

**CHANGING
LIVES**

vf volunteering fund
health & social care

**Women Volunteers for Health
Final Evaluation Report January 2014
Platform 51/Changing Lives**

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Introduction to the project

Women Volunteers for Health is a Platform 51 project funded by the Department of Health through the Health and Social Care Volunteer fund. The fund is designed to develop capacity within local communities and to use this as a lever for change. Commentary on the success of this approach across all the funded projects can be found in the evaluation of the fund by Leeds Met University.¹

The Women Volunteers for Health project aimed to provide a structured and accredited progression route for hard to reach women into health and social care volunteering, whilst recognising and overcoming the individual barriers women face to engagement. The project presents a model for introducing women into volunteering whereby the women are supported at all stages, and can then go on to support other women.

Description of the project model

Women are recruited onto the project and offered training in volunteering. The training has been developed in-house and is accredited through the Open College Network. The training is offered at Tier 1, NOCN Level 1 and Tier 2, NOCN Level 2. On completion of the training women are supported throughout volunteer placements in Health and Social Care settings. Women become skilled and qualified volunteers adding value in their volunteering and in their communities.

The project is being run in four centres, Wolverhampton, Knowsley, Doncaster and Nottingham. It includes a volunteer counsellor aspect whereby counsellor opportunities are developed to present a wider resource through volunteers, thereby improving Platform 51's Health and Social Care offer and impacting on their beneficiaries.

Other aspects of the project include application for the Investors in Volunteers Kite Mark, and the development of local partnerships to provide volunteering opportunities and to provide a base for future commissioning.

The project has been running in all the centres since July 2011.

¹ [http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/HSCVF_Evaluation_Report_-_Full_\(68_pages\).pdf](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/HSCVF_Evaluation_Report_-_Full_(68_pages).pdf)

The evaluation

Evaluation of the project has been on-going from July 2012. The evaluation looks at both the impact of the project and the processes used.

A previous interim report covered the period July 2012 to December 2012 and focussed on describing the processes used by the project to deliver its work. This report includes the following:

- data from the project including narrative and statistical reports,
- interviews with key stakeholders,
- workshops with staff in each of the centres on how the project works in practice,
- meetings with the project manager responsible for the project,
- weekly, and fortnightly diaries completed by project staff for the period September to December 2013,
- focus group meetings with women volunteers in each of the centres,
- individual interviews with counsellors and counsellor managers in each of the centres,
- feedback forms from those attending counselling.

This evaluation differs from the national evaluation of the Health and Social Care Fund in its focus on the impact of the project locally and within the organisation of Platform 51. In this way, some of the issues raised, and experiences related, differ from those found in the national report, to a greater or lesser degree. Whilst others reflect the experiences of the National Evaluation. In this way the project evaluation allows for a more nuanced examination of the Women Volunteers for Health project and lessons learnt locally.

Platform 51 to Changing Lives

One of the local issues that will be referred to in this evaluation is the change of delivery organisation during the course of the evaluation as five Platform51 centres were merged with the Cyrenians and became Changing Lives. The consequences and experience of this will be referred to within the evaluation, but it is not our aim to evaluate the impact of the changeover on wider delivery.

The model

After the interim report the programme manager felt that it would be helpful for the centres to see the project model pictorially. As a consequence of this the following was devised and shared with the centres at future meetings. It emphasises the four different parts of the Platform51 approach as well as the different parts of the model.

- Women-centred approach
- Participatory Approach
- Strengths Based Assets Approach
- Transitions Approach



The model places women at the centre whilst also outlining the other aspects of the model that support the development of partnerships and the organisation more broadly. In the evaluation we look at the different aspects of the model, and the delivery of the model overall.

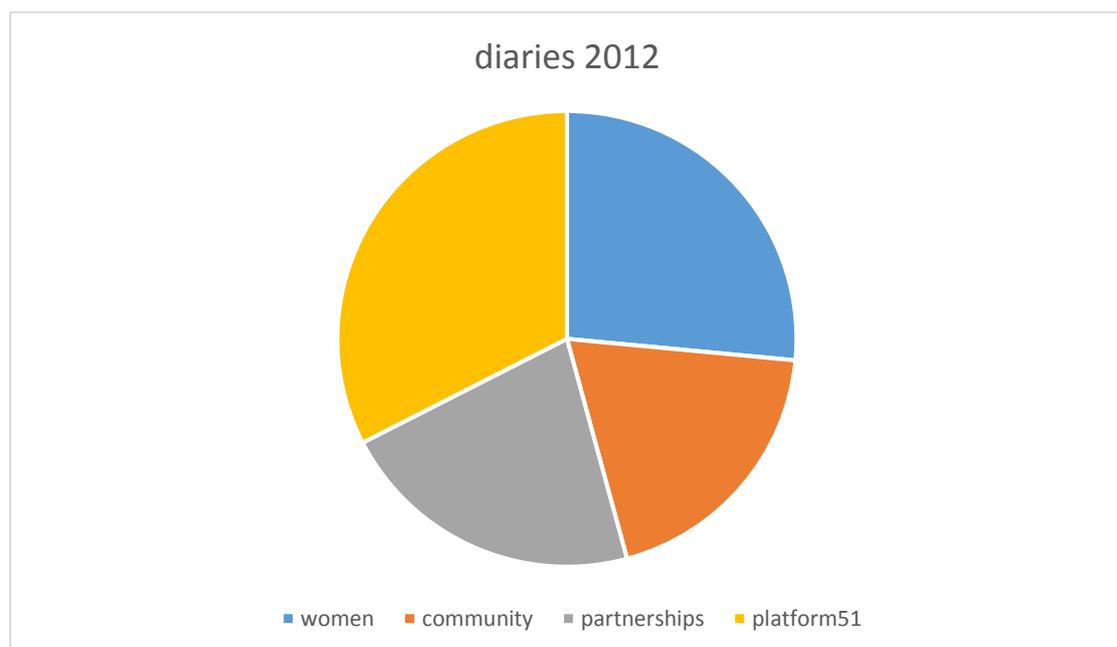
The model overall

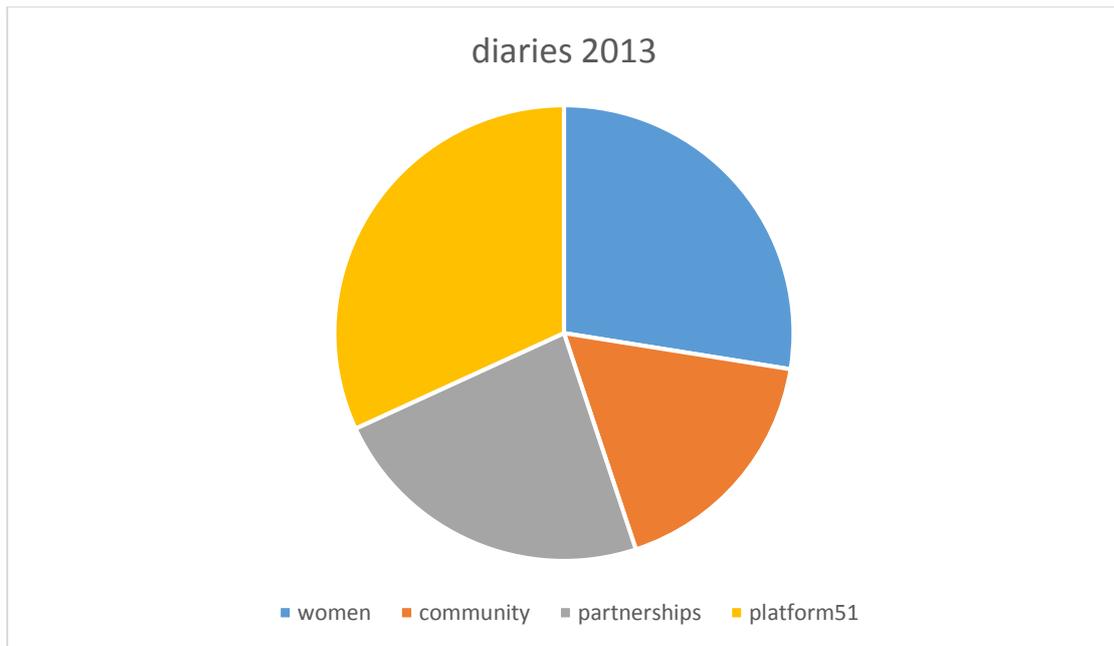
The model has been successful in that centres have delivered and targets have largely been met. Feedback from women volunteers, stakeholders and partners show that they are satisfied and that the project has achieved on key success criteria of engaging women on the margins and supporting them into volunteering. Staff have taken on responsibility for delivering the model and for joining up all areas. Where difficulties have occurred these have been attributable to external factors such as the wider reorganisation, or to centre specific problems such as changes in staff, working in outreach, and partnership changes due to the re-structure of statutory services. Staff have worked on developing solutions for these. In this way the project has evolved and developed in the different centres.

