Changing Times: Women’s organisations in Newcastle

A study of the current challenges for women’s voluntary organisations

Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service

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Newcastle CVS would like to thank the contributing organisations for their help and openness:

Angelou Centre
Millin Centre
Newcastle Women’s aid
NIWE Eating Distress
North East Women’s Network
Regional Refugee Forum
Riverside Community Health Project
Them Wifies
Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre
Tyneside Women’s Health
West End Women and Girls

Thank you also to Sue Robson, from the North East Women’s Network, for discussing the context and focus in the initial stage of the work.
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Executive Summary

There are many strengths in women’s organisations and women’s work in Newcastle. There is no doubt that women only and girls only space develops that work and is well used, including in mixed/generic organisations. A number of organisations noted the need for that neutral provision that enables women to access support and advice on sensitive issues. A number of the organisations use lateral mechanisms to involve women and make them feel comfortable.

Many use group work to support women and it was referred to in several conversations as being more effective than one to one work. Some women’s organisations felt that group work was not truly understood by commissioners and that to work properly, a group needs women members who are not in crisis.

There were numerous instances of referrals from the statutory sector to women’s projects because of the recognition of expertise, specialist approach and ‘reach’.

At the same time there are many potential threats to this work with women in Newcastle. There is a lack of recognition of the value of work with women in commissioning, services and in the attitudes of men in some communities. The closure of some women’s groups, plus the commercial pressures to become generalist and offer services to men as well, could lead to the disappearance of women friendly space.

The external economic environment is an added pressure. Women’s organisations are finding the demand for their services and the demand for help in other areas of work is increasing, with some services becoming more short term. All of the women’s organisations have loose links and interdependencies on other local voluntary and community groups and there is a strong web of joint work with other voluntary and community groups, which has for many years been building a safety net for communities. Many groups expressed concern of a potential domino effect of losing some organisations and projects.

Newcastle agencies regularly question if people from outside Newcastle are using more than their ‘share’ of the service. This is likely to worsen in the current economic climate. Competition sits uneasily with many of the women’s organisations, who feel marginalised, and vulnerable. Many groups do not want to expand and grow; they want to remain locally run. But often this is not valued by procurement teams and by the competitive market system. They are not seen as local assets to be nurtured. The disappearance of campaigning work was referred to several times.

Changing attitude and communities also highlight some areas of concern, for instance younger women and girls seem more likely to believe that abuse is a normal part of life. Also, women from some asylum seeker and refugee communities have no women’s space or support to interact.
The voluntary sector in Newcastle in 2012

Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) is the infrastructure organisation for the voluntary and community sector in Newcastle. As well as supporting and developing voluntary and community organisations, it offers opportunities for networking and involvement and tries to reflect and represent the views of the voluntary and community sector. It does this to give organisations a voice and opportunities to influence decision-making. As part of its representation role Newcastle CVS carries out research and studies to find out what exactly is happening in the sector, the views and experiences of its members and what life is like for them in order to influence decision-making.

In 2010 Newcastle CVS published The State of the Sector which looked at the position of the voluntary and community sector in Newcastle in order to examine the local impact of the economic downturn and social policy changes (Reference 1). It continued this work in 2011 by working with VONNE (Voluntary Organisations’ Network North East) to publishing Thriving or Surviving in July 2011 which tracked the impact of the spending cuts in the North East’s third sector (Reference 2). This included four case studies from Newcastle organisations to highlight their particular concerns. In February 2012 it worked with VONNE to publish Surviving or Thriving in Newcastle which tracked the impact of the spending cuts on 53 organisations in Newcastle and included five case studies (Reference 3). Newcastle CVS also worked with Judith Green, who was commissioned by Unison to narrate the stories of 31 organisations and what happened to them in 2011 (Reference 4).

This research and the evidence from elsewhere, highlighted the ‘perfect storm’ for the voluntary and community sector in Newcastle. There is a higher reliance by North East organisations on public sector funding, which means as the public sector faces substantial cuts as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review, there is a higher level of cuts to North East organisations (Reference 5). In the North East, 49% of the income of charities is from statutory sources; compared to 38% for the UK. The Ipsos Mori research from 320 charities and social enterprises in Newcastle in 2010 indicated that 48% of the respondents received funding in the form of a grant and 30% received income in the form of a contract from the public sector (Reference 6).

