The Prison Reform Trust’s *Transforming Lives* programme

Qualitative research into the involvement of women in year four

Authors: Sarah Sharrock, Dr Billie Lister, Arjun Liddar and Caroline Turley

Cover image: Erika Flowers ([Recorded in Art](#)), hopes of women with lived experience of the criminal justice system attending the Transforming Lives Women’s Summit in April 2019
At **NatCen Social Research** we believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people’s lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we’re able to put all our time and energy into delivering social research that works for society.

---

**NatCen Social Research**
35 Northampton Square
London EC1V 0AX
T 020 7250 1866
www.natcen.ac.uk

A Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England No.4392418.
A Charity registered in England and Wales (1091768) and Scotland (SC038454)
This project was carried out in compliance with ISO20252

August 2020
Contents

Foreword ................................................................. 1
Acknowledgements .................................................... 2
Executive summary ..................................................... 3
1 Introduction.................................................................. 8
  1.1 Background and context to the evaluation ....................... 8
  1.2 Research aims.......................................................... 10
  1.3 Methodology ............................................................ 10
  1.4 Methodological challenges ......................................... 15
  1.5 Report structure ...................................................... 15
  1.6 Terminology ............................................................ 15
2 Understanding of Transforming Lives ......................... 17
  2.1 Understanding of Transforming Lives .......................... 17
  2.2 Involvement with Transforming Lives ......................... 18
  2.3 Purpose and experience of service user involvement ......... 19
3 Views and experiences of the events ......................... 21
  3.1 Initial contact ......................................................... 21
  3.2 Nature of involvement ............................................... 21
  3.3 Decision making ..................................................... 21
  3.4 Expectations .......................................................... 24
  3.5 Event preparation .................................................... 24
  3.6 Barriers to involvement ............................................. 26
  3.7 Experiences of the event .......................................... 27
  3.8 Views on representativeness of service users ................. 30
  3.9 What worked for women .......................................... 30
4 Impact and outcomes of women’s involvement .......... 32
  4.1 Immediate effects: how participants experienced service users’ involvement ................................................. 32
  4.2 Wellbeing outcomes ................................................. 34
  4.3 Broader outcomes .................................................... 37
5 Conclusions and recommendations .......................... 40
  5.1 Maximising the value of service user involvement .......... 40
  5.2 Facilitating meaningful involvement .......................... 42
5.3 Aftercare ................................................................................................................. 47
5.4 Recognition and reward ......................................................................................... 48
5.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................ 49

Tables
Table 1: Interview content ......................................................................................... 14
Table 2: What worked well and less well ..................................................................... 30

Figures
Figure 1: TL’s approach ............................................................................................... 9
Figure 2: Participants’ involvement in the TL programme ............................................ 19
Foreword

The voices and insights of women with direct experience of the criminal justice system have informed Prison Reform Trust’s Transforming Lives advocacy programme from the outset. They have shaped its thematic approach and strategic focus, breathing life into the quantitative data that provides much of the evidence base for reducing the unnecessary imprisonment of women.

Data and discussion of crime and punishment still rarely distinguish between women and men. This renders women and their distinct experiences invisible - a small, silent minority of those caught up as suspects and offenders in a male dominated system. We have been committed to collaborating with a wide range of women throughout the programme, learning from them, standing alongside them and providing a platform for them to speak truth to power.

This work – including over 150 women, whose reflections are captured in all our publications - has been done through round table discussions and focus groups in prison and in the community throughout the UK, and the regular meetings of the Transforming Lives Women’s Councils convened for us by User Voice in Birmingham and London from 2016 to 2018.

By participating in meetings with government ministers, local politicians and officials and speaking alongside us at conferences, women with lived experience have succeeded in influencing policy makers and practitioners to improve their response to women. Not only do the women we’ve talked to bear witness to the debilitating effects of what is often cruel and disproportionate punishment for minor crimes, but they invariably provide constructive solutions and alternatives when we take the time to listen.

Women labelled as ‘offenders’ are not a different breed but they have usually been through more abuse, trauma and adversity than most and can then be saddled with additional shame, stigma and guilt. This is not to deny women’s agency, which could not be more evident than in the events analysed by NatCen in this report. Women’s participation in the Transforming Lives programme, their brave, generous and active contribution, was an assertion of that agency and of the determination to help ensure women who come after them experience less rough justice.

The major Women’s Summit we held in London in April 2019 was an extraordinary day, bringing together ministers, senior police representatives, government officials, women’s service providers and many women with experience of the criminal justice system. It was intended as a celebration of the immeasurable contribution made by these women, and an inspiration for all those involved.

Finding a voice remains hard for many women in society, still marginalised in public life and under-represented in senior positions. It takes courage to speak out – especially when you are not confident you will be listened to, respected or taken seriously by those with the power and resources to make change happen. There are still too few opportunities for women to speak and be heard. Yet the impact that women’s testimony can have on decision makers, politicians, government ministers and service providers is clear from this report.

There can be no doubt that women’s testimony influenced the government to make its ambitious commitment two years ago to reduce the imprisonment of women on short sentences, and its recognition of the strong links between women’s offending and their prior victimisation. Progress in achieving a significant reduction in women’s imprisonment nonetheless remains painfully slow. I hope this report will spur progress and ensure this essential work is well informed by the experiences and insights of women who have experienced the criminal justice system firsthand.

Jenny Earle, Programme Director, Transforming Lives, Prison Reform Trust
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who gave so generously of their time to be interviewed about their views and experiences of the Transforming Lives programme as part of this research.

We would like to thank the Prison Reform Trust, the Transforming Lives programme’s advisory board and its funder, the National Lottery Community Fund, for commissioning this research. Particular thanks go to Jenny Earle and Katy Swaine Williams, director and senior programme manager of Transforming Lives, for their invaluable engagement and support throughout the evaluation process. We would also like to thank the rest of the Transforming Lives team, including Emily Evison, Ashleigh Murray and Anne Pinkman, for their involvement in and support given to the research.

We are grateful to colleagues at NatCen for their input across the key stages of the research – particularly Ceri Davies for her work on the overarching design and her insight at key stages; and former colleagues Thomas Barber for leading on the document review and much of the participant recruitment as well as his involvement in fieldwork; and Merili Pullerits for her involvement in observation fieldwork.

Finally, thanks again to everyone who was involved in the 2016-2018 evaluation of the Transforming Lives programme, which formed the foundation on which this study builds.

The NatCen research team
Executive summary

Overview of TL
From 2015, the Prison Reform Trust’s (PRT) Transforming Lives (TL) programme has aimed to reduce women’s imprisonment across the UK. To achieve this, TL uses advocacy, research, collaboration, and advice and support to influence sector stakeholders in policy and practice roles (PRT, 2016).

TL’s objectives include improving the governance of women’s justice and working in selected ‘high custody’ areas to promote the use of early intervention and community solutions for women. The programme aims to increase awareness of the links between domestic abuse and offending, strengthen pathways into mental health and social care services, reduce the proportions of foreign national and Black, Asian and minority ethnic women in custody, and promote non-custodial options for mothers.

Overview of the research
PRT commissioned this qualitative research to build on the evaluation of the TL programme carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) from 2016 to 2018 and focus specifically on a key aspect of their advocacy approach. As such, this smaller-scale study examines how women with lived experience of the criminal justice system (CJS) were involved in the TL programme, and the impact of their voices on its activities and outcomes. Through in-depth interviews with women and programme intermediaries who had been involved in three events in 2019, the research explored what meaningful engagement looked and felt like to women, as well as their and their audiences’ perceptions of the effects of their involvement.

The study comprised three components:

- A high-level document review of literature on service user involvement in criminal justice and related contexts. The document review also fed into the wider research design, and relevant findings are woven throughout this report where appropriate.

- Observations of a sample of three events convened or attended by TL in 2019: the National Police Chief’s Council’s National Custody Forum, Transforming Lives’ Women’s Summit, and the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner’s roundtable meeting on Women in the Criminal Justice System. The observations were used to develop researchers’ understanding of how women were involved in the activities and inform the subsequent interviews.

- In-depth individual interviews with women and programme intermediaries who had attended or been involved in the three events.¹ These qualitative encounters explored participants’ understanding of and involvement in TL, their experiences of the events, perceived impacts of women’s involvement, and recommendations around meaningful service user engagement.

The findings presented in this report will inform PRT’s ongoing work to improve outcomes for women in the CJS. They should also be of use to other agencies increasingly seeking to involve service users in their work, particularly where this involves collecting and sharing evidence about individuals’ lived experiences for advocacy campaigns and research, as well as involving them in service design.

¹ The terms ‘women’ and ‘programme intermediaries’ are used to differentiate participant groups for the purposes of this report only, as detailed in section 1.6.
Key findings

A range of programme intermediaries were involved in the three events as audience members and delegates, while women with lived experience contributed to event design and content, attended as delegates, and/or shared accounts of their experience. The key findings reported below relate to the outcomes of women’s involvement that our research participants described, and considerations for future work.

Outcomes

Knowledge, understanding, and commitment

For some programme intermediaries, women’s involvement in events gave access to insights that were not otherwise available, as their strategic or policy roles offered little to no direct contact with frontline services and service users.

Service users’ accounts of their experiences were felt to deepen understanding by adding to the evidence base and giving credibility to the case being made, whether information was new to audiences or offered a different perspective on issues with which they were familiar.

Women giving first-hand accounts of their experiences helped to inform and emphasise key messages. These accounts were sufficiently clear and powerful to prompt reflection from programme intermediaries. Some reported that what they had heard led them to consider their own work differently, while for others, women’s contributions to TL’s activities reinforced their previous thinking (in a positive way) rather than changing their approach.

Programme intermediaries also reported disseminating information within their own organisations – for example, with senior management teams. One view was that the involvement of women made them want to share information ‘a little bit more’, perhaps because the information was more ‘front of mind’ than it might otherwise have been, and women’s insights and reflections on their experience had illuminated the need for systems change.

Participants felt that women’s involvement contributed to a shift in attitudes among the audiences with which they engaged. Hearing directly from women (about, for example, factors underlying their offending behaviour or the impact of CJS interventions on them) increased empathy and acceptance of the need for change in how women are treated and supported within the CJS.

Increased knowledge and understanding were also important outcomes for some women, who benefited by learning more about ongoing work in the statutory and non-statutory sectors around women’s imprisonment, as well as through opportunities to form connections with programme intermediaries, including women with similar experiences. For some, this was an important factor in deciding to be involved. It was also felt to be particularly useful for other service users attending the events who might themselves be affected by the issues being highlighted.

Wellbeing

Women described feeling valued from the earliest point of their involvement in the TL programme, as being invited to contribute showed they were considered to have useful insight to offer. For women who spoke at the events, being given the floor and an opportunity to share their experiences for a constructive purpose was described as both empowering and therapeutic. They also felt that their inclusion could be empowering for other service users in the audience, because it showed an appreciation of voices like their own.
The accomplishment of contributing to the TL events was a key outcome for women. Sharing their lived experience was often an intimidating prospect, and ‘getting through’ this was a considerable achievement for women with positive implications for their sense of self-worth. Using their experiences to advocate for change, for better solutions and support, was something of which women felt justifiably proud. This sense of achievement extended to women who participated in audiences, and was also felt to build over time with ongoing involvement in the TL programme.

Connecting with other service users was a key wellbeing outcome for women. In some instances, involvement in events gave access to a community of supportive peers for one of the first times since completing a prison sentence, and lasting friendships were forged.

Women also described ways in which audience engagement had a positive impact on them: feeling they had been heard made the challenge of disclosing their past experiences worthwhile. Women valued being listened to and appreciated, and knowing they had got their point across. Women’s views of programme intermediaries were also influenced: for some, the fact that professionals in decision-making roles attended events and engaged in dialogue was felt to be indicative of their willingness and effort to learn and make improvements.

Positive experiences were not universal, however. Where there was not direct discussion between service users and programme intermediaries, it could be difficult for women to gauge interest. Some programme intermediaries were perceived to respond to women differently once they were identified and labelled as ‘service users’ (the inference from some being that they had also been identified as ‘offenders’).

Women also suggested that how their input was received at the events was less important than other potential outcomes. For example, where action that they thought needed to be taken did not materialise, women’s sense of being valued and respected diminished.

**Extent of influence**

Women and programme intermediaries noted the challenge of assessing outcomes of service user involvement beyond their own responses to events and immediate indicators of engagement among those in the room (body language, participation in Q&A sessions, and feedback). For many, the true measure of impact would be when action was taken to respond to the systemic issues raised.

Both women and programme intermediaries noted that the process to achieve change would be a cumulative effort which developed over time. While they felt strongly that involvement of service users was a valuable tool, women recognised that its potential effects only went so far, and felt that programme intermediaries needed to coordinate and take action in order for change to be realised. The extent to which programme intermediaries could do so was in some cases constrained by the specific limits of their professional remit.

These views chime with the ‘influencing funnel’ that underpins TL’s theory of change, which illustrates that barriers to change intensify as progress is made from one stage to the next – moving from increased knowledge and awareness to commitment and finally behaviour change outcomes. It also highlights that keeping key stakeholders on board, and translating commitment into action in the face of competing priorities, may be significant obstacles to achieving TL’s goals.

**Key considerations in service user involvement**
Participants in this research were asked to reflect on their views and experiences of service user involvement both within the TL events and more broadly. This section pulls together the key themes from across this data.

Women and programme intermediaries agreed that there were significant benefits in involving service users in advocacy and improvement work – provided that approaches were not tokenistic or exploitative. Care, time and resource are needed to ensure a supportive and constructive approach is taken, including efforts to recognise and minimise potential harm, provide continuous feedback, and, as far as possible, ensure that service users benefit from contributing.

Organisations must carefully weigh up potential benefits and risks to inform decisions about how best to involve individuals with lived experience in different aspects of their work. In particular, organisations need to appreciate what disclosing their lived experience could mean for the individual, and work to minimise burden and potential harm by providing support and carefully targeting the approach to maximise the value of their contributions.

**Targeting service user involvement**

One view was that service user involvement was most effective when carefully targeted to the particular context or to their audience. For TL, this included those who played a particularly important role in women’s experience of the CJS, or those who could enact specific and impactful changes in response to targeted messages.

Carefully selecting which service users to invite to participate is also important. Identifying and engaging with individuals can be a time- and resource-consuming process, which can make it challenging for organisations to achieve diversity across the group they involve. Participants also suggested that individual support needs and vulnerability would limit the extent to which activities could attain diversity across skills and ability (including confidence and language/communication) and behaviour. Characteristics such as race and age should be diversely represented, and geographical diversity could help to maximise relevance to the local context. However, the risk of ‘over involvement’ was highlighted: programme intermediaries described how if they heard the same women sharing their experiences at multiple events, their accounts could start to have less impact.