All centres are on track for achieving their targets, Nottingham and Doncaster will have overachieved. Centres have delivered in engaging women, achieving qualifications and gaining volunteer placements. All have submitted reports, although not always on time. Formal support has been offered to volunteers by each of the centres, although in different ways. All have been involved in the evaluation and used the processes of the NOCN, the kite mark has yet to be achieved. New counselling services have been set up in Wolverhampton and Nottingham and existing services expanded in Doncaster and Knowsley. All the centres have developed partnerships these have been pursued differently in each.

Centre activity

This spread of activity across the different areas of the model was reflected in the ongoing feedback we received from diaries completed in each of the centres from September to December in 2012 where more than half of the impact of the project felt to be on organisational issues, either internally or with external partners, reflecting the spread of this work.





This was repeated in 2013. The small amount of change from 2012 to 2013 is surprising. It would be expected in a project such as this for delivery and impact upon women to become more pronounced as initial partnerships and organisational change becomes more sustained. However, the project focus was to include organisational change and the development of partnership, as per the model. The consistent focus on this over the two years is a key outcome for the project and will help to ensure future sustainability. Feedback from the staff themselves indicates this is their view.

In the next section we look at each of the areas of the model in more detail.

Administration

In the interim report we described a lack of ownership at local level, with centres talking of the large amount of administration for the project. Whilst centres also expressed some frustrations with aspects of model such as the structure of the course, the assessments, and the need to find time for additional support. Many of these problems seem to be attributable to the difficulty of balancing the wider model and its holistic approach with the need for producing reports, meeting targets and producing financial and attendance commentary.

Changes were made as a result of the Interim Report, most notably the communication of the model to all centres in the form seen above and all of the recommendations were taken on board. However frustrations were still noted at the final report, for example:

- Reporting has felt to be overemphasised with more reports required from the centres than demanded by the funding organisation: this is felt to be unnecessary.
- The report format was found to be repetitive, asking the same question in different ways, there were also overlaps with parts of the evaluation.
- For the programme manager the need to continually remind centres of report deadlines took a considerable amount of time.
- There have been lots of different interpretations of the form. This led to some confusions as to what was required which was passed onto the centres.

Whilst reporting has been an area that project workers have found arduous it has provided a wealth of evidence on the programme, its impact and the development it have undergone. Project workers have identified the monthly report writing as a time for reflection, allowing achievements to be highlighted.

The evaluation has provided an opportunity for difficulties to be raised, whilst diaries have been used to record successes and for reflection. For example on what has been achieved, areas that have been less successful, and where things could have been done differently.

The programme manager has driven the reporting on the project and maintained an overview, sometimes against organisational barriers, for example being made redundant and reappointed, and losing her immediate manager. In the diary she describes her role is planning for the future of the project:

The major issues are ensuring clear financial guidance going forward and ensuring HSCVF continues to be a national priority for Centres – the governance structure is complicated as the money will be drawn down by Platform 51 whilst the delivery will be sub-contracted to The Cyrenians.

This development role will become increasingly important as the project funding ends and other forms of sustainability are sought.

Expenditure

Looking at the expenditure per centre over the last year of the project, costs are consistently low in all centres. The costs per volunteer in the final year of the project are below that generally associated with training volunteers from vulnerable groups of £2000² with Doncaster having the lowest costs of below £500.

This suggests that having a standardised training package with support along the way and into counselling may help to reduce costs as well as engage and sustain vulnerable and hard to reach women into volunteering.

² <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/1007830/>

Developing volunteer processes

One of the objectives of the project model was to professionalise the already established volunteer routes into Platform51 and the support of volunteers therein. The Tier 1 course was developed alongside the V24 induction as a way to deliberately provide a common introduction that could be used across the organisation. This offered a standardised learning programme which was a new development for the organisation. Whilst this focus on Platform51 presented some difficulties for centres as volunteers could be placed elsewhere, it was the start of a standard approach.

Accreditation

The development of the national standardised NOCN route was an important part of the professionalization of the project and an example of innovation, leading to changes in delivery and administration of learning. It was particularly appreciated by women who saw it as a 1st step towards re-engagement. The portfolio itself was important for the women, to be able to show their achievements to potential placements, and stakeholders who could see what had been learnt and appreciate the certification of skills.

However, there has been a delay in the delivery of NOCN certificates. In Wolverhampton this may have contributed to some women choosing not to go onto level 2. Project workers sought to address this by encouraging commitment to level 2 before the delay in certificates became known, rather than leaving it 2 months before following them up which was the previous practice. This demonstrates to some extent the importance of certification to the women and the flexible and developmental approach taken by the staff in this centre.

Whilst accreditation involved considerable amount of staff time moderating and monitoring, and inputting data, especially when larger groups were involved, and when criteria changed, staff commitment to the project ensured that certification was achieved. Where this task became too much for the project workers to achieve on their own, volunteers were enrolled as an additional resource, thereby feeding back into the project and continuing to support it.

Accreditation, whilst at times difficult for the centres and individual project workers was also a unique aspect of the course. It allowed women to experience learning and receive accreditation for it in an environment flexible enough to support their individual learning needs. It also allowed centres to take volunteers from other voluntary sector organisations and train them using their woman centred approach. Staff perseverance was key in achieving this.

Volunteering kite mark

An original aim of the project was to apply for the volunteering kite mark, and whilst preparations for this is ongoing it has been delayed as the organisation dealt with change at a

national level. All policies and procedures have been developed and the standardised approach has been deployed through the volunteering pathway.

Standardisation

Some staff felt that more could have been done to bring the different centres together and increase standardisation and the sharing of best practice. It was suggested that increased training, as well as celebration events could be ways of achieving this. Whilst meetings were held not everyone came and there was some feeling that the focus of these was target setting rather than best practice sharing. The programme manager noted the difficulties of getting people from different centres together when they were engaged in delivery.

The workbooks and accreditation acted as methods of standardisation, with the option to tailor them appropriately to the group, centres used these in different ways and found solutions to the difficulties presented by them. Whilst, the change in organisation from Platform51 to Changing lives led to problems with some of the content of the level 1 courses as it is Platform51 focussed solutions were found. Latterly Wolverhampton has rewritten the workbooks to change the focus to Changing Lives and shared this with other centres. Future adaptations suggested by the centres included replacing part of the course with a generic section on employability, or one on dealing with CRB checks as these have been a barrier to some women gaining placements.

Standardisation has also been achieved across the centres with the development of counselling services where previously there were none, and the adoption of the Doncaster model for this.

Overall the project has streamlined and standardised the role of volunteer, developing volunteering policy and proving documentation to support this formalisation. This process marked an organisational change involving staff resource and commitment.

Formal support for volunteers

A particular feature of the project is the support offered to women both during and after the courses and on into volunteering, recognising the barriers faced and the individual needs of the women. All of the centres offered this to some degree either through on-going relationships with the volunteers or through holding special events to bring the volunteers back together.

- In Knowsley for example the worker holds celebration events, that although time consuming offer a way to check on the volunteers and receive feedback on what is happening.
- Whilst in Wolverhampton they have a shared lunch every week which volunteers can attend and gain peer support, as well as a Job Club plus for accessing volunteering opportunities.
- Doncaster has set up peer mentoring opportunities within the Women's Centre to allow volunteers to be supported whilst offering support to others. This allows women to develop skills and confidence within a secure environment before moving into an external placement.
- Doncaster developed a Volunteer Suite for the women to use. This was to develop their ownership of the volunteering role, as a space for peer support and allowed the volunteers to be integrated into the centre.
- Nottingham offer 1 to 1s during the course and 4 weeks after the end.

