BRIEFING PAPER

DEVELOPING AND DESIGNING WOMEN'S CENTRES: SHARING LEARNING FROM THE DEVELOPMENT PHASE

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INTRODUCTION

The Robertson Trust provided funding and support for the introduction and development of two asset-based and community-led Women's Centres focused on meeting the needs and aspirations of women and girls including those who are most vulnerable. This research was commissioned to:

1) explore the effectiveness of the approach taken during the development and design phases of the Centres initiated by The Robertson Trust;
2) share learning throughout the evaluation process to inform future work in this area for the Trust, those involved in the programme and other interested organisations.

As part of this, The Robertson Trust is contributing to the evidence-base about what works, what doesn't work and why in developing a community led approach to the design and development of community-led Women's Centres and to use that learning to help inform and improve local and national policy and shape future service delivery in this context. This project, designed to document and analyse the process and inform that learning, commenced in May 2015 and concluded in February 2017. Here we provide a summary of the learning from this project with the intention to inform the early stages of development of any further or related project of this nature.

METHODS

The evaluation focused on the development and design phases of the Women's Centres. There are three key aims of the process evaluation summarised here, each of which represents a distinct but interlinked element of the work:

- **Element 1 - Document:** Clearly articulate the process and what has happened.
- **Element 2** - **Inquire**: Exploring the process and progress
- **Element 3** - **Reflect and learn**: Partners identify lessons and take action to improve

Our approach to this process evaluation combined observations, stakeholder interviews, focus groups and action research workshops (which we termed 'reflect and learn sessions'). We employed an action research methodology. The basic precept of action research is that it should lead to change and therefore that change should be incorporated into the research process itself. These methods were used to generate data to inform all three elements of the study outlined above across the development and design phases.

Number of observations and interviews conducted

Location	Interviewees*	Observations	Workshops
Site 1	10	3	0
Site 2	13	5	1
Not location specific	7	0	0
TOTAL	**30**	**8**	**1**

*** Note some interviewees were interviewed in small groups.**

ASPIRATIONS

The initial rationale for the development of the Women's Centres reflected The Robertson Trust's history of and commitment to working with women involved in the criminal justice system and an acknowledgement of the need for improved community support and connections for women who offend or are at risk of offending. The Robertson Trust conducted research into existing women's centres and services, finding that to be most effective Women's Centres should:

- Be led by the community and in particular, by women within the local community;
- Offer gender-specific services that build on women's strengths and aspirations while also responding to their needs;
- Provide opportunities for women to come together to build positive social networks and participate in activities in a safe, non-stigmatised environment;
- Be located within communities with a defined boundary to enable a sense of community ownership over the Centre and the services it offers.

This review of the research informed the development of the Women's Centres and The Robertson Trust's aspiration that each Centre would:

- Provide a safe, positive environment where members of the community can come together and socialise;
- Host a wide range of recreational activities that all women of the community can engage with (including those who are vulnerable);
- Host a range of universal public services that all women, girls and families can engage with (including those who are vulnerable);
- Provide specialist and targeted support for vulnerable women, girls and families to help address their needs;
- The Robertson Trust also envisaged that these Centres will include a social enterprise component such as a cafe, both to create job opportunities within local communities and to increase the long-term financial sustainability of the Centres.

From the inception of this project, the project management team at The Robertson Trust were committed to the Women's Centres being designed and developed by women in the communities in which the Centres were located. Whilst there was an aspiration to target a core population which included vulnerable women and girls, there was an aspiration to engage a broader demographic and thus to destigmatise service provision and diversify opportunities for participation to reflect the different interests and capacities of a wide range of women.

The ideology underpinning the development of the Centres is one of cultivating a culture of solidarity; of those with capacities supporting other women to develop theirs; and for each woman to have parity of opportunity to participate or contribute as she feels able.

At the start of the process, in July 2015, while The Robertson Trust had no fixed ideas as to how the two Centres would operate, they were clear that the Centres would be a physical space that would communicate a sense of self-worth, of being valued, and which could make women feel safe and which would respond equally to the needs of women who might benefit from early intervention as well as women moving on from statutory services and women resident in the community. As we have already noted, The Robertson Trust project management team also aspired for the Women's Centres to be community led and coproductive, while being sustainable, in the longer term.

