



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY



A Qualitative Evaluation of The Nelson Trust Bridgwater Women's Centre

Final Report

February 2020

Dr. Alexandria Bradley

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without inspirational women who were incredibly generous with their time and honesty. Thank you to all the amazing women who shared their experiences at the Bridgwater Women's Centre.

A special thank you to all of the supportive and dedicated staff who shared their reflections with me and included me in all of the activities in the Centre. Welcoming me into the staff 'Feel Good Friday' pamper session was particularly appreciated. The support that you provide is inspiring and changing the lives of women in your area.

It was a pleasure to meet such a fantastic group of strong women.

Thank you to Leeds Beckett University and The Nelson Trust for funding this evaluation.

Contents

The Impact of Trauma-Informed Approaches in Women’s Rehabilitation	4
Aims and Objectives of the Bridgwater Women’s Centre Evaluation	6
Evaluation Methodology and Analysis	7
Limitations of the Research	7
Working Towards an Enabling Environment	9
.....	11
Implementing Trauma-Informed Practice: Staff Perspectives	12
Hiring and Recruitment	12
Embedding Trauma-Informed Practice	13
Training and Shared Resources	14
Recognising Staff Need and Adaptation	15
Holistic Support: Women’s Experiences	18
A Place of Safety	18
Shared Experiences, Building Trust and Intimacy	19
Reclaiming Power	20
Commendations, Recommendations and Future Directions	22
Commendations	22
Recommendations	22
Future Directions	23
References	25
Appendix 1: Bridgwater Women’s Centre Timetable	27

The Impact of Trauma-Informed Approaches in Women's Rehabilitation

According to Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts (2007) there are nine lessons for good practice for women in community rehabilitation. These lessons include, women-only provision; integration with the community; supporting empowerment, well-being and choice; holistic support; practical services; links to multi-agencies; flexibility in support and encouragement to re-connect mothers and children. Further, it is argued that many women's community centres within the UK operate using the above principles (Radcliffe et al., 2013; McNeish and Scott, 2014). The principles allude to a gender-sensitive way of working to recognise the unique needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantages.

More recently, rehabilitation services for women have adopted trauma-informed approaches due to the prevalence of trauma histories within the lives of women in the criminal justice system. A trauma-informed approach for women has been a celebrated practice across human services in the United States of America since the millennium (Harris and Fallot, 2001). In 2011, the United Kingdom also recognised that supporting women to heal from trauma and abuse, is an important pathway out of offending (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). In recent years, the trauma-informed approach has become an elastic term for rehabilitation services to demonstrate innovation, during a challenging climate of perpetual competitive funding. This has not only diluted the meaning and importance of the approach, but it has led to the over-use of the term, without the appropriate implementation and value for both staff and individuals accessing services.

Therefore, services need to revisit the conditions that are needed to establish a trauma-informed system. Harris and Fallot (2001) argue that there are five key conditions that must reflect both the organisational culture and structure to facilitate change. First, organisations require **Administrative Commitment to Change**, whereby resources are allocated to increase and embed knowledge of trauma within service delivery and programmes. The second condition refers to the adopting a **Universal Screening** of all individuals seeking support to determine if they have histories of trauma. The process of screening helps to embed a trauma-informed system as it encourages staff to ask questions about the lives of individuals seeking services. This also may support individuals to respond well to a service that is concerned about their personal life experiences. However, through the process of asking trauma-informed questions, the institutionalisation of trauma-awareness within the service is increased. Thirdly, the prioritisation of **Training and Education** for staff is crucial for organisations committed to becoming trauma-informed. The service should be determined to educate all of its staff about trauma, including specialised training for staff wishing to deliver trauma-responsive and

trauma-specific services. This top-down approach ensures engagement from stakeholders to permeate through the organisational hierarchy, to ensure that all staff, regardless of role, are equipped to interact with survivors of abuse. This also sends an organisational and cultural message that all staff are responsible for providing a safe place for individuals accessing services.