In 2010 the Working Neighbourhood Fund was £9.3 million in Newcastle, and funded around £6.3 million of voluntary sector projects. The Supporting People grant was £16.3 million in 2010; last year this was £9.83 million, a 39% cut in funding. In 2010 the Area Based Grant was worth £13.4 million for Newcastle; a small element of this went into new grant aid streams, but the majority was lost. This reduction in central government grant was particularly devastating for the voluntary and community sector. The new Work Programme schemes introduced in July 2011 are run locally by Avanta and Ingeus as prime providers, with very little (if any) work going to the voluntary sector.
The demands on grant making organisations have grown, with several finding it difficult to deal with the number of applicants and taking longer to make decisions. There is also a downturn in individual giving and company giving.

Newcastle Primary Care Trust (PCT) invests around £5 million into the voluntary and community sector. The majority of this goes to the two hospices, a mental health charity and a health development charity to provide services. Around 35 Newcastle voluntary organisations receive funding from the PCT to deliver services. There are concerns that the move towards Clinical Commissioning Groups, larger clinical support units and the cuts of £20 billion from the NHS in the next four years, will see the loss of a significant amount of funding.

Newcastle Council invested £46.3 million into the voluntary and community sector in 2011; the majority of this funding was used to deliver adult and children’s social care services. The council had to make cuts of £43 million in 2011 and will be making around £30 million of cuts in 2012 due to the loss of Government Grant and the changes to the formula funding and weighting. The impact of future changes to the Business Rate isn’t clear yet. The council is predicting further cuts of £55 million over the next two years.

At the same time, research has shown that the demand for services is increasing with 57% of the organisations asked (in January 2012) noting an increase in demand for their services. This is hardly surprising as people need somewhere to go in a time of crisis and with a loss or decrease in statutory services. From the information Newcastle CVS gathered from its members there appeared to be certain types of organisations which were experiencing particular problems. Often these were organisations who gave advice (and this was before the impending cuts to the Legal Aid budget), organisations that worked with children and young people (a number of these were going through contracting processes), services that supported people from black and minority ethnic communities (a lot of central government support had gone) and organisations that worked with women.

Newcastle has a complex and well developed voluntary and community sector, with around 2,500 organisations and groups. Historically this has been well supported by the public sector and certain interest groups have flourished. Over the last thirty years a number of organisations that worked only with women have developed, and a number of community organisations also established women’s projects. Newcastle CVS decided to carry out a small study with ten local women’s organisations and women’s groups to find out what exactly was happening in their world.
Life for women in 2012

Research undertaken recently by the Fawcett Society and the Women’s Budget Group illustrates that women are being particularly affected by the economic downturn. Female unemployment is at a 23 year high, with 1.1 million women out of work in December 2011; not least because two out of three jobs in the public sector are held by women. More than 70% of the £18 billion cuts to social security and welfare will fall on women. On average, 20% of the female wage consists of benefits to compensate for the low wages associated with female-dominated sectors such as care and retail; benefits make up only 10% of the male wage. There have also been reductions in childcare support making it more difficult for women to work. The introduction of Universal Credit in 2013 will create further disincentives. Larger numbers of women are taking lower status and lower paid work out of necessity, and an increasing number are taking part time jobs. For those in work, the gender pay gap in the private sector, with women earning around 18% less, is double that of the public sector, around 9%.

Robson and McGuiness compare poverty in Britain now to the early 20th century (Reference 7). They particularly note the number of homeless households headed by a woman (92%), the number of older women living below the poverty line (mainly due to historic differences in pension rights), the wider gender pay gap in the North East and the new position of women as “the prime carer and manager of the home as well as main wage-earner in the family”. In their discussions on women’s voluntary organisations, Robson and McGuiness note that “the women’s sector is the legacy of the women’s liberation movement and feminism. It has been responsible for bringing about significant gender-equality changes in legislation, policy and public perceptions. Advocating and campaigning on behalf of the women they work with remains an important role of women’s organisations.”

The recent work done by the North East Women’s Network in December 2011, demonstrated that there was an increase in the number of women’s voluntary and community organisations reporting a decrease in income from the previous two years (from 20% to 60%) (Reference 8). It also noted that women’s organisations were trying to minimise the impact of the cuts by reducing staff hours and focusing on core business at the expense of networking, researching and campaigning. This reflects the national position highlighted within the work of the Women’s Resource Centre (Reference 9).

Women are strongly linked to voluntary and community organisations with 68% of the voluntary sector workforce being female. There is an under-representation of women at the higher managerial/professional level. Only 10% of women working in the sector reached the highest levels, compared to 20% of men.
Methodology

Pam Jobbins from Newcastle CVS, who has worked with many of these groups over the years, went to talk to staff about what was happening; the key issues for them; to identify common threads and concerns and to look at what would happen next. Pam asked questions about dedicated women’s space, women who use the services, changing attitudes, demand, style of work, funding and commissioning, collaboration and partnerships, competition, referrals, and the future.

Several of the organisations had contributed to recent surveys and research. Given the numbers of the organisations contacted, it was felt more appropriate to use a qualitative approach and focus on what was being said, rather than carrying out quantitative research.

Sally Young wrote the policy and recent research framework.

Thanks

Thanks to Sue Robson, from the North East Women’s Network for discussing the context and focus in the initial stage of the work.

Contributing organisations

Angelou Centre
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Tyneside Women's Health
West End Women and Girls
Women’s groups in Newcastle

hear something once, it’s noted
hear something twice; it’s of interest to us
hear it three times and it is evidence

Ofsted safeguarding inspector

Women’s space

“For 33 years we have been working to the same principles although we’ve changed what we do.”

“It’s our 30 year anniversary.”

“Girls’ work is very important and used to be in the 80s; about education about feminism and politics, and feminist practice. Needs regional influence, girls’ work is off the agenda. Need to bring together.”

“Using the centre for women’s space; we’ve no dedicated resources but carved out.”

“Dads’ work is high profile, seen as important. We allocate resources to women while Sure Start allocates resources to Dads.”

“There is little work with adult mainstream women.”

“Young people’s work, girls work, is out of favour. Things not funded. Girls are referred from Pupil Referral Units, social workers, schools.”

“There’s no funding for women – do as part of other services such as Sure Start women’s groups.”

“The work with girls and young women, centered around issue based drama through Theatre Pie, has increasingly been hard to fund. Past sources of funding either no longer exist or are extremely difficult to access.”

From the conversations and as illustrated in some of the quotes, there is a general impression that access to women only or women friendly space, physical and emotional, is disappearing or becoming less.
There is a lack of recognition of the value of work with women (as women and not for another role) in commissioning some services and in the attitudes of men in some communities.

Commissioners may not have analysed spending in term of gender, as there seems to be some imbalances. For instance, there is local authority funding support for homeless children in mixed homeless provision, but from April 2012 not in women-only refuge provision.

The closure of some women’s groups, plus the commercial pressures to become generalist and offer services to men as well, could lead to the disappearance of women friendly space.

“Mental health services need more focus on women. A high proportion of female users using mental health services have domestic violence issues – how is it reflected?”

“There are issues about the physical space in services that are for men and women, for example in day centres most of the space is used by men. (Another service) tried to run a women’s service and said it didn’t work; I think they need to look at how they went about it. That is where we can help as women’s organisations. We could support services to be more women friendly and responsive to the needs of women.”

“We’ve had to change our mem and arts – from women victims to persons; and include perpetrators.”

For some organisations, having developed an expertise and specialist area of work, expanding their service enables them to meet changing demand.

“Would be great if we could offer a service for men. It’s hard for me as I’ve no answer where to send an initial enquiry. It’s difficult not offer therapeutic support. We do understand the strength in women only services for women.

“There are low numbers of men although it’s (eating distress) higher in younger men; it is a growing problem across the country. Young people will speak out more; there is an increasing pressure on how they look. And young men are more able to say and seek help.”

“The women with learning disabilities work with the Josephine project has been very successful. A pilot project using Josephine in North Tyneside identified the need for a similar approach working with men – Wifies is leading on this work and the creation of ‘Jack’ is in hand...the work with women and men will be kept separate because of the nature of the work. Interesting that there has been a lot of interest in the development of Jack!”
“The other mixed work we do is looking at young people and mental health issues based in Young Peoples Secure Units or in schools”.

Some services are used mainly by women but were not set up as women only services.

“It’s women that come and are interested; this year trial trading. We’re running workshops in March - for women in their own homes making things; have chance to come out and trade. If men use the courses, it’s for specific things e.g. food hygiene, or when there were asylum seekers from Angel Heights (now closed).”

“The percentage of men was 1% now it’s about 20%; it’s changed over the last few years.”

“With one group, I go and will talk to the whole group – I focus on the women. They do not want to be a constituted group on their own but they do want to do things, do activities.

While most established groups have developed a web presence in recent years, some new groups are web based from the start, such as Mamas Rise Up.

“They raise awareness of women raped, lost children, do campaigning not service delivery, marches, work with families, campaign on how many children raped, political climate how system fights against women. It’s hard to get united as different classifications of children in different countries; direct people to appropriate solicitors; say it’s okay to miss children; campaign here to raise awareness of what happens in their country.”

There is no doubt that women only and girls only space is developed and is well used, including in mixed/generic organisations. It would be interesting to find out whether the recent Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA) process, used by the public sector, makes this make this more likely to happen?

“Women want to do activities and most go to give input.”

One group held a session on tackling harassment and reporting crime with ARCH:

“The men were reporting crime, confidently speaking and saying what had happened to them, the women not confident to say what happened to them. That young people swear and shout at them, not reporting because they have to live there; not develop the skills to report. Women came in to the session at different times, sat in huddle – not speak out; accept it – things thrown, chased, go back to your country; over here. Until one man turned to the women and said you had something happened didn’t you and she says no it’s fine it doesn’t matter it’s nothing. The women sat there on the side of the room with all the
children crawling round their feet. ARCH asked what day it was, how many times, what week; the women did not have the capacity to say or read.”

“Women who seek asylum – in the day are in all the time, stuck in all the time – they become reclusive. There’s nowhere to socialise in the shared housing; no community rooms.”

“Lots of groups are struggling to meet, they have no funding for activities.”

The women who use women’s services

It is helpful to look at the women who use these dedicated services to see if they are the same groups that have traditionally used these services. Do the service users reflect the changing demographics in Newcastle?

The organisations asked noted the changing age profile of women who use these services, and believed this was due to raised awareness and improved services. There appears to be more women accessing crisis and support services at a younger age than previously. Additionally women with learning disabilities are accessing services now as part of living in the local community.

Newcastle city previously had a black and minority ethnic (BME) population of 5% for many years. This has changed, due in part to the dispersal of asylum seekers who were sent to Newcastle from many countries in Asia, Middle East and Africa, with higher numbers especially among children and younger adults. There are also growing settled Asian communities; plus an increase from European countries. This is particularly obvious in some of the traditional white working class areas of Newcastle. The other large growth in these communities is related to the relatively high numbers of overseas students at the two universities.

“If a woman is 30 or 40 she will have had an eating disorder problem for decades. She’s not told, muddled though, she’s got sorted out; people can be very afraid, very terrified of statutory services – they want to stay away. Hospital services have changed a lot now.”

“We would get more women from BME communities using the service if we went to local communities – we have had more funding in the past to develop proactive going out to for example Iranian communities, Asian communities in west end.”

“It is changing - small numbers of women are asylum seekers and refugees – it’s very difficult when women are in the process of seeking asylum to seek our help.”
“Recently we’ve had lots of mobility issues – maybe as a result of sexual violence and ill health.”

“Women with learning disabilities are using the service; the project to involve women with learning disabilities is now our core work; agencies know to refer now.”

“We are training to work with interpreters.”

“There are language issues – we cannot cover them all. You have to find ways round it like a sign saying come back Tuesday.”

“It’s an advantage the workers speak Arabic and French, plus Hindi and Bengali.”

“We work with all women including women with learning disabilities now. Women of all nationalities. Women who are not ready for further education, out of learning, not getting support.”

“The biggest impact of the changing population is in holiday schools; there’s most engagement with BME girls then, refugee and asylum seeker girls. Student support units in schools refer refugee and asylum seeker girls. There’s less (BME girls) on Thursday night groups because they are referred from Social Services mostly – less impact of the changing population.”

“One woman wants to work with people who have just been told they are HIV from a routine test at hospital now they are here. She wants to support women and show how it is ok; it’s not a death sentence. Support to women to have an everyday life, children.”

“There are still no significant numbers of BME staff; and no policy or managerial BME staff in areas where there are 30% BME children.”

“We started as a training organisation; women wanted to work and give children better future and increase their family income. Then there were more women’s projects; we complemented the others. Over the years they have gone, or only provide a defined service and are not campaigning.”

A number of organisations noted the need for neutral provision that enables women to access support and advice on sensitive issues such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), trafficking and domestic slavery.

A number of the organisations use lateral mechanisms to involve women and make them feel comfortable. Often food, literacy classes, and creative work are used as a vehicle and the focus that brings women together.
Changing attitudes

Women’s groups report that there are changing trends among the women using their services in some areas. Younger women seem more likely to believe that abuse is a normal part of life; while women from some asylum seeker and refugee communities have no women’s space to interact.

It appears abusive and controlling behaviour is entrenched and cultural, and still internalised by young women. Normalizing abusive behaviour increases the risk for young women who are already vulnerable from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly with a history of care, low self esteem, parental domestic violence. This vulnerability can easily be picked up by groomers/abusers.

