

| Ref Code                       | Organisation Name               |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2022-11-YO73                   | Women Acting in Today's Society |
| Visit Date                     | Visited By                      |
| 28 <sup>th</sup> February 2023 | Victoria Southwell              |

**Overall aim of the funding**

To offer young women offenders affected by domestic abuse sustainable employability pathways that support access to employment and training opportunities, creating positive distractions to reducing risks of re-offending or re-entering harmful relationships in the future.

**Background to Organisation and governance**

Women Acting in Today's Society (WAITS) is a registered charity that was established in 1993. It is run by a CEO and employs eight other members of staff and has 25 volunteers. The CEO is supported by a board of eight active Trustees whose skills include finance, governance training, law, charities, housing, the criminal justice system, and HR. Trustees meet four times a year (this has recently changed from bi-monthly) and will hold additional meetings if needed. Task and Finish groups are set up as necessary and these tend to be focused in the following areas; audit, refuge development and fundraising. There is also an annual Trustee away day and at the next one risk will be a focus and the strategy will be reviewed and new goals developed.

WAITS has a strategic business plan that runs from 2020-23 and sets out where they want to be by the end of 2023. There are seven strategic objectives which are; empowerment of women through the delivery of excellent services, delivering high quality supported refuge accommodation, having a highly skilled workforce and achieving excellence in governance, having excellent ICT and business support services, being financially strong and delivering value for money, being environmentally friendly and influencing change, and raising awareness and understanding of issues relating to domestic abuse. These are linked to objective initiatives and goals with specific target achievement dates. These are reviewed every six months by Trustees.

**Leadership and expertise**

At the assessment I met with Marcia Lewinson (CEO) and Sally Bateman (Trustee and Treasurer). Three members of staff also joined the meeting for short periods.

Marcia joined WAITS in 1993 as a volunteer shortly after it was set up and became involved in WAITS community organising work. She has a business and admin background but is passionate about social justice, bringing about change and campaigning. She describes herself as a supportive leader who supports her staff to have the space to think about their interactions with clients and the impact this has on their long-term health. She tries to embed in her team not having fears around not knowing and is keen to learn and share her skills with others.

Sally has supported WAITS in various capacities since it was established. She used to do their book keeping and when she retired from this role joined the Trustee board and has previously served as Chair. She has a background in banking and then moved to the third sector working with charities to help them with their infrastructure and

financial processes. She is also a Trustee of four other charities which gives her an invaluable insight into other issues and charities.

### **Aims and Activities**

Women Acting in Today's Society has a vision of a society where women are safe, valued and fulfilled. They aim to achieve this through empowering women to make positive choices in their own lives. They run a number of projects to achieve this that include;

- A Community Integration Project that provides advocacy, floating support, employment support and counselling to women offenders and those at risk of offending or suffering domestic abuse.
- Women's Support and Development Project which provides domestic abuse support, advocacy, befriending, personal development and counselling and signposting to legal support.
- Three Refuges that provide a safe space for women fleeing domestic abuse where a woman can recoup, develop skills and confidence, receive support, befriending, personal development and counselling.
- Volunteering and Influencing Project that provides weekly workshops, donation collections and distribution, food parcels and recruitment and training of volunteers. Women are also supported to take part in decision making forums and consultations.

Annually WAITS has around 300 women on their case load at any one time and respond to around 400 phone calls a year requesting help.

### **Safeguarding**

WAITS has both a Children and a Vulnerable Adults policy to support their approach to safeguarding. These documents both have clear diagrams at the beginning of them that map out the process that needs to be followed if a staff member has a concern about a client. The policy states that the Nominated Officer is the CEO and the Deputy is the Operations manager. Due to the vulnerable nature of the women that WAITS engage with Safeguarding is a core part of their work and awareness of this runs through all that they do.

Levels of staff training are high and regularly refreshed. Good partnership working is also in place to ensure that both clients and staff receive the support that they need. WAITS work with women who are considered to be low to medium risk but come across multiple safeguarding concerns on a regular basis.

Internal systems to both raise and monitor concerns are strong and links to statutory procedures are clear. This is a trauma informed support service and so a good understanding of safeguarding issues is held across both the whole staff team and the Board of Trustees. Trustees receive Safeguarding training themselves, regularly review WAITS approach to Safeguarding and the Chair of Trustees is part of the reporting process.

### **Finances**

Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ending 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022 show income of £205,318 against expenditure of £173,677 resulting in a surplus of £31,641. Net current assets amount to £60,634 and this is the reserve figure all of which is unrestricted. The reserves policy states that Trustees have decided that to safeguard WAITS, reserves should be equivalent to at least three months unrestricted core running costs and current levels sit above this figure.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show a planned increase in expenditure. This is linked to a number of new grant awards that have been received and the intention to take on a fourth refuge. Main funding is received from Lloyds Bank Foundation, Big Lottery and the Oak Foundation alongside Universal Credit for refuge income.

The CEO and Treasurer have ensured that good financial systems are in place. Day to day management is undertaken by the CEO with the support of an external book keeper. However, a Finance Officer is currently being recruited and this will bring this function in house. The Treasurer has vast expertise of financial systems in charities and provides a lot of support to the CEO. Together they review the monthly management accounts that are produced, oversee cash flow and share financial information with other Trustees.

### **Current Situation and need**

Despite young women making up only 5% of young people in custody they present a significant challenge to the criminal justice system. Their reconviction rates are 71% as opposed to 63% for young men, which highlights the needs and differences they have within a system that has been designed for male offenders. As the Young Women's Justice Project Report, which was published in 2022 by Agenda and Alliance for Youth Justice shows, offending is usually a response to lived experiences of violence, rape or domestic abuse, trauma or exploitation such as sex work.

WAITS has regularly provided resettlement support pathways to young women offenders affected by domestic abuse and through this have identified reasons for returning to a perpetrator, re-offending or repeat imprisonment. Their data, and that from similar organisations, show that homelessness and unstable safe accommodation can be a key determinant to reoffending and a return to custody. Lack of resettlement support and information and advice also increases the risk of reoffending. One of the top reasons stated by women though is a lack of education and employment prospects. Many have no employment history, some exited education early without literacy and numeracy skills and for other English is not their first language. Without vocational support they struggle to access or sustain a job and feel stigmatised by employers for being an ex-offender so do not apply for jobs for fear of not passing a DBS check.

Employment can play a key role in addressing other factors in women reoffending. These include meeting finance, poverty and economic needs as many women are financially dependent on a perpetrator. Isolation is also a key factor in offending behaviour that having a job can address through helping a young woman to build positive social networks, gain agency and reconnect with friends and family.

WAITS have been supporting women on probation through their Goals to Employability programme since 2019. During that time they have worked with 258 women, 40% of who were from BAME communities. 20% have gone on to secure paid employment, based on current data, and recorded levels of increased qualifications, skills and confidence are high. Significantly 99% of participants have not reoffended and are living crime and domestic abuse free. Birmingham City University evaluated the impacts of the Community Integration Project that the Goals to Employability Programme is part of and found that it was meeting the specialised needs of women with complex cases that were not being met elsewhere. A key benefit and value of the programme, and WAITS' support in general, was seen to be empowerment and a focus on enabling women to make positive choices and changes in their own lives and achieve their aims and goals.

WAITS now want to add further capacity to the programme by employing an additional Goals to Employability Coach to focus just on young women offenders under the age of 25. Each year four 10-week programmes will be run that will support 10 women.

The programme is structured across three distinct modules.

Mentoring and coaching will explore employment and career aspirations. Personal strengths and weaknesses will be identified and barriers to achieving goals will be explored. Goal setting also takes place alongside confidence building activities to cope with change.

Interactive Workshop Training Activities will engage participants in role play, action and desk top learning to become better communicators, listeners and presenters of information. They will develop basic IT and social media skills and learn to use them to prepare for the world of work. They will also learn to understand personal and employers' expectations and gain access to employment opportunities. CV writing, job search and interview techniques and presenting self to others will also be covered.

Work Placement Experience will be offered and the job coach will match the skills of the participant with an agreed engaged external employer/organisation. The Employment Coach supports both the participant and the employer in agreeing expectations and roles and responsibilities leading to key targets being agreed and a personalised employment plan being developed. The Employment Coach conducts regular ongoing visits to check in with both the young person and the employer to progress development.

40 young women will be recruited onto the programme with an anticipated 25 going on to complete the full ten-week course.

### **Expected Key Achievements in Year 1**

#### **EKA 1**

40 young women will have been referred to the programme and attended mentoring and coaching sessions.

#### **EKA 2**

25 young women will have actively participated in and completed the 10-week Goals to Employment programme.

#### **EKA 3**

20 young women provided with opportunities to apply for employment or external work placements.

### **Request and Budget**

WAITS is requesting **£59,963** over 2 years for the salary costs of a full time Employment Coach and project costs.

**£29,994 in year 1** - £24,473 (salary), £3,597 (project management costs), £1,404 (travel), £520 (recruitment and training).

**£29,969 in year 2** - £24,718 (salary), £3,597 (project management costs), £1,404 (travel), £250 (training).

### **Conclusion**

WAITS provides a unique service to women experiencing domestic abuse in Birmingham. They are led by a passionate CEO who manages a team of women that have a deep understanding of their beneficiaries and an equally deep commitment to supporting them. It has a personal and empathetic feel to it and at the assessment meeting it was easy to see why women would be drawn to and feel secure in the services that are offered. This approach will be invaluable to them engaging successfully with women who have offending backgrounds as their support is trauma

informed and staff are skilled, knowledgeable and well linked to other local organisations.

This foundation of this project is based on existing work that this proposal will build on. Since 2009 they have been working with women offenders through a Lottery funded project that targeted domestic abuse as a specific issue. They have already shown success in supporting female offenders to move into employment and this will allow them the opportunity to focus support on the under 25 age group. There are strong links with relevant referral agencies, such as local prisons, housing associations and recovery organisations, and other providers who will offer additional support for the wide range of complex needs this group of young women will have. The importance of employment in helping a young woman to move away from offending is huge and explicitly linked to other issues such as domestic abuse. Employment can offer opportunities for a woman to gain an independence that allows them to resist the reasons why offending previously occurred. It enables them to become financially independent, build confidence and be less vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Whilst the positive benefits of employment for offenders has come across strongly in other applications, it has never been so apparent and explicit than in this application. Gaining employment for these women not only potentially changes their future offending but also moves them out of abusive and exploitative relationships.

This is a black women led organisation that will add huge value to the wider cohort. It not only has a focus on young female offenders, a group that we have struggled to target previously, but is rooted within a type of organisation whose work goes beyond criminal justice. Their current programmes working around employability give them a good track record in knowing how to deliver this kind of programme and this is backed up by the evaluation from Birmingham City University. They understand their beneficiaries well and design person centred services to meet their needs. This is also a learning organisation and they showed genuine enthusiasm and excitement about the Peer 2 Peer Exchange sessions and contributing to those.

This will be an interesting addition to the portfolio and will provide some useful learning about what works with young women. WAITS are well placed to deliver this project and whilst the challenge of helping this group of young women into employment is a big one, if anyone is going to help achieve this then it is this organisation. Therefore, I would recommend support with a grant of £59,963 as requested.

| <b>Recommended Priority Rating</b> |                                   |                 |
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| Risk = Low                         | Difference to organisation = High | Priority = High |