In addition, trauma awareness should be included within **Hiring Principles** to ensure staff are appropriate for the role. This can support teams to increase the amount of staff who understand trauma dynamics. Finally, it is important for organisations to conduct a **Review of Policies and Procedures**, to determine whether they have intrusive and punitive practices which may be harmful to trauma survivors. This review enables organisations to explore potential re-traumatisation within their practice to avoid disempowerment and potential disengagement. In addition to the five conditions, Harris and Fallot suggest that staff should “adopt the physicians’ credo, *Primum non nocere*: Above all else, do not harm” (2001:10). Therefore, to be truly trauma-informed, this has to be the philosophical foundation for every organisation.

The Nelson Trust has been operating as a trauma-informed service since 2004, when they opened their first specialist residential service for women with trauma histories, whose needs are often masked by substance dependency. This approach was embedded before the publication of the celebrated Corston report in 2007, which specified the need for recognition of trauma and abuse in women’s rehabilitation. In 2010 The Nelson Trust opened their first “one-stop-shop” Women’s Centre in Gloucester. This centre was recognised by the Howard League for Penal Reform who gave the Trust an award for the ‘best community service for women’. Shortly after, in 2013, The Nelson Trust then introduced their second Women’s Centre in Swindon. Across the organisation, over 1,200 individuals each year are supported. The evidence-based treatment and support for individuals with multiple needs has led to a national and international reputation as a centre for excellence in the treatment of addictions. The one-stop-shop Women’s Centres provide a safe place for women to access support. The centres support women at risk of offending, and during each stage of their criminal justice system involvement, to identify and address the needs of women in an empowering environment. The centres act as a focal point for women to access a variety of support, including but not limited to: group work; one-to-one support; addiction treatment; employment skills; shower and washing facilities; counselling; mental health services; housing assistance; childcare support; lunch clubs and practical support which responds to the evolving needs of women. Each centre is imaginative in its response to the needs of women who seek support.

On July 9th 2019, The Nelson Trust opened its third Women’s Centre in Bridgwater, Somerset. Prior to the opening of the centre, the staff were operating on an out-reach basis to support women in a

variety of settings, including cafes, home visits and co-located venues. This was particularly challenging due to the resource intensive nature and the rural landscape in Somerset. Despite the various challenges, the team were able to engage women who are experiencing multiple and complex needs. The women that are supported within the centre are a wide cohort which includes women at risk, women who are sex working, women who are involved in the criminal justice system, women who have substance use needs and women who have education and employment needs. The various support strategies are delivered within a trauma-informed environment.

Aims and Objectives of the Bridgwater Women's Centre Evaluation

The evaluation used a qualitative methodology to explore the implementation of trauma-informed practice within the newly opened Bridgwater Women's Centre.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the evaluation aimed to explore staff experience of their recruitment and training, the opening of the centre, and their reflections on working within a trauma-informed service.

Through the use of semi-structured interview and focus groups, the evaluation aimed to hear the voices and experiences of women who are accessing support from the Bridgwater Women's Centre. This aim was to focus specifically on their experience with staff, the environment, and how this service compared with others they have accessed previously.

All of the perspectives within this evaluation were used to assess the early implementation of trauma-informed practice within the women's centre. As The Nelson Trust has adopted this approach across services since 2004, this evaluation highlights some of their practices within the early implementation stages.

Evaluation Methodology and Analysis

This research was given ethical clearance through Leeds Beckett University. The Nelson Trust provided organisational consent and access to services.

All of the women and staff were provided with information sheets, informed consent forms, informal discussions about the research and full debriefs. All of the respondents were given the opportunity to see full transcriptions and either fully withdraw from the research or retract any information provided in the interviews. Staff were asked to create a pseudonym to avoid vicarious recognition.

The purpose of the qualitative research undertaken was to hear the experiences of the women who are accessing support from the Women's Centre in Bridgwater. In addition, staff reflections were collected to explore newly recruited staff's experience of training and working within a trauma-informed service.

Interviews with Women: One focus group interview with seven women was conducted. One semi-structured interview was conducted with one woman accessing the drop-in service. The sampling was opportunistic and was representative of the sporadic engagement of women at the early stages of the centre opening. Although all of the women were given the opportunity to create a pseudonym, it was impossible to identify each individual during transcription of the focus group interview.

To draw the focus group interviews to a close, all of the women were asked if they would like to create a collage to represent their experiences of their experiences so far with the Women's Centre.

Interviews with Staff: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four staff members who were new to the organisation. Staff were asked to reflect upon their experience of training and supporting women within the centre.

Thematic analysis was conducted on the interview data to reveal themes discussed in the report.

Limitations of the Research

This research is a small-scale qualitative study. The sampling strategy was opportunistic due to the transient nature of the population. As such, it provides a platform for individuals who have direct experience of the Bridgwater Women's Centre only. It was beyond the scope of the study to conduct a longitudinal and quantitative study; therefore, the findings provide short-term outcomes of the programme. Future research is required to conduct a full evaluation of trauma-informed, trauma-

responsive and trauma-specific organisations, utilising a mixed methodological longitudinal approach to identify long-term outcomes for justice-involved women. Furthermore, it would be wise to conduct a further longitudinal mixed-method evaluation to provide outcome statistics and robust comparison data, to better evaluate the outcomes for women.

Working Towards an Enabling Environment

To achieve the quality mark for an Enabling Environment Award, ten specific domains are required. These are as follows: belonging; boundaries; communication; development; involvement; safety; structure; empowerment; leadership and openness (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2013; AVA and Agenda, 2017). Although the Nelson Trust Women's Centre in Bridgwater does not have this award, there are examples of the above ten domains within the environment. Alternatively, Victim Support (2017) released specific guidelines to better support survivors of sexual violence, which included promoting an environment that prioritises safety, respect, rapport and healing. These aspects are further prioritised within the design of the centre.

The trauma-informed and safe environment provides a welcoming and nurturing service. The female-only staff in the centre encourage women to participate in a variety of services in one location, to provide ease of engagement. One of the ways The Nelson Trust achieve this is through a fully staffed creche where women can attend support and group work without worrying about child care, which further enables women to succeed.

Tomkins et al.'s (Cited in AVA and Agenda, 2017) evaluation of the Nelson Trust's residential substance misuse treatment, indicated that nurturing approaches can be encouraging and empowering. From a trauma-informed perspective, the key five values include safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment. The initial experience of a woman accessing the service is the environment and building. Trauma-Informed specialists consider the impact of the environment for women and staff and conduct regular assessments. For example, Brown, Harris and Fallot (2013) acknowledge an important process of becoming trauma-informed is for organisations to conduct a 'walk-through' of the service, from the perspective of a woman accessing their service for the first time. This walk-through can help staff to consider how they may inadvertently re-enact trauma dynamics and to avoid practitioner complacency. Therefore, as part of the evaluation, it is important to highlight some of the features within the Women's Centre.

Image One: Womens Centre Entrance

The entrance to the women's centre is inviting and welcoming. It does not appear clinical and there is attention to detail. Upon entry, there is a warm reception which mimics a living room with blankets, sofas and furniture. It is an open safe space. This doorway is the first thing a woman will see before engaging with the service.



Image Two: Lion Painting

The centre is decorated with empowering and motivational quotes as well as bright paintings and art work which has been designed by previous women accessing Nelson Trust services. The art work is one way that the Nelson Trust inspire women within the centre, reminding them of their strength, bravery and journey.





Image Three: Creche Facilities

The staffed creche facility for children enables safe play and learning for children whilst their mothers access support, attend group work or socialise within the centre.

Image Four: The Group Room

This room acts as the full team meeting room before the centre opens. During the day this room will host group work in a light and comfortable environment which is welcoming for women and staff during training.



Implementing Trauma-Informed Practice: Staff Perspectives

“We never say that we have arrived at trauma-informed. We say that we are always becoming trauma-informed. If we say that we have arrived, it is as though we have nothing more to learn, yet we are always learning and always striving to improve... always, we cannot be complacent”.

The above quote emphasises the becoming trauma-informed culture within the team working at The Nelson Trust. It demonstrates an eagerness to avoid complacency in their service to ensure that staff development is continuously prioritised.

Before women can benefit from a trauma-informed approach within an organisation, staff must be equipped with knowledge and training. It is advised that during the implementation, staff are recruited based on their trauma awareness. Yet, it is acknowledged that many organisations will struggle to hire all new staff to harness their trauma-informed development (Harris and Fallot, 2001). This is largely due to organisations not needing to recruit all new staff teams. However, The Nelson Trust are in a unique position whereby they have been able to recruit a new team to nurture their trauma lens, through recruitment, training and personal development. This section contains the themes developed from the thematic analysis of staff interviews. The themes that will be discussed are **Hiring and Recruitment, Embedding Trauma-Informed Practice, Training and Shared Resources** and **Recognising Staff Need and Adaptation**.