“When we had one girls group, for young women from a particularly disadvantaged ethnic community, the men were waiting outside for ‘their’ women and wanted to be in the room; straight away there was pressure for it to be mixed.”

“We were supporting women from one community but the community association has no women on the board. It shows the importance of women’s work – women hold communities together. There’s no resources except made by us.”

“All the women’s refugee groups raise issues of domestic violence and no recourse.”

-Increasing numbers of women at a young age, 17-19 age range, very young mams who come in because they’ve got to. They’ve totally normalised the abusive behaviour. It’s very challenging to tackle. A young mam is still a child. One 19 year old, not seeing the domestic violence as an issue, she has two young children now. Some young women have been to a MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) and they still don’t see it as an issue. “

“The young women, aged 14-16 on the YOT pilot accepted abusive relationships as normal.”

“Men and families are using the two year rule; they do not let women apply for the right visa/residence and it’s leading to women being classed as over-stayers and with no recourse.”

Sometimes individual women have campaigned and fought to have a recognised place on the board of trustees or management committee.

“The (name) community organisation has no women’s groups but lots of women are involved because of (x) being the lead person, she’s a conduit for information; the women are active.”
Increasing demand

It will be no surprise that women’s organisations, in common with others in the voluntary and community sector, are finding the demand for their services and the demand for help in other areas of work increasing.

“Concern that complementary services are closing and so the demand will increase exponentially and there’s pressure to do other services.”

“We’re overwhelmed by case work – supporting women in crisis, we can’t lift our heads to do more strategic work. The numbers are greater than ever – needs presenting. How you provide more with less. How can you ensure your voice is heard in networks? Do the networks ever focus on women?”

“The situation for women individually is getting harder; the demand is increasing on women’s services; women are bearing the brunt.”

“Newcastle is under-resourced for its population size anyway.”

“More women from Newcastle are using the service.”

“Numbers are up, women have just started coming in… from all over the city”

“Two hundred women came in on Wednesday morning; with a lot of Libyan and Bengali women.”

“It’s positive and a challenge – more people are using the service, with more and more complex problems. More self referrals. All mainly self referral. They have long term difficulties – always been but with cuts, the atmosphere, rationing of health services – women sent from pillar to post; more mental health issues. It’s more difficult for all the more psychological therapies. It’s good but. But challenging. I’m the only person doing new referrals in the office.”

“We are doing additional work – which is not funded.”

The demand on services was already increasing for some organisations; there is a rapid increase now due to the worsening situation for women.

“Day time enquiries increasing.”

“We see more women; increasing numbers of women with more complex mental health referrals from GPs, mental health staff, generic counsellors.”

“Increasing numbers of women at a young age, 17-19 age range, very young mums.”
“The demands going up, hugely for ESOL (English as a Second Language) courses, for domestic violence, about elders, caring.”

“The pressures are changing – some financial and changes in other services people are getting. There’s more awareness of what needed but there’s only short term services, or people are passed form one place to another.”

**Style of work: Group work or one to one**

Many women’s organisations use group work to support women and it was referred to in several conversations. Some felt that group work was not truly understood by commissioners; the use of groups, the mutual and peer support that is generated, and that it can be more effective and longer lasting than if provided by a worker.

The need for a balanced group came up several times. That to work properly, a group needs women members who are not in crisis. This is problematic as often, funding is only for targeted support which militates against this mixed approach.

“There is more targeting to individuals, and brief interventions mean groups are not supported.”

“It’s not good to run a group with all in crisis.”

“Older women help young women with general advice; but the funding is for women with children under 5. Informal mentoring comes out of group work.”

In instances where there was a lack of group work practice and skilled facilitation, it led to negative situations and women were not enabled or supported to play an active part in the community. There is a potential issue that in newer refugee communities women are not being brought together in groups.

Sometimes one to one work is a response to the demand from women due to the nature of the issues being confronted or due to community control.

“More Bangladeshi young women are isolated in their homes; we do more home visits in this area.”

“Now women do not know who to trust – so they come in only one or two at a time not in groups. Trafficked women are coerced, coming from Manchester, they lack capacity.”

Sometimes women need more support than one to one services can offer and find it through group work. It has been noted already that the increase in brief
interventions and funding for targeted work means that group work is less funded.

“All of our work is group work. Some women have a counsellor – they still want something that is less statutory. They want to be with other women because they feel alone with it.”

“Women’s groups work best when asking and saying things of each other – learning, other experience leading women to reflect on their own and feel positive. There are two counsellors in every group – they still work best when the women are doing peer support and understanding; it’s how women work, the style of women.”

“Some women need a social activity to be the focus as they don’t want to jump into support groups straight away.”

Generic services can increase access for women in a non-stigmatising way, and this is a safe approach for sensitive work such as addressing domestic violence and abuse.

**Funding and commissioning**

The strong impression given is that all of the organisations, including those doing well financially next year, are only precariously afloat on a choppy sea fighting strong currents and an unpredictable undertow.

“At this moment in time (three months before the start of the next financial year) one out of eight funders have confirmed funding and that is a 50% cut.”

“We’re on a knife edge. There is a deficit at this point – where can we find a quick few thousand pounds?” (Two months later the whole funding for the following year was secured.)

“We have no reserves; no room for risk.”

“A lot of groups are floundering.”

“We have half of the funds for next year – in the circumstances we’re doing as well as we could.” (A month before then financial year begins.)

“Trusts’ income is down.”

“This work has been funded in the past by EIG (Early Intervention Grant) and Comic Relief; we’ve another three year Comic Relief funding for this work.”
The funding climate means that in some communities women are not developing groups.

“A lot of women are not setting up groups because they have heard from others it’s hard to access funding or for a sub group of existing groups on women’s issues.”

“For example, one community group in the north east – most meet in Newcastle; women who are active; the ladies would like to know how they can take more responsibility for their health; who can help with fitness, the cooking side, what to do in school holidays.”

A number of organisations noted the difficulties in negotiating funding from various statutory authorities. Often organisations need funding for separate projects as well as core funding. Sometimes the statutory agency has a suspicion that they are paying for something that is being funded from elsewhere; they believe the amount they pay is the unit cost. Often contract managers are used to dealing with a complete tender and the unit cost for that work; they might not have the experience of working with charities. They might not appreciate they are paying a fraction of the true cost of the work where many groups have used the statutory funding as ‘leverage’.

“We have Newcastle Fund money; it gives a bedrock to build on.”

“We provide domestic abuse services and are partly contracted by Newcastle Commissioning Services Adult Directorate. Contracts are currently being issued for three months at a time as outreach domestic abuse services are due to be tendered by Oct 2012. But the interim contracts have been in place now for over two years.”

“Three month interim contracts – doesn’t look good for other funders. Adult and Culture Services have been intending to go to procurement for approx two years now – they aim to by October. There has been no inflation to contract pricing since 2003. Only pay us for two thirds outreach (of a full time post). Not good for staff on three monthly contracts, morale is low.”

“Last year we were moved out of Newcastle Fund to contract for the same amount but just for one year.”

“Our application to Newcastle Fund to support work with children was unsuccessful. We’re committed to early intervention trying to tackle the effects of domestic violence on the children. We’re disappointed.”

We offer structured play which complements the support to women. We’ve always had a small contribution from Newcastle City Council; £10,000 for a £40,000 service; it’s not just structured play it is positive parenting, safeguarding,
representing families, bridging gaps, YOT, schools. Look how we subsidise (statutory) services; everything is fundraised for. We rose to the challenge and done the work”.

“Historically we relied on charitable funds – we’re going back to that.”

Geographical boundaries

Often the way that people want to use services does not relate to statutory authority boundaries. For example, voluntary and community groups that are Tyneside-wide are mostly funded by the separate local authorities or the PCT for clients from their area. Newcastle agencies regularly question if people from outside Newcastle are using more than their ‘share’ of the service, even where they are not paying the full amount for Newcastle residents.

“Newcastle women use 30-40% of the service but the Newcastle PCT does not cover that; we feel that Newcastle women wouldn’t go outside Newcastle.”

“We feel vulnerable because women from other areas use the service; yet if we went out of the city Newcastle women wouldn't travel out of the city.”

Transport routes also play a part; some Newcastle women find it easier to use services just over the river in Gateshead than to travel from one side of Newcastle to another.

Collaboration, consortia and partnerships

Women’s groups have various views about partnerships and collaboration. These have been informed by their direct experience and approach to other organisations. Some work with or have formal partnerships with regional or national organisations, and some are involved in support networks rather than formal partnerships. All have loose links and interdependencies on other local voluntary and community groups.

For example, one group was working on local collaboration.

“We’re building a local bid. we look after each other. Go on each other’s management committees. But there’s nothing to apply to that is locality based.” (for funding)

“I really like the partnership work, with Edible Elswick, Chat Shop, Fairshare, giving hampers for the elderly and first time tenants. Fantastic collaboration it includes Your Homes Newcastle, preventing obesity fund. We’re doing mixed gendered work in Elswick School.”
“We work with other workers, who we’ve known for years, as they move around the sector.”