Whilst all centres offered this ongoing support it received very little coverage in the discussions on the projects, and was commented on as area for development by the project manager. Conversely in the interviews with stakeholders this support was a particular feature picked out for mention as part of the unique selling point of the model.

Debra is always available for information or to link people who are having trouble to support. There are support groups and one to ones where they also look at the person's wellbeing.
(Stakeholder Nottingham)

They offer a one to one level of support. The people involved stay in touch. (Stakeholder Knowsley)

The ongoing support is a big thing. Without the support and prep beforehand volunteers are less engaged in the role. So the support beforehand promotes the volunteers to be successful in their roles. (Stakeholder Doncaster)

This is perhaps because the support helps the volunteers to maintain their role in placement organisations whereas previously they might have left if things became difficult. This is of direct benefit to the stakeholder organisations if they are offering placements. It is also an area where

volunteering projects can fail. The need for this support was acknowledged by one project worker who commented in the diary:

I realised today that in order for some of our volunteers to be able to compete in the volunteer market they do need to develop more confidence. Here at the centre, we are prepared to be patient and invest time in our volunteers because we realise that this might be the first time women have dipped their toe into the water of the employability skills market. It became clear through discussion today that Partner organisations have such a choice of volunteers that they can afford to cream off the most confident applicants.

Achieving targets

Each of the centres had defined targets to meet over the course of the project. These were:

Recruitment: 576 women over the 3years, 144 per centre, 54 in year 3.

Training at Tier 1: 480 women over 3 years, 120 per centre, 45 in year 3.

Training at Tier 2: 408 women over the 3 years, 102 per centre, 38 in year 3.

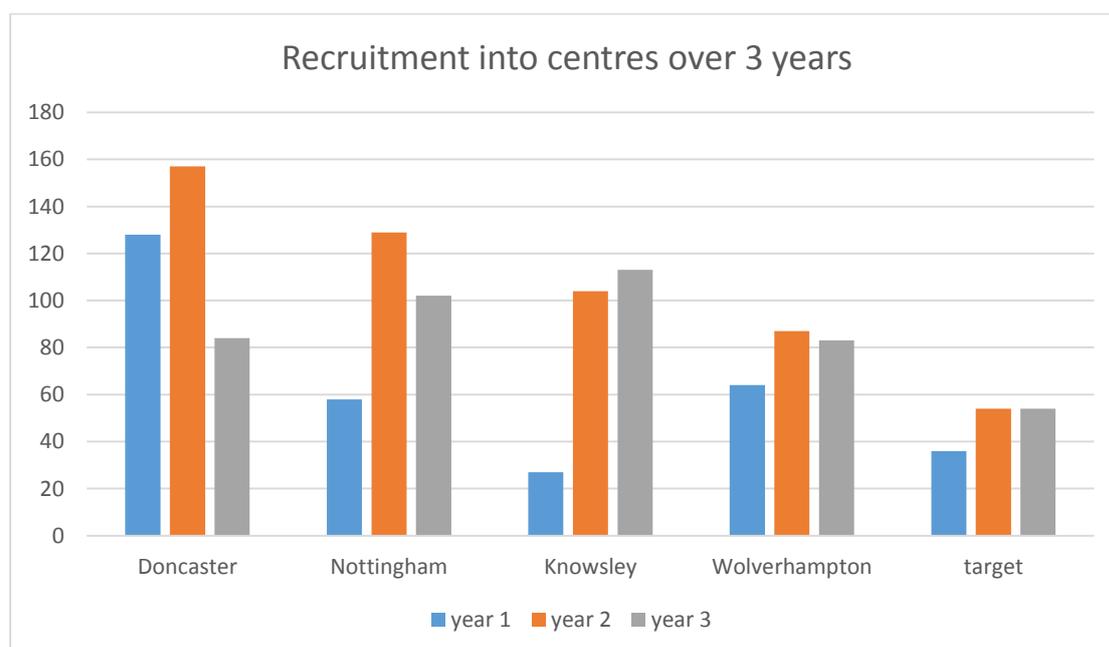
Volunteering opportunities identified: 408 over the 3 years, 102 per centre, 39 in year 3.

Women into volunteering: 350 over the 3 years, 88 per centre, 32 in year 3.

Women into counselling: 48 over the 3 years, 12 per centre, 4 in year 3.

Recruitment

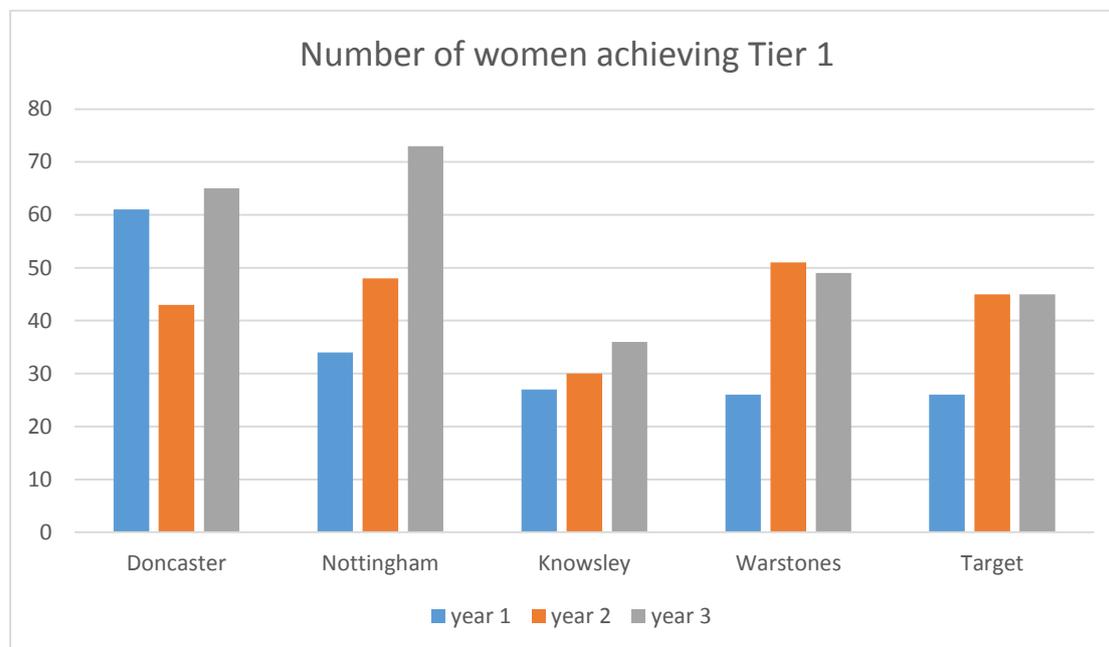
Recruitment onto the course took up a considerable amount of resource at some centres, in particularly where the project was run as an outreach service such as in Knowsley.



This target has been met by all centres. Some centres put early resource into this and achieved high numbers into the project early on. Year 2 has been the major delivery year for all centres except Knowsley where steps have been taken to boost recruitment in year 3. Whilst the figures for year 3 are not yet complete it looks as if this year has seen a decline on numbers recruited in some centres, although this has not carried through to numbers taking part in the course.