In planning the location for the Centres, The Robertson Trust sought to identify communities out-with Scotland's cities and had decided that one Centre should be in a rural locale. A further consideration was the size of the population, which had to be sufficiently dense to justify a Centre and to have enough people to support it. Beyond these considerations, the project management team were also keen to invest in typically overlooked communities; those communities in which projects are rarely initiated. There was also an aspiration to work with local stakeholders who had a strong appetite and capacity for engaging in this project, with prior experience of project development. Ideally, they did not want any single agency to be seen as 'leading' on the Centres, but rather acting as 'project hosts', or facilitators of a community-led process.

The early stage interviews highlight The Robertson Trust's aspiration to develop, design and deliver a community resource from a different starting point than has been tried before, specifically for women in the community, by women in the community. Unlike other Women's Centres, there were no predefined objectives or criterion, it was not about responding to identified needs or vulnerabilities *per se*, but about building capacities, utilising strengths and building on individual interests. This initiative is, then, fundamentally about another way of designing, developing and 'doing' services. There was an acknowledgement that, being a new approach, this was going to be unfamiliar and challenging for many of those involved, including the project management team. Given the challenges inherent in working in this way, along with the fact that this way of working would be new to most of those involved, it was further acknowledged that there would be much to learn from this process. There were, unsurprisingly, unanswered questions expressed at this early stage, particularly around sustainability, governance and achieving an appropriate balance between being community led and the need to have clear purposes and parameters. From the outset, those involved accepted that they did not have all the answers and were not only open to learning from this process, but committed to sharing this learning for others to benefit from. Thus, the aspirations for this project are not just about creating successful community-led Women's Centres, but about exploring and learning from a different way of working.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Our initial fieldwork took place in July 2015 and by July 2016, following a consultative process, a specific Women's Centre was no longer being pursued in one area (site 1); by contrast, a building had just been identified and secured for a Centre in the other (site 2). In what follows we map out plans for and processes of development up to July 2016 and the early considerations that informed these plans and processes.

In both site 1 and 2, there were a series of stakeholder meetings and smaller meetings with core individuals to plan how the Women's Centre might be developed. A consultant was employed to support the earlier stages of the development phase, based on prior experience of developing Women's Centres alongside other agencies.

Site 1 Development

The project hosts in site 1 submitted a brief and worked alongside the consultant to develop and flesh out the consultation process which included the conduct of a survey. The survey of 500 people from the local area revealed that the project had the support of the community, with 74% responding positively to the idea of a Women's Centre and 58% saying they or someone they knew would use it. Respondents were also asked whether they would be interested in being involved in the development process. What is important to note for those pursuing community-led initiatives of this nature is that 80% of respondents stated that they were either unsure or uninterested in being involved in the development of the Centre. There is, then, a distinct difference between being supportive of the development of a Centre, as a 'concept', and being interested in having involvement in its development.

After the survey, those respondents who *had* expressed an interest in the Centre and its developments were contacted to invite them to an event which was also publicised on local radio, through the distribution of posters, and disseminated via the host organisation's networks, partners' networks and social media. The event, held on 7th October 2015, was attended by a total of 29 people. Although there was strong interest amongst many stakeholders, there were also questions and concerns raised about the proposed Centre, and The Robertson Trust therefore did not have the impression of overwhelming support.

A development meeting followed this event which focussed on establishing the role and remit of the development group and discussing the feedback from the event and planning next steps. It was agreed at this meeting that there was enough of an appetite to go ahead. The group were positive about the idea of harnessing the constructive response they had been met with and opening up the development group to those who wanted to be a part of this.

Those in attendance agreed that the Centre had to be community-led, to start small and have the premises come at a later stage following a process of deciding what it should look like and what it

might be from the perspective of local women. The core challenge raised at this juncture was in knowing who could drive this forward and it was suggested that employing someone part time, a facilitator, who could liaise between the different groups and bring them together to help establish the vision of what the Centre would be the key. It was agreed that the consultant would approach the Project Management Team to propose employing someone who could be 'the face' of the Centre, although it was recognised that some consideration of how that individual is employed, what supports would be in place, and where they would be based prior to the Centre being created was required.