“We are buying in services from other organisations to support the work, as our core work is not youth work.”

“Partnerships – little ones will not survive. But bigger organisations in a partnership may not have the same ethos. Our experience of partnership was that the contract price was the same in it as not. Is it safer for the local authority?”

“Other partnerships not big in money: the pilot with the YOT worked well. It was a four week programme.”

“Partnership work takes more work. Makes the budget spread thinner. For a partnership – if there is a very different focus in another provider, then it’s successful. If the other group is too similar and work in a particular way – it might not. More bother than having more workers. X said they were banging on about partnerships at the supplier event. Don’t know what they think people will bring.”

It is clear there is a strong web of joint work with other voluntary and community groups, which has for many years been building a safety net for communities. This is known about and used within the voluntary and community sector but there is no picture of it; it is not articulated and so possibly not recognised by the statutory sector.

Many groups expressed concern of the domino effect of losing some organisations and projects. This would have a major impact on other areas of support and services, and are the unintended consequences of reducing or targeting funding.

Several groups are embedded in Newcastle and spoke about women now using their services who used their services as children.

“Some were in the refuge as children.”

“Parents come who came as children.”

Some organisations work with others in the same field that are not women only, rather than with women’s organisations working in a different field.

“The therapeutic approach has similar things to think about in relation to ethics.”

“Women’s organisations also work with mental health, domestic violence, and have to penetrate other networks. There’s no women’s network to penetrate.”
Other examples of joint work identified included drama and art; joint training, developing a carers group with the Carers Centre, running groups in other organisations’ premises, partnership youth work, and being paid by another voluntary organisation to deliver work in local areas.

“Monthly drop in with NECA / Ron Eager house. Lots of joint working.”

Statutory sector referrals

Some groups noted that the statutory sector used their premises to enable women to access their services, though often without financial support. There were numerous instances of referrals from the statutory sector to women’s projects because of the recognition of expertise, specialist approach and ‘reach’.

Joint work with the statutory sector included working with schools, Sure Start, probation, adult care, children’s services, the police, the fire service, the youth service, Your Homes Newcastle, other housing providers, NTW NHS Trust, Community Psychiatric Nurses, community development workers and regeneration staff.

“We run contact sessions for parents and their children in care.”

“Probation uses the building to sign on licence – it brings in another group of women and activities that can be open to all women.”

“There is increased demand for us to go to the team briefings.”

“We’re trying to build work with GPs and Community Mental Health Team.”

“We’ve good links with services on ground; women come from Community Psychiatric Nurses, health trainers, GPs.”

“Referrals are haphazard. Several from one nurse who understood; there’s others with no referrals.”

Competition

Competition sits uneasily with many of the women’s organisations, who feel marginalised, threatened and vulnerable, and are aware that they are not well understood or valued by commissioners.

“(Name of large organisation) is encroaching, scooping up everything – we see it as a social enterprise out to get anything.”
“New kids on the block, have national monies.”

“We know we’ve not done a good job of selling ourselves; not able to compete with the bigger fish.”

“Non–specialised services are awarded large sums of money to provide services, when there is already a specialist service. It feels messy in Newcastle in last couple of years and there is not the support to maintain what we’ve got.”

“New Deal funded other projects.”

“We’re specialist – a bit protected – it feels if we don’t do it now – we’ll loose chance – never had spare capacity – if we don’t do it now we’ll feel the pressure of competition.”

“There’s competition and duplication from other groups like arranging the same session at the same time – we can only see it as deliberate.”

“Big organisations – while they have their own pressure – they can make a big move and bid for pieces of work.”

“We respond to local need and then seek funding to meet it. Other larger one is a quality service delivering to the government agenda.”

Expansion and sustainability

Many groups do not want to expand and grow; they want to remain locally run with a size and structure that their management committee can manage. But often this is not valued by procurement teams and the competitive market system. They are not seen as local assets to be nurtured.

“We don’t want to grow. The Management committee doesn’t. It means we cannot apply for project funding in case we get it and double; we can manage the staff now.”

One organisation that has expanded to meet the growing demand for its services to women now finds that it means more fundraising is required.

“It’s a problem because we’ve grown and had to sustain a new level so it’s competitive; we struggle to find the funds.”

“We don’t do much campaigning, there’s not much, lack of time. We prioritise individuals with needs and preventative work. It would be a strength if we could campaign.”
Conclusions

Like many voluntary and community organisations in Newcastle, women’s organisations are suffering with the loss of income and the growing demands for their services. They also feel that many commissioners don’t really understand the special value of their work and the emphasis is on cost (rather than value).

Women only and girls only space develops and is well used, including in mixed/generic organisations. It would be interesting to find out whether the recent Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA) process, used by the public sector, makes this more likely to happen?

Several organisations noted the pressure to provide services for men, but felt this could detract from their principles and would change what they did and why they worked in a particular way.

A particular problem raised by several organisations was the value of group work and the concerns that this wasn’t appreciated and understood by commissioners. For group work to be really effective, it needed a balanced group, not just women in crisis. Peer support approaches work particularly well amongst women.

Often non-threatening courses and events around food, or language or literacy lessons, could be attractive to women who had different problems, but needed to find a safe route into organisations.

There was a greater emphasis on service delivery, at the expense of campaigning, research, networking and policy work.

The women’s organisations tended to feel part of the whole system and were more likely to be interdependent on others. The current contractual climate put organisations into opposition and made them less likely to cooperate; this went against the principles of several groups.

There was a definite and indeed growing need for women only space and women only services.

A growing number of younger women and girls appear to believe that abusive and controlling behaviour is normal and acceptable.

Women’s organisations have responded well to the challenge of the rapidly changing demographics in Newcastle in making their services accessible. But there are few new women’s groups developing and there is insufficient facilitated support to enable women in the newer communities to develop groups in response to their needs. There is a need for facilitated support for women from minority ethnic communities; whether newer arrivals or from settled communities – this not always recognised or welcomed within their communities.
Contributing organisations

The contributing organisations can all be found on the Newcastle CVS online database. The purpose of each organisation, taken from the database, is set out below. To find out more visit the Newcastle CVS database https://www.vcconnectsystem.org.uk/newcastleonlinedirectory/Home.aspx

Angelou Centre a BAME-led women's organisation established in 1993 to advance economic inclusion for women excluded due to disadvantages of race and gender in the north east. http://www.angelou-centre.org.uk/

Millin Centre is a community centre which provides training, education and recreational activities for local people in the west end of Newcastle. http://www.millincentre.co.uk/

Newcastle Women’s Aid provides emergency temporary refuge accommodation, advice and support to female victims of domestic violence/abuse...outreach services...and a children's support service. http://www.newcastlewomensaid.org.uk/

NIWE Eating Distress provides support to all those in the north east of England who are affected by eating disorders or eating distress...Our service complements existing provision and has been created in response to the needs people (particularly women) have identified. http://www.niwe.org.uk/

Regional Refugee Forum is to meet the needs and ideas identified by our members through reflections, evaluations and capacity building. We focus on promoting our members work on economic inclusion, health, and community safety through access, empowerment and advocacy. http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk/

Riverside Community Health Project ‘works according to community development principles to improve the health and well-being of disadvantaged communities by acting with others to ensure appropriate service provision’. http://www.riversidechp.co.uk/

Them Wifies enables women in the North East to lead healthier, more positive lives. We use creativity and the arts to work with people who face disadvantage and barriers... We currently deliver projects for women with learning disabilities, young people with mental health issues and vulnerable girls and young women. http://www.themwifies.org.uk/
**Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre:** Provision of counselling, support, helpline, training and volunteering opportunities within Newcastle. Direct services are for women aged 16 and over who have experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives. Support information and training offered to the public, family members/partners, supporters and professionals.

http://www.tynesidercc.org.uk/

**Tyneside Women’s Health.** A commitment to recovery focused practice aimed at empowering women to determine their own future •A commitment to service user involvement and participation, in Tyneside Women’s Health and the wider community •A commitment to acting in the best interests of women suffering mental distress •Working in a safe, women-only environment…

http://www.tynesidewomenshealth.org.uk/

**West End Women and Girls** is a registered charity which has been working with women and girls in the West End of Newcastle since 1981. The Centre provides support through group work where the members have the opportunity to meet, have fun, learn skills, look at issues relevant their lives and generally build confidence in a safe and supportive environment.

w.endwomencentre@btconnect.com
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(4) The Heart of the City: the Voluntary and Community Sector in Newcastle Newcastle City Branch of Unison March 2012

(5) Mapping Registered Third Sector Organisations in the North East Northern Rock Foundation Third Sector Trends Study August 2010

(6) National survey of charities and social enterprises Overall report – Newcastle upon Tyne Office for Civil Society Ipsos Mori 2011


(8) The Health of the Women’s Sector in the North East NE Women’s Network www.new.womens.net December 2011