Training at Tier 1

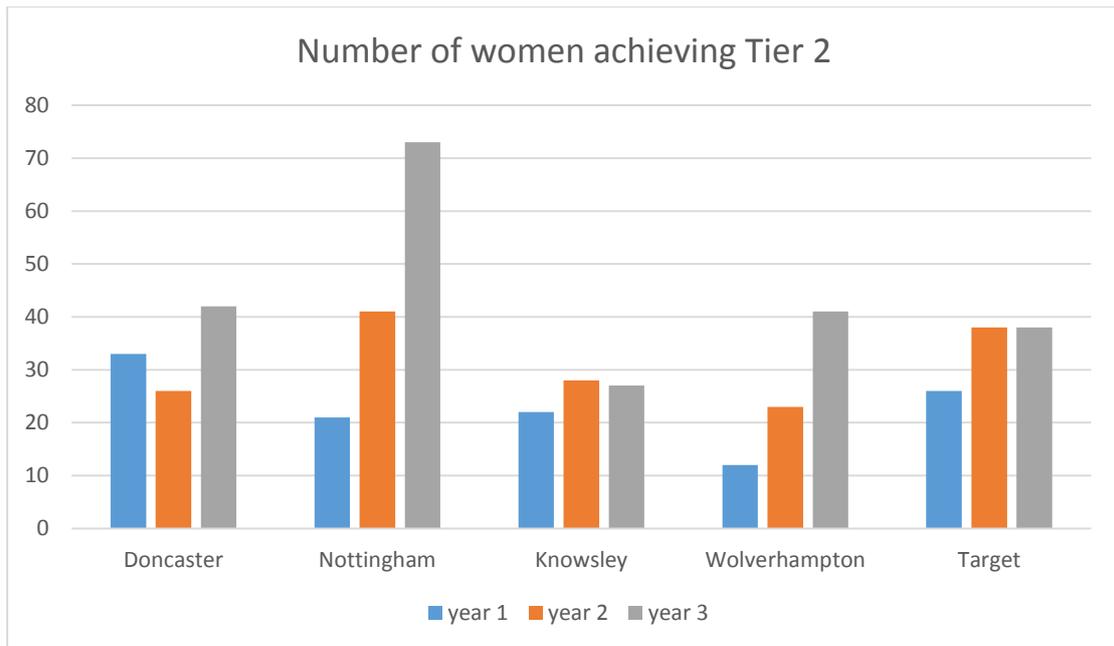
Training at the introductory level was compulsory before being able to move onto level 2. The target for Tier 1 has been met in all centres except Knowsley, where considerable effort has been spent on increasing numbers in year 3. Other centres have overachieved on this target with Doncaster and Nottingham experiencing considerable growth in numbers in year 3.



Where there has been some variation within centres on numbers to Tier 1 this could be a consequence on recruitment drives to achieve the target, or the setting up and running of new courses as opportunities arise, for example as outreach in Children's Centres.

Training at Tier 2

Moving women onto Tier 2 is where the staff have experienced difficulty, this has led to innovations in how the course is delivered and how women are further engaged in this learning. For example in Nottingham where Tier 1 and 2 are delivered as one course the target has been met and overachieved. All centres except Knowsley have experienced an increase in Tier 2 in year 3.

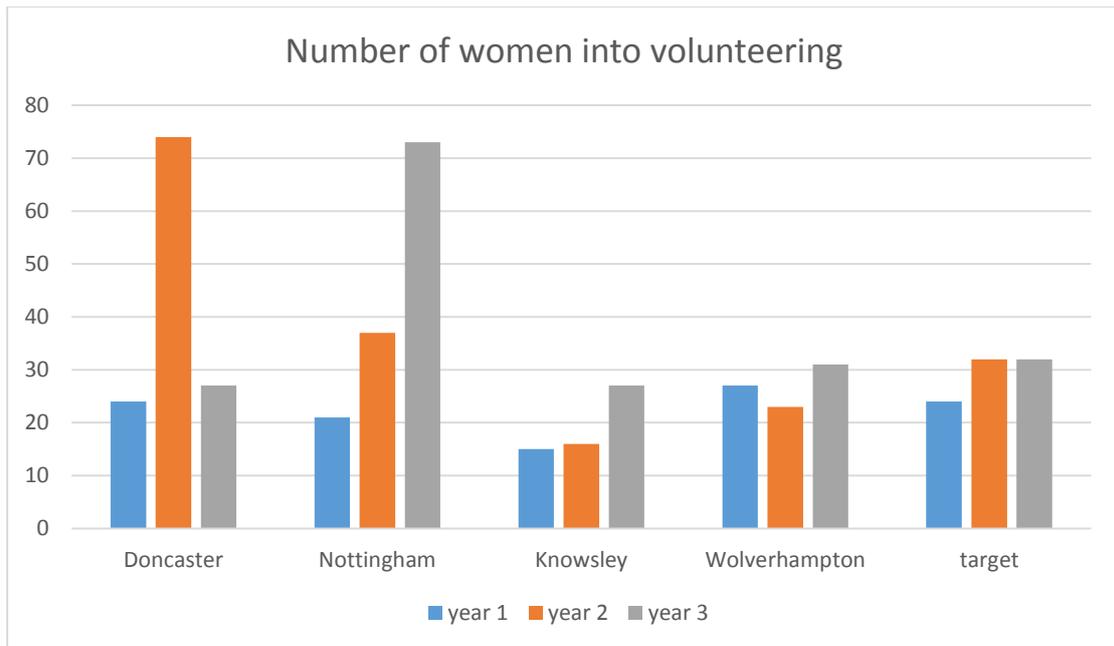


Volunteers

Two targets were available for volunteering the first was for the number of opportunities identified, and the second for the number of women moving into active volunteering.



Significant opportunities were identified in all centres over the course of the project particularly in years 2 and 3 as the project became established. All projects had considerable impact in this in year 2 with Doncaster achieving highly. In year 3 Nottingham, Knowsley and Wolverhampton have all increased the opportunities identified above the target.



The picture for this target is different for each of the centres.

- Compared to a second year, in Doncaster numbers have fallen this year.
- In Nottingham the 3rd year figures are considerably higher.
- Both Doncaster and Nottingham have achieved this target.
- Knowsley has found it hard to achieve on this target, although more opportunities have been identified which may explain the increase in numbers in the 3rd year.
- Knowsley and Wolverhampton are on-track to achieve.

Volunteer counsellors

A key outcome of the project was the recruitment of volunteer counsellors. This offered an opportunity for enhancing services, and setting up a new service in Nottingham and Wolverhampton.

This target has been met. Centres have experienced some difficulty in recruiting and managing volunteer counsellors which will be looked at in more detail in the section on counselling.

Target achievement

Target achievement has been a key driver for the centres and has been vigorously managed by the programme manager, this has ensured that a large number of women have been engaged and received certification.

Some of the issues that the centres have identified in achieving these targets are:

- Changes in staff, including long periods of leave, leading to projects being suspended or delayed whilst new staff familiarised themselves with the project.
- Difficulties in recruitment in some areas felt to be attributable to the attitude of Job Centre Plus to the course and women's fear of losing benefits.
- Difficulties in marketing the course, partially related to the name and expectations of others, for example health and social care suggests job training, whereas referring to volunteering suggests not. The first may lead to more interest but disappointment, the second to lack of initial interest.
- For recruitment to level 2: delays in getting the certificates for level 1 led to women becoming disengaged. This meant that staff had to then try to re-engage women onto Tier 2 which was not always successful.
- Targets have meant that in some centres the focus of effort has changed as different needs within the project have arisen. For example if recruitment was down effort was put into increasing this through links with other organisations as well as outreach in the streets. One project worker commented:

I felt like I was chasing my tail but I can see the outcomes.

- Inappropriate women being referred into the project who have then needed additional support. One centre reported on the difficulties of assessing 45 women and making sure that they are all able to do the course and be ready for volunteering.

Innovations

Innovations that the centres have devised to help them in their recruitment and sustaining of women have included:

- Bringing organisations in in week 4/5 to talk about the volunteering opportunities they can offer, allowing for a smoother transition to volunteering as project workers can prepare volunteers and placement organisations.
- Holding open days in the centre for organisations to meet the women and vice versa, allowing organisations to see the value of trained volunteers and volunteering and the women to see the variety of opportunities on offer e.g., speed dating.
- Working with training organisations in the Social Care sector to allow women to work on zero hour contracts in care, gain experience, and thereby progress to NVQ2 with flexibility.
- Linking to other organisations and training their volunteers and using their facilities. For example local Children's Centres have women volunteers who can benefit from the training offered. This also allows the project workers to widen their links and spread knowledge of the project.
- Forming good links with other voluntary sector organisations to encourage referrals and open the door for placements, including those organisations who may find it difficult to access volunteers e.g., In Doncaster Lifewise Crucial Crew have a need for volunteers with experience of the Criminal Justice system.

- Recruiting women by approaching them on the streets thereby raising the profile of Platform51 as well as the project.