The range of experiences and characteristics among the service users involved in the three TL events was considered to be appropriate, and some participants acknowledged that limited diversity was achievable where only a couple of speakers could participate in a session. However, some felt there could have been greater diversity across both the type and timing of women’s criminal justice experiences, and that older women and less recent experiences were to some extent predominant at the TL events.

**Facilitating full contributions**

Participants stressed the importance of examining what involvement might entail for service users on an individual, case-by-case basis, and invest time and resources in supporting them to contribute fully. Facilitators to this include careful assessment of and response to individual support needs; promotion of a wide range of benefits at both the individual and programme level; provision of clear, consistent and transparent information across all stages of involvement; and prioritising appropriate support before, during and after their involvement. Support should include recognising and rewarding women’s contributions by thanking and crediting them and providing updates on outcomes. Participants suggested that:

- Considering and prioritising service users’ individual support needs was necessary from the point of their invitation onwards. The vulnerabilities of some individuals
who are experts by experience should not be a reason to avoid genuine involvement, and participants stressed the importance of building in emotional support from the earliest point.

- Service user involvement should benefit the individual as well as the programme. Fully involving service users could require considerable time and resource, which participants felt was important for services to factor in when designing and resourcing their approaches.

- Expectations should be clearly set at the earliest point. This should include details of the purpose, process, and planned or anticipated outcomes of the event; information about service users' specific roles, and, for programmes like TL, supporting women to understand potential consequences of identifying themselves publicly as somebody with a criminal record. A range of information-sharing approaches might best respond to individual needs, as views were mixed on communication via intermediaries.

- Briefing service users, rehearsing with them, or using a Q&A delivery style might help them to keep their contributions focused and enhance confidence.

- Expenses should be covered. However, views were mixed on whether women should be paid for their time.

- Recognising women's involvement was key. Where they felt valued, respected and taken seriously, and where they were kept informed of tangible outcomes from their input, women felt more confident that their work was worthwhile.

Conclusion

Key implications can be drawn from this research for other organisations that are considering involving service users in their work. These centre on the need to balance risk and benefits, and to factor the provision of support and feedback into their approaches. Recognising the potential emotional and practical burdens that sharing experiences may place on service users, assessing whether there is sufficient merit to ask service users to take the task on, and mitigating risks through careful planning and support are key to ensuring effective, meaningful, and sustainable contributions from service users as part of a wider programme of work.
1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context to the evaluation

1.1.1 The Transforming Lives programme

The Prison Reform Trust’s (PRT’s) Transforming Lives (TL) programme was launched in 2015 with the aim of reducing imprisonment of women across the UK. Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the programme engages with policymakers, commentators and influencers, criminal justice agencies and third sector practitioners to raise awareness of the disproportionate use and negative impact of women’s imprisonment, and influence the choices and actions of decision-makers.

Reducing the numbers of women in prison is a priority for policy in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as in other Western nations (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 2018; Roberts & Watson, 2017). The programme responds to empirical research indicating a problematic rise in the incarceration rates of women in the UK (Roberts & Watson, 2017). It also challenges the high numbers of women sent to prison when, as a group, they are more likely to have committed offences which are not serious in nature (Lacey, 2003; MoJ, 2015).

Towards the overarching goal of reducing the number of women sent to prison in the UK (both on remand and sentenced), TL’s objectives include improving the governance of women’s justice and working in selected ‘high custody’ areas to promote the use of early intervention and community solutions for women. Incorporating inter-jurisdictional learning from across the UK’s four nations, the programme aims to increase awareness of the links between domestic abuse and offending, strengthen pathways into mental health and social care services, reduce the proportions of foreign national and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women in custody, and promote non-custodial options for mothers. To achieve this, as shown in Figure 1 below, the programme uses advocacy, research, collaboration, and advice and support to influence sector stakeholders in policy and practice roles (PRT, 2016).
TL is a collaborative programme which relies on close joint working with a range of criminal justice, women’s and civil society organisations. It has been informed by an advisory group of academics and experts from statutory and third-sector delivery agencies. The programme’s partnership with User Voice, as well as joint work with KeyRing, Hibiscus Initiatives, Llamau and Women in Prison, helped ensure that insights from women’s experiences of the criminal justice system (CJS) inform the programme, and partnership with Families Outside has supported and strengthened the strategy in Scotland. PRT has also worked with Soroptimist International’s UK Programme Action Committee, whose members gathered information on the state of women’s justice in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2014, leading to the development of the programme.

Throughout the TL programme, PRT has worked with partner organisations to provide a platform for the voices of women with lived experience of the CJS. To date, over 150 women have been engaged, as well as children with experience of maternal imprisonment. Their stories and comments are included in TL publications and are considered by PRT to be an essential part of their advocacy role (PRT, 2019a; a list of these publications is provided at Appendix A).

1.1.2 The previous evaluation

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) was previously commissioned to carry out an evaluation of the TL programme between 2016 and 2018 (Davies et al., 2019: unpublished). This whole-programme advocacy evaluation explored progress made by TL towards its goal of reducing the numbers of women sentenced or remanded to custody, including key barriers and facilitators to success. It aimed to examine how TL’s advocacy and influencing work with a range of relevant government, criminal justice and third sector organisations might have contributed to changes in policy, practice or approaches to women’s justice, either directly or indirectly.
The evaluation found that the TL team employed three key influencing strategies: undertaking and disseminating research and analysis, operating as a critical friend to key stakeholders, and using ‘principled opportunism’ (working nimbly and responsively to exert influence where opportunities arose). These approaches enabled the programme to identify and respond to stakeholders, challenges and priorities, within a complex and fast-changing policy landscape, to achieve progress towards the overall aim. This work contributed to a growing political consensus on the need to reduce women’s imprisonment, evidenced by The Female Offender Strategy published by the Ministry of Justice in June 2018.

The evaluation also found that the theory of change underlying the TL programme could be refined using the ‘influencing funnel’ concept used in social marketing contexts (see Appendix B). The funnel indicates that as you move through the different stages of the programme’s logic model, from awareness to commitment and on to behaviour change, it becomes more difficult to achieve each outcome, and it is increasingly hard to keep a wide range of stakeholders on board (Sharrock et al., 2019).

1.2 Research aims

The Transforming Lives programme was extended for an additional year in 2019. To understand its effectiveness and build on the previous evaluation described above, NatCen was commissioned to carry out a small-scale qualitative study to explore the perceived impact of the voices of women with lived experience of the CJS on TL’s goals. The rationale drew on the ‘influencing funnel’ concept, which points to TL working in a targeted way with a narrower group of stakeholders to secure changes in practice.

Specific aims of this research were to understand:

- what meaningful engagement looks and feels like for women with lived experience
- the efficacy of involving women as key advocates to influence decision-makers in a compelling way, from the perspective of stakeholders who had attended events where women had spoken
- how engagement with women could be improved in the future.

1.3 Methodology

The study involved three key components, discussed in the sections below. These were: a high-level document review; observations of a sample of the events convened or attended by TL; and in-depth individual interviews with women and programme intermediaries who had attended or been involved in those events.

The research sought to understand the experiences and perceived impacts of women’s involvement from the perspectives of those outside the TL programme team. As such, views from the programme team itself were not gathered and are not represented in this report, except where references are made to programme literature.

The three events on which the observations and in-depth interviews focused were part of TL’s larger programme of work involving women. As outlined by the TL team in its Women’s Voices reports, this has included a range of meetings, events and

---

2 Originally described in Davies et al., 2019: unpublished.
3 For the purposes of this report, the terms ‘women with lived experience’ / ‘women’ are used to describe women with lived experience of the CJS who were involved in TL activities.
conferences that bring together women, practitioners and policy makers, as well as evidence-gathering activities such as interviews, focus groups, and thematic Women’s Council meetings to explore women’s direct experiences of the CJS (PRT, 2019a). Specific examples include:

- 20 Women’s Council meetings convened in Birmingham and London by User Voice from 2016 to 2018;
- focus groups on topics such as domestic abuse and women’s offending, maternal imprisonment, the experiences of foreign national women in the CJS and recall to prison, all of which informed TL’s research reports and briefings; and
- a national conference co-hosted by PRT, NHS England and the Centre for Mental Health at the Supreme Court in September 2019 to conclude the original four-year TL programme. This conference placed women with lived experience at the centre of its discussions on delivering effective solutions (PRT, 2019b).

1.3.1 Document review

We carried out a high-level review of 16 documents focusing on service user involvement in criminal justice and other settings (such as health and social care). Sources were compiled in close liaison with the TL team, who provided an initial list of suggested sources from which the research team selected the most relevant as well as adding to the sample. Most documents were supplied by TL.

Areas of focus for the document review included the service user approaches that had been or are currently being used by other organisations, facilitators and barriers to success, and the outcomes and/or impacts of service user involvement.

The documents were summarised into a thematic matrix, provided to PRT as a standalone research output. The review informed the design of the topic guides used in the qualitative fieldwork, and references to reviewed documents have been included throughout this report where relevant.

1.3.2 Observations

The NatCen research team used three events that TL convened or attended as a framework to explore the perceived impact of women’s involvement in the programme. The observations focused on how events worked in practice, including the nature of women’s and programme intermediaries’ involvement and contributions, as well as practical issues such as room layout and accessibility which might affect women’s experiences.

Researchers recorded notes from the observations using a tailored pro forma, to ensure consistency across the three events.

The observations were used to inform the research team’s understanding and guide the qualitative fieldwork, rather than as data collection — as such, observation data is not reported here. Instead, the information fed into development of the topic guides for the qualitative interviews, and was used by researchers during interviews to probe and prompt participant recall where necessary (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002).

An overview of each of the three events is provided below.

1. Women’s Summit (30 April 2019)
This large-scale event was convened and hosted by TL to bring together ministers, senior police representatives, government officials, women's services and women with experience of the CJS and share learning from local areas on responding effectively to women’s offending. It provided Edward Argar (then Justice Minister), Sophie Linden (Deputy Mayor for Police and Crime in London) and others with the opportunity to hear from women with lived experience of the CJS. The event was attended by over 60 women with lived experience, as well as stakeholders from criminal justice and related fields such as healthcare, government and academia.

The Summit comprised eight sessions; five involved women sharing their experiences of the CJS during presentations, in a Q&A session, or contributing as part of the audience. Other sessions were led by policymakers, ministers, academics and support organisations. The sessions focused on topics such as drivers of women’s offending and experiences of working with women as service users. The day also included a theatrical performance about women’s experiences in custody, and four concurrent breakout sessions which attendees chose between. These included a wellbeing workshop and three sessions offering detailed discussion on service user involvement; family law advice for women in contact with the CJS; and access to employment.

2. The National Custody Forum (NCF) (15 May 2019)

The NCF was hosted by the National Police Chiefs’ Council and focused on police custody, with presentations from academics and police stakeholders. The conference brought together around 80 delegates, including police, academics, and other CJS stakeholders (such as representatives of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services).

One of eight sessions on the day involved TL. This was a presentation entitled There’s a reason we’re in trouble: Problem solving responses for women in contact with the criminal justice system, given by Jenny Earle (TL’s director) alongside two women with lived experience of the CJS. The session focused on the links between women’s victimisation and their offending, and each woman spoke about her own lived experience. Both also participated in a Q&A.

3. Women in the Criminal Justice System (6 September 2019)

This event was a roundtable meeting hosted by the Police and Crime Commissioner at West Midlands Police HQ. Its aim was to bring together several workstreams with a view to developing a system-wide action plan to reduce the number of women in the CJS, and the likelihood of those in the system to reoffend.

Around 20 people attended, including two women with lived experience and the TL senior programme manager. Delegates represented a range of organisations and services, including the police, probation services, the Crown Prosecution Service and services providing early intervention for female offenders.

The event comprised eight sessions overall; the first focused on contributions from women. In it, each woman spoke about her experiences of the CJS, including the impacts of custodial sentences on their families and future opportunities, and considerations relating to BAME women and cultural differences. The women also contributed to discussion in two other sessions during the event.

Other sessions were led by support organisations and charities and focused on topics such as alternatives to custody in the West Midlands, early intervention schemes to reduce reoffending, and working with women with lived experience of the CJS.
1.3.3 Depth interviews

Participants were purposively sampled as far as possible, to ensure range and diversity across the study population:

- **All women** had lived experience of the CJS and had spoken at one or more of the events. Women were sampled primarily in relation to the event they had contributed to; other characteristics (such as relationships with TL, age and ethnicity) were monitored throughout recruitment with the aim of facilitating diversity as far as possible.

- **Programme intermediaries** had attended one of the three events in a professional capacity, and were sampled to achieve diversity across roles, relationships with TL and influence at various points in the offender pathway. Their roles included senior managers, policy heads and frontline support workers in organisations working directly with women offenders, as well as positions in CJS agencies such as law enforcement.

**Interviews with women**

PRT contacted women in the first instance to introduce the research to them and pass on a tailored information sheet produced by NatCen. If women consented for their details to be shared with the research team, they were then contacted by a NatCen researcher to provide more information about the study and, if they agreed, arrange an interview.

Six in-depth interviews were conducted with women who had spoken at an event (some had been involved in more than one, which allowed researchers to explore whether and how their experiences differed across events). Interviews were conducted in person with all but one participant who chose to be interviewed by telephone. They lasted between 60 and 80 minutes. Women were offered £20 as thanks for their time.

**Interviews with programme intermediaries**

Programme intermediaries were contacted via email in the first instance. For events 1 and 2, the research team drew a sample from the delegate lists from the events. Selected individuals were then contacted by a member of the TL team in the first instance to introduce the research and the research team.

For event 3, a list of attendees was not available to the research team. Instead, the initial invitation and participant information leaflet was circulated by the event leads to delegates who were invited to opt in to the research by contacting the research team directly.

NatCen researchers followed up the introductory email with further information and an invitation to take part in the research. All programme intermediaries were provided with a tailored information sheet which outlined the aims and purpose of the research and what would be involved. Researchers invited potential participants to discuss any questions or concerns about the research before deciding whether to participate.

Seven in-depth interviews were conducted with programme intermediaries who attended the events. These took place over the telephone and lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

**Interview conduct**
To enable fully informed consent, researchers provided detailed information at the start of each interview. Further details on how this was done are provided in Appendix C.

Data collection was supported by tailored topic guides, one for the women’s and one for the programme intermediaries’ interviews. These research tools were used flexibly to support consistency across interviews and between members of the research team while allowing researchers to respond to the nature, content and dynamic of each discussion.

The table below sets out an overview of the focus and coverage of interviews. Further detail is provided in Appendix D.