At a further meeting of this group, the following month, it was clarified that The Robertson Trust trustees needed reassurance about the need for or receptiveness to the idea of the Centre. It was pointed out that there had been concerns at the event about the Centre that required further consideration. It was proposed that the next stage would mean that someone local, a Development Worker, would take the plans for the Centre forward and progress the next steps. Indeed, a potential role and remit for a Development Worker was discussed and it was clarified that the Development Worker's role would be to work with the community rather than to work with The Robertson Trust *per se*. The actions that emerged from this meeting were the need to consult with the wider community, to draft a job description and recruit a Development Worker and to find premises. However, prior to the recruitment of a Development Worker, a decision was made by The Robertson Trust that they would not pursue the establishment of a Women's Centre, as originally envisaged, in site 1. The Trust took this decision as there continued to be evidence of a lack of appetite for the concept of a Women's Centre and a concern from some that it would duplicate other developments. After a lengthy period of engagement with the local intermediary organisation and the development group the Trust concluded that the drive and motivation was not there to take this proposal forward.

When it became clear that a single Women's Centre would not be established in site 1, as an alternative, The Robertson Trust explored supporting three projects situated in different geographical locations in the area. In the end, only one of these projects moved forward and funding was provided for a project coordinator to develop a 'Women's Space'.

Site 2 Development

In site 2 a strong and clearly expressed appetite for such a Centre was voiced from the outset by a wide range of stakeholders, including senior representatives from the local authority, third sector organisations and public bodies. Individual meetings were held with senior stakeholders throughout 2015 and a wider stakeholder meeting was then held in November 2015 with a wide range of individuals who work with and support women in the community. All those who attended these early stage meetings really wanted the Centre to happen and saw a need for it and were committed to supporting it. The strength and clarity of their commitment, and the identification of a strong intermediate organisation who were well-known to the Trust, thus led to a decision to appoint a Development Worker to oversee the development phase. Once the Development Worker was in post

she set about engaging with local women, by visiting shops, women and toddler groups, utilising existing friends and contacts, and spreading the word through these networks. A 'Ladies Day' was then organised. Information about the event was shared, and people were asked to contribute to the event in various ways. The Ladies Day was situated in a community space which had been thoughtfully and carefully decorated for the purpose and which included afternoon tea and activities such as singing, nail painting, and Zumba. While representing an opportunity to bring local women together in a welcoming and fun environment, it also represented an opportunity to seek out views about the creation of the Women's Centre. This first ladies day was a critical stage in the development of the Centre; it provided a focal point for activity, something for the women who had expressed interest to engage with; it provided opportunities for women to get involved; it helped to spread the word about the developing Women's Centre; and perhaps most importantly it gave the attendees a sense of what the Women's Centre could be. At the event, women were invited to comment on what they would want from a Centre and to sign up to become involved in shaping its development. The Development Worker phoned everyone who signed up after the event, telling them how pleased she was that they were to be involved. Fortnightly meetings were then arranged for a 'core group' of women who discussed ideas and began to think about how things should progress. The women continued to 'spread the word', recruiting friends and family and they identified others who weren't involved, particularly identifying the need to engage with girls and younger women at an early stage, and planned the steps required to engage this group.

The Development Worker was the lynchpin for communication in site 2. In between fortnightly meetings, she maintained regular contact by text messaging and holding conversations with individual women involved which gave them an opportunity to share information that, sometimes, they were hesitant to share in the meetings. She also continued to engage other women and groups who were not as yet involved. During this time, the women focused on organising further 'Ladies Days', which included focusing on engaging with more women to encourage participation and incite interest. A key focus of the development phase included securing a building to house the new Women's Centre, with negotiations still underway at the time of interviewing. A range of decisions and actions have been identified in relation to what the Centre will do and be but, at the time of interviewing, these discussions were on hold until a building was secured. A range of other issues have been identified for the next phase of activity as the Centre gets up and running, such as future funding and sustainability. At the time of interviewing, the Development Worker had also met with the key agencies who had recognised the need for and expressed an interest in establishing a Women's Centre, but to date, after their initial expression of interest, the agencies have had limited direct engagement with the women involved in developing the Centre, although some representatives of those agencies had attended the 'Ladies Days'.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

As a process of testing the appetite for a Women's Centre, it was generally considered that the initial and early consultation processes with stakeholders worked well. The importance of having a Development Worker able to connect to local women from across the respective communities, to then drive the development of a Women's Centre, and to build a community of support clearly emerged as one of the most important features of the creation of a community led Women's Centre. Given the significance of this role, having the right person in post is clearly critical to the success of the Centre. Distilling the learning from site 2 reveals that such a role is multifaceted, requiring the individual to operate as a leader, conductor and a facilitator, fulfilling these different roles at different points along the journey. Secondly, any Development Worker recruited for this task must have the skill set and ethos to operate in this way which is fundamentally underscored by a community development and community engagement approach. Thirdly, and perhaps more elusively, that individual must exhibit the qualities and character that other women connect with, identify with and respond to. As this is a voluntary endeavour for the women involved, it works well if the approach to the development phase is welcoming, fun and individually tailored to their interests, strengths and cultures, thus ensuring a localised approach rather than attempting to respond to a generic concept of what women want, imagine or, indeed, aggregated needs. In particular, the positive focus of the Women's Centres is a hugely motivating factor for securing women's interest and continued involvement in the development phase.

To ensure that the Women's Centre emerging from this process can cater to the various needs and interests of the wider community, it is particularly important to ensure that a diverse range of women are involved in the development phase, if, for the most part, the approach to its development is individually tailored around those involved. This was successfully achieved in site 2 by the Development Worker regularly reflecting on who is involved and who isn't, and taking steps to reach out to specific women and groups to encourage involvement.

One of the principal learning points from the development phase was the importance of having engaging activities for those who might become involved in the Centre to participate in. The 'Ladies Days' developed in site 2 were an effective (and infectious!) way of giving women an understanding of what a Centre could do and be, before the sourcing of a physical space. By focusing on 'doing' not just 'discussing', the ladies days represented opportunities for the women attending to come together as a community, both in the development of the days and on these days themselves. In this way then 'a Centre' was already being created, but it started with a focus on relationships and connections rather than a physical space. These events also worked well as opportunities to explore women's views, spread the word about what was happening and keep up the momentum whilst waiting for a physical space to be procured.

The individual communication running throughout the development phase in site 2 also worked extremely well. In between meetings, regular communication was maintained via the Development

Worker who played a critical role in sharing developments and giving everyone an opportunity to share their thoughts and views, on a regular basis. The regularity of personal communication via texts, phone calls and fortnightly meetings meant that people felt able to have a say and helped ensure their continued engagement throughout the whole process. This was incredibly important to the women in building trust, building a sense of ownership and ensuring that each individual felt part of it, while communicating value and ensuring that each person was equally informed of developments. There is, therefore, an important balance to be found between open events where all women have opportunities to get involved, core group meetings where operational decisions are made, and individual communication and contact to explore concerns, thoughts and issues in greater depth than is possible in a group environment. It is this balance of layers of communication and engagement which appears to have been a particularly useful enabler to keeping people involved and engaged during this development phase.

Underpinning what worked well was the wider organisational and community support for the initiative in site 2, what it sought to do and how it aimed to do it. This wider organisational and cultural support was sometimes hidden from the view of interviewees but clearly set a context for some of the things that worked well, identified above, to happen. Processes of development worked particularly well where there was a common understanding, vision, ethos, culture and way of working across organisations, agencies and the local community. It worked particularly well where an intermediary organisation with pre-existing working relationships to the funding organisation, coupled with a sound understanding of processes of community development and direct contact with a diverse group of women, , acted as the host organisation for the Development Worker.

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The experiences in site 1 and 2 also highlighted that there were areas for development. These include points of learning for others and issues emerging through this early phase which are important to be aware of during the next stages of development of the Women's Centre.

The learning from this process emphasises the importance of role clarity and clarity of remit and of expectations (and thus what people feel they can and can't do – or even should be doing) and the communication and agreement of a clear mandate for the work. Difficulties in the process emerged where roles were uncertain, or where the expected roles did not match the strengths and skills of those involved. Open discussion and taking time to clearly understand each other, build relationships, trust and understanding is clearly fundamental to an initiