this source</i>	<i>Timing of Referrals</i>
<b>Courts/Cells</b>	57	April - November
<b>Civil enforcement team/Warrants Officer</b>	29	May – October
<b>Other/Eden House</b>	10	May, July, September, October, November
<b>Health</b>	5	October, November
<b>Self-referral</b>	5	May, June, July, November
<b>Probation</b>	4	July, August, September
<b>Children’s and families centres</b>	1	June
<b>Housing provider</b>	1	May
<b>Prison</b>	0	

<b>Police</b>	0
<b>Social Services</b>	0
<b>Drop-in/Clinic</b>	0

- It may be of use during the remainder of the project to consider whether referral routes differ according to the time of year, in order to support Missing Link in identifying times of higher demand/ referral routes to target.

Of the 112 women referred to the court worker service during April – November 2015, 17 (15%) were deemed to be high risk. Of these, 4 women were considered to be at high risk of self-harm or suicide (24% of those at high risk, 3.6% of total women referred to service), 2 were considered to be a risk to others (12% of those at high risk, 1.8% of total) and the remaining 11 considered to be at high risk of prolific offending (65% of those at high risk, 9.8% of total referred to service). In March 2016, four were deemed to be high risk, one each of self-harm or suicide, or of being a risk to other. Two were at high risk of prolific offending.

- Whilst most women referred to the service were not considered to be high risk, the skills of the CSW in ensuring that the women are referred to someone who will work with them are essential in lowering both the risk of harm to themselves and others, and of re-offending.

During the study, an interview was undertaken with an Enforcement Officer. This individual also commented on the attitudes and attributes of the CSW; the personal attributes of the CSW were seen as important, not just to fulfill the role but to also facilitate an effective working relationship.

*“X cares about people, she is friendly and reliable...and honest – we can talk”*

The CSW was perceived to “go out of her way” to help people which was seen as a valuable attribute and akin to the values of the Enforcement Officer.

- ‘Humanising’ the support offered to service users was perceived again as an approach adopted by the CSW, and appreciated.

The trustworthiness of the CSW was important to the Enforcement Officer as was the ability to respect confidentiality, plus maintain professional boundaries and act professionally. The sharing of pertinent information about service users was respected as it contributed to effective collaborative working for the benefit of service users.

### Working with the women

One of the key aspects of the CSW role is working with the women, to empower them, enable access to appropriate services and support them to make the changes which will reduce their risk of re-offending and coming to harm in the future.

Of those women referred between April and November 2015, almost three quarters, 79 of 112 (70.5%), engaged with the court worker service. Thirteen had extra therapeutic input at assessment. Eight women were still engaged with the service after 3 months, whilst most (43, 54.4%) had made a planned exit. Unplanned exits numbered 24, 30% of those who had engaged with the court worker service.

At initial assessment, the vast majority of women engaging with the service (71 out of 79, 89.9%) were deemed to have needs in at least two areas. Sixty-three women, 79.7% of the total, had needs in two to four areas, and a further eight (10.1%) had needs in more than 4 distinct areas.

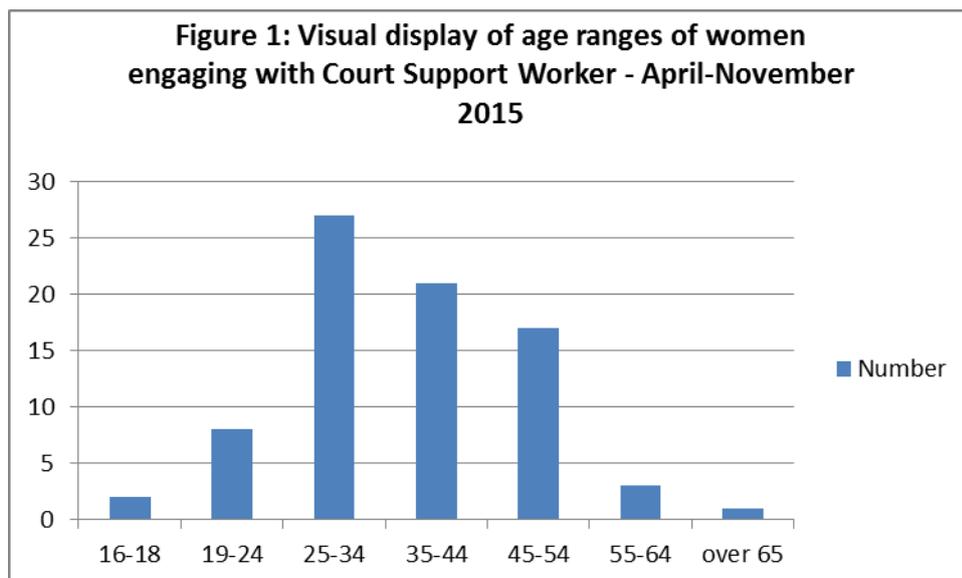
For those referred in March 2016, 14 (77.8%) engaged with the service, with none received extra therapeutic input. Two had made a planned exit, and three an unplanned exit from engagement with the service.

At initial assessment, of those who engaged with the service in March 2016, most (9, 64%) had needs in at least two areas and three (21%) had needs in more than four distinct areas.

- Most women referred to the service engaged with it, and many of these were considered to have needs in at least two areas.
- At least 10% have needs in a minimum of four different areas. This has implications for both accessibility of the services required, but also for the skills and expertise of the CSW in assessing and addressing these needs.