**Table 1: Interview content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant group</th>
<th>Focus of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>• Understanding of TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expectations ahead of participating in a TL event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Experiences of participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support given to enable their involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perceptions of differences their involvement has made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflections and suggestions for service user involvement in future events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme intermediaries</td>
<td>• Understanding of TL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expectations of attending event(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Any difference women’s stories have made (including how they had/planned to use information; what this helps to achieve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflections and recommendations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some women who participated in the research had histories of problematic substance use, mental ill health and/or domestic abuse. While the interviews did not focus on these issues, they naturally arose in some discussions and were given as context for their experiences of the CJS and the event they were involved in. As such, interviews could potentially have triggered traumatic memories. Researchers ensured women knew they could skip any question they did not want to answer without giving a reason, or pause or stop the interview at any point. All participants were provided with contact details for a range of support organisations at the end of the interview, and all had previous links to support from specific organisations as well as their contact with TL.

**Analysis**

With permission, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to support detailed analysis.

Interview data were managed and analysed using the Framework approach developed by NatCen and embedded in the NVivo software package. In this approach, data is organised using matrices that enable thematic analysis both within and between cases, allowing descriptive and explanatory analysis to be undertaken (Spencer et al., 2014). Analysis explored the full range of experiences and views, interrogating data to identify similarities and differences and seek to explain patterns and findings.
Verbatim interview quotations are provided in this report to highlight themes and findings where appropriate. Care has been taken throughout the report to anonymise participants’ views as far as possible.

1.4 Methodological challenges

Recruitment was supported by TL and the other organisations that had convened the events. However, it was only possible to conduct 13 interviews of the intended 15.

- For the women’s sample, challenges related to making contact and securing consent for details to be shared with the research team (as all those who consented to be contacted agreed to participate in the research). Women who did not agree to be contacted may have had concerns about discussing their direct experiences, despite assurances being made with regards to ethical conduct, confidentiality and anonymity.

- A number of programme intermediaries declined to take part in the research. Reasons they gave included only having attended some of the event, a change in role, or extended leave.

1.5 Report structure

The following chapters bring together the perspectives of women and programme intermediaries who participated in this research, structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** discusses participants’ understanding of and involvement in TL
- **Chapter 3** explores women and programme intermediaries’ experiences of the three events, including contributing to their design and development as well as experiences on the day as speakers or delegates
- **Chapter 4** describes perceived impacts of women’s involvement in the events
- **Chapter 5** provides conclusions and recommendations around meaningful service user engagement, in relation to TL as well as more broadly.

1.6 Terminology

As noted above, the terms ‘woman/women with lived experience’, ‘woman’ and ‘women’ are used in this report to describe women with lived experience of the CJS who were involved in TL activities. The term ‘service user’ refers to individuals who are employed in organisations’ work more broadly.

The term ‘programme intermediary’ is used to describe individuals who had attended one of the three events in a professional capacity and who were not working as part of TL. Their roles included senior managers, policy heads and frontline support workers in

---

4 Anonymity and confidentiality are key ethical considerations in high quality social research and are particularly important where individuals are discussing sensitive topics or views (including, for example, perspectives that may be at odds with those of the programmes with which they are involved). Participating on the basis that particular views will not be traceable back to specific individuals can help to ensure that participants can speak openly, supporting their wellbeing and improving data quality. For this study, all participants’ informed consent was given on the basis that they would not be identifiable in this report.
organisations working directly with women offenders, as well as positions in CJS agencies such as law enforcement.

It should be noted that these two broad categories are used to distinguish between individuals’ roles in the events which serve as case studies for this research. Outside this context, of course, women are the key stakeholder group TL focuses on. Further, individuals with lived experience may also fulfil professional roles in the sector and be part of the audience of intermediaries with whom TL seeks to engage.
2 Understanding of Transforming Lives

This short chapter explores participants’ understanding of TL, including the programme’s key objectives and its approaches to achieving them. It also explores participants’ involvement with the programme, and, finally, their views and experiences of service user involvement.

2.1 Understanding of Transforming Lives

As set out in chapter 1, TL’s objectives include improving the governance of women’s justice, working in selected areas to promote the use of early intervention and community solutions for women, increasing awareness of the links between domestic abuse and offending, strengthening pathways into mental health and social care services, reducing the proportions of foreign national and BAME women in custody, and promoting non-custodial options for mothers.

Women and programme intermediaries had varied views and understanding of TL’s key objectives. Views they shared included, for example, that short-term prison sentences were ineffective for rehabilitation and had particularly negative impacts on mothers. Participants also noted that TL promoted the use of community sentences as an alternative to custody.

‘[TL aims to] reduce women from going into prison and doing short-term sentences, because through short-term sentencing they [PRT] were saying women are losing their homes, losing their children. They’re losing everything […] So they were trying to put something in place where women could do community orders […] instead of going into prison.’ (Woman with lived experience)

TL has four distinct but overlapping approaches to work towards its goals – advocacy, collaboration, advice and support, and research (Davies et al., 2019: unpublished). Women and programme intermediaries discussed two main approaches which can be broadly categorised as research and collaboration, as discussed below.

2.1.1 Research

Women and programme intermediaries described how TL had helped build an evidence base around the issues that women face in the CJS, both by conducting primary research and by collating and disseminating information and evidence (sometimes produced by other organisations). Dissemination to programme intermediaries such as ministers, policymakers and the police took place in a number of ways. Approaches included video/film outputs and meetings or events that brought women and programme intermediaries together.

Participants discussed a range of topics that evidence shared by TL covered. Examples included information on alternatives to custody; the impact of short custodial sentences; links between domestic abuse and offending behaviour; the specific needs of mothers in custody; and ways in which women were treated when in contact with the CJS and the impact this could have.

‘They [PRT] can give platforms for people to be able to talk to large numbers of the right kind of people, the people that we should be talking to […] [such as] police officers, MPs, yes, the people that need to make things change.’ (Woman with lived experience)
2.1.2 Collaboration

Programme intermediaries identified that TL supported collaboration among different CJS agencies.

‘I think they’ve also been quite instrumental in supporting areas where they want to have a whole-systems approach to dealing with women who get involved with the criminal justice system.’ (Programme intermediary)

For some women, TL’s facilitation of collaboration and connection provided support for individuals. This impression stemmed from women’s experiences of connecting with TL staff and other women during TL events.

‘You don’t think that anybody cares. You’ve got sentenced and you’ve clearly committed something, which I regret […] but it’s like, do you get a second chance? These [TL staff members] are the women that really helped me get that second chance […] these are the goals, giving us women a second chance, so then we can move on.’ (Woman with lived experience)

2.2 Involvement with TL

Women and programme intermediaries had proactively contacted TL because they wanted to contribute to the change that PRT was trying to achieve, or had responded to contact made by PRT.

‘Just going on the internet, just reading more about it [a PRT programme]. […] It was definitely something I wanted to get involved with when I came out [of prison].’ (Woman with lived experience)

Participants reported three ways in which they had been involved in TL’s work (as illustrated in Figure 2): as a contributor, collaborator or audience member. Some were involved in more than one way.
2.3 Purpose and experience of service user involvement

‘Service user involvement’ refers to any advocacy, campaigning, and/or service development work in which individuals who have used or experienced the relevant services are involved. For TL, service users were women with personal experience of criminal justice services or agencies (including, for example, prisons, probation, courts, and liaison and diversion schemes).

Participants in this research had varying levels of experience of service user involvement, and some participants drew on broader perspectives when discussing key considerations for organisations working in this way (discussed in chapter 5). All the women had experience of service user involvement before the TL event on which their research interview focused. This included advocacy and campaigning work; and some discussed involvement in service development and service delivery, including work in peer mentoring schemes. Programme intermediaries’ experience was more mixed.
Examples given by programme intermediaries included conducting qualitative research with individuals in prison.

Participants highlighted the importance of involving service users in these ways, to positively influence service users (those directly involved and the wider population) and programme intermediaries. This is discussed further in chapter 3, in relation to involvement in the three events.
3 Views and experiences of the events

This chapter explores women’s and programme intermediaries’ views and experiences of speaking at or attending one of the three events. This includes how and why they got involved, any preparation they undertook, and their experiences of the events themselves. Finally, the chapter looks at what worked well and areas for improvement, from the perspectives of both women and programme intermediaries.

3.1 Initial contact

Women were invited to contribute to the events in two ways. One was a direct invitation from a member of the TL team; the second was an invitation passed on by an intermediary at a support service they were involved in.

‘She [support worker] contacted me and she was like, ‘Look, babe, would you come down to London and do this thing?’ [It] wasn’t the PRT that directly contacted me; it was one of my contacts.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Women described feeling flattered to be invited to speak about their experiences and were pleased that TL felt others should hear what they had to say. For some, being asked to speak was a ‘nice surprise’ and a privilege.

‘I was kind of privileged to be asked to be speaking on the panel at the last minute. I can't understand why. I don't know. A load of thoughts go through your head, don't they, like ‘Why have they asked me?’” (Woman with lived experience)

Programme intermediaries described finding out about events either through direct invitations from the organisers, because of existing working relationships, or via the PRT mailing list.

3.2 Nature of involvement

Participants were involved in the events in a range of ways: design and development of the event itself, attending as an audience member, and delivery of an event session.

While programme intermediaries we interviewed had all attended the events as audience members, women were involved in at least one of these ways. Some women delivered part of a presentation within the event, sharing their experience as somebody with lived experience of the CJS. Other women also took part as audience members in other elements of the event. Others were involved in the initial planning and design of the event as well as one or more of these other elements.

3.3 Decision making

Participants decided to take part in events for a range of reasons, including learning and knowledge exchange; networking; PRT’s/TL’s reputation; and inspiring others. Each of these is discussed in turn.

3.3.1 Learning and knowledge exchange

Women and programme intermediaries discussed a desire to learn and/or share information with others as a key reason for their participation in the events.
Programme intermediaries’ motivations related to the event’s relevance to their professional role. One view was that attending as many CJS events as possible was essential to keep up to date with processes and practices across the sector. Programme intermediaries also felt that events offered opportunities for knowledge exchange, particularly around ways in which they could support women with experience of the CJS. How the CJS had impacted on women was a longstanding interest for these stakeholders, given their roles involved working with women with experience of the CJS (see chapter 1 for details on the programme intermediary sample). It was felt that events involving service users provided an opportunity to actively learn from women so that working practices of organisations within the CJS could be improved.

3.3.2 Networking
Participants felt that attendance at events offered networking opportunities. For some, this was a valuable opportunity to connect with specific individuals or organisations, including service users. One view among programme intermediaries was that this also offered an opportunity to represent their organisation and foster connections that could facilitate effective partnership working in the future. One example was building relationships between police and regulatory bodies.

‘I think it’s very useful in terms of networking, for us as an organisation, so that the police get to know us more […] because that helps us break down barriers.’ (Programme intermediary)

For some, attending an event would show that they and others in their role were interested in women’s welfare, and genuinely cared about making a positive difference.

‘In the general conversation sometimes at these events you’re seen as the blocker, the dis-enabler […] We care deeply about what we do. Some people are quite antagonistic towards you as a [role] at those type of events […] we have a whole group of [roles] who live and breathe and really deeply care about the women we look after.’ (Programme intermediary)

3.3.3 PRT/TL’s reputation
PRT’s and/or TL’s positive reputation bolstered participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of events. Many participants had heard about PRT’s overall remit in advance of taking part in an event. The individual support provided to some of the women by PRT played a part in women’s decisions to speak, as did previous work such as TL’s research outputs and presentations. Women spoke of hearing about PRT for the first time while in prison and were interested in getting involved in their work upon release.

‘Prison Reform Trust is huge and that is one of the first things you read about when you’re inside. It was definitely something I wanted to get involved with when I came out but because we don’t have that much, because we’re up North and there’s a lot of organisations that are down South.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Seeing other women present at PRT events previously encouraged other women to contribute and have their voice heard.

‘I’m glad I went because I’ve heard so much about Prison Reform Trust and I’ve read about it and […] when you actually see women up there that are talking about the project and having that insight about what the organisation is and
what it involves, then you feel like you want to be more involved as well. I was just, as soon as [support worker] mentioned it, she said, 'Are you up for it?' I didn't even hesitate.’ (Woman with lived experience)

3.3.4 Influencing change

Influencing change was a key driver for women to contribute to the events. Participants described anticipated change in terms of impacting policy and practice, reducing stigma and inspiring others.

**Impacting on policy and practice**: By speaking, women hoped that they would enhance audiences’ understanding of issues such as how women are dealt with on arrest, the impact of custodial sentences on women and their children, the impact of having a criminal record on employment opportunities, and alternatives to the CJS for women who have offended (for example, having women engage with support services to address the issues that underpinned their offending behaviour).

‘It is important to involve service users, because a lot of the policymakers that are involved in policymaking have never had the experience. They've never been to prison. They've probably come from wealthy backgrounds. They probably never have been under-privileged, or they've been well educated, or they're born into money and stuff like that, so I do feel that it's very important that service users are listened to in informing policy. I do think it is needed.’ (Woman with lived experience)

‘[I talked about] how that [referring women to support services] can be an alternative to arrests and imprisonment. How it worked, showing that […] we're proof that there is a different way and things can be done differently.’ (Women with lived experience)

Women also described previous positive engagement with particular audiences as a factor in their decisions to be involved in events those stakeholders would attend. Where they felt their involvement had previously had a tangible positive impact, some women felt more willing to engage with those stakeholders. One example was where funding for an intervention to support women following arrest had been extended following a meeting at which women had spoken about the positive effects of the approach on their own experience. As a result, women felt listened to and eager to engage with that group again.

‘When they took it on board and they went, “Yes, we're going to keep funding it [the project]” and now they’ve taken it to [a new area]. So, because I saw that there was an actual concrete sustainable result, I was happy to speak to them.’ (Woman with lived experience)

**Reducing stigma**: Some women decided to speak at events to challenge stigmatising attitudes they perceived some CJS stakeholders held about service users. They hoped that, by speaking, such views might be reconsidered.

‘They had governors from the prisons there. They had people from the police there. They’re all different. So, it’s just basically about making them understand and seeing how people do change.’ (Woman with lived experience)

**Inspiring others**: Women also saw events attended by other service users as an opportunity to inspire their peers, using their own stories to evidence that change is possible and achievable. The potential to improve other women’s circumstances and build their confidence was a catalyst for their involvement. For example, others might
gain confidence around being involved in advocacy work and public speaking — skills which could later be transferred to employment.

‘It's like a lot of things happen through life and you end up put in situations, but look, I was there [prison]. I made a mistake and I learnt from that, and look where I am. Look at what I'm doing. I've changed my life around and I'm supporting other women and helping them to try to do the same.’ (Woman with lived experience)

3.4 Expectations

Information that women were given in advance of the events, and therefore their expectations, varied. Some women had a detailed understanding of what to expect before the event. Examples of how this information was provided included written details passed on by their support organisation and a verbal briefing given in person a week before the event.

However, other women appeared to have received less information and had a more limited understanding of what their involvement would entail other than speaking about their experience in the CJS. In one instance, a woman described being asked to speak as part of a panel at the last minute – this appeared to be because someone else had dropped out of the role. On reflection, some women felt they would have benefitted from being better informed before the event including, for example, about the purpose of them speaking.

‘I'm quite an opportunistic person, if that's a word. If an opportunity comes my way and it's something that I was involved in, I was like, 'Yes, yes, I'll come along'. So, I didn't really expect anything from it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Other women had thought little about the event in advance as a coping strategy to help to minimise any anxiety.

‘I was very much just going along with it [...] I didn't really think about what it would involve really [...] I was very much kind of almost zoned out and went and did what I had to do and left. That's the way that I was able to do it, that's the way I coped with it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Programme intermediaries’ expectations of the event they attended also varied. Some described having few specific expectations, and others anticipated having an opportunity to learn specifically about service delivery and research, as well as to network.

‘I thought it would be an opportunity to possibly network a little and to hear what was being said, but I don't think I had any particular expectations from it [...] I don't think I went along with a particular aim of seeing any particular people or organisation there.’ (Programme intermediary)

3.5 Event preparation

This section focuses on women's preparation for speaking at events. The perceived need for preparation varied among women. Some had spoken at several events previously and were used to sharing their story, whereas for others this was a new and nerve-wracking experience.

Where they had done so, women discussed preparing for the events between one and two weeks in advance. This included, for example, writing down what they wanted to
talk about in broad terms, and/or practising out loud and in front of a mirror. Not surprisingly, preparation could extend to decisions around what to wear, including choosing to dress smartly to appear professional, which some women said helped to mitigate feelings of insecurity. This chimes with other research recognising the potential effects of power imbalances between service users and professionals (HMPPS Wales, n.d.).

‘Feeling like a service user when you’re on a board and everyone’s looking at you, and it’s a bit like, you’ve got to try and act professional. Again, I think that’s part of feeling inferior, so that’s down to me rather than down to the people that are watching me. It can make you feel a little bit inferior when people are there in suits and stuff like that, so I wore smart blouse and black trousers, to probably not feel as inferior. So, you become part of them.’ (Woman with lived experience)

At one of the events, some women stepped in on the day to speak after other women changed their minds, and therefore did not have the option to prepare. For one participant, this broadly worked well, as she felt any advance preparation would have caused her to become anxious. However, she did reflect later in the interview that she would have benefitted from having more time to prepare than she did.

‘I don’t really like preparation. I’ve got it mentally stored in my head, but the more I prepare for things, the more anxious I get, like, ‘Oh, could I do this, could I do that?’ So, no, I like that spur of the moment thing. I think you get a bit more authenticity if it’s just spur of the moment.’ (Woman with lived experience).

Some participants described support they were offered to prepare their presentations before the event. This came in a variety of ways, including:

- information via email, to help calm any nerves around presenting in front of large groups
- in-person support from TL or women’s own contacts in support organisations, including brainstorming ideas for the content of the speech, help with structuring content in a logical and coherent way, and listening to women rehearse presentations.

Some women would have appreciated more support, information and time to prepare than they recalled being offered. For example, one view was that more information on what women’s roles were, why they were needed, the difference their input could potentially make and what would happen on the day would have been beneficial. The need to inform service users of the reasons for their involvement is supported by the wider literature which recognises this as a facilitator to service user involvement (HMPPS Wales, n.d.; Revolving Doors Agency, 2016).

Some women discussed not having known that preparatory support was available, as a result of which they prepared for the events by themselves. While some would have appreciated help with writing their speech, others concluded that, as it would be rooted in lived experience, the responsibility for preparation ultimately had to sit with them. This aligns with Robinson and Webber’s (2013) observation that service users are ultimately experts because of their experiences.

‘Well, as I said before, my journey, only I can write it […] I think I might’ve needed help, probably with how to write it, but I’ve done it anyway and nobody else has said anything […] So, I can’t have done that badly.’ (Woman with lived experience)
3.5.1 Practical support

Practical support was offered to some women to facilitate attending events. For some, this came directly from TL; others were supported by their direct contacts within support organisations (who it appeared were attending the event as delegates themselves). Examples included support being arranged in advance, travel tickets being paid for, and women being accompanied from a train station to the event venue on the day. This practical support with arrangements allowed women to focus solely on speaking at the event, and was described by some women as making the difference between them being able to participate or not.

‘Living with anxiety and stuff, just getting out of the house on time to do nice things can be difficult. Going to do something that is obviously going to cause you to stress, having to make your own way there and find where you’re going, that kind of thing would just be too much.’ (Woman with lived experience)

3.6 Barriers to involvement

There were a number of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to involvement in events for women. An intrinsic barrier was anxiety (general, specific to speaking, and relating to concerns about presenting to delegates such as police officers). Extrinsic barriers included availability of childcare and financial concerns. Addressing these barriers assisted in helping participants attend events, although there were some, such as anxiety, which could not be completely alleviated.

3.6.1 Anxiety, nervousness and trepidation

Travelling alone to a new place could be intimidating for women who were anxious about using public transport. The Llwybrau Project (2017) identified this as a potential barrier, particularly where service users live in rural areas. To alleviate this, women discussed support such as being met by contacts from their support organisation, as discussed above.

‘But my next step was, actually, getting public transport, getting the train to London as well, which was - yes, I think I was confident enough, but my anxiety was a bit, because I've not been to London in years […] Well [support organisation contact] met me there, which was good because I knew as soon as I get off the train, I know that [she] is going to be there, and she'll meet me.’ (Woman with lived experience)

For some women, anxiety was more specific, and rooted in the requirement to speak in front of professionals, particularly those related to the CJS. Women and programme intermediaries highlighted that sharing their personal stories with such audiences was likely to be intimidating and stressful for women due to their past experiences within the CJS. In some cases, women described that the presence of other service users at the event had helped to reduce these concerns, as did presenting first at the event so that they did not have to manage their nerves for longer than necessary.

3.6.2 Childcare

Availability of childcare was described as a potential barrier to involvement for some women, and noted in the wider literature (The Llwybrau Project, 2017). For women who participated in the research, family members had looked after children to enable women to attend events, or women had altered childcare start/finish times.
‘I might have had to stay down there the night before. Either that, or I left very, very early in the morning. […] that's where it's a bit harder for me, because I need to get someone to take my daughter to school and pick her up and look after her, sort of thing.’ (Woman with lived experience)

3.6.3 Financial

Having to finance travel could also hinder women’s participation, something which has been widely recognised by initiatives which seek to involve service users (for example, The Llwybrau Project, 2017; Foot et al., 2014). Women’s expenses were covered by TL for the three events, but had they not been, the cost of taking part in the event would have been prohibitive. Women also felt that expenses should be covered on principle, given the importance of their contribution.

3.7 Experiences of the event

This section describes women’s involvement in event design, and their thoughts and feelings before, during and immediately after the event. It also explores programme intermediaries’ views and experiences during and immediately after events.

3.7.1 Event design

Women who were involved in helping to design aspects of the Women’s Summit, in collaboration with TL, were invited to planning meetings to contribute ideas about what the event should involve. This aligns with evidence of the benefits service users can bring to the initial organisation of events which seek to bring about change (McLeod & Clay, 2018; Revolving Doors Agency, 2016; Faulkner, 2009).

‘We had some meetings pre [the Women’s Summit] and then [with] the Prison Reform Trust, they sat us down and said, 'What can we do? How can we make things better?' So, we got ideas. Everybody gave ideas, so we were just passing on ideas to see what was going to be the best and what wouldn't be good.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Being invited to contribute ideas before the event itself was a source of pride for some women. One view was that it was an honour to be included and for their views to be taken on board as part of the event design.

‘Even the fact that they even considered me to be part of the planning […] and to hear if I wanted to be involved in it, if I had any things to add to it or to put towards, it's nice. It's very rewarding.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Not all women were involved in designing events. None were involved in setting up events 2 and 3, which were convened by other organisations and were smaller in size. Some of those who spoke at the Women’s Summit were involved in the overall design, while other women were asked specifically to talk about their lived experiences. Women who had not been involved in designing events did not find this a cause for concern.

3.7.2 Before the event

Women felt nerves, trepidation and intimidation before the event itself, and some continued to feel these emotions throughout their session. However, they were
determined to contribute to the event because they felt what they had to say was important and worthwhile.

‘I enjoy it. I’m bricking it, but I do enjoy [it] - just for the fact that I can tell my story […] It’s about being heard and to make change. It means so much to me, honestly!’ (Woman with lived experience)

The knowledge that other women with lived experience of the CJS were also talking at their event helped to boost participants’ confidence, and motivated them to make a contribution that might help achieve change to improve women’s experiences within the CJS.

‘There was women going on stage and speaking about their project and why they got involved and how they got the support. It helps you as well, because you know that there’s somebody there that’s been through it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

### 3.7.3 During the event

Initial nerves affected all women on a physical and emotional level during their presentations, with some women describing how they physically shook while they were speaking.

‘It was completely nerve-wracking, yes. I was just about holding it together, to be honest […] The set-up, the amount of people, knowing that you’re talking about something that you know is going to stir up emotion and, yes, just the whole thing.’ (Woman with lived experience)

For programme intermediaries, women’s involvement in events was felt to be particularly engaging and compelling. First-hand accounts of lived experience were powerful, sometimes shocking, and emotionally resonant. They held the attention of programme intermediaries who appreciated the accessible and creative ways in which women illustrated points. At the Women’s Summit, for example, a theatrical performance and women’s speeches were considered by programme intermediaries to be highlights, which aligns with experiences described in the literature (Faulkner, 2009). The theatrical performance opened the Summit and was felt to be a ‘scene-setter’ for the rest of the day.5

‘The opening […] performance I thought was excellent. I was very impressed by that […] and I was very impressed by the women who spoke about their experiences. They were uniformly impressive.’ (Programme intermediary)

Programme intermediaries were also emotionally affected by women’s testimonies.

‘I think having the service users there and then them talking about their experiences really brought everything home. It was very powerful […] there were a couple of male officers who were taken aback at the stories that these women were telling about how they’d been treated.’ (Programme intermediary)

Programme intermediaries’ interest and engagement in these sessions were evidenced by their direct accounts, body language, involvement in Q&A sessions and feedback given to women and colleagues afterwards. Women’s lived experience served to highlight positive and negative experiences of the CJS to programme intermediaries.

---

5 The performance was delivered by Clean Break, a women’s theatre company and charity aiming to effect change in the lives of women with experience of the CJS.
'It [presence of women’s voices] actually gave some reality to the situation. It’s not just an academic standing up with some facts, figures and some slides. You can see the impact, the positive and the negative in their policing interventions in the way they talk, the way they spoke and how things have progressed for them.' (Programme intermediary)

Two events offered an opportunity for the audience to put questions to women following their presentations. At one event, none were asked, and this left one woman doubting whether her presentation had been well received, or if the audience had been listening.

‘I don’t even know […] how people took it, because I would’ve thought at least one question would’ve come back to me, and none never. I think [I would have liked questions] yes, because if I get a question then I feel like I’ve been listened to, but when I don’t, I just don’t know [how it’s been received].’ (Woman with lived experience)

The format of women’s contributions at the Women’s Summit captured programme intermediaries’ interest, including for example the theatrical performance mentioned above, and the targeted workshop sessions. The latter enabled greater depth of discussion on specific topic areas, for example the experiences and needs of BAME women. Some programme intermediaries chose which workshop to go to with the intention of widening their existing knowledge, or learning about an area they had little knowledge of. Such workshops were well received as they presented complex information clearly and provided an opportunity for more targeted networking.

‘[The breakout sessions] were quite good because we got into little groups of people that I didn't know. They weren't people that I'd met before or had anything in particular in common with. So that was quite good […] to get different perspectives from different people.’ (Programme intermediary)

3.7.4 After the event

Reflecting on how they felt immediately after contributing to events, women reported feeling relief and pride at having ‘got through’ nerve-wracking public speaking. Some felt the experience boosted their self-confidence, as has been noted in the wider literature on service user involvement (User Voice, 2019; Faulkner et al., 2015). Others felt excitement: for example, one woman described herself as ‘buzzing’ after her speech. Experiences varied according to how receptive audiences appeared to be both on the day and afterwards. As explored further in chapter 4, women were pleased when audience members acknowledged their talks, appeared to have listened, and explained the difference their contributions had made to their views and attitudes.

For some women these feelings of elation were tempered by feeling emotionally drained, sometimes alongside frustration that they may not have been as coherent and/or comprehensive as they would have liked, or that they had got emotional when they would have preferred not to. Such feelings arose once women had had time to unwind and reflect on their presentations.

‘When you've finished speaking, the period after is where you relax and calm down and then, all of a sudden, you have all these things that you want to say, that you really want to say, and you're not just talking without thinking […] I'm quite often left feeling really irritated with myself because I've got emotional, instead of my being clear. There's been so many things that I would have wanted to say, that I didn't say.’ (Woman with lived experience)
3.8 Views on representativeness of service users

Participants in this research felt that in general, service users should be diversely represented, for example including BAME women, and diversity across age. Factors such as geographical diversity were also considered important to avoid a ‘London-centric’ focus and maximise relevance to different local contexts.6

The range of women involved as service users in the three TL events was generally considered to be appropriate. Some participants noted that the scope for diversity was limited where only a few speakers could present in a session. However, some important gaps were also identified. These included diversity across criminal justice experiences and sentence types. For example, one view was that women who had received community sentences could have been better represented at the Women’s Summit, and stakeholders from other events suggested that including women whose sentences were more recent or ongoing might offer particularly timely information and increase impact. It was also suggested that more effort could be made to include younger women. (These considerations are discussed further in 5.1.2 below.)

‘I would have liked to have seen [...] more younger females there being advocated on behalf of. That for me is one of the impacts that I did take from it - what about young females? One of those 17, 18-year-old girls that are going through this sort of stuff. I didn’t see nothing with people there being advocated or even getting the opportunity to talk about their views.’ (Woman with lived experience)

3.9 What worked for women

Table 2 brings together findings about what worked well and less well in involving women in the events.