Hiring and Recruitment

All of the staff discussed why they wanted to join The Nelson Trust. They all considered the charity's excellent reputation for supporting women, as one of the main reasons. The majority of staff had previously worked in third sector organisations helping individuals within the criminal justice system.

“I'd heard of the Nelson Trust before and knew they were renowned for their holistic, person-centred approach which is what I was trying to do my previous role and, actually, I would like to think, in all the roles that I've done, cos I think a lot of places like to say 'Oh we're holistic and person-centred' but when you actually get involved you realise it's number crunching and it's different. People have to fit into certain boxes and some of the people we work with they don't fall into neat little boxes all of

the time, so to actually work for a charity as well that genuinely is holistic and flexible and how we can work with women that is best for them, that was really appealing to me. **Mary**

Mary reflected on her previous working experience within the third sector and discussed the notion of 'number crunching' when services claim to be holistic. However, she felt that having joined The Nelson Trust, she had found a service which placed women at the heart of the service.

In addition, all the staff shared their experiences at their interview for their position with The Nelson Trust. They all stated that the focus was placed on their understanding of trauma.

"I was asked 'What's your understanding of trauma?', they give you like a case study of a woman who had just come out of prison and she had no housing, she was on a script. You talk through a scenario and say what you would do. It was all based on your beliefs, yeah, and your understanding of why we work with the women that we do". **Olivia**

"One of the main questions is 'what's your understanding of trauma and how trauma can affect people in different ways and what trauma can then lead to". **Laura**

These experiences indicate that The Nelson Trust have embedded trauma awareness within their hiring practices, as indicated within Harris and Fallot's (2001) conditions of trauma-informed services.

Embedding Trauma-Informed Practice

All the staff discussed their understanding of trauma-informed practice. They reflected on previous roles and workplaces and how the centre has worked towards establishing a safe and nurturing environment.

"I think everything we do is trauma-informed. So, I think it's just about who we are as people and how we behave. And I think we're really lucky because everybody within our team here kind of feels that and they kind of get it and they look past the behaviour or the words that somebody's saying and they kind of think 'Okay...there's something else. This isn't it'. I think that's probably, for the clients, what sets us apart from other services, is just that. So, when they say 'I feel really safe' and 'I feel really welcome' I think it's just that way of working that makes them feel like that. Not so much that

we do anything over and above that anybody else doesn't do, it's just that we kind of nurture them that little bit". **Rebecca**

"It's totally different to anything, even working in previous charity jobs I've worked within the trauma-informed element is so high on the priority list and it's so clearly on the priority list and with everybody working within that, people do go the extra mile... and the training has just been amazing". **Mary**

The above quotes emphasise the importance of the trauma-informed approach within the service. All of the staff talked about the priority of trauma-informed practice for women. However, they all placed less significance on the importance of trauma-informed practice for staff. Despite this, some of the staff considered some of the challenges they have experienced since working so closely with women with trauma histories.

"I think being so close to everyone's issues, they were coming to you, it was really hard. I don't think I had... I kind of did have it in my other job, but not to that extent and I thought I was prepared for it, but I wasn't. Yeah, but like I said, I was really honest about it and they just adapted it all for me. Like, there was no 'Oh, well, we employed you because you seemed great for the job and you're obviously not'. It wasn't like that it was 'actually, what can we do to help you do it'. **Laura**

These viewpoints indicate the flexibility within the service to support the needs of staff who are adapting to a new culture and way of working. Furthermore, trauma-informed working is not easy, it can be emotionally draining, and it is important for staff to feel safe to request support and understanding from their management. This is something that all the staff discussed.

Training and Shared Resources

The training was a key discussion point for all staff, with all of them stating that they had been impressed with the volume and quality of the training received at The Nelson Trust.

"If I turned around to [my manager] today and said 'Oh my God I just don't know how to do support plans', she'd be like 'don't worry I'll get you on training'. There's always training available and if you want it. It's all available to you and you've got Swindon and Gloucester who are more established so lots of training gets done there but they still invite us, so that's really good. It's quite a big thing that, even though we're here

we communicate and connect with Swindon and Gloucester as centres. So we went up to Swindon the other day for self-care training so it's like we try and keep all the centres interlinked rather than keeping them separate". Olivia.

"It's absolutely... I can't even put it into words. It is amazing. And alongside that we get lots of well-being training, staff well-being training as well, because in our jobs we do have to listen to a lot of traumatic things going on and that training's absolutely great. It's really good". Rebecca.

The staff valued their visits to other Women's Centres within The Nelson Trust. The staff shared a variety of training they had received. However, all of the staff emphasised how much they had enjoyed self-care and well-being training. This concentration on staff needs is vital to enhance staff feelings of value within the organisation.

Recognising Staff Need and Adaptation

Although the opportunity to recruit new staff enabled The Nelson Trust to ensure trauma understanding was prioritised within the recruitment and training process for all staff, they all arrive with individual life and employment experiences. To operate in a truly trauma-informed way, the histories of staff also need to be taken into consideration. The movement towards a trauma-informed service which prioritises nurturing, empowerment and relational approaches may be quite overwhelming within the rehabilitation sector. As a result, more flexibility is required to support staff to adapt to a new culture, team and holistic way of working. The staff discussed some of the hurdles they have experienced while working in a new centre, developing a trauma-informed team.

"It was quite a negative space to be in, we kind of sat back and realised that it wasn't turning into a very nice place to come to work, so we've implemented, like, feel good Fridays; we have, although they're not used, we do have a staff computer up on the top floor that people can use if maybe the staff room is getting a bit too busy and loud and you can't concentrate in there. We do, only the one time, but we've been out for food after work together, which is nice to build those friendships and not just working friendships, so it's taking time for us because, I think we're conscious that we don't want to all be negative to each other because you're going to put that on the women".

Laura

"I think when you have all these fancy titles, it's great, but really, at the end of the day you're still a person that has never sat in front of someone that is relapsing and had

their kids taken away yesterday... that's not a normal thing to be around and I think that's actually really hard. I'm really open about how I feel a lot of the time and I think I never was like that though, until I worked here... We have wellbeing days now and I think the staff are getting more support. I think it was company-wide as well, because they did a staff survey last year and it was all reflected on that as well, like that we were putting clients before staff and, actually, they should be on the same level".

Mary

"I feel really supported, really supported. I can't say enough how supported I feel in terms of my staff well-being is really good. Even more so now, like they're really on board with it, which is really good... really nice. I can't fault that at all." **Olivia.**

The staff considered the challenges of their new roles and how they have adapted within their team. They discussed some adversity; however, they had an awareness of the impact this would have on the women they support. Their awareness of potentially negative cultural influences within the centre is a testament to the trauma-informed training they have received. In addition, the staff all stated that they were well supported when they asked for additional support. One member of staff emphasised the importance of prioritising staff well-being as equal to the support provided to women. This is a requirement within a top-down approach to the implementation of trauma-informed practice.

Further, some of the staff raised concerns with boundaries within the team.

*"I think, as well, like the flexibility and the holistic work is fantastic but at the same time I think boundaries have been crossed... there was a lot of issues with welfare checks as well because people care here, they genuinely do, there's no question about that at all. If they do a welfare check there's that pretence that there could be something and then you're going to have to deal with that when, actually, you probably aren't equipped to deal with it and it may not be safe to do that either. So there's a lot of that that I've found particularly difficult to sit back and listen to...sometimes I think 'shouldn't have gone in'. You know, if you had a concern, ring other agencies, ring their next of kin and then ask for a welfare check, but I don't believe that the keyworkers should be doing welfare checks. The Trust promotes holistic work, but the Trust also promotes boundaries and that's really important, but to be fair, sometimes I think that is blurred and I think the Trust will promote things that do undermine boundaries to some degree. So yeah, some training would be great in that area for everyone, just to highlight do's and don'ts. **Mary***

While trauma-informed practice encourages staff to provide consistent and nurturing support, it does not require staff to cross professional and personal boundaries. Therefore, staff should be encouraged to consider their safety and wellbeing as an equal priority to that of the women that they support. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenge for organisations to emphasise the significance of working in a trauma-informed way, while balancing staffs' boundaries to avoid confusion. In addition, to avoid uncertainty for staff, it is crucial to stress the importance of maintaining professional boundaries to improve a safe and trauma-informed approach for the team. This is particularly important for staff who have previously worked at an organisation with conflicting or punitive practices which are not trauma-informed. This is a contentious and challenging issue within the sector which operates under varying and contrasting philosophies.

As a responsive organisation, The Nelson Trust emphasise that supporting women must never be to the detriment of staff safety and staff well-being. As such, the Trust provides an extensive and on-going staff training package, which was complimented by all of the staff involved in this evaluation.

Holistic Support: Women's Experiences

All of the women interviewed were accessing a variety of services and support from the centre. The women seeking support from The Nelson Trust were at various stages of their recovery journeys and addiction. Most of the women were new to the service, and two women had only attended two group sessions. The majority of women interviewed had been seeking support from local organisations for their substance dependency before the opening of the Women's Centre. All of the women discussed the importance of finding the Women's Centre and they acknowledged that the staff supported them holistically and were consistent with the support provided.

Due to the multi-faceted needs of the women accessing support, a variety of groups and services are provided at the centre. This provision includes drop-in support, one to one support, well-being groups, trauma-specific groups and various tailored rehabilitation support. The emerging themes that the women discussed concerning their experiences at the centre included; **A Place of Safety; Shared Experiences; Building Trust and Intimacy** and **Reclaiming Power**.

A Place of Safety

When asked what support the Women's Centre provides, all of the women agreed that the staff at the Nelson Trust provided an excellent service. Women were asked to discuss their experience accessing support and services within the centre.

"I was short on money one week and didn't have any food and [staff member] said, on reception, 'we got food parcels. Would you like one?' and I went 'Yeah, please I'd love one'. She handed over a food parcel and that helped for the week. That's how helpful they've been. The other thing. I ran out of sanitary towels, tampax and they supplied me with all that. They're brilliant. Especially for a woman out there living on the streets not knowing their way, knowing Nelson Trust is just around the corner for safety, it's great. The staff are lovely. They all talk to me. They all make me welcome. If I need anything just have to ask. Really good".

"I can't fault any of them. They made me feel really welcome and stuff. I don't feel judged and they make me see hope, and everything, with what I'm going through...and, erm...I just feel supported and I guess things will be alright whatever happens and I know that they'll be here".

“I come here and sometimes I just take a hot chocolate. Sometimes I speak to [staff member], I do my washing, get some clothes and I get a shower. They keep trying to get me into group work and it is something I quite fancy actually”.

“I could live here you know, honestly. It is just my safe place, you know. You always know they [the staff] are here. They really make my day. I have never had that before, you know in other places”.

The women provided examples of the breadth of support provided by the staff within the centre. This support varied from a place of safety, support and reliability, to a place where women could access vital supplies. The consistency and safety experienced by the women should ensure greater engagement with the service in the future. It is important to highlight that the centre had been open for one month at the time of this evaluation. All of the women discussed feeling safe which is a testament to the environment and relationships with the staff at the centre.

Shared Experiences, Building Trust and Intimacy

All of the women discussed the impact of sharing their lived experiences with one another, in a women’s only space.

“When it’s women understanding women, it’s so much easier, we just know”.

“What happens in this group stays in the group and you can discuss as much or as little as you want to”.

“It’s only been going three weeks but I always look forward to coming to the group. I don’t leave the house at any other time apart from when I come to group so it’s really nice to get out, see other people have a nice chat; be able to talk about things without ‘oh look at her the criminal’ which is what I usually get when I try talking about it ‘Oh, I’m not talking to that, she’s a criminal!’... so it’s nice for me to be in this environment where I can talk freely and not be judged. I do. I get a lot out of it”.

“There is an intimacy here, it’s like we understand everyone here and you are heard. It has only been a short while, but it just feels unique here, I can say what is really going on for me”.

The women felt that despite the women's centre only just opening, the environment encouraged trust, intimacy and non-judgmental discussions. Intimacy is not a term traditionally used within the rehabilitation sector. However, within a relational, trauma-informed setting, women recognise the power of women supporting women, within a safe environment. All of the women in the focus group acknowledged that the trust built within the group had supported them to openly discuss difficult and upsetting issues, which previously, they may have avoided. This is significant as this could encourage women to share experiences to help staff to identify needs that may require additional support.