These have been innovative. They demonstrate centre flexibility, and partnership working in practical ways. When centres have faced difficulties in meeting targets the programme manager has spent time in discussing the issues and developing plans to help them to achieve.

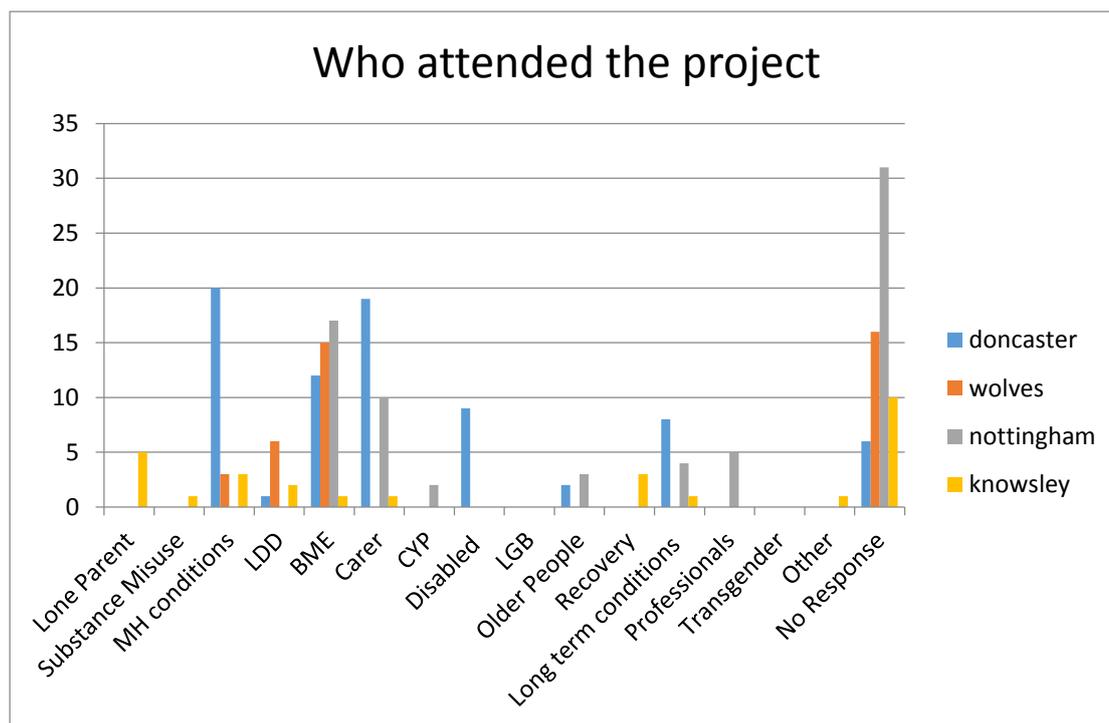
Overall the project is meeting its targets and been successful in engaging women in volunteering. Difficulties have been experienced but these have been overcome with staff taking responsibility for achieving them and putting plans in place to take remedial action when necessary.

Women – assessment, delivery, recruitment, training

Who attended?

An evaluation undertaken for the Commission for the Compact in 2011 looked at who volunteered and who didn't. It identified those who did not volunteer as:

- those with no qualifications and those whose highest qualification is at GCSE level (compared to those with degrees or equivalent)
- those not born in the UK (compared to those born here)
- those in lower supervisory and technical/semi-routine and routine occupations (compared to those in higher/lower managerial and professional occupations)
- those earning £5,000 or more per year (compared to those earning less)
- those with long-term limiting illness or disability (compared to those without)
- those who disagreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area (compared to those who agreed).³



Although the data on the Women Volunteers for Health project is not complete with many no responses, what is there shows the wide range of women attending, many of whom were from the groups identified above. For example most volunteers within the Knowsley area were lone parents, Doncaster had a high number of volunteers with mental health conditions, as well as

³ *Use it or lose it: a summative evaluation of the Compact*. Meta Zimeck, Colin Rochester and Bill Rushbrooke. March 2011.

those who are carers and from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities, BAME and carer volunteers were also prevalent in Nottingham, Wolves also have a high number of BAME volunteers, as well as those with LDD. Many of these groups are those described above as being least likely to volunteer.

The staff commented that they found it very satisfying to work on a course that had a wide variety of women who wanted to be there and that was not defined by age or gender. One worker commented that it was nice to work with older women, along the original lines of 'stage not age'. Overall the staff felt that the woman centred approach created a more welcoming atmosphere for women.

The engagement of these hard to reach women is a particular success of the project. It also suggests that the model is offering support beyond skills development, allowing women to address underlying issues with the support of staff and build skills.

Recruitment

Recruitment has been harder for some centres than for others. For example at Knowsley some parts of JC+ have not been supportive of the project making women leave the course to go on skills training '*if you are well enough to volunteer you are well enough to look for a job.*' This has made it difficult to recruit as people are afraid of losing benefits. To address this the centre has applied to become an approved training centre so that the training can count for JC+. Doncaster have also experienced difficulties with women having to miss sessions or withdraw from the course to attend Job Centre Plus appointments. The flexibility offered by the project has allowed for women to attend on alternative dates in order to complete.

Where recruitment has been a success this has often been through the development of partnerships with other voluntary organisations such as the Refugee Council, or mental health charities for example Doncaster Drug and Alcohol Services needed volunteers with experience of drug, alcohol or offending issues which the project has been able to help them with; or the pursuing of opportunities with strategic organisations who have volunteers such as Voluntary Councils or CCGs. This demonstrates the unmet need of organisations in seeking volunteers with particular experience of assets, as well as the needs of the women volunteers.

There has also been a notable word of mouth effect between women with examples of women supporting others into the course once they have gone onto placement in other organisations.

Assessment

Assessment for the course was built into the model with project workers taking time to make sure the women were appropriate. This could be difficult depending on numbers and needs of the women involved. Where drop out has occurred there is the suggestion that women may have been inappropriately recruited and that some other course might have had better outcomes. However, wherever possible centres have sought to accommodate women and to support them through, often offering enhanced support and flexibility. There were also examples

of women with little or no English completing the project, as well as those with substance misuse problems and history of offending. One stakeholder commented:

Women come with a range of issues, many are experiencing personal difficulties. Volunteering helps them with low self-esteem, mental health problems etc., as well as providing a crèche service for carers. It is for women who want to return to work but can't and those who are socially isolated.

Delivery

The project is delivered differently in each of the centres with changes being made to the structure and delivery of the course as the project has progressed. These changes have included adaptations to suit the learning needs of women including disability and learning difficulties, as well as flexible timing to allow for childcare and other needs. For example Wolverhampton have delivered Tier 1 as a short intense course. Whilst Nottingham have delivered Tier 1 and 2 as one course, thereby keeping the women engaged and preventing drop out. Doncaster delivered Tier 1 and 2 concurrently when women wanted longer training. Other changes have included trying different venues across an area to see where works best, this has been tried in Knowsley and Wolverhampton. Whilst this has been successful in engaging women, it does involve more work on the part of the staff with a need for more planning and flexibility.

Each of these changes has been developed in response to a perceived need either observed by the project worker or given through direct feedback at evaluation or review sessions. These have allowed the project to develop locally to meet needs. They also evidence reflection and development on the part of the project workers. Reflecting on this the programme manager felt the development of the different types of courses suggested that women need a choice on the length of course on offer to include longer courses and short ones, and that the centres were adapting the model to suit this need, allowing for the needs of different women to be accounted for.

Flexibility within delivery has also allowed women to be able to miss sessions and catch up. This has been beneficial when women have meetings to attend or other calls upon their time. Women have also been put through at level 1 in Mentoring if they do not achieve a level 2, this was felt to be beneficial for women with additional needs who might want to continue but not at level 2. The flexibility also allowed for issues to be raised and discussed within a structured course, for example Knowsley commented on the need to take time out to discuss issues of domestic abuse when this was raised as an issue. Where necessary the numbers attending the course have also been decreased to allow for issues to be dealt with which may require one to one support. This flexibility has helped the women to achieve, and the project workers to help them in doing that, sometimes against expectations.