The demographics of women using the service were as follows:

**Age:** Age range data is available for all women engaging with the service between April and November 2015, and a variety of age ranges were represented. The most frequent age range was 25-34; 27 women within this age range engaged with the court worker service, representing 34% of the total. Twenty one women in the 35-44 age range engaged with the service (26.6%), with 17 in the 45-54 age range (21.5%). Thus, over three quarters (82.1%) of those engaging with the services were between the ages of 25 and 54, and over half (60.6%) were aged between 25 and 44. Eight women between the ages of 19 and 24 engaged with the service (10.1%). The least frequent age range represented was the over-65s; only 1 individual, representing 1.3%, in this group engaged with the court worker service. In the 16-18 age group, two women engaged with the service (2.5%); in the 55-64 age group, three women engaged with the service (3.8%). This is represented visually in Figure 1.



During March 2016, those accessing the service were also of varying age ranges. Most were aged between 25 and 34 (7 women), four women were aged between 19 and 24, three aged 35-44 and two aged 45-54. One woman did not state her age. There were no women accessing the service aged younger than 18, or over 55 years old.

- Many of the women accessing the service are within the 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54 age ranges. It would be interesting to identify whether these age ranges are representative of those appearing at Bristol Magistrates Court, or whether these groups are disproportionately represented amongst those accessing the Missing Link service.

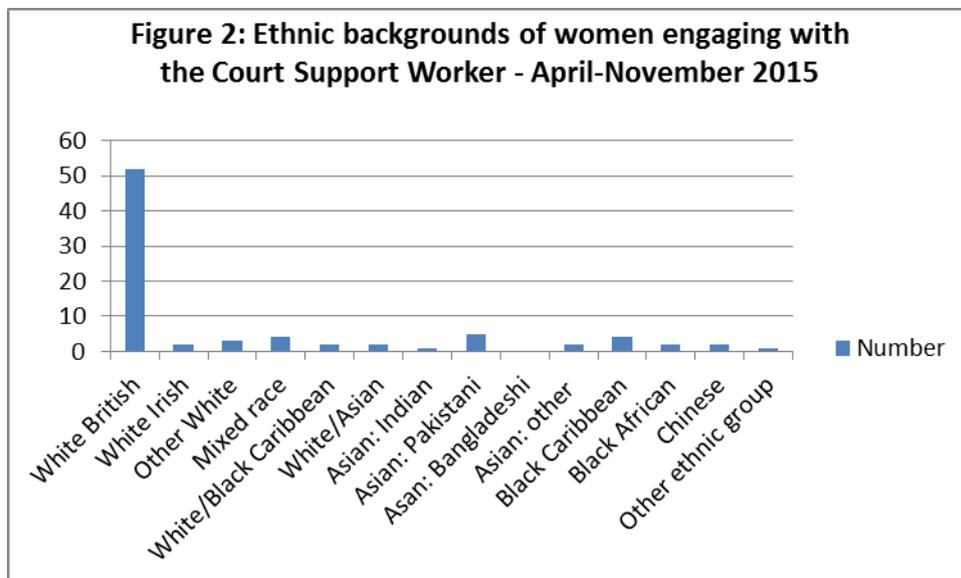
**Disability:** Disability data is available for 75 of the 79 women engaging with the service between April and November 2015. Of these, 38 (50.7%) declared a disability whilst 37 (49.3%) declared no disability.

Of the 38 individuals with disabilities, six different disabilities were indicated. The majority of women, 22, representing 57.9% of those with a disability, declaring a disability described this as a mental health or emotional issue. Long-term illnesses were also declared by 14 women, representing 36.8% of those with a disability. Other disabilities declared included Visual impairment (1 individual, 2.6% of those with disabilities), Mobility issues (4 women, 10.5%), and Learning disability (3 women, 7.9%). One individual declared other disability, but further data for this is unavailable.

Disability data for March 2016 is available for 13 women. One woman stated that she did not have any disabilities, and four did not indicate their status. Eight women considered themselves to have a disability; all eight described themselves as having mental health or emotional issues, and three also had a long-term condition.

- Most women declared themselves to have some form of disability, and a significant proportion of these experienced mental health or emotional issues. These figures are higher than those found in the literature amongst offenders.

**Ethnicity:** Ethnicity data is available for all women engaging with the service between April and November 2015. Most of those accessing the service were White British (52 of 79, 65.8%). Two individuals were White Irish, and three of another White background. Four individuals were of mixed race, two (2.5%) from a White and Black Caribbean background, and two (2.5%) of White and Asian background. Of those with an Asian background, one was of Indian ethnicity (1.3%), 5 (6.3%) of Pakistani background, and two (2.5%) a background other than Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. Four women (5%) were of Black Caribbean background, three (3.8%) of Black African background, two (2.5%) of Chinese background and one woman was of another ethnic group. Figure 2 demonstrates these numbers in visual format.



Data is available for 13 women accessing the service in March 2016; of these, ten were White British, one from a White and Black Caribbean background, and two did not state their ethnicity.

- Most of those accessing the service were White British. It would be interesting to determine whether ethnicity, or indeed any other characteristics, correlates with likelihood of maintaining appropriate engagement with the service.

**Religion/belief:** Data concerning the religion or beliefs of most of the women engaged with the service (78 of 79) is available. Most (40 of those for whom data is available) described themselves as having no religious belief. Twenty-two women were Christian, eight Muslim, three Buddhist, and one each of Hindu, Sikh and Jewish. Two described themselves as being of another religion. The percentages of women who declared themselves as being of the different religions can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4: Percentage of women from different ethnicities who engaged with the Court Support Worker - April-November 2015**

Religion	Percentage of women (of 78)
No religious belief	51.2%
Christian	28.2%
Muslim	10.3%
Buddhist	3.8%
Hindu	1.3%
Sikh	1.3%
Jewish	1.3%
Other	2.6%

In March 2016, two women were Christian and ten stated that they had no religious belief.

- Most of the women accessing the service state themselves as having no religious belief. However, a significant proportion indicated that they were of a specific religion; Missing Link may wish to consider building links with some of these religious communities (if these do not exist already) in order to support women in accessing community support.

**Sexual orientation:** Data concerning sexual orientation is available for all women engaging with the service between April and November 2015. More than four fifths of women – 65 out of 79, 82.2% – described themselves as being heterosexual. Five (6.3%) described themselves as being lesbian, seven (8.9%) as gay and two (2.5%) as bisexual.

Data is available for nine women from March 2016 – all were heterosexual.

**Location:** Postcode information is available for all women engaging with the service between April and November 2015. Of the 79 women engaging with the court worker service, 4 (5%) were of no fixed address. A further two were based at postcodes outside of the Bristol area. Of those living in a Bristol postcode, over a quarter (21, 26.6%) were based in the BS5/6 postcode areas, with a further 11 (13.9%) living in the BS4 area. Ten women (12.7%) came from the BS10/11 postcode areas and eight individuals lived in each of the in the BS2 and BS15/16 areas (10.1% and 10.1%). A further six women (7.6%) were based in the BS12/13 postcodes, 4 (5%) in the BS14 area and 3 (3.8%) in BS7.

Only a single individual lived in each of the BS1 and BS3 areas, and none at all were living in the BS8/9 postcode areas.

A smaller range of postcodes were represented in the March 2016 data. Three women were described as being of no fixed address, and three were based at postcodes outside of the Bristol area. Of those living in a Bristol postcode, two were based in each of the following postcode areas: BS5/6, BS10/11, BS12/13 and BS15/16. One was based in the BS7 postcode area.

- Certain postcode areas are more highly represented in the data, indicating a higher proportion of female offenders in these areas. These areas are those with the following postcodes: BS5/5, BS10/11, BS4, BS15/16, BS12/13.

**Children:** Most of the women – 59 of 79, representing 74.7% - who engaged with the support worker service during April to November 2015 had children. The average number of children, for those women with children who engaged with the service, was 1.64. Of these, almost one third (32.2%) had children either in care (11, 18.6%) or living elsewhere (8, 13.6%).

The date for March 2016 also demonstrates that most of the women have children. Seven had children, with those whose children were living elsewhere numbering six.

- Most women engaging with CSW had children. It would be interesting to collect qualitative data from one of these women to understand how this impacts upon their experiences of working with the CSW.

The 79 women who engaged with the Court Support Worker between April and November 2015 were all involved in current criminal proceedings, with one woman involved in two different matters, and one had also been referred as part of a CJS requirement. The latter had been referred as part of the conditions of her licence. Of the 80 criminal proceedings, none were dismissed before court. Three resulted in women being remanded in custody whilst awaiting their court hearing. More than half of offenses (49/80) were dealt with through a fine, ten (12.5%) resulted in sentences to serve a community order, three (3.75%) led to a suspended sentence order, one resulted in release on licence, seven led to a custody sentence of less than 12 months (8.75%) and two to a sentence of more than twelve months in custody. Five offenses resulted in another type of sentence (defined only as 'other'). Given that almost three quarters of women who accessed the support worker were issued with a fine or sentenced to a community order, it is likely that the crimes committed were minor. This reflects the courts worker's comments and her surprise at the common nature of the referrals that made ie. through appearances in court etc for a seemingly relatively minor offence. Unpacking the support that these women require however reveals the complex life stories they have often endured with little support.

*"it seems to be the referrals that come through, are for non-payment of TV licence and yeah – that's, you know, the main issue, and obviously with that you unpick all the other issues that are going on but fundamentally people are being summoned to court for non-payment of TV licence"*

A total of six women had attended the women's court service on a previous occasion, since April 2015 when the service began. Of these, four had had further convictions since attending the service. Two women had not re-offended between this time and their current court proceedings.

In March 2016, data is available for thirteen women who were involved in criminal proceedings. One woman was on bail whilst she awaited her court hearing, and twelve women had been issued with a fine. This reflects the numbers from 2015, and again supports the court workers comments.

- Most offences committed by those who engaged with the CSW were dealt with through a fine. One-eighth of offences were dealt with through a community order. This would indicate that the vast proportion of offences committed by these women are not particularly serious, and maybe could be prevented through community support prior to the offence being committed. This may be an area Missing Link could explore with the wider community (local authorities etc), in order to reduce the numbers of women appearing in court.

The qualitative data collected offer some insights into how the court support worker supported those with whom she engaged.

### a) Empowerment

The CSW spoke of working alongside the women, 'doing with' rather than 'doing for' thus empowering the women by developing and enhancing life skills, often the first opportunity they had been given to do so despite engagement with other services. The encouragement of the women as to taking personal responsibility was an underpinning approach for the CSW and skills used perhaps as best described as being from a life-coaching perspective ie. not only a health and social care perspective (medical model). The women therefore experiencing support holistically, thus also focusing on their skills, achievements and the positive aspects in their lives as well.

*"...[I ask] Do you feel in a position to make that phone call -that's something we can do together?" - so that captures the fact that someone can do it themselves. They just needed that encouragement you know."*

Respect was articulated as to the decisions made by the women and the CSW was clear not to impose support, again indicating an empowering approach mindful of consent and capacity. This is a skill gained by experience as often it may mean respecting the potentially unwise decisions of others.

*"But sometimes you have to accept that sometimes they don't [want support], and that's their choice"*

Mindful of the above, the CSW however also drew upon the skills of maintaining engagement when assessed as being necessary, this a key skill set when working with such a complex and vulnerable client group.

*– "it's challenging in the sense of engagement of meeting up with them and keeping them engaged and getting pieces of work done."*

*"[my prompt letter] gives them a bit of a nudge and they will text me at the last minute saying "Yes please!"*

## **b) Extended Impacts of the Role**

The nature of the CSW input was wide ranging and significant. Looking beyond the remit and actions of the role as first envisioned there were also further impacts for the women themselves.

*".....you're listening and they find that very helpful, it may be the first time that they have spoken about some very unpleasant hidden, issues"*

Linked to the above, often issues were resolved by the CSW that not been addressed before. Indeed for many women, the CSW reported that they felt able to articulate buried or sensitive issues for exploration.

*"[Well, I might say]... if you don't mind me asking, it feels like there is more going on here, can I ask a little bit about that?..... you do not have to answer difficult questions but if you would like to, there is space to talk about that and can offer support with that through other agencies"*

The above also would seem to identify that the CSW is able to build rapport and develop trusting working relationships with the women very quickly and work at a pace that the women are comfortable with.

These impacts appear to be strongly linked to the skills used by the CSW eg. assessments are also used as interventions.

*"A lot of them have not been able to open and speak up about what's happened to them in fear of whatever, or just never been...or not had the opportunity or not had the support, so eh, believing them in the sense of hearing what they say and, and acting upon it, if that makes sense ..., and it's using the opportunity of the court system as an inter-rail as a supportive pathway..."*

As identified above the CSW was of the opinion that being believed was an important factor for women in working with the support worker - not just being believed as to the narratives of their life and experiences but that their difficulties were genuine also, those factors drawing them into the CJS system, often repeatedly.

*".....believing that they've had all these difficulties"*

This experience of 'being believed' also extends to 'being believed in' ie. the fact that that the women felt supported by the CSW's belief that they were capable and resourceful if adequately and correctly supported in the achieving the actions required.

- The CSW recognised the need for the referral of many women to a variety of relevant mental health and wellbeing services/agencies (voluntary and statutory) - this was able to

be identified very quickly by the CSW, again, given her MH experience and skill set. Often these women had not received this type of necessary support before.

Overall, the role seems to suggest that the 'support' both offered and required extends into addressing wide health and social care needs impacting on both the women and their families.

The service user also described how important was for her to be enabled to work with the CSW, in a way which other services had failed to do.

### **a) Facilitating access to other services and agencies**

As well offering significant useful advice and information and supporting actions to be taken together, the CSW also recognised the need for considering the self-harming aspect of the service user's life and gained her a place attending a specific support group, which was felt to have greatly benefitted her. She reported that other agencies had, thus far, eg. GPs 'not had time for me', or could not offer the necessary home visits,

*"...but she came to see me...she made the time for me..."*

The above comment was repeated several times, therefore was clearly an important feature of the CSW input.

### **b) Support actions offered**

As well as identifying what needed to be 'done' together eg. completing forms to ensure the receipt of entitled benefits and other welfare concerns and advice, the CSW broke down tasks into manageable parts that could be undertaken both together and alone eg. organising personal paperwork, arranging payment of the TV Licence, using the internet to achieve household tasks eg. bill payment. The CSW also accompanied the respondent on visits when asked to offer support and guidance. Again, the CSW was felt not to intrude or direct, but support and suggest actions rather than instruct which was a welcomed approach, and seemed to indicate to her that personal views and opinions were being heard which was very different from her experience with other agencies.

A key factor in empowering the respondent in the achievement of many actions (especially those undertaken independently) was felt to be the time spent to 'talk it through' first, to both enhance understanding and reduce anxiety.

As well as addressing the issues above, the CSW also supported the respondent to successfully use social media for the first time to re-connect with friends and family to tackle her feelings of isolation, this was greatly appreciated and had significant positive impact on her life.

### **Working with the court system and other services**

As well as working alongside the women, the CSW felt it key to be working collaboratively with and within the current court system which was felt to work well, the role welcomed within the CJS setting.

*"...the fact that you're combining, or even having an alternative role, working alongside, with, a rather rigid court system, and it being satisfying, that it is being welcomed"*

It was described that the fact that the role was welcomed had further impacts - crucially "humanising" the current system.

*"...I feel this service is bridging a gap and humanising the court system really"*

The extent to which the Court Support Worker provided support to women before, during and after their court hearing can be seen in the quantitative data collected. Advice, guidance and information was provided for 41 women, support to attend court for 42 women, input to PSR for one woman, and support to comply with a court order for four women.

The Enforcement Officer works with service users as they come into contact earlier in the CJS system and asks permission to contact the CSW when she identifies that there is a specific need for the bespoke support of the CSW. This referral is made without difficulty as the CSW is able to be contacted easily eg. a conversation on the phone - this is facilitated due to the effective trusting working relationship between the two people in the roles and a mutual understanding as to the sharing of confidential information. Although all referrals are in effect formal, they can be made in this relatively informal way if necessary due to immediate health and wellbeing concerns, and/or the service user's route into the CJS system eg. Overnight admission straight into a police cell. The services of the CSW can also be engaged through sending the CJS referral form (electronically or traditional mail) or using the CSW referral form or standard letters.

These referral streams from the Enforcement Officer is perceived to be the main route through which the CSW engages with the client group....*"part of the bread and butter of X's work"*.

This ease of contact and referral was acknowledged and appreciated by the Enforcement Officer.

The enforcement officer also indicated that they had a good working relationship with the CSW, and that this helped in providing support to the women.

*" I think we have an excellent, trusting, working relationship...an easy relationship"*

The clients most likely to be referred are those identified by the Enforcement Officer as female and potentially vulnerable, with no other source of support, often clearly with mental health concerns. The Enforcement Officer respected the skills of the CSW – *" I go to you [CSW] as I trust you"* with particular reference to CSW experience and skills.

As part of this effective working relationship, the Enforcement Officer felt that they could use each other *"as a sounding board...and talk through service users circumstances – have an honest talk."* This could be seen as also suggestive of a mutually supportive working relationship.

## **Outcomes**

Many of the women were referred by the Court Support Worker to relevant and appropriate services, including accommodation, financial and employment, health and addiction, family services, psychological support, and those supporting those working in prostitution or experiencing abuse, rape or domestic violence.

### ***Accommodation***

Nineteen women were identified as requiring accommodation as part of the court worker service. Numbers peaked in July (seven women) and November (5 women), though it is not possible with these small datasets to confirm a trend. Whether this is linked with the higher numbers of self-referrals to the service at these time points cannot be confirmed at this stage.

Of those requiring accommodation, two women (one in July and the other in November) experienced a deterioration in their accommodation status; there may be a link here to these being the months when numbers of women requiring accommodation peaked. Most (12/19, 63%) made positive progress, whilst the remaining five experienced no change in their accommodation. All of the women requiring accommodation in May, September and October made positive progress, together with most of them in July and November.

Two women, one each in July and November, moved to settled accommodation. A further two women, again one in each of these months, sustained their existing accommodation. None moved from unsafe to safe accommodation. Three women, one each in May, September and October, went from being homeless to being accommodated. Seven women, three each in July and November and another in September, improved or secured their current housing situation. Fifteen women were supported to access specialist housing service, and 16 were provided with information, advice and/or signposting. Again, numbers peaked in July six and five women respectively) and November (five and five).

Of the available options, three referrals were made to Bristol City Council/Housing Association and seven to Shelter. No women were referred to Next Link safe house, SW Law or BASS.

For the women accessing the service in March 2016, thirteen women were considered to require accommodation, of whom eight experienced positive progress. One woman's accommodation status deteriorated, and for four there was no change. One woman was supported to access specialist housing service, and four were provided with information, advice and/or signposting. Four referrals were made to Bristol City Council/Housing Association.

- It would be interesting to understand whether there is a peak (as suggested in this data) in particular months for women requiring accommodation and, if possible, to gain insights into the reasons for this.

### ***Skills and employment***

Six women were deemed to have needs in respect of skills and employment. All but one of these women made positive progress, with the remaining woman having no movement.

One woman gained or improved her education/training or employment, another sustained employment over a four week period. All six women were provided with information, advice and/or signposting, and were supported to access specialist services.

Referrals were made to Volunteer Centre (one woman), ML TREE service (one woman) and Rethink (two women). No referrals were made to Platform 51, Eden House or Clean Slate.

For the women accessing the service in March 2016, no women were deemed to have needs in respect of skills and employment.

### ***Health***

Sixteen women were deemed to require access to health services, twelve of whom made positive progress and the remainder of whom did not deteriorate. Of those with a need relating to health identified in August, October and November, all made positive progress.

Twelve women (the majority) required support with mental health, three with physical health, and one with both mental and physical health. One required support in registering with a GP or dentist. Three women needed support to reduce self-harming. Fifteen of the women were advised on or supported in visiting their health professional, and were provided with information, advice, signposting and/or referral to specialist services.

Referrals were made to a variety of services, these can be seen in Table 5. Some women were referred to more than one service.

**Table 5: Number of women referred to different mental health services - April-November 2015**

Service	Number of women referred
Missing Link FSS / Pre-Resettlement support services for women with acute mental health support needs which are impacting on housing	7
CARS	2

<b>Secondary mental health services</b>	2
<b>ML Counselling Service</b>	6
<b>Housing Support Register</b>	11
<b>ML self harm service</b>	3
<b>Eden House</b>	7
<b>Platform 51</b>	0
<b>GP (registration or appointment)</b>	0
<b>Mind/Right Steps</b>	0

All fourteen women who engaged with the service in March 2016 had health needs, with ten able to make positive progress and four seeing no change in their status. Seven women required support with mental health, and a further seven with both mental and physical health. One required support in registering with a GP or dentist. Seven of the women were provided with information, advice, signposting and/or referral to specialist services.

Referrals were made to Missing Link FSS / Pre-Resettlement support services for women with acute mental health support needs which are impacting on housing (one woman referred), Secondary mental health services (one woman referred) and Housing Support Register (two women referred).

- Many women engaging with the service have health needs, both mental and physical. Again, it would be interesting to see whether this impacts on their likelihood of maintaining appropriate engagement with the service.

***Drugs and alcohol***

Fifteen women were considered to require support with drug or alcohol use, of whom seven made positive progress, seven experienced no change and one of whom deteriorated in this regard. Eleven women were provided with advice, information and signposting, and ten women were supported to access specialist services. Of those who received support, five reduced the frequency of their drug or alcohol use and one reduced the seriousness of the drugs they were taking. Another two individuals were supported to manage their drug and alcohol intake.

Six referrals were made to ROADS/BDP/GAMCARE. This constituted all of the referrals made; no women were referred to CJIT, ARA or BSDS via GP or other health professional referral.

Of those women engaging with the service in March 2016, five women were considered to require support with drug or alcohol use, of whom two made positive progress and three experienced no

change. One woman was provided with advice, information and signposting, and two women were supported to access specialist services. No referrals were made.

- Support from the Missing Link CSW would seem to be instrumental in many women making positive progress with drug and alcohol use.

### ***Finance, benefit, debt***

The most frequently identified need was finance, benefit and debt; twenty-seven women were supported in this. Twenty four were provided with information, advice and signposting. Twenty one women were supported in accessing specialist advice. As a result, twenty three made positive progress and four did not change in their status; none declined. Thirteen women were supported to reduce or manage their debt, and eight increased their income.

The numbers of women accessing support for financial matters was relatively consistent across the time period, with the maximum number in any month being five, and the minimum three, indicating a consistent problem in this area. Data is not available for December and January; the number of women accessing support for financial matters may have peaked at this time of year.

Of those requiring support with finances, seven referrals were made to WRAMAS, fourteen to the talking money service/project, three to North/South Bristol advice services and two women were referred to food banks. No women were referred to Eden House – drop ins and workshops or to Missing Link.

Of the women accessing the service in March 2016, fifteen women had a need in this area. Ten made positive progress and five did not change in their status; none declined. One was supported to reduce or manage her debt, eleven were provided with information, advice and signposting, and three women were supported in accessing specialist advice.

Of those requiring support with finances, three referrals were made to the talking money service/project, one to Missing Link and two to North/South Bristol advice services.

- Reflecting the nature of the offences committed, most women had needs in the area of finance, benefit and debt. Missing Link may wish to share these data with local bodies, with a view to increased provision in this area to reduce the number of cases resulting in court proceedings.
- There was a significant increase in the number of women requiring support in this area in March 2016. It will be interesting to see whether this represents a persistent change, or whether there is a difference in the early months of the year compared with later in the year in women requiring support with finances.

### ***Children, families, relationships***

Seven women were deemed to require support in the area of children, families and relationships. All were provided with information, advice and signposting regarding the options available to them.

One improved the school attendance of their children, five were supported to access specialist services. None of these women had their children returned from care to their mother, removed from the child protection register, improved their supportive relationships or improved their parenting skills as a result of the intervention.

Only one woman was referred to support services, this being to Social Services for extra help and support. No women requiring support in the area of children, families and relationships were referred to CYPS, Eden House – Barnardoes, or Home Start.

Of those women accessing the service in March 2016, none were deemed to require support in the area of children, families and relationships.

### ***Attitudes, thinking behaviour***

Fifteen women were considered to require support with regard to attitude and thinking behaviour. Two-thirds of these women made positive progress, whilst for one-third, there was no movement. No women experienced deterioration in this area. Twelve women were provided with information, signposting and advice on options, and ten were supported to access specialist services. Three women engaged with the service and had a planned exit; four attended at least 80% of the planned sessions. Two women improved their wellbeing by attending therapy sessions, a further two increased their self-esteem and confidence, and three attended lifeskills classes. With regard to offending, five maintained a non-offending status, four reduced their offending and none reduced the seriousness of their offending.

Three referrals were made to each of Eden House and to LIFT Psychology.

Of those women accessing the service in March 2016, one woman was considered to require support with regard to attitude and thinking behaviour; this woman made no progress but did not deteriorate. She was provided with information, signposting and advice on options.

Three referrals were made to LIFT Psychology.

### ***Experience of abuse, rape or domestic violence***

Seven women supported by the court worker had experienced abuse, rape or domestic violence. Of these seven, five made positive progress and the remainder had no movement; no women deteriorated following intervention. Six women were supported to access specialist services, and five were provided with information, signposting and advice on their options. One woman was supported to create a safety plan, and four were referred to specialist agencies. No women were referred to the keyworker at MARAC, or were in safer relationships.

Not all of those who have experienced abuse, rape or domestic violence were referred on to specialist services. One referral was made to Kinergy counselling and another to Safe Link sexual violence support services, three to the Freedom programme, and two to Next Link domestic abuse services/safehouse/crisis response/resettlement.

Of those women accessing the service in March 2016, four women supported by the court worker had experienced abuse, rape or domestic violence. Two made positive progress and the remainder had no movement. One woman was provided with information, signposting and advice on her options.

A single referral was made to Next Link domestic abuse services/safehouse/crisis response/resettlement.

### ***Involvement in prostitution***

Five women either were or had been involved in prostitution, of whom two were supported to make positive progress and two of whom had no change. One woman attended a sexual health clinic, three were referred to specialist support and four were provided with information, advice on options and signposting.

Two referrals were made to One25 and none to TheWell.

In March 2016, a single woman was or had been involved in prostitution, and she made positive progress.

Two referrals were made to One25.

### **Removal of the CSW**

Both the service user and the Enforcement Officer commented on the value of the role, and the potential risks of it being discontinued.

The Enforcement Officer was of the opinion that for the service users themselves, it was thought that they may feel “...even more scared as the support wasn't there...” and that this “...fear ends up as aggression” with the negative consequences of that behavior for the women within the CJS. Thus, there may be an increase in fines for the women involved and an increase in the repeating cycles of offending and re-offending as the complex issues women may have remain unaddressed.

It was felt that the CSW role enhanced the “*quality of the service [CJS]*” and facilitated her own role “...you get to do the job you want”.

The CSW role was viewed as very valuable and perhaps should be extended to offer male service users the same opportunities for support within the CJS.

When asked whether there were “Any questions you think should be asked as part of this project from the service user perspective?”, the service user interviewed felt a key question to ask in the future of the project should surround service users' thoughts as to “What if the service wasn't there?”

The respondent's own thoughts on that question were that the role had been vital to her and was instrumental in her ability to move forwards and regain a sense of health and wellbeing – therefore she felt that many others would share that view.

The CSW herself hoped the role would become embedded within the CJS in order to support women – remaining of course within the organisation and therefore independent.

*"I think it's good the way it is, but I'd like to see it being more, almost see it..er, it's an automatic role that you see in court if that makes sense..."*

### Key conclusions

The Missing Link Court Support Worker is providing a service which is valued by the women accessing it and other parties such as enforcement officers. The skills of the individual in the CSW role are essential in ensuring that women feel able to engage with the service, and in empowering them to make changes. Whilst most women referred to the service were not considered to be high risk, these skills and her trustworthiness in ensuring that the women are referred to someone who will work with them are essential in lowering both the risk of harm to themselves and others, and of re-offending. The CSW adopted an approach which 'humanised' the support, and this was valued by those engaging with her. Whilst direct peer support was not possible, the CSW valued the support of the team at the organisation and ongoing regular monthly support and the availability of the line manager.

Most referrals to the CSW, as could be expected, were from the courts or cells, with the second greatest number from the Civil enforcement team/Warrants Officer. No referrals were received from Prison, Police, Social Services or Drop-in/Clinic. Based on current data, there may be some trends in referral rates from different sources at different times of the year; there is, however, insufficient data to draw conclusions at this stage.

Most women referred to the service engaged with it (likely due to the approach adopted by the CSW, and she recognised the need for the referral of many women to a variety of relevant mental health and wellbeing services/agencies (voluntary and statutory). This was able to be identified very quickly by the CSW, again, given her mental health experience and skill set. Often these women had not received this type of necessary support before. Many of the women were considered to have needs in at least two areas. At least 10% have needs in a minimum of four different areas. This has implications for both accessibility of the services required, but also for the skills and expertise of the CSW in assessing and addressing these needs.

Of the needs identified, most women declared themselves to have some form of disability, and a significant proportion of these experienced mental health or emotional issues. These figures are higher than those found in the literature amongst offenders. This may indicate that either those accessing the service are more likely to have a disability than would be expected (potentially due to regional differences) or that they feel more able to disclose their disability to the CSW.

Most of those accessing the service were White British. Most also describe themselves as having no religious belief. However, a significant proportion indicated that they were of a specific religion. Certain postcode areas are more highly represented in the data, indicating a higher proportion of female offenders in these areas. These areas are those with the following postcodes: BS5/5, BS10/11, BS4, BS15/16, BS12/13.

Most offences committed by those who engaged with the CSW were dealt with through a fine. One-eighth of offences were dealt with through a community order. This would indicate that the vast proportion of offences committed by these women are not particularly serious, and could be prevented through community support prior to the offence being committed. Reflecting this, most women had needs in the area of finance, benefit and debt.

All parties felt that the role should continue. Suggestions were made that offering the service to male offenders, and embedding the role within the CJS could be beneficial.

### **Key recommendations at June 2016**

#### ***Recommendations for Missing Link***

The CSW role is strongly valued by stakeholders (described by one woman as giving her back her life). It should be maintained.

Recognition of the skill set and support requirements may help to inform current and future training needs for the Court Support Worker Role

Maintaining a 'humanised' approach to the service is valued by women, and should be maintained

Ongoing support from the Missing Link team, including regular monthly support and the availability of the line manager are key in ensuring the efficacy of the role. These should be continued.

Most referrals to the CSW, as could be expected, were from the courts or cells, with the second greatest number from the Civil enforcement team/Warrants Officer. No referrals were received from Prison, Police, Social Services or Drop-in/Clinic; if Missing Link wishes to gain referrals from these sources, they may wish to target promotion of the service specifically at them.

Due to the wide range of needs of many women engaging with the CSW, it is essential that the individual undertaking the role has up-to-date knowledge of and contacts at the various services to which referrals are made. It is also important for the individual to have the personal knowledge and skills to be able to recognise these needs.

Whilst most women described themselves as having no religious belief, a significant proportion indicated that they were of a specific religion. Missing Link may wish to consider building links with some of these religious communities (if these do not exist already) in order to support women in accessing community support.

Most offences committed by those who engaged with the CSW were dealt with through a fine, whilst a further one-eighth of offences were dealt with through a community order. This would indicate that the vast proportion of offences committed by these women are not particularly serious, and maybe could be prevented through community support prior to the offence being committed. This may be an area Missing Link could explore with the wider community (local authorities etc), in order to reduce the numbers of women appearing in court.

Reflecting the nature of the offences committed, most women had needs in the area of finance, benefit and debt. Missing Link may wish to share these data with local bodies, with a view to increased provision in this area to reduce the number of cases resulting in court proceedings.

Missing Link may wish to use the data for this project to work with external parties in embedding this role further into the CJS, and in promoting the introduction of a similar role for male offenders.

### ***Recommendations for this project***

It may be of use during the remainder of the project to consider whether referral routes differ according to the time of year, in order to support Missing Link in identifying times of higher demand/referral routes to target. The same applies to any patterns in specific needs being identified at specific times of the year (for example, the data collected suggest a peak in particular months for women requiring accommodation). Qualitative data may be able to provide some reasons for any patterns identified.

Many of the women accessing the service are within the 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54 age ranges. It would be interesting to identify whether these age ranges are representative of those appearing at Bristol Magistrates Court, or whether these groups are disproportionately represented amongst those accessing the Missing Link service. The researchers can investigate this, working with Missing Link, over the coming years if Missing Link thinks this information could be useful.

It would be interesting to determine whether particular characteristics (ethnicity, disability, religious belief, postcode etc) correlate with the likelihood of maintaining appropriate engagement with the service. This would require some changes to the data collection procedure, and so would need to be negotiated between the researchers and Missing Link.

Most women engaging with the CSW had children. It would be interesting to collect qualitative data from one/more of these women to understand how this impacts upon their experiences of working with the CSW.

There was a significant increase in the number of women requiring support in the area of finance, benefit and debt in March 2016. It will be interesting to see whether this represents a persistent change, or whether there is a difference in the early months of the year compared with later in the year in women requiring support with finances.

### **Summary**

The Missing Link Court Support Worker undertakes a role which is highly valued, utilising a range of skills to identify the needs of the women she comes into contact with. Women feel empowered by working with the CSW due to the humanised approach adopted. The data collected to date indicate some patterns may exist in referral rate at different times in the year, and in the difference needs of women. Most women have more than one need, requiring a range of skills on the part of the CSW in supporting women to make progress. Several recommendations are made for both Missing Link and

for the remaining two years of this project, but the main one would be to continue with an excellent service which supports women to get back their lives, and look to the future.

## Appendix 1

### Summary of impacts and Outcomes

**Table 2. The Value of Court Support Worker Role**

<b>Dimension 1.</b> <b>Impact on the Women’s Health and Wellbeing</b>	<b>Dimension 2.</b> <b>(Multiple) Skills &amp; Attitudes of the Court Support Worker</b>	<b>Dimension 3.</b> <b>Impact on the Services</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling empowered</li> <li>• Feeling listened to</li> <li>• Feeling believed as to the narrative of their lives and their circumstances</li> <li>• Having previously unaddressed issues sensitively explored and subsequently supported</li> <li>• Having the opportunity to speak out and be heard about issues in their lives.</li> <li>• Feeling able to disclose mental health concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous experience in mental healthcare settings enabling effective assessment of mental health issues and networking with appropriate agencies as well applying relevant interventions.</li> <li>• Excellent communication and interpersonal skills (trust and rapport) enabling both work with the women and effective networking with other agencies</li> <li>• Autonomous worker with awareness of accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• Practices safely (including preserving own safety) and to reduce risk as well take positive risks</li> <li>• Flexible in approach in working with the women and other agencies eg. modes of communication used and timing of appointments</li> <li>• Offers immediate support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts as a triage to identify women’s key needs, crucially signposting to mental health services and support where appropriate</li> <li>• Acts as an advocate for women within the CJS</li> <li>• Impacts on the CJS – now embedded within the system and note taken of supportive CSW input for the women as well reducing previously perceived rigidity within the service. Eg. a sentence might be suspended or a conditional discharge with conditions instead of a custodial sentence.</li> <li>• “humanising” of the CJS. The CSW can now not only be in the court but also stand with the client in court. The supporting letter offered by the CSW enables a more holistic approach from magistrates in considering sentencing.</li> <li>• Reduces the instances of ‘revolving door’ circumstances by putting in place support and interventions for women, thus they do not repeatedly appear within the CJS system</li> </ul>

	<p>either personally or securing assistance from other agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works transparently whilst mindful of confidentiality when working with women and other agencies</li> <li>• Delegates appropriately to other agencies and works collaboratively alongside them</li> <li>• Embraces equality and diversity and is non discriminatory eg. dual diagnosis inclusive of all women seen</li> <li>• Diligent with good attention to detail pertaining to written documentation and develops own templates for effective recording use</li> <li>• Consistently empowering in approach whilst working with the women – acting as an ‘enabler’, enhancing and developing their existing skills</li> <li>• Offers an agreed framework for forward planning with women often used to chaotic lifestyles</li> <li>• Maintains the quality of the service and prioritises input well ie. identifies limits on the number of women who can be supported in 1 day/1 wk.</li> <li>• Enjoyment and satisfaction in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairer court outcomes for the women within the CJS system ; outcomes more accurately reflecting the nature of their reason for appearance in court.</li> <li>• Perceived reduction in arrests (Enforcement Officer's perspective)</li> </ul>
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	<p>the role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mindful of ethical issues, confidentiality and working with vulnerable adults and children.</li><li>• Positive attitude to the role and the work with service users ie. valuable role</li><li>• Optimistic yet realistic approach working with service users offering emotional as well as practical support.</li><li>• Compassion and empathy used skilfully (showing care and concern) to build and maintain relationships whilst remaining professional and setting boundaries.</li><li>• Able to achieve mutually agreed outcomes within a set period of time – maximum input time with service user 3 months.</li><li>• Able to recognise and manage stress, engage fully in support mechanisms available.</li></ul>	
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