Table 2: What worked well and less well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What worked well</th>
<th>What worked less well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Events that were tailored to relate directly to the audience, such as the National Custody Forum (event 2) which focused on arrest and diversion.</td>
<td>• Some women would have liked more detailed information about events in advance, including their purpose and what the perceived value of their own personal contribution would be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Women’s messages were considered powerful, emotive and compelling. Creative delivery formats, such as the theatrical performance at the Women’s Summit (event 1), enhanced this.</td>
<td>• Programme intermediaries’ use of jargon and acronyms were a barrier to comprehension, which some participants described as exclusionary and potentially triggering for women. This aligns with the wider literature (Sandhu, 2017).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 TL’s engagement with women across the UK, including work highlighting a ‘postcode lottery’ in CJS outcomes for women across England and Wales, is discussed further in the research reports and briefings listed at Appendix A. Diversity was evident across geography, ethnicity and age in our participant sample and observed at the events.
| • Opportunities for Q&A demonstrated that the audience had listened and allowed for interaction between women and programme intermediaries. | • Where a Q&A was not offered, or where no questions were asked, this could give the impression that the audience had not listened. |
| • For some women, events that were smaller in size and used a ‘roundtable’ approach helped to alleviate nerves. | • A ‘lecture style’ event layout was intimidating for some women and provoked feelings of being ‘looked down upon’. |
| • Women appreciated the chance to meet others with similar lived experiences to their own. The presence of those who could personally relate to their stories helped reduce feelings of marginalisation and helped women feel supported. | • A less formal approach, such as allowing women to talk about their experiences in smaller groups, would foster inclusion of women who would not feel comfortable talking in front of a large audience. |
| • Practical support with arrangements and support with preparing women’s contributions to events was greatly appreciated. | |
| • Coverage of expenses associated with event attendance was welcomed by all women as removing any financial barriers to attending. | |
4 Impact and outcomes of women’s involvement

A key focus of the interviews was the impact that women’s specific contributions to the events had. This included both immediate and distal effects – how participants themselves experienced the involvement of service users, how they perceived others responded to it, and what resulted from these experiences.

TL’s intention and expectation is that hearing directly from women with lived experience contributes to an understanding of the need for a problem-solving whole systems approach and reinforces the case for police, courts and probation services to be asking women not what they have done but what has led to the circumstances in which they offend.

In line with the programme logic model (Appendix B), outcomes for programme intermediaries related to knowledge and understanding, commitment, and action or behaviour change. For women with lived experience, a range of effects relating to wellbeing were also apparent, both positive and negative.

4.1 Immediate effects: how participants experienced service users’ involvement

As described in chapter 3, women’s involvement as event speakers was seen as a particularly engaging and compelling approach to delivering substantive information. First-hand accounts of lived experience were considered, emotionally resonant, compelling and accessible ways of illustrating key points. Participants discussed their own and other delegates’ interest and engagement in these sessions. Evidence of others’ interest was evident to participants through their body language, participation in Q&A sessions, and discussion and feedback they gave afterwards.

Related to this, women and programme intermediaries felt that first-hand discussion of lived experience was more memorable than information delivered in less direct ways (such as PowerPoint presentations). Some participants could clearly recall specific details and the key messages from women’s presentations months later, supporting the suggestion that these were particularly impactful – we could infer that this might influence the degree to which they would be acted upon.

‘You get the emotional response from hearing their story […] that stays with you in a way that statistics don’t. It’s powerful stuff.’ (Programme intermediary)

The following sections set out the two broad categories into which immediate effects of women’s involvement in the three events can be classified. These are the influence on knowledge and understanding, and on connection.

4.1.1 Enhancing knowledge and understanding

Women’s involvement in sharing their first-hand experiences was felt to add to the evidence base and give credibility to key arguments – as evidenced in the wider research literature (McLeod & Clay, 2018). For some participants, this was because women presented information that was entirely new to them; for others, accounts of lived experience offered a different perspective or experience that illuminated issues
with which they were already familiar (for example, through statistical evidence, at a policy level, or through their own lived experience).

Some programme intermediaries reported that it was generally difficult for them to access service user perspectives directly, as strategic or policy roles offered them little if any direct contact with frontline services and service users. As such, women’s involvement in events granted them access to insights that were not otherwise available and, they felt, resulted in a more rounded understanding of how service users were affected by the aspects of the CJS which they spoke about.

‘If you go to conferences and you haven’t got service users there, all you do is you have a view from above looking into or across an organisation, or across a service. If you hear it from a service user, you get a ‘warts and all’ view of the actual service and it’s far better […] it makes it real.’ (Programme intermediary)

Women’s insights were also felt to ‘bring home’ information that had been presented in other ways (both in TL’s own presentations and the events as a whole, and more broadly in wider discourse outside the events).

‘If [decision-makers] can hear the actual story of the actual woman, it makes such a difference to them […] they go, ‘Wow, I didn't think that at all,’ […] sitting in the audience […] thinking, ‘Actually if she’d had some intervention at age 15 that wouldn't have happened’ or, ‘If she'd had some better support when her children were taken into care that wouldn't have happened.’ I think when you see somebody’s story you can make those connections much more […] It’s like a physical thing […] as opposed to just an academic [one] […] You might know that statistic or whatever, but it doesn’t mean anything until you meet the real people.’ (Programme intermediary)

By illustrating ways in which CJS approaches linked to the outcomes they experienced, women’s accounts deepened their audiences’ understanding of the effects that particular approaches or interventions could have. This included areas for attention, improvement, and/or positive learning.

For some women who participated in the research, their involvement in the event offered them a learning opportunity, enhancing their knowledge and understanding, both of other women’s specific experiences, and of wider work in the sector. This aligns with other research that describes learning opportunities as a key benefit of service user involvement (Foot et al., 2014). Adding to this, as discussed in 4.3.1 below, increases in knowledge and understanding were important for some in contributing to a feeling of hope, and felt to be particularly useful for other service users in the audience who might themselves be experiencing some of the issues highlighted at the event.

‘Some of the women there have just come straight out of prison, or […] on ROTLs’ […] I think it's good for women like that […] to see that there's something going on outside of them prison walls, that [people] are working to advocate on behalf of them.’ (Woman with lived experience)

4.1.2 Making connections

Women participants and programme intermediaries both identified forming connections and networks as important perceived impacts of the events, particularly the Women’s Summit, This chimes with other research evidence (User Voice, 2019; McLeod & Clay,

7 Release on Temporary Licence.
The formation of supportive relationships was a key dimension of this and is discussed in 4.3.2 below. A second key dimension was breaking down barriers.

Women felt confident that sharing the ‘raw’ truth of their experience contributed to a shift in attitudes among the audiences they engaged with. One view was that, at the very least, this type of engagement would ‘plant a seed’ for someone in every audience. The effect of sharing information directly – including details about, for example, women’s backgrounds, contextual factors linked to their offending, and/or the direct impact of the criminal justice process on them – was felt to be ‘humanising’ women who have offended, increasing empathy rather than regarding them simply as ‘offenders’ (also suggested by Robinson & Webber, 2013). Women felt that this shift in perception was important in influencing greater acceptance of the need for change in how women are treated and supported within the CJS.

‘We've been so fortunate to have people come up and really connect with us on a human level and recognise that I'm not just my mistake. If you can just do that once, it's a bonus because that person's going to go away [with that message] [...] you're chipping away, [...] You're making a change.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Additionally, programme intermediaries suggested that women’s delivery contributed to a shift in how audience members regarded them – and, by extension, how they might think of service users in general. Clear and considered presentations, performances, and contributions to panels emphasised to audiences that the women could be defined by more than their past offending behaviour: they were demonstrably capable individuals, contributing usefully in a professional sphere. This more holistic appraisal, expanding from a focus on offending behaviours to encompassing an appreciation of skills and abilities, could enhance empathy and identification with women which might in turn bolster programme intermediaries’ commitment to the goal of improving women’s justice.

‘It’s about changing their mindset to go, just because you’re a woman with lived experience doesn't mean you can’t do the job. You can do the job just as well as the so-called professionals, so it’s breaking down that barrier.’ (Programme intermediary)

Women’s views of criminal justice practitioners were also influenced by these connections in some instances. Some women were sceptical as to whether attendance would result in actual change (discussed in 4.3.1 below). For others, however, the fact that professionals in decision-making roles (such as ministers and prison governors) attended the events and engaged in dialogue was felt to be indicative of their willingness and effort to make improvements.

‘They must care. They must want to make changes [...] I felt it was really good [that they were there]. It give[s] me a little bit of a sense, like, ‘Okay, then, so you are aware that things aren’t working as properly as what they should be. That’s why you're here’. That’s what I took from it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

4.2 Wellbeing outcomes

Some aspects of service users’ involvement were seen to influence women’s wellbeing, including making women feel valued, connected, and accomplished.
4.2.1 Value

The wider literature highlights feeling valued, and satisfaction arising from contributing to something perceived to influence improvement, as key benefits of service user involvement (Foot et al., 2014).

When discussing their involvement in TL, women described feeling valued from the point at which they were approached and invited to take part in an event, as this showed they were considered to have useful insight to offer. As such, being asked to contribute, whether to event planning, delivery, or both, was considered a ‘privilege’ – perhaps reflecting how rare these opportunities still are for many women.

Related to this was the sense that being invited to and included in events would be empowering for service users in the audience, because it showed an appreciation of their voices. At the Women’s Summit, for example, women with lived experience of the CJS comprised a substantial portion of both audience and presenters. Participants suggested that bearing witness to another service user’s input could inspire a sense of self-esteem and hope, particularly because the event gave them access to stakeholders with authority and power as well as information.

‘It’s motivating. I think it inspires them to feel that their voices can be heard. I think it helps them to think about different opportunities, and doors that might be open to them.’ (Programme intermediary)

For women who spoke at the events, being given the floor and an opportunity to share their experiences for positive purposes was described as both empowering and therapeutic.

‘I enjoy it. I’m bricking it, but I do […] I feel powerful, I feel strong; everyone is listening to me for once! Yes, nobody normally listens [, but when speaking at an event] You’ve got all these people and you’ve got the silence and they listen to me! […] It really uplifts me.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Women also described ways in which audience engagement had a positive impact on them: feeling they had been heard made the challenge of disclosing their past experiences feel worthwhile. Women described assessing audience engagement through indicators such as body language, audience questions, and direct feedback. Knowing they had got their point across was key.

‘Those where you feel like somebody’s listened, they let you know that they’ve listened and that you’ve had an impact, they’re the one that make you feel it was worth doing.’ (Woman with lived experience)

However, a positive response was not a universal experience. There was not always direct discussion between women and programme intermediaries. Examples included women’s surprise that stakeholders in the audience had not approached them in a breakout session after they had spoken, and, as discussed in chapter 3, no questions being asked after one woman spoke at an event. This made it difficult for her to gauge interest and left her wondering whether her contribution had been appreciated.

‘I started to feel within myself that, ‘Are these people taking me seriously? […] why is nobody asking me a question?’ That’s all I was thinking: “Have I delivered the right message? Are they really listening to what I’m saying? Or are they judging me for what I’ve said?” […] I would’ve liked somebody, at least one [question] because there were a lot of people there, you know?’ (Woman with lived experience)
Some programme intermediaries were perceived to respond to women differently once they had been identified and labelled as service users. For example, a woman described feeling that a stakeholder’s initial approach to her as a colleague, shifted to a more distant response.

‘[After the stakeholder had seen the presentation, they] changed from perceiving me as a colleague and talking to me as a colleague, to perceive me as something else. The conversation just didn't have the same flow. [...] I don't know if they all respect us or feel that we should be in that forum, like, ‘How dare we let the criminals in to talk to us and tell us how to do our job?’ Sometimes you get that vibe.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Women also suggested that the ‘immediate’ response to their input at the events should be considered in the broader context of other potential outcomes. While being granted ‘an audience’ with key stakeholders was a significant opportunity, and being acknowledged was an important aspect of service user involvement, actions taken would be the real measure of impact. Where this did not materialise, women’s sense of feeling valued and respected would diminish.

‘It was brilliant to have the chance to speak to [a minister… because] someone was going to listen […] we spoke to him and he seemed to get it, and he seemed to have these actions, and he seemed that he was going to take it away and move it on, but then it all went into the wind […] I don't mind if you want to come to me and ask for me to share my lived experience […] but there needs to be something concrete with it, because that is how you're going to show that you actually respect what you're asking for people to share.’ (Woman with lived experience)

### 4.2.2 Connection and community

Women connected with other service users, in some instances forming lasting friendships, through shared involvement at events. This was particularly the case for the Women’s Summit, which involved large numbers of speakers and audience members with lived experience of the CJS. As is noted in the wider literature (for example, Foot et al., 2014), this was a ‘very important’ benefit because it gave access to a community of peers with shared understanding. For some women, the Summit appeared to be one of the first times they had felt socially supported since completing a sentence.

‘Service users can relate to each other. A lot of things, being in the judicial system, you can't have that conversation with somebody who hasn't [been] as good as [you can with] somebody who has, because they wouldn't understand […] because they haven't been there, so it's hard.’ (Woman with lived experience)

### 4.2.3 Accomplishment

An intrinsic outcome for women was the achievement and accomplishment inherent in contributing to the TL events. As discussed in chapter 3, sharing their lived experience was often an intimidating prospect – the trepidation and nerves they experienced related to public speaking itself; sharing sensitive information about abuse, loss and trauma for example; and engaging with authority figures associated with negative experiences they had had in the past. ‘Getting through’ this was a considerable achievement for women.
'There's a big of a sense of achievement because it's something that I never thought I would do.' (Woman with lived experience)

This linked to women’s sense that using their adverse experiences to advocate for change and more effective solutions was important: doing so effectively was an achievement. This sense of accomplishment extended to women who participated in audiences.

‘They get a sense of pride from going to an event like that. They come back and they feel that they’ve been invested in and that they’ve been able to be advocates for change. I think that’s a really important role for any woman who’s a service user.’ (Programme intermediary)

One view was that this effect also built over time.

‘Being in these sorts of arenas [...] gives you that little bit more confidence. I’m like, ‘Okay, then. You’ve done this before and you can do this again.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Reflecting on their broader experiences of service user involvement (beyond the three TL events), women discussed the sense of catharsis that they had experienced when speaking about their lived experience. Part of this therapeutic effect was the reinforcement that it provided to women’s appreciation that they were more than their past mistakes – as such, it could have a profound influence on their self-worth. This feeling was amplified where audiences appeared to accept them.

‘The first time I stood up and shared why I’d been arrested and the circumstances that led to it, I cried and cried and cried [...] seeing the reaction actually of the police officers, and actually not being demonised by them [...] was a really impactful thing for me because it was like, ‘Okay, they get that I’m a human. They get that there’s a reason’ [...] it was just that acceptance, because I was being accepted by the people, that allowed me to forgive myself, and I’d never had that.’ (Woman with lived experience)

4.3 Broader outcomes

This section explores distal effects of service user involvement in the TL events, including programme intermediaries’ reflections on their own responses outside and after the events themselves and any tangential impacts within their wider networks or the CJS more broadly. In line with the programme logic model (Appendix B, outcomes for stakeholders related to knowledge and understanding, commitment, and action or behaviour change.

4.3.1 Reflecting on own practice

Programme intermediaries felt that women’s first-hand accounts of their experiences worked to emphasise key messages and were sufficiently clear and powerful that they prompted further thought.

‘It made people stop, listen and think about their involvement and their organisation’s involvement in relation to women in the criminal justice system.’ (Programme intermediary)

This was also evident in feedback women had received:
'After the talk that I did [...] I got a lovely letter [...] all about what an impact I'd made and how much he appreciated it and how I'd made him think. He thought that it had made other [professionals attending the event] think [...] about how women are treated.' (Woman with lived experience)

For some, the insight provided by women’s contributions to TL’s activities reinforced their previous thinking rather than changing their approach or planned actions.

‘It would be safe to say that it reinforced some of the changes that we were thinking of making rather than it brought things to our attention that hitherto we hadn’t thought of.’ (Programme intermediary)

Others, however, reported that what they had heard prompted them to consider their own work differently. One example was a programme intermediary examining their existing practice around the treatment of women in detention specifically in relation to points raised in women’s discussions of their own experiences in custody.

‘There were a couple of things [...] in regards to the treatment of women that we’ve taken away and we’re going to look at to see if there needs to be any additional incorporation in terms of when we have female detainees [...] like making sure that we’re fully aware of any other responsibilities that they might have outside and obviously in the home [...] that they were accurately recorded – which we do [do] as a matter of course, but [this thinking] it’s all about how we do it, rather than just almost like a mechanical process.’ (Programme intermediary)

An unexpected impact was that some programme intermediaries reflected on the importance of service user involvement in their own service improvement work, because they considered this to have been such an effective way of sharing information and ‘embedding learning’ in the context of the event for TL. While this view was expressed among the group of programme intermediaries already involving service users, it nonetheless suggests that stakeholders could be inspired by this approach to engage more with other service users in their own areas, which could contribute to greater inclusivity and amplification of their voices.

4.3.2 Dissemination of information

Programme intermediaries discussed sharing key information from the event with colleagues at their own organisations – for example, with senior management teams and directors. While some said that they would have shared the information anyway, one view was that the involvement of women made them want to share information ‘a little bit more’, perhaps because the information was more ‘front of mind’ than it might otherwise have been.

‘I reported back to the [...] directorate at the next meeting that we held with all the governors, and so did [my colleague], on how well the event went. I know that [another colleague] was pleased that [they] went as well.’ (Programme intermediary)

4.3.3 Challenges of assessing outcomes

Participants across the women and stakeholder groups noted that it was challenging to assess outcomes beyond their own perspectives and responses to events and the immediate indicators of engagement among those in the room (body language,
participation in Q&A sessions, and feedback). For many, the true measure of impact would be when action was taken to respond to the issues raised.

‘I can’t really say [whether it matched expectations] until I hear of some form of outcome, because it’s all well and good you having these meetings, but if nothing is going to come out of it, it’s dead. Once I get some information that [tells me], ‘Oh, from that meeting we have now done…’, then I can say, you know?’ (Woman with lived experience)

While they felt strongly that involvement of service users was a valuable tool in advocacy work, women recognised that the effect this could have only went so far, and felt that others needed to coordinate and take action for change to be realised.

‘[Organisations] all need to know what each other is doing [or…] you’re just repeating yourself, repeating yourself, repeating yourself as a service user and you’re not getting anywhere. You’re just saying the same things, the same things. […] It’s not getting the service user anywhere.’ (Woman with lived experience)

The extent to which stakeholder participants could influence distal outcomes – action taken in response to the information TL highlighted – was felt to be constrained by the specific limits of their professional role and remit.

‘The reality is some of those decisions are made at a very high political level […] I’m listening to it, I think I’m a real advocate actually, it would be much better if we had more women in the community because the destructive nature of sentencing, but that’s pitched at Edward Argar, not at my level. I do my job and I try and influence policy, but policy is set by politicians.’ (Programme intermediary)

Both women and programme intermediaries noted that the process to achieve change would be a cumulative effort developing over time.

‘It’s a bit hard, because it takes a while for outcomes to occur […] organisations aren’t going to suddenly change their strategy based on one [talk].’ (Woman with lived experience)

These views chime with the influencing funnel (Appendix B) that underpins TL’s theory of change. The influencing funnel illustrates that overcoming barriers to change become increasingly challenging as progress is made from one stage of the programme logic model to the next – that is, as outcomes move from increased knowledge and awareness to commitment and finally behaviour change. It also highlights two important barriers to achieving TL’s goals, which align with those outlined by participants: namely, keeping key stakeholders on board, and translating commitment into action in the face of competing priorities.

‘These things take time to trickle through the system, and there’s so many different aspects of things that need to happen to create policy impact. [But] lots of the right people were in the room, and that’s always helpful in terms of making sure you’ve got the ear of people that can possibly make decisions to support the process.’ (Programme intermediary)
5 Conclusions and recommendations

PRT commissioned this research to examine how women with lived experience of the CJS had been involved in the TL programme, and the impact of their voices on its activities and outcomes. Through in-depth interviews with women and programme intermediaries who had been involved in three of TL’s most high-profile events in 2019, the research explored what meaningful engagement looked and felt like to these women, as well as perceptions of the impact of their involvement.

The findings presented in this report will provide PRT an opportunity to reflect on the programme and inform their ongoing work to improve outcomes for women in the CJS. More broadly, the key considerations and recommendations presented here will be of use to any agencies seeking to involve service users in their work, particularly where this involves collecting and sharing evidence about individuals’ lived experiences for advocacy campaigns and research.

In this section, we outline key findings from the research which can be applied as lessons for this and other programmes involving service users. These draw from participants’ experiences of the three events that have formed the focal point of the preceding chapters, but also their views and experiences of service user involvement more broadly. Where relevant, comparison is also made with key considerations from the broader literature examined for the document review.

5.1 Maximising the value of service user involvement

This section sets out considerations about service user involvement approaches, relating to balancing potential benefits and negative impacts and targeting efforts in such a way as to maximise value. Specific considerations for subsequent work to involve individuals follow in section 5.4.

Across the interviews, participants suggested that organisations must carefully weigh up potential benefits and risks (at the individual and collective levels) to inform decisions about how best to involve individuals with lived experience. This requires an appreciation of what disclosing their lived experience can mean for the individual, and work to mitigate potential harms by providing support and carefully targeting the approach to maximise the value of their contributions.

‘The problem I have with it now, and where I’m at with it now is, I find it’s the same question being asked over and over and over again, and not everybody has respect for how hard it is for somebody to share their mistakes, to share their dirty laundry.’ (Woman with lived experience)

This echoes findings from the literature that involvement for its own sake can lead to process being prioritised over outcomes, potentially resulting in tokenistic practice (McLeod & Clay, 2018). A failure to focus service user involvement on its potential outcomes could convey a lack of appreciation of the difficulty that discussing their experiences presented for women, potentially with detrimental impact on their wellbeing and relationships between organisations and service users.

‘Think of the worst thing that you have ever, ever done in your life: the time that you have felt the most vulnerable; the time that you’ve hated yourself the most; the time that you’ve felt the saddest in your life. Think how you would feel
sharing that, and then before you come and ask for something, have that in mind.’ (Woman with lived experience)

5.1.1 Targeting specific audiences

One element of targeting service user involvement was choosing to engage with specific audiences. For TL, this included those who played a particularly important role in women’s experience of the CJS, or those who could enact specific and impactful changes in response to targeted messages. This is in line with recommendations in the literature, that approaches involving service users ‘telling their story’ be thoughtfully linked to the intended outcome or learning objectives of a particular activity (Robinson & Webber, 2013).

The second TL event was an example of this. In speaking about their experiences of arrest and custody at the National Custody Forum, women delivered a targeted message that linked directly to changes in police practice that audience members could themselves implement.

‘That is really why we wanted to speak [to them], because all the other people had been more affecting their practice on a day-to-day basis, but with the custody sergeants it was more important, because [they] are pivotal to whether or not that woman [detained in custody] is going to share that [information about her circumstances or experience leading to arrest].’ (Woman with lived experience)

5.1.2 Diverse service user involvement

The wider literature highlights that attempts should be made to ensure that service user involvement reflects the diversity of that population as far as possible (HMPPS Wales, n.d.; McLeod & Clay, 2018). At the same time, identifying and engaging with individuals can be a time- and resource-consuming process, making it challenging for organisations to achieve diversity across the group they involve. In the CJS context, those who have served longer prison sentences, for example, may be more likely to come forward than those with lived experience of early intervention or diversion, community sentences and short prison sentences, all of whom are likely to engage for shorter periods with CJS agencies and services through which organisations like PRT can make contact.

As highlighted in chapter 3, participants in this research felt that service users’ intrinsic demographic characteristics such as race, gender, and age should be diversely represented; additionally, factors such as geographical diversity could help to avoid a common ‘London-centric’ focus and maximise relevance to the local context.

While the range of women involved in the three TL events was generally considered to be appropriate, and participants acknowledged that the extent to which diversity was achievable was limited where only a couple of speakers could participate in a session, some gaps were identified. For TL events specifically, greater diversity across criminal justice experiences and recency of sentences were important considerations, as was inclusion of younger women.

Reflecting on service user involvement they had seen outside the three TL events, women and programme intermediaries discussed the risk that particular individuals were invited to speak too frequently at the expense of hearing from others. Programme intermediaries described having heard the same women share their experiences at multiple events, which could reduce the impact of their advocacy.
One view was that, where service users’ backgrounds or experiences related to the particular context or to their audience, their advocacy might have more impact:

- The NCF presentation (event 2) was one example where content and context were carefully matched. Here, women spoke to a police audience about the ways in which differing approaches to engaging with them in custody had positively or negatively affected their experiences and outcomes;
- The Women in the Criminal Justice System meeting (event 3) was mentioned as an example of effective involvement of a service user whose background was relevant to the local population. Her presentation focused on cultural differences and the particular needs of BAME women in the CJS. It was seen as particularly relevant and useful as a result of that shared minority ethnic background.

Participants acknowledged that service users’ support needs and levels of pre-existing disadvantage and vulnerability would limit the extent to which activities could attain diversity in relation to two key dimensions: skills and ability (including confidence and language/communication) and behaviour. In part, this reflects Thorne’s (2016) conclusion that service user volunteers’ capacity is an important consideration: they need to feel capable and resilient to take part and share their stories. One view was that some women with lived experience might find the thought of speaking to CJS professionals an insurmountable challenge because of their experiences of trauma.

‘The majority of service users, obviously, struggle with anxiety and mental health problems, so to expect somebody to stand in a room full of hundreds of people, especially people like police officers or anyone with involvement in prison for women, who have been in prison or been arrested - I have friends that […] wouldn't even be in the same room as a police officer. It's too triggering, it's too traumatic. Yes, although I found it very intimidating and struggled with it, but I know there are lots of women who just wouldn’t be able to do it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Another view expressed by both programme intermediaries and women was that more vulnerable women might not be considered for inclusion.

‘It’s always going to be the problem that those that are more vulnerable or most inarticulate or most disadvantaged may be the ones who are least likely to feel confident enough to become involved […] Certainly the people that I heard speaking at the event, many of them were clearly very articulate and although some of them were extremely nervous they equally had enough confidence to stand up in front of a room full of people and speak.’ (Programme intermediary)

Related to this was speculation among women that audience engagement might be greater where they identified more with a service user’s demographic characteristics. Limited diversity among CJS stakeholders could present particular challenges to advocacy involving women of BAME backgrounds (PRT, 2017).

‘I feel like people […] listen to me, as a white, middle-class woman, [more] than they would [people with lower levels of education…] Being a white middle-class woman […] maybe they can relate to that and maybe […] take the time to listen; they possibly wouldn't if they saw my angry black friend. They possibly wouldn't want to hear [them].’ (Woman with lived experience)

5.2 Facilitating meaningful involvement
This section draws on participants’ experiences of service user involvement – both in the three TL events and more broadly – to explore how specific individuals could best be involved, once the overall approach is appropriately planned (as discussed above).

Participants stressed the importance of examining what involvement might entail for service users on an individual, case-by-case basis, and invest time and resources in supporting them to contribute fully. Some women described past experiences with organisations other than Prison Reform Trust which they felt had a ‘conveyor belt approach’, in which service users were there to fulfil a function, instead of being supported and developed as individuals – and were left feeling exploited and used as a result. This contrasts with good practice, whereby ‘one size fits all’ approaches are avoided, and individuals offered choice, autonomy and a range of support to facilitate genuine involvement (Faulkner, 2009).

The facilitators discussed in this section include careful assessment of and response to individual support needs, promotion of a broad range of benefits at individual and broader levels, provision of clear, consistent and transparent information across all stages of involvement, and prioritising appropriate support.

5.2.1 Vetting and risk assessment

Considering and prioritising service users’ individual support needs was something that participants considered necessary throughout all stages of their involvement – from the point of their invitation onwards. Women and programme intermediaries highlighted this as a key consideration, particularly given the prevalence of trauma and experiences of exploitation among those in the CJS.

‘Maybe that should be part of the vetting process […] where they say, ‘Okay, then. Let’s speak to this individual, find out what their lived experience is, and basically have that human one-to-one approach with them’. Rather than like, ‘Yes, yes, tick a few boxes, you’re in, okay, then’, and then that person ends up having a breakdown or something, halfway through […] whatever it is they’re doing, because they’ve been triggered by something [and] they’ve got no one to speak to.’ (Woman with lived experience)

The wider literature suggests that this approach to vetting or risk assessment is appropriate, in that it contextualises vulnerability within an assessment of the support that could mitigate it (Thorne, 2016). However, risks are noted too, with concerns that the vulnerabilities of individuals who are experts by experience can be used as an excuse to avoid genuine involvement (Sandhu, 2017).

Participants also stressed the importance of building in provision of emotional support (discussed further in 5.4 below) from the earliest point. This aligns with best practice recommendations, which emphasise the importance of recognising and responding to individual needs by providing adequate support to service users (Thorne, 2016).

‘You are asking that person […] delivering that message or helping [your programme], to almost relive their experiences – and sometimes, very traumatic experiences. You have to be very careful in working with them to make sure they’re in the right place and the right space to do that, and that the support is there for them to be able to do that.’ (Programme intermediary)
5.2.2 Reciprocal benefit

Participants considered that service user involvement should benefit the individual as well as the programme, and that this required consideration from the earliest point.

‘It should be a two-way learning for the organisation and for the service user. What can the service user take from this? Are [the organisation] going to upskill them? Are they going to heal in some way? Instead of using [the service user].’ (Woman with lived experience)

Similar conclusions are evident in the wider literature. McLeod and Clay (2018), for example, note that both the benefits to individual users and the wider potential outcomes are necessary focuses for organisations commissioning service user involvement if it is to be both genuine and effective.

Reflecting on the TL events, one view expressed by both participant groups was that women benefited in terms of learning and understanding more about ongoing work around women’s imprisonment, as well as through opportunities to form connections with other women and programme intermediaries. This was an important consideration for some in their decision to be involved. These findings are echoed in the wider literature, where access to positive networks and role models and opportunities for learning and development are highlighted as benefits to service users (User Voice, 2019; McLeod & Clay, 2018).

Participants discussed a range of ways in which the specific approach to involving service users could empower them. One was to maximise their remit as far as possible, rather than constraining involvement. In one example (drawn from her wider experience, not connected with TL or PRT), a woman compared two organisations’ approaches to service user involvement in service improvement programmes:

‘We used to attend stakeholders’ meetings [at organisation 1…] they'd want us all there. They'd want us presenting it […] very much at the forefront of it. It was mainly us that was delivering. I've never experienced anything like that with [organisation 2]. They don't really let you in on what's going on behind the scenes, basically. You're just given your role and that is your role. That's it. So, that's where I felt exploited. It was just like, ‘Okay, then, so I'm just here to work for free.’’ (Woman with lived experience)

Emphasising individual autonomy and offering control over how women were involved was also important, in line with the wider literature (Faulkner, 2009). This included empowering the person to participate on their own terms – offering choice on the order in which they spoke, for example, or offering breaks at any time.

For more extensive or long-term projects, service users could be supported to develop their skills further through opportunities for managerial supervision and reflection on their input, which some considered indicators of organisations’ investment in supporting service users’ growth. This chimes with recommendations elsewhere that supervision and training for service users enables skills development (Faulkner, 2009).

Fully involving a wide range of service users demands considerable investment in terms of resource and support – as evidenced in Robinson and Webber’s (2013) conclusion that appropriate funding is a key facilitator to involving service users. A view among programme intermediaries was that the extent of some women’s needs presented a steep learning curve for organisations embarking on involving service users. This did not appear to reduce their commitment to involving service users, but – in line with recommendations from the wider literature – was considered important for services to factor in when designing and resourcing their approaches.
Some people have got to learn the professional etiquette of being just employed. So that was quite a learning curve for us.’ (Programme intermediary)

5.2.3 Setting expectations
Provision of clear information at the earliest point was considered important. Participants suggested that information provided to service users should include details of the purpose, process, and planned or anticipated outcomes of the event, and of service users’ specific roles. These recommendations concur with the wider literature, which emphasises the importance of setting and managing expectations as transparently as possible, and ensuring that this is delivered in a way that users can understand (Faulkner et al., 2015; Revolving Doors Agency, 2016).

For the TL events, one view among women was that information about the events might not have been communicated as clearly when it was delivered via an intermediary, such as a support worker, with whom TL had spoken. Direct contact and liaison with women could support better understanding and fully-informed agreement to their involvement. However, a contrasting view was that discussion with experienced peers could support service users’ understanding of what their contribution might involve. Using a range of approaches to communicate all the necessary information might therefore be considered.

Thinking of service user involvement in general, programme intermediaries also acknowledged that direct information-sharing could be particularly challenging for specific groups, such as those with currently serving prison sentences, to whom access would necessarily be mediated by staff and fear of potential recrimination could be exacerbated.

‘To be sure that people are genuinely involved because they want to be and because they've chosen to be and not because they feel that that's what the officers or the managers in the prison or whoever else wants […] it's always challenging. […] There is always a worry from people that you're talking to, that there may be potential repercussions for them in terms of the information that they give you.’ (Programme intermediary)

Understanding potential consequences
Two key risks were identified for women considering sharing their lived experience. As discussed in 5.3.1, one was that it could be triggering or retraumatising for women.

The second was that being identified as somebody with experience of the CJS had potential longer-term impact on women’s lives because of others’ negative perceptions. It was considered crucial that women were supported to understand potential consequences of identifying themselves publicly as somebody with a criminal record. Examples included acquaintances seeing outputs (such as print or television interviews) that identified the woman as an ex-offender. This might result in women being judged negatively and treated differently. Another potential consequence was that being ‘labelled’ as a ‘service user’ or ‘person with lived experience’ could overshadow how women’s wider skills and experience were perceived and limit them professionally on a longer-term basis.

‘You can locate them back in their story all the time when actually they should be moving on and those things. […] once you've put that label on yourself and maybe had a job where your lived experience is the reason you've got that job and that's on your CV, it’s quite difficult to move on from that and just be seen as a professional alongside everybody else.’ (Programme intermediary)
One way in which some organisations had done this effectively was by involving people who had lived experience in the teams that supported service users: such individuals were considered particularly well-placed to support women’s voluntary involvement because of shared understanding and experience. Research also suggests that peers are often viewed as more approachable than other staff members, influencing the degree to which service users feel comfortable raising issues with them (Revolving Doors Agency, 2016).

Contextual information

Participants’ experiences of some of the TL events suggested that additional contextual information could help to ensure service users felt comfortable. In particular, a clear explanation as to why specific individuals were involved, including detail about their role and remit in the sector, might help offset interpersonal barriers, including a sense of ‘us and them’ which increased feelings of trepidation and intimidation. One example where this appeared to have been the case was the Women’s Summit (event 1), where one view among women was that some of the senior programme intermediaries involved in delivery of sessions were difficult for them to relate to.

‘I did feel like, ‘Maybe you could have chosen someone different to do this’. [...] The impression [...] was like [...] to be honest, yes, a bit stuck-up. A bit like, ‘How can she relate to me? [...] why her? What importance is she?’ I probably will do a little bit more background research on her now to see why she was asked [to be involved].’ (Woman with lived experience)

5.2.4 Support during preparation and delivery

Content

Reflecting on their experiences in TL events, women generally had not rehearsed their presentation in full. Some felt that doing so would have increased their nerves or reduced the effectiveness of their speech because it might become rote and feel less ‘raw’ or ‘real’. However, others felt audience engagement was better when they could speak without notes, and those who had more experience of speaking at events felt that this had improved the quality of their contributions.

‘I felt more confident just for the fact that I have done it a lot. So, the first time I did it, it was all about me and my emotions, whereas now, it’s more factual because too much emotions makes people uncomfortable, and then they stop listening [...] Experience has enabled me, to a degree, to try and speak more professionally in a way that I hope they’ll receive the information better.’ (Woman with lived experience)

A risk that some women might reveal more of their story than they had intended – both for their own privacy and the focus of the session – was discussed by programme intermediaries; part of their concern being to protect the women. One view was that some women might need support to focus their contribution. This might be supported by briefing service users, rehearsing with them, or perhaps by using a Q&A style of delivery.

‘They can [...] overshare [or...] go off on tangents. That happens all the time, which is why it’s so important that somebody prepares them [...] They’ve got so much [lived] experience, that’s the trouble, that they can go off [...] into something that happens to be prominent in their mind for that day. You have to pull them back [...] and [keep] focused.’ (Programme intermediary)
Managing power imbalance

The literature notes that power and privilege should be key considerations for service user involvement (Sandhu, 2017). Power dynamics should be acknowledged and minimised. One approach, for example, is that managerial staff should be sensitive to these differentials throughout their work with service users (Faulkner, 2009).

When reflecting on their experience with TL, women described the challenge of engaging with a professional audience in the context of trauma and, often, damaged self-esteem. This presented a clear power imbalance.

‘It can make you feel a little bit inferior when people are there in suits and stuff like that.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Drawing on peer support was considered one way of involving women effectively.

‘One of the things that really helps is when you are working with former prisoners […] that direct connection for people still in prison […] helps people to feel safer around disclosing information, and […] In situations where people have been really motivated by fear and what people who’ve left prison can achieve […] they’ve directly related to that and begun to think about what they could achieve when they leave prison.’ (Programme intermediary)

5.3 Aftercare

Participants highlighted the emotional toll of disclosing information about lived experiences, which were often bound up in trauma and shame.

‘Reliving these experiences and talking about them are quite personal and quite emotive, I think. It probably would contribute, possibly, [to] nervousness, […] just telling the story, but also, you are giving a presentation or a talk to a large group of people, […] a lot of police officers – who are the ones you might have had issues with in the past.’ (Programme intermediary)

One view among participants was that provision of emotional support was generally insufficient and should be a key consideration across all stages of service user involvement (as suggested by, for example, Thorne (2016) and Faulkner et al. (2015)). Women acknowledged that it might not be appropriate or possible for organisations to provide specialist support directly, but acknowledging the potential need and facilitating access to relevant sources of information and support should be done consistently, whether the organisation was directly involving women or commissioning other organisations to do so.

‘Just a courtesy like, 'Look, I hope […] there was nothing there that was too uncomfortable for you to speak about. If there is, would you like to come and speak to somebody?’ or something like that. That's probably all I'd expect.’ (Woman with lived experience)

5.3.1 Debriefing

Following up with women, about any longer-term impact of their work as well as to thank them for their specific role, was considered to be of key importance.

Women were determined to contribute to advocacy activities that they felt to be important. Where outcomes were not transparently communicated, however, it was clearly difficult to sustain motivation and manage frustration.
‘Some of it’s exploitative, because you get all this information and then we never see what happens with it. We never see how they use it. We don’t see how it’s affecting any change. […] I think some people are doing it to tick a box, rather than to actually do anything with it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

‘When I’ve done research, I felt like, ‘What good is going to happen with this information?’ […] if no good happens with it, I just feel like I’ve just opened that can of worms for that person and not closed it down.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Including women in updates around the intended and achieved results was one way in which organisations could maintain trust and confidence in their relationships with the service users (one view among women was that TL worked in this way). This aligns with best practice recommendations that information provision to service users should include feedback and details of outcomes of involvement (Faulkner et al., 2015).

‘I’d like to read more about what was the outcome, and to see what impact it did have […] I know it’s a bit hard, because it takes a while for outcomes to occur, but organisations aren’t going to suddenly change their strategy based on one, but I would like to see how other professionals, other organisations viewed it, as well. Did they feel that it was important?’ (Woman with lived experience)

5.4 Recognition and reward

5.4.1 Recognition and acknowledgement

Acknowledging the work that women had done was important in supporting positive connections between programme intermediaries and those drawing on their lived experience. These markers of appreciation of their effort were valued. For example, some women noted that they had received thanks directly from the TL team; others had heard from members of the audience after the event.

‘I’ve had lovely cards […] to thank me for doing it. […] I’ve had a couple that have been really nice […] It makes you feel like you’re not just being used, you’re not just there to do something and people aren’t appreciating it.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Considering more formal acknowledgment of their involvement, one view was that employer references could be helpful. Being credited for their work when it was shared or discussed helped women to feel that they were valued, and their individual development invested in.

However, one view appeared to be that these things were ‘nice to have’ rather than ‘essential’. More important was that the information they shared was used effectively and that clear outcomes were attained.

‘Yes, there’s a thank you and, yes, there’s a smile and, yes, sometimes it goes somewhere […] but actually, in the grander scheme of things, what are you actually going to do with it?’ (Woman with lived experience)

Some women were also more inclined to speak to audiences where they had seen commitment and change take effect in response to their past work. Where they felt valued, respected and taken seriously, and where they were kept informed of tangible outcomes from their input, women felt more confident in their work being worthwhile.
5.4.2 Payment

Participants agreed that women’s expenses (travel and subsistence costs) should be covered, in line with recommendations from the literature (The Llwybrau Project, 2017). There was clear evidence that this had had an impact on who took part in events with TL, with some women explaining that they would not have attended had travel expenses not been reimbursed, for example. Some participants discussed costs being covered up-front to ensure women could take part without being out of pocket.

‘I personally wouldn’t pay to go down and get my views heard […] I wouldn’t have gone if I’d had to pay for it myself […] The train fare […] would have been about £150 […] I would have wanted something tangible back for that money.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Views were mixed, however, on whether women should be paid for their time. For some, it was important that women’s time and effort was recognised in the same way as with any other service provider. This chimes with other recommendations that service user contributions should be recognised as work rather than just ‘empowerment’ (Brown, 2019).

‘We are offering a service, and if it’s a gas service, or electric or water, you have to pay for it, don’t you? The police service, social services service; you have to pay for it [...] I can’t go to any shop with praises and say, ‘Take this’ and come out with a bag of groceries. I can’t do it! That’s the only thing that I think needs to be looked at. We are offering a service and it’s a service that is needed, so I think we should have some kind of incentive.’ (Woman with lived experience)

Discomfort with service users being paid for their contributions related to two key concerns. One was a perceived risk that the organisation would consider that its obligations to service users were met through their payment, instead of prioritising ongoing work towards broader outcomes (which service users felt were more important). This was described as something that could cheapen individuals’ contribution.

‘I personally would not want to receive money for sharing my story. Travel expenses, absolutely, but I wouldn’t want to receive money. What I would like is to see it affect the bigger picture [...] Mean what you say. The women that do the talks don’t want to be paid [...] They want to effect change [...] They don’t want [...] the kind of token, ‘Oh, thanks for your time.’ No, because how does that help me in the future? How does that help me support myself in the future? How does that give me any kind of confidence or self-esteem or worth in the future? [...] I feel it’s cheap.’ (Woman with lived experience)

The second concern was that, were payment offered, women might take part for financial gain without proper consideration of and preparation for the impact that doing so might have on them. The perception that women might participate primarily for financial gain also appeared to affect some audience responses to women.

It is widely recognised among organisations committed to service user engagement (including the PRT) to ensure that participants’ costs are covered and their contribution acknowledged with a small cash payment or gift token. This is also supported by the wider literature (Faulkner, 2009).

5.5 Conclusion
Participants in this research, as in the wider literature, agreed that there were significant benefits in involving service users in advocacy and improvement work – and that this had been the case with Transforming Lives. Care, time and resource are needed to ensure approaches are not tokenistic or exploitative and that a supportive and constructive approach is taken, including efforts to recognise and minimise potential harm, provide continuous feedback, and, as far as possible, ensure that service users benefit from contributing.

‘I think it’s a massive advantage and I think done well, the women get loads out of it, but it’s got to be done well and the risks are big.’ (Programme intermediary)

Key implications for those considering involving service users in their work centre on the need to balance risk and benefits, and to factor support provision into their approaches. Recognising the potential burdens (both emotional and practical) that sharing their experiences place on service users, assessing whether there is sufficient merit to ask service users to take the task on, and, if so, mitigating the risks for them through careful planning and support provision are key to ensuring effective, meaningful, and sustainable contributions from service users. In terms of broader impact on policy and practice, it also seems important to situate service user involvement as part of a wider programme of work which deploys a range of strategies to respond to the challenges outlined in the influencing funnel.
References


Appendix A. Transforming Lives briefings and reports

PRT provided the following overview of their briefings and reports.

PRT’s factsheets on Reducing Women’s Imprisonment and the following reports are available to download at www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women, some are also available in hard copy on request to PRT. All reflect the insights and varied perspectives of women with direct experience of the justice system.

**Women’s Voices**

These briefings provide a thematic overview of the insights contributed by women with personal experience through the Transforming Lives Women’s Councils co-convened with User Voice in Birmingham and London from 2016 to 2018, and focus groups held with women in Wales by Llamau.