Women themselves talked about the circumstances in which the course was delivered as well as the deliverer, more than the course content. For example in Nottingham the top three positives in relation to the course were that it was free with free crèche places and bus fares. This was important in helping women get on the first stepping stone to doing something else and removing barriers. Conversely in Wolverhampton the most important aspects were that the course was fun and interesting with less emphasis on money and access, although these were important for some. This difference could reflect the location of the different courses with Nottingham being city centre based and Wolverhampton based in the community.

This could suggest that women from different locales might need different sorts of help in overcoming barriers and becoming engaged.

For all the groups one of the most important aspects of the course in terms of their early engagement and attendance was the atmosphere created by the tutor. Women talked about feeling nervous before they came, unsure of what would be expected of them, worrying that they would be too old, or that their language skills would not be sufficient. These feelings were quickly dispelled with feelings of trust being established within the groups very early on. They particularly liked the rules and boundaries laid down by the tutor as it suggested respect for them and made them feel comfortable and confident and able to learn.

This demonstrates the skills of the project workers not only in adapting the course to fit the women but also in overcoming the fears of the women and creating an atmosphere in which they could relax and learn. When talking about the project workers women used a range of words, as below.

Wolverhampton	Nottingham	Doncaster	Knowsley
Friendly/welcoming	Inspiring person – role model	Trustworthy	Caring
Made feel easy	Confident	Amazing	Kind
Confident	Friendly	Bubbly	Understanding
Open	Unique	Warm	Good listener
Different	Understanding	Approachable	Good laugh
Talkative	Open minded	Inspirational	Outgoing
Laidback	Helpful	Makes learning easy	Good source of information

These skills and attributes were felt to be important in breaking down boundaries between the tutor and those on the course and creating the right atmosphere of trust and lack of judgement. The staff tended not to talk about the project in this way but to talk about practicalities of delivery e.g., being flexible and developing solutions to the problems experienced by the women.

Training

The workbooks provided a structure which was adopted in the centres, allowing workers to cater for the needs of women and use their skills and experience in delivering the course. For example

in Nottingham the project worker had enhanced the mentoring courses with personal experience of 3rd sector e.g. with examples on safeguarding and health and safety. The worker also described how she encouraged those with mental health issues to volunteer by focusing on their experience and insider knowledge, thereby encouraging them to use their assets in making a transition. She described her job as:

Changes people's lives. E.g. moving from course to volunteering to a job. Building confidence and getting women engaged.

Whilst in Wolverhampton the project worker had included case studies on mentoring to embellish the workbook.

A stakeholder in Knowsley who had attended the course described it as follows:

There is a nurturing environment for individual needs when issues arise. There is a good plan in place for each session and they encourage portfolios to be completed to a high standard. There is high diversity and involvement with the group: such as who they want as the group speaker. There is a focus on the future and next steps. (Stakeholder Knowsley).

The course itself was praised for being fun, interesting and simple to understand which resulted in a change to thinking, covering areas that hadn't been thought about such as the rights and responsibilities of volunteer, permissible language, confidentiality, personal boundaries, and safeguarding. Women liked the short units offering space to get to know each other, and the lack of homework.

A concern expressed by the staff was that the level of the course was too low for some of the women attending, however none of the women interviewed expressed this, rather they enjoyed the opportunity to go on a journey together and develop skills with a variety of women at different levels, developing their own support networks along the way.

Location

The siting of the projects within existing centres with established infrastructures was felt to have helped the centres in the delivery and development of the project. For example offering crèche facilities and space for the women to be was felt to be important. An advantage of hosting the project within these established centres was the progression routes available, in particular in those centres where much of the course was delivered on Platform51 premises. So in Wolverhampton the course was part of a progression route, with other pathways on offer, linked into ongoing learning. Whilst in Nottingham the citing of the course in The Nottingham Women's Centre opened up other opportunities, both in terms of courses and volunteer placements for

example links with the WoLaN project offering further opportunities for self esteem and skill development.

Where the courses were delivered outside the centre these processes and facilities were not there and this had an impact on expenditure as well as on standardisation and the relevance of the introduction, especially if the workers were training volunteers for another organisation. The advantages of this outreach delivery were in reaching groups who would not normally access the Platform51 centre such as a parents of young children and LGBT groups. There have also been instances of women engaging in Platform51 outreach courses whom the host organisation have found difficult to engage. This has been positive feedback for the staff and given credence to their approach.

In Knowsley whilst these outreach courses helped in developing partnerships and reaching women, they were less effectual in terms of engaging women in the wider work of Platform51 as the centre was an hours ride away. Whilst St Helens had been the area identified in the bid by the Centre Manager, it was found that this area was already overrun with employment programmes making recruitment and engagement hard. Latterly the project worker has been delivering the course at the centre base, which has helped in the recruitment of women and in engaging them in the wider work of the centre.

Impact on women

Twenty three women across the four centres were asked about the impact of the course upon themselves. All of the women attended courses in the centres, rather than on outreach. All were still involved in the centres either as volunteers, receiving ongoing support through their placements or on other courses.

As well as learning more about volunteering a key impact of the course, identified by the women was on their self esteem. They also appreciated the opportunity to meet other women and to share experiences. These impacts were translated for the women into actions either through engagement in volunteering at the centre or at another organisation, getting a job or becoming more prepared to get a job, going on a further course or having plans to go onto further training or university.

In many cases being on the course with women of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and experiences has opened their eyes and expanded their friendship groups, with attitudes changing.

I am not alone, others feel as I do.

I feel more confident that I am eventually going to be able to get a career.

My attitude has changed, some of the young mums I have met have been inspiring.

The women also talked about the impact that their involvement was having on others. Here the responses focussed on finding information that could be passed to others e.g., on volunteering or about certain health issues such as smoking, or in increasing their understanding of the lives of others.

The value of offering a women only project within a women only organisation was one of the key innovations of the project. Allowing hard to reach women who may need a more secure and supported environment the opportunity to engage was key. The women appreciated this and for many this was the first step in further engagement, either within the centre where they could receive more support before volunteering elsewhere or in a placement at another voluntary organisation. Women talked about the confidence and self esteem as well as skills and knowledge they had acquired allowing them to set up new provision or to challenge practices in their placements, for example in relation to Health and Safety or volunteer responsibilities.

Counselling

The setting up of a counselling service for women is a particular success of the Women Volunteers for Health project with volunteer counsellors now in place in all centres. The project offers an opportunity for the trainee counsellors to complete their 100 hours and to provide a service for women. Previous to this project a counselling service did not exist in Wolverhampton and Nottingham and the other centres have helped in setting up these services as well as expanding their own services from young women only.

Volunteer counsellors appreciated the opportunity to carry out their placement, and whilst not all of them felt that they personally needed to be in a women only space, they recognised that this was important for some of the women they saw. For others this was a particular attraction and added value to the counselling experience for themselves and for the women.

There came a time when I realised that women are only half the population and I do need to engage with men.

Volunteer counsellors particularly commented on the professionalism of the placement offered to them by Platform 51 compared to other placements, talking about the support they received within a structured organised environment. Comparisons were drawn with other organisations where they had felt unsupported. There was also a feeling that the Platform51 approach fitted with their own approach to counselling, however counsellors were often unclear about what this approach was, and how it might manifest itself other than in a professional structure. An additional benefit of the development of the counselling service was the links made to the educational establishment training the counsellors.

Where criticism was offered this was generally in relation to admin and issues with technology.

For the Counsellor Managers the development of the new service meant either expansion or establishing a new service. Much of the difficulties encountered were to do with managing the placement hours for the counsellors against the needs of those seeking counselling, where need outstrips demand. One example was of a centre losing three counsellors in one week as they reached their placement limit, leading to pressures on the waiting list and potential difficulties with referring organisations. The solution to these problems was the recruitment of further volunteer counsellors.

Where issues were identified these were in relation to management or supervision time and the amount of support needed both in the early days of placement and to support volunteer counsellors with more complex cases. This had resulted in some centres taking on volunteers to support the managers thereby freeing them up for supervision.

For all the centres the counselling service was felt to be a success and an area of continuing need being taken forward by Changing Lives. This was reflected in the feedback from the women who had used the service with respondents being overwhelmingly positive about the service they

received, the only negatives being associated with delays in accessing the service, although these were acknowledged as relatively short, lack of crèche facilities and the need for more than the 12 sessions offered by some centres. There was also appreciation for the woman only nature of Platform 51.

This is a wonderful service that helped my life. It has been fantastic

Counselling for 18 weeks completely changed my thought processes, coping strategies, maintaining relationships and my wellbeing. By talking through things weekly, problem solving and reflecting, I have tackled my past and living for the present.

It has helped me come to terms with what I was struggling with and also brought to my attention and helped with difficulties I hadn't faced

Partnerships

All of the centres have spent considerable resource on developing partnerships both as routes to refer women into and out of the project, and as a way of marketing the project more strategically, hopefully leading to its future sustainability.

These different sorts of partnerships were characterised by the project manager as operational partnerships, typically with other voluntary sector organisations to gain referrals and placements and strategic partnerships, or with statutory organisations, to gain influence and raise the profile of the project.

Operational partnerships

Partnership building at the operational level has been more or less successful in the different centres although it has been resource heavy. For example Knowsley reported that despite spending approximately 30% of their time on this they only received sporadic results. Wolverhampton has also experienced difficulty in developing partnerships but has found that the counselling services and the links made through the development of that service have helped. For example links to Troubled Families have seen women referred into the course as well as upped the profile of the course. Other issues have been to do with key partners moving on as statutory organisations respond to their own organisation changes and the need to keep developing relationships this requires.

At Knowsley a key partnership with Stronger Families to help women gain confidence and get back to work has wide potential. This developing partnership offers an opportunity for the impact of the project to be felt widely and to have an impact on developing government agendas around worklessness and families. As a stakeholder noted:

People don't feel they can volunteer, they aren't ready. The course provides them with support, identifies their skills and gives them the confidence to take the next step which is yes I can do it!
(Stakeholder)

Stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation tended to be at the operational level and this tended to be how they saw the project, indeed some stakeholders did not know anything about the project and what was on offer other than it was a course for women who wanted to do volunteering, and that they could refer into it.

Strategic partnerships

Doncaster has been most successful in developing these links at a strategic level with one worker dedicated to this. These links are starting to pay dividends with partnerships leading to matched funding for projects and other opportunities for development such as through consortia and CCGs, and the local pathway to volunteering. In Doncaster there was recognition about the

amount of time this involves and the potential for failure with links failing to develop or meetings falling through, but the benefits in terms of increased exposure and sustainability were felt to be worth it.

In Nottingham and Wolverhampton, partnerships at this level have been difficult to sustain as in the face of widespread public sector transformation in the last three years. Nottingham changed their approach to partnership building, after the previous project worker left and changes to local strategic organisations the new project worker has taken a more selective approach to developing partnerships, making links where needed to help the project.

Whilst the national organisation is looking at taking the model forward, local centres might also want to boost their local strategic links copying Doncaster's success in the this area.

Volunteers in the community

Volunteers have been placed in many different environments and organisations throughout the local communities. These placements have sometimes been problematic in that the placement has been found wanting. This issue reflects the professionalization of volunteering and the wider impact of the course on this. An example of this from the report from Doncaster is described below:

A concern has been that we have been unable to offer volunteering opportunities in Mental Health because of the limited options available. During the year we have worked closely with Manager of Rethink Crisis Intervention after it became clear that Volunteering was something they had on their agenda "to do" but they had not actioned this. We have had regular meetings supporting them to develop their policies and procedures and role descriptions and at the same time deciding where responsibilities lay for each organisation for example with CRB's, supervision etc.

During this last quarter this work and effort has come to fruition and we have been able to refer 2 Volunteers for Placement with them. It felt very much as if Rethink were moving forward with trepidation in their first experience of using Volunteers.

The outcome has been very positive – one Volunteer has moved from befriending to co-facilitating group work and now is capable and trusted to have her own clients allocated to her. Now the Rethink Manager is asking to be involved with each group of Volunteers as they complete their training so that she can gradually develop a band of volunteers to enhance their service delivery.

A knock on effect of this is that Rethink partners with TONIC, a unique service that provides practical and emotional support to carers and cared for in the Doncaster area to promote carers wellbeing and offer respite which will ultimately enable them to continue to care and the clients to be cared for in an appropriate manner supporting the emotional wellbeing of both parties.

The Rethink Manager has been given responsibility for TONIC so she is now interested in expanding the Volunteer arrangement through to TONIC as well.

This demonstrates the wider impact of the project on other voluntary organisation, and the potential for further development. There are other examples of women who have attended the project going on to use their increased capacity in local communities to make a difference e.g., a support group for single mums, a local group for those affected by welfare changes and development of a budgeting group, and engagement in other opportunities.

The impact of increased skills in the women is also being felt in other services with professionals commenting on increased confidence from BAME women in asking questions and being more engaged in conversations.

The emphasis here is on women identifying where they can help and make an impact and taking the initiative in setting these groups up and running them. This rolling out of impact not only has a positive effect on the women but also on the wider community.

Future sustainability

The programme manager is working with centres to plan for the future of the project and look at the way forward. All of the centres are looking at ways of sustaining all or part of the project with bids being developed in consortia. This effort is part of the wider repositioning taking place in the voluntary sector as organisations are seeking collaboration with others to bid for larger scale locally based projects. It is likely that the work undertaken on partnership building will pay dividends in developing these groups and embedding a professional structure to volunteering across the sector, however this may not be the case in every centre.

Where difficulties may lie in this model of partnership working for future sustainability is in the competing agendas of some of the organisations, for example in Wolverhampton they have been working successfully with Healthy Minds but there is a worry that as Healthy Minds expands its counselling offer they will see Platform51 as a competitor rather than a partner. In Knowsley much of the work on partnership building will be lost as it took place outside the centre in an area where they no longer work. They were also finding it hard to include the project in the consortium approaches that they were developing.

In Nottingham partnerships are already paying off with the development of a breast feeding mentoring programme written by the worker, with accreditation through the project. This suggests a willingness to look around the project at how it can be aligned with other local developments.

The business development team of Changing Lives is now working with the centres to look at what can be sustained and go for future funding. This ranges from the counselling service to aspects of the model but with more flexible entry between Tiers. There is also a plan to develop an information sheet for funders to spread the learning from the project.

Impact on platform51/Changing Lives

The project was designed to not only have an effect on the women volunteers but also to help to develop the organisation. These developments have taken place at the individual centre level as well as across the organisation.

The overall organisational changes that have been attributed to the project include:

- Development of the NOCN standardised accreditation and delivery across all centres which will be taken forward.
- Application for an Investors in Volunteers kite mark across the organisation.
- Development of a volunteer policy for Platform51 acknowledging the role of the active user within the centre including pathways from counselling to Tier 1 or vice versa.
- Standardised volunteering policies across the organisation which promote good practice in volunteering.
- Development of a delivery model that works in terms of engaging hard to reach marginalised women and offering positive progression.
- Development of delivery workbooks for marginalised groups such as offenders, learning disability which provides a structured learning experience.
- Achievement of targets for a national project that focusses on vulnerable women and their engagement.
- Development of counselling services across 4 centres with national systems and procedures.

Whilst for specific centres the following has been achieved:

- Open days to encourage organisations with volunteering opportunities to attend the centre for the organisations to meet the volunteers and for the volunteers to talk with them about the opportunities available.
- Joint ventures with CVS Doncaster on promoting volunteering across the Borough. Along with other work on developing links with the CCG and Council, and across the voluntary sector.
- More professional support for volunteers within the organisations including a greater engagement from the women involved. This has also increased confidence in the staff team, to for example engage in community issues.
- Development of new services to offer opportunities for volunteering, that also offer new opportunities for others e.g., the Saheli girls group and a group for women with learning disabilities in Doncaster and the pre level 1 group in Wolverhampton
- Working with partners to customise the course for new applications such as the breast feeding support work in Nottingham.
- Increased profile of Platform51 across the Borough and reputation as a provider of a volunteers with a professional training.
- An increased profile on volunteering across the Borough as other organisations can see the benefits of volunteering and start to offer placements.

- An increase in community cohesions as BAME women are encouraged to take on opportunities and engage in the community.
- Accreditation to other volunteers on projects that work alongside the WVfH
- Staff development including access to training on volunteering
- Development of new partnerships in new areas.
- Achievement of project targets in most areas of the project.

Opportunities for further development include:

- Centres working on internal evaluations and learning for example Wolverhampton have instigated action plans to respond to issues raised, and Knowsley cited the monthly reports as an opportunity for reflection.
- Recognition from managers and staff of their influence on developing the project and pushing it, and the opportunity to gain as much as possible from it.
- Shared learning of good practice across the centres and with stakeholders, and opportunities for shared celebrations.
- Marketing the project nationally and pushing forward the volunteering agenda and the model for engagement of hard to reach groups.
- Pushing the project on a strategic level and widening the strategic impact, thereby opening up opportunities for women and forwarding the volunteering agenda.

The project has added additional value to volunteering in terms of:

- Engagement with vulnerable groups who do not normally volunteer including offenders, BAME women those with mental health and substance misuse problems.
- Adapting the course to meet the needs of the women responding to feedback and reflection.
- Trying different venues in order to access more women, offer opportunities for engagement and to achieve targets.
- Flexible delivery to allow women time to share experiences and seek support, as well as catch up when sessions were missed.
- Focussing on the skills the women brought from their own experience and looking at the value this could add to a volunteering role.
- Development of solutions to problems experienced in the course including the focus on Platform 51.
- A holistic approach to learning including using experiences and working at the women's pace to meet her needs.
- Removing barriers to engagement experienced by women such as childcare, bus fares, and access to courses.
- Staff experience and dedication in engaging and working with women to achieve at Tier 1 and 2 and support the women into volunteering.

- Building of peer networks between women from different backgrounds and breaking down barriers.
- Achieving on-going commitment from Changing Lives to the project and its future.
- Delivery of women only counselling within a new service that offered not only a service to women but also a placement to students.
- Creating a women only space where women can seek counselling and allowing them to face their difficulties.
- Developing women's self esteem and enabling them to take first steps in moving on with their lives, whether that be to further education, volunteering or into employment.
- Having a wider impact on communities both through transferring knowledge and through developing skills that the women can use locally.
- Changing attitudes as women meet each other and overcome the barriers of age, race and sexuality.
- Cascading of skills and knowledge on volunteering into placement, challenging practice and offering improvements when necessary.
- Expanding the volunteer pool available and allowing other voluntary sectors to learn from the Platform51 experience and to grow in turn.
- Partnership building at the local level increasing the local profile of Platform51 and opportunities for funding.
- Responding to the changing situation in the statutory sector by renew partnerships and making new links when required.

Conclusion

As a project whose aim was to engage women from vulnerable groups into volunteering the project has done well in achieving on targets. It has achieved these for less than the accepted cost of engaging groups. Centres have at times overachieved on targets, particularly for recruitment and level 1. Where centres have struggled is in moving women into volunteering and into placements. There have been some innovation from individual centres to help them achieve here, with for example Nottingham combining Tier 1 and 2, and Wolverhampton offering outreach courses to other voluntary sector organisations. This innovation by individual centres is an important aspect of the course and suggests that the model could be replicated elsewhere whilst allowing for individual organisational priorities.

The setting up of counselling services in areas where they were previously missing has added to the local offer and helped develop partnerships with both referring agencies and educational establishments. It has also increased the organisational skill base at the centres. That the volunteer counsellors outlined the professionalism of the organisation and the support they received is notable.

This is therefore considered a viable model for engaging vulnerable women into volunteering. Consideration should be given to the optimum course configuration for the women involved, whether that be offering one course across Tier 1 and 2 or looking at other configurations. Women thought that the course itself would be suitable for other groups, including men. It is also worth noting that the whole model including the support and the counselling presents a way to professionalise volunteering and build in progression that is appreciated by both women and external stakeholders.

The commitment by Changing Lives to the future of the project suggests that the course will continue. There has also been long lasting changing in terms of the processes and structures put in place at Changing Lives and professionalization and standardisation of volunteering across the organisation. Notable changes have also been made in women's lives with re-engagement occurring and steps being taken beyond the remit of the projected e.g., into work or on the way to university.

Appendix 1 – methodology

How we did the research

The previous interim report looked more at the setting up of the project and issues around creating a new programme within an existing organisation. For the final report we have built on the findings of the previous interim report with a specific focus on the impact of the project on women volunteers, community, Platform51 and partnership working. This focus is reflected in the method used and the information gathered through them.

1. Workshops

To inform the previous interim report a workshop session was held in each centre with those staff involved in the project. The aim of the session was to find out how the project was delivered in each of the centres and any issues arising. Data from these workshops was used in the interim report.

For the final report we repeated these workshop using the large project pathway created in the previous session. This allowed the attendees to identify what had changed over the year since the previous workshop and to discuss the reasons for this. It also allowed consideration on what might be sustained and any changes that were desirable. Specific areas covered in the discussion included:

- What is different and why?
- What is the same?
- What will stay?
- Where has there been long lasting impact?
- What is good practice?
- What are the lessons on monitoring and reporting?
- What are the lessons learnt?
- What worked well and less well?

A separate workshop was also held with the overall project manager which allowed her to take an overview of the work of the different centres and to reflect on the above questions across them.

Information from the workshops has been used to inform all sections of the report.

2. Focus groups

Alongside the workshops for the final report focus groups were undertaken with women who had attended the course or who were still attending it. The women were selected by the staff. Between 6 and 10 women attended each of the sessions.

The focus groups were undertaken slightly differently in each location depending on how they were set up. For example in Nottingham the session was run as a drop in, in Knowsley and Doncaster as a focus group with lunch provided and in Wolverhampton as part of a Tier 2 session. This resulted in some of the exercises being delivered in slightly different ways in different settings, however it is not thought that this has made a significant difference to the data collected as in each location the following were covered.

- A discussion and prioritising exercise on the course, and trainer including feelings before attending, during the course and plans for afterwards.
- A written exercise on the impact on the individual and community.
- A discussion on what would need to change to make the course suitable for men – and what made it suitable for women.

The session allowed the women to reflect back on the course and the steps that they might take next.

Information from the sessions has been used to inform the section on the impact on women.

3. Interviews with stakeholders

For both the interim and final reports interviews were undertaken with stakeholders. Stakeholders were selected by the staff from each of the centres. These stakeholders were chosen because of their links to the project either through commissioning, partnerships or placements. Around 20 telephone interviews were conducted for the interim report and another 20 for the final report. The majority of these interviewees were different reflecting not only the development of new partnerships but also changes in personnel in organisations where links had been made previously.

The focus of the interviews was on:

- their connection to the WVfH (Women Volunteers for Health) project and knowledge of it including the impact of it on what they do and volunteers and good practice
- any difficulties in setting up or working with the programme
- contribution to innovation in volunteering and long lasting change
- the Unique Selling Point of WVIH and how this differs to other programmes.

Information from the stakeholder interviews is used in the sections on partnership working and women.

4. Desk review

To gain insight into the progress of the project over the period of delivery the annual and quarterly reports over the period of the project were reviewed. These included reports from each of the centres and the collated reports for the programme managers.

Data on achievements were extracted from the reports and have been reproduced here.

The information from this review is included in the report in the section on administration, targets and women.

5. Diaries

All of those involved in the project were asked to complete weekly diaries for the period September to December in 2012 and 2013. The diaries were designed to capture the most significant thing that had occurred in the last week whether that be directly related to an individual, to a course or to the admin attached to the project. In the first year 36 diaries were completed, in the second year 28.

The dairies proved difficult for some to complete, in particular there was a low response rate from managers. This could have led to a bias towards more hands on experiences with women, however this has not been the case. More consideration of this issue is to be found in the section on the model.

Information from the diaries is used in the section on the model.

6. Counsellor interviews

It was decided by the project manager that more attention needed to be paid to the role of the volunteer counsellors as part of the project evaluation in the second year. To address this telephone interviews were conducted with the four counsellor managers and with 6 volunteer counsellors.

In addition the counsellor feedback form for women attending counselling was reviewed and changes made to reflect the needs of the evaluation. Counsellor managers were asked to return a summary of these for inclusion in the evaluation. Forms from 3 of the 4 centres were collated by the centres and reviewed.

Information from the counsellor interviews were used in the section on counselling.