

Clinks submission to the Welsh Justice Commission call for evidence

About Clinks

Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system (CJS) in England and Wales. Our aim is to ensure the sector and those with whom it works are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of people in the CJS and their communities. We do this by providing specialist information and support, with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, to inform them about changes in policy and commissioning, to help them build effective partnerships and provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their users.

We are a membership organisation with 500 members, working in prisons and community settings, including the voluntary sector's largest providers as well as its smallest. Our wider national network reaches 4,000 voluntary sector contacts. Overall, through our weekly e-bulletin Light Lunch and our social media activity, we have a network of over 15,000 contacts. These include individuals and agencies with an interest in the criminal justice system and the role of the voluntary sector in rehabilitation and resettlement.

Introduction

Clinks welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Justice Commission's Call for Evidence. Third sector organisations in Wales make a vital and considerable contribution to community justice. It is estimated that of the 33,000 third sector organisations operating in Wales, just under 1% (around 300) work exclusively in the criminal justice system including work with people who have offended and are in contact with the prison and probation services, with their families, with victims and in prevention and community safety activities. In addition to this, a larger number of other organisations will work with individuals who are in contact with the criminal justice system in matters relating to housing, education and training, debt and finance, as well as health and social care.

These organisations are part of a wider sector across England and Wales but those operating in Wales face some specific challenges to, as well as some opportunities for, the support they provide for people in contact with the CJS, which we outline below.

Devolved and non-devolved policy areas

Third sector organisations in Wales have to navigate the complexity of working in devolved and non-devolved policy areas. While many elements of the criminal justice system remain the responsibility of the UK government (largely through the Ministry of Justice and Home Office), there are significant overlaps with areas of Welsh Government responsibility. Many organisations will be providing wrap-around services, which work alongside prison and probation, to provide individuals with the support they need to complete the sentence of the court and go on to live fulfilling lives. These services include education, health, housing and social care support, all of which are policy areas which are devolved to Welsh Government.

It is vital that any long term vision for justice in Wales, and future structures resulting from it, consider how to ensure that these devolved and non-devolved policy areas can be best joined up to

ensure that they work together towards better rehabilitation outcomes. The probation review offers an opportunity in Wales to consider how prisons, probation, police and crime commissioners and other public services can better work in partnership to co-commission services and focus attention towards shared outcomes. There is real potential that Wales could be at the forefront of a whole systems approach to justice and this opportunity should be seized.

Multiple and complex needs

Many people in contact with the criminal justice system have multiple needs, facing a combination of problems including homelessness, substance abuse, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health. They fall through the gaps between services and systems, making it harder for them to address their problems and lead fulfilling lives. As a result many people in this group are in a revolving door of contact with the criminal justice system and would significantly benefit from a holistic, all systems approach, that puts individuals and their needs at its centre.

Many of these individuals are likely to have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the commitment by Cymru Well Wales to addressing ACEs and their impact by making all public services in Wales able to respond effectively to prevent and mitigate the harms from ACEs, and by building protective factors and resilience in the population to cope with ACEs that cannot be prevented. This is a significant step towards providing effective services for this group. Clinks is a member of the Making Every Adult Matter Coalition (MEAM) which alongside Homeless Link and Mind works to improve policy and services for people with complex needs. The MEAM coalition has developed an approach to support local areas design and deliver better coordinated services for people with multiple needs and has a wealth of learning about the best ways in which to do this which may be of interest to the commission.

Meeting the needs of urban and rural populations

Third sector organisations working in criminal justice are predominantly small and local and therefore have excellent links with the communities in which they are based and able to provide appropriate and responsive services to their needs. Given the geography of Wales it is vital to recognise this as a key asset of the voluntary sector and ensure that partnership and commissioning models for justice services do not disadvantage small, locally based organisations who are best able to meet the needs of local people.

Welsh women in custody

There is no women's prison in Wales meaning that Welsh women are held in custody significant distances from their home. This undermines their ability to maintain links with their families and communities, despite the fact that research tells us that family support is a significant protective factor in preventing reoffending.

Further, as the Corston Report on *Women with Particular Vulnerabilities in the Criminal Justice System*, and subsequent reports and inquiries since have told us, the drivers of women's offending are significantly different from those of men. They include a prevalence of multiple and complex needs (as outlined above) and high incidence of previous and ongoing trauma. As a result prison is rarely the most appropriate response to their offending nor is it the most proportionate given that the majority of women serve short sentences for non-violent crimes. A significant number of women are also primary carers and their imprisonment far from home has a severely detrimental effect on those they have caring responsibilities for.

The Welsh approach to Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Future Generations Act provide a welcome opportunity and framework through which to respond to the vast body of evidence on

how best to support women in the criminal justice system and to realise a radically different approach.

Any such approach must learn from and utilise the knowledge and skill of the women-centred voluntary sector who provide gender specific holistic support to women. Currently the Welsh Community Rehabilitation Company provide no funding support to such centres.

Conclusion

Clinks is very happy to have been able to provide this submission to the call for evidence and we would be delighted to support the commission to further engage the voluntary sector in its ongoing work.

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