Reclaiming Power

All of the women discussed a variety of ways that they experienced empowerment within the centre. The women discussed the importance of group work in developing their confidence levels, to find encouragement and to promote a sense of belonging.

“Everybody that comes here has had difficulties in their lives with one thing or another, different reasons, different circumstances but we all understand that and appreciate that everyone's had difficulties and that we're all trying to work through them together. I feel like the group gives strength back to us”.

“I always feel welcome at the Nelson Trust and the most beautiful thing you can get is confidence. I'm confident here but I'm not confident out there so hopefully my confidence here will spill out”.

“When I am here [Bridgwater Women's Centre], I am working on getting back to my old self, onto the right track. They just keep me going, the group, the staff. I want to see everyone heal and get well together. We will stick together”.

“Everything is a choice here, it's not do this, do that. That's empowering, when it's for you and about you”.

The majority of the women interviewed discussed the benefit of the group setting. The central findings of this research demonstrate the positive impact of the trauma-informed culture embedded within the centre.

Collage Work

Below are some examples of the collage work completed by women at the Bridgwater Women's Centre. All of the women were asked to consider their experience of accessing support at the centre.



The collage work enabled the women to reflect on their experiences and creatively communicate this. Much of the language used in the collages connects to the five values of a trauma-informed practice, which are Safety, Trust, Choice, Collaboration and Empowerment (Covington,2016). The collages demonstrate that the culture and trauma-informed approach is being experienced by the women accessing support.

Commendations, Recommendations and Future Directions

Commendations

The findings of this evaluation highlighted some areas of good practice within the implementation of trauma-informed practice. These included embedding trauma awareness within hiring practices and the prioritisation of staff training and development to ensure that staff are able to better recognise and respond to the needs of women with histories of trauma.

This evaluation has demonstrated that the staff have been proactive in reflecting on their workplace environment and the need to prioritise their wellbeing. This proactiveness is of significance for a trauma-informed culture for all at the centre.

The value of the trauma-informed approach was identified within the experience of women accessing the service. The women already consider the centre a place of safety, consistency and empowerment and this is a testament to the prioritised staff training, development and relational approach within the culture of The Nelson Trust.

The findings indicate that all of the staff were happy with the prioritisation of their developmental needs and the quality of training provided. Therefore, it is evident that The Nelson Trust is adhering to the precedents set within the implementation of a trauma-informed service.

The evaluation identified that the staff benefitted from sharing their practice with other Women's Centres within The Nelson Trust. This sharing is an example of good practice within services to establish a shared and consistent trauma-informed culture.

The findings highlight the importance of engaging with local partnerships and companies to improve the service and quality of supplies provided to women. For example, staff had worked with local food suppliers to develop a weekly lunch club for everyone at the centre to enjoy collectively. The sharing of food enhanced the sense of belonging and relationship building between women and staff.

Recommendations

The Women's Centre is based in a listed building and as such, it is acknowledged that renovations to the physical space may not be straight forward. However, observations within the evaluation highlighted a need to consider accessibility for wheelchair users and women with mobility issues. There are accessible toilets, group space and a room for private one to one conversations. However,

downstairs there is a room filled with donated clothing and toiletries which may not be accessible. Therefore a lift may be beneficial for women with accessibility needs. It is acknowledged that as a responsive service, the staff would support the women to access donations. However, from a trauma-informed perspective, the service should be as inclusive as possible to enable wider engagement and choice of donated products.

Although the Women's Centre is in the early stages of the implementation of becoming trauma-informed, the evaluation identified the need for tailored boundary training with staff to enable them better to support women safely.

The findings of this evaluation indicated a particular issue for women who are not on probation. It was acknowledged that women do not receive support with transport costs and journey planning within some rural areas. While the costs cannot be covered by The Nelson Trust, the staff could create some transport maps, to identify the best way for women to travel to the centre from local rural villages to increase engagement opportunities.

Future Directions

This evaluation has identified a need to develop a trauma-informed 'Kitemark', standard or accreditation. This evaluation has demonstrated some of the challenges and achievements of trauma-informed working. Therefore, a framework is required which can act as both a quality checker and as a way to stop organisations claiming to be 'trauma-informed' for funding purposes. The accreditation can then be awarded to the organisations who demonstrate successful engagement with trauma-informed standards, conditions and implementation stages. The accreditation would also benefit future evaluations of services.

Findings from this research indicate that some aspects of the early implementation stages and conditions have been successful. However, future evaluations of trauma-informed services are required to examine each condition outlined by Harris and Falot (2001) to ensure a full cross-sectional examination of policy and practice.

To demonstrate implementation, it is important to consider the timelines of the various ways services embed this approach. This consideration of timelines would be beneficial to organisations aiming to examine their implementation, as well as to provide transparency if they wish to share good practice.

A mixed-methodology evaluation of all of The Nelson Trust Women's Centres is required, to assess full implementation to examine each domain, condition and standard across each environment to evaluate the full extent of the trauma-informed and trauma-responsive approaches.

References

- AVA and Agenda. (2017) *The Core Components of a Gender-Sensitive Service for Women Experiencing Multiple Disadvantage: A Review of the Literature*. (Available at: <https://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Mapping-the-Maze-The-core-components-of-a-gender-sensitive-service-for-women-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage-January-2017.pdf>). (Accessed 13 November 2019).
- Brown, V.B., Harris, M., and Fallot, R. (2013) 'Moving Toward Trauma-Informed Practice in Addiction Treatment: A Collaborative Model of Agency Assessment', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 45 (5), pp. 386-393.
- Covington, S. (2016) *Becoming Trauma Informed Toolkit for Women's Community Service Providers*. California: Center for Gender and Justice.
- Covington, S. and Bloom, B. (2008) *Gender Responsive Assessment Tool*. California: Center for Gender and Justice.
- Gelsthorpe, L.G., Sharpe, S. and Roberts, J. (2007) *Provision for Women Offenders in the Community*, London: Fawcett Society.
- Harris, M., and Fallot, R.D. (2001) *Using Trauma Theory to Design Service Systems*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McNeish, D. and Scott, S. (2014) *Women and Girls at Risk: Evidence Across the Life Course*, Lankelly Chase, Available at: <http://lankellychase.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2015/12/Women-Girls-at-Risk-Evidence-Review-040814.pdf>. (Accessed 4 November 2019).
- Radcliffe, P., Hunter, G. and Vass, R. (2013) *The Development and Impact of Community Services for Wwomen Offenders: An Evaluation*, London: The Institute for Criminal Policy Research.
- Royal College of Psychiatrists. (2013) *Enabling Environments Standards*. London: Royal College of Psychiatrists' Centre for Quality Improvement, Available at:

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/EE%20LS%20Standards%20Document%202015%202.pdf>.
(Accessed 13 November 2019).

Prison Reform Trust. (2014) *Brighter Futures, Working Together to Reduce Women's Offending*,

Available at:

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Brighter%20Futures%2025314web.pdf>. (Accessed 28 October 2019).

Victim Support. (2017) *Sexual Violence Policy Statement*, Available at:

[https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/Victim%20Support%20Policy%20State
ment%20-%20Sexual%20violence.pdf](https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/Victim%20Support%20Policy%20Statement%20-%20Sexual%20violence.pdf). (Accessed 13 December 2019).

Appendix 1: Bridgwater Women’s Centre Timetable

NELSON TRUST WOMENS CENTRE TIMETABLE: THERAPUTIC GROUPS

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Crèche open 10:00-14:00		Crèche open 10:00-14:00	Crèche open 10:00-14:00	Crèche open 10:00-14:00
Cooking on a Budget 10:00 – 11:30	Tea and Talk Drop in Session 11:00-12:00	Breakfast Club 10:00-11:00	Emotional Health & Wellbeing 11:00-12:00	Art Therapy 10:00-12:00
	Lunch Club 12:00-13:00	Job Club 11:00-12:00	Lunch Club 12:00-13:00	Tea and Talk Drop in Session 12:00-13:00
Pattern Changing 12:00-13:00 Please speak to staff to be added to the wait list	Beyond Anger 13:00-14:00 Please speak to staff to be added to the wait list	Positive Parenting 12:30-13:30 Please speak to staff to be added to the wait list		
	Emotional Health & Wellbeing 11:30-12:30 Weston-Super-Mare			