- **Women’s Voices West Midlands**
  www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Women's Voices WEST MIDLANDS.pdf
- **Women’s Voices London**
  www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Women's Voices LONDON FINAL.pdf
- **Llamau Women’s Voices report**
  www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/PRT Llamau service user engagement FULL REPORT June 2018.pdf
- **Women’s Voices summary, April 2019**
  www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Women's Voices Summary Report FINAL for print.pdf

**Working it out: improving employment opportunities for women with criminal convictions – January 2020**

Co-published with Working Chance this briefing considers the disproportionate impact that a criminal conviction, and even more so imprisonment, has on women’s employment. It highlights both problems and good practice in prisons and in the community and makes recommendations for change.


**Out of the shadows: women with learning disabilities in contact with the criminal justice system – May 2019**

This report draws on the experiences of 24 women with learning disabilities in contact with, or on the edges of, the criminal justice system as well as practitioners in criminal justice, social care, and women’s services. Abuse by men lay behind the offending of most of the participating women.

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Out of the shadows.pdf

**Broken Trust: the rising number of women recalled to prison – December 2018**

The rising number of women recalled to prison prompted Prison Reform Trust to undertake this research. Its findings confirm that reforms intended to improve support
for those released from prison have done the opposite and are trapping vulnerable women in the justice system.


**Leading Change: the role of local authorities in supporting women with multiple needs – October 2018**
This provides a strategic guide for councils about their obligations and opportunities to champion women and deliver multi-agency support that can make a positive difference to the daily lives of women at risk of imprisonment and their children.

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/leadingchangereissuecomp.pdf

**Still no way out – September 2018**
This report updates earlier research on foreign national women in the criminal justice system, many of whom have been trafficked or coerced into offending, and found there is still inadequate legal representation, poor interpreting services and disproportionate punishment for many women.


**What about me? – July 2018**
This report considers the impact on children of maternal imprisonment, finding that this can affect every area of their lives, including their housing, education, health, and well-being. Based on extensive consultations with children as well as mothers and support services, it makes detailed recommendations and informed Lord Farmer’s review of the family relationships of women in prison.

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/portals/0/documents/what about me.pdf

**Home truths: housing for women in the criminal justice system – June 2018**
This briefing highlights the chronic lack of housing support for women released from custody – as one woman says, “Without it you don’t have a chance.” Many become trapped in a cycle of offending, struggling to meet their licence conditions, in some cases returning to prison to avoid homelessness.


"There’s a reason we’re in trouble": Domestic abuse as a driver to women’s offending – December 2017
This report identifies strong links between women’s experience of abusive and coercive relationships and their offending. It calls for the police, prosecuting authorities, probation services and the courts to adopt the practice of routine inquiry into women’s histories of domestic and sexual violence at each stage of the criminal justice process. It also highlights the lack of any effective defence for those whose offences arise from coercion or duress as part of an abusive relationship.


**Counted Out: Black, Asian and minority ethnic women in the criminal justice system – August 2017**
This briefing highlights the ‘data deficit’ that obscures the disproportionate rates and impact of imprisonment among women from different minority ethnic and religious backgrounds and their different experiences of the criminal justice system.
Recommendations to tackle the discrimination and disadvantage that black and minority ethnic women face informed the Lammy Review. 

**Fair Cop? Improving outcomes for women at the point of arrest – March 2017**
This briefing looks at the variations in how police forces deal with women who come into the criminal justice system and provides solutions and examples of positive work being delivered by police to tackle low level, non-violent crime committed by women. It has informed the roll-out of early intervention and diversion schemes for women. 
www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Women/Fair Cop.pdf

**Sentencing of Mothers: Improving the sentencing process and outcomes for women with dependent children – November 2015**
This discussion paper, informed by talking to mothers sentenced to imprisonment, provides an overview of sentencing practice for women with dependent children and sets out a number of proposals for improving the operation of the justice system. 
www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/sentencing_mothers.pdf

**Transforming Lives: Reducing Women’s Imprisonment – January 2015**
This report, based on information collected at local level with the support of the Soroptimists across the UK, provides an overview of current practice relating to women in the criminal justice system, highlighting good practice and making recommendations for comprehensive reform. 
Appendix B. Influencing funnel and logic models

The 'influencing funnel'

Wide representation at roundtable ➔ MoJ commitment through grid; less clear about commitment of other parts of system ➔ Challenges translating commitment to action, (e.g. resistance of CPS)

Mechanisms
- Double loop learning – using information to prompt different way of thinking about issue
- Getting inside the tent – using reports/ information as way of becoming part of decision-making process

Barriers
- Keeping right people on board – fragmentation of system means difficult to keep all people/ agencies involved
- Translating commitment into action in the face of competing priorities
Transforming Lives Programme - High Level Outcome Pathway

PRT activities

PRT skills and capabilities

Intermediaries

Governance outcome pathway

Practice outcome pathway

Specific groups outcome pathway

Reduce the number of women sent to prison, either on remand or sentenced

Knowledge transfer/evidence base
Transforming Lives Programme – Outcome Pathway

Activities
- Advocacy
- Collaboration
- Research
- Advice and Support
- Communication

PRT skills and capabilities
- Increase in partnership working
- Increase in knowledge of the evidence base on drivers to women’s imprisonment
- Increase in knowledge of the evidence base for non-custodial options for women
- Increase in knowledge of the effectiveness of justice reinvestment strategies
- Increase in knowledge of the effectiveness of devolving justice budgets
- The voice and experiences of women offenders increasingly informs PRT’s activities

PRT skills and capabilities

Criminal Justice
- Criminal Justice Agencies, e.g.
  - Police
  - CPS
  - Prison system
  - Probation
  - Inspectorates
  - Courts
- Sentencers, e.g.
  - Senior Judiciary
  - Sentencing Council
- Professional organizations
  - Bar Council
  - Magistrates Association
  - Law Society

Government
- National
- Devolved Government / Parliament

Local Government, e.g.
- Health & Social Care leads
- Local Authorities

National and local VSOs (women’s sector and civil society organisations)
**Transforming Lives Programme – Practice Outcome Pathway**

**Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Practice change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase in knowledge of the profile of women who come into contact with the CIS</td>
<td>Recognition of the importance of a different approach for women in contact with the CIS (including early intervention and diversion and non-custodial options)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in awareness of the early intervention and non-custodial options</td>
<td>Criminal justice decision-makers (e.g. police, sentences, prosecutors, probation) are increasingly skilled at responding to women’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in confidence in using non-custodial options where appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved collaborative working between women’s justice and appropriate services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase in person-centred decision-making in relation to women in contact with the CIS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Impacts**

| Increase in use of appropriate non-custodial options | Reduce the number of women sent to prison, either on remand or sentenced |
Appendix C. Methodology and sample

This appendix provides further detail on the research and methods described in chapter 1.

Recruitment

As outlined in chapter 1, a staged opt-in recruitment process was used. In the first instance, PRT spoke directly to members of the NatCen research team for a detailed briefing about the recruitment and fieldwork process prior to contacting any potential participants. The NatCen research team created introductory emails for participants which were sent by PRT to select potential participants. These emails communicated the aims of the research and what taking part would involve (including why they were being contacted; the interview content, duration and recording; how their information would be used; the level of anonymity offered and the voluntary nature of participation) and all the relevant materials that individuals needed (including information sheets and consent forms).

Prior to the start of interviews, the researcher reiterated key information about the study. All participants had the opportunity to ask the research team questions about their involvement. Permission to audio record the discussion was also sought and verbal consent was obtained from participants prior to the start of interviews.

Data collection, management and analysis

The research team carefully scheduled interviews to ensure that participants would be able to access appropriate support if needed after the interview. Individuals’ accessibility issues were accommodated as far as was possible within the research team. This included offering face-to-face or phone interviews in settings most suitable to the participant. Interviews with women were held in quiet, private rooms in their homes or support organisations. Data was collected between September 2019 to January 2020.

Interviews were managed and analysed using the Framework approach developed by NatCen. Key topics emerging from the interviews were identified through familiarisation with the transcripts to develop a thematic framework for data management. All members of the NatCen research team were given a thorough briefing about the analytical framework and a detailed description of what should be included in each sub-theme, to ensure consistency of approach.

The Framework method has been embedded into NVivo version 10. The software enabled the summarised data from the research to be linked to the verbatim transcript. This approach meant that each part of every transcript that was relevant to a particular theme was noted, ordered and accessible. The final analytic stage involved working through the charted data, drawing out the range of experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences and interrogating the data to seek to explain emergent patterns and findings.

Research ethics

The key issues that were considered in designing and conducting the research were:

Ethical approval
The observations, and qualitative fieldwork strands of the research were reviewed and approved by NatCen’s Research Ethics Committee (REC), comprised of senior staff. The REC considered all aspects of the research design in detail.

**Participation based on valid consent**  
Participants were made aware of what the research involved and that they could consent (or refuse to consent) to participate. We prepared and provided clear tailored, accessible materials and informed participants across the groups that taking part was voluntary, confidential and anonymous.

Researchers facilitated participants to make an informed decision about taking part, ensuring before data collection began that they understood what confidentiality and anonymity meant and being clear about the limits of confidentiality. The ongoing nature of consent was explained, including that withdrawal was possible up until the point of data analysis.

**Participants’ wellbeing**  
Careful consideration was given to protecting the welfare of research participants, which is particularly important when exploring sensitive topics or engaging people who may be in vulnerable circumstances. Although participants’ personal experiences of the CJS were not explored as part of the research interviews, there was a possibility that women would wish to share information about upsetting experiences of prison, community sentences or probation. In the instance of any disclosure, we would have followed the standard NatCen disclosure policy (see below).

Throughout all stages of the research – from recruitment to participation in interviews – we provided participants with clear information about the topics being covered, and agreed clear ground rules for participants ahead of each interview.

**Confidentiality, anonymity, and disclosure**  
The standard NatCen disclosure policy was put in place to deal with any instances where a participant disclosed past or potential serious harm to themselves or identifiable other.

The circumstances in which participant confidentiality may have to be breached were carefully explained to participants in the information leaflets, consent forms, and by researchers at the time of the interview. No incidents of disclosure took place during the fieldwork.

Rigorous data security and protection against direct or indirect disclosure of identity was built into all stages of the research, in line with the Data Protection Act and GDPR obligations.
Appendix D. Topic guides

Tailored topic guides were used to ensure a consistent approach across all the interviews and between members of the research team. The guides were used flexibly to allow researchers to respond to the nature and content of each discussion, so the topics covered and their order varied between interviews. Researchers used open, non-leading questions, and answers were fully probed to elicit greater depth and detail where necessary.

The main headings and subheadings from the topic guides are provided below.

Programme intermediary topic guide

1. Introduction
   - Introduce self and NatCen (including NatCen’s independence)
   - Introduce research, aims of study and interview
   - Length (about 60 minutes)
   - Voluntary participation
   - Brief overview of topics to be covered in interview
   - Confidentiality, anonymity and potential caveats
   - Audio recording (including encryption, data storage and destruction)
   - Questions
   - Verbal consent recorded on tape

2. Background
   - Overview of role and responsibilities

3. Overview of relationship with Transforming Lives
   - Explore participant’s relationship [as an individual/their organisation] with PRT/individual members of the TL programme team
   - What their understanding of TL’s approach is
   - Their involvement in PRT/TL activities and/or use of TL outputs

4. General views on service user involvement
   - Views on involving service users in advocacy/campaigning/service development work
   - Any general challenges/barriers/considerations
   - Any previous involvement/experiences of work involving service users

5. Overview of event they attended
   - How they heard about the event; why they wanted to attend
   - Explore expectations ahead of the event
• Overall impressions of event

6. Views on women’s involvement
• Overall reflections on women’s involvement as speakers/session leads
• Their understanding of the purpose of women’s involvement in the event
• What difference, if any, women’s involvement made to the session(s)
• Overall views on key strengths of each session involving women
• Overall views on gaps/limitations of each session involving women
• Suggestions for improvement in how future events involve women
• Reflections on women involved in the event as delegates

7. Outcomes
• Overview of the impact/outcome of each activity involving women with lived experience
• Views on what the key results of TL’s involvement of service users have been
• Perceived impact of women’s involvement on others
• Did the event have any immediate impact on them and/or their work
• Were there any longer-term impacts
• Explore the role of women being involved in the event in these changes
• Explore influence of sessions involving women with lived experience on:
  • Knowledge of women in the CJS
  • Commitment and support to reducing women’s imprisonment
  • Behaviour change
  • Influencing distinct approaches for different groups of women;
  • Influencing distinct approaches at different stages of the CJS journey

8. Reflections
• General reflections on involvement of women in TL
• Overview of whether they think women’s involvement has had an impact on the event’s overall impact, on delegates’ work, and more broadly
• Recap what worked well/recommendations for improvements across: which women are involved; nature of their involvement; extent of their inclusion
• Views on perceived added value of women’s involvement
• Recommendations for improvement/priorities, opportunities and challenges for the next year

9. Close
• Other closing comments and stop recording: any questions, review confidentiality and check whether participant is comfortable with content of discussion, thank them for their time, close.
Women’s topic guide

1. Introduction
   - Introduce self and NatCen (including NatCen’s independence)
   - Introduce research, aims of study and interview
   - Length (about 60 minutes)
   - Voluntary participation
   - Brief overview of topics to be covered in interview
   - Confidentiality, anonymity and potential caveats
   - Audio recording (including encryption, data storage and destruction)
   - Questions
   - Verbal consent recorded on tape

2. Background and overview of relationship with Transforming Lives
   - Overview of role and responsibilities
   - Explore participant’s relationship with PRT/individual members of the TL programme team
   - What their understanding of TL’s approach is
   - Their involvement in PRT/TL activities prior to this event

3. General views on user involvement
   - Views on involving service users work aiming to influence change (e.g. advocacy, campaigning or service development programmes)
   - What should organisations consider when considering this approach
   - Any previous involvement/experiences of work involving service users

4. Expectations and preparation for this TL event
   - When, how and why they first got involved
   - Stages of their involvement
   - Explore expectations ahead of the event
   - Preparation for the event

5. Experience of their event session
   - Overall reflections on their involvement
   - Suggestions for improvement in how future events involve women

6. Impact and outcomes
   - Views on what the key results of their involvement in this event has been – what difference has it made to them personally
7. Views of the rest of the event
   - Overall impressions of event outside their session
   - Reflections on women’s involvement in other sessions
   - Overall views on key strengths of each session involving women
   - Views on whether TL is involving appropriate individuals
   - Overall views on gaps/limitations of each session involving women

8. Reflections
   - General reflections on involvement of women in TL activities
   - Overview of the impact of involvement in this particular event on them
   - Recap what worked well/recommendations for improvements across: advance preparation, nature of their involvement, extent of their involvement, impact of their involvement.

9. Close
   - Other closing comments and stop recording: any questions, review confidentiality and check whether participant is comfortable with content of discussion, thank them for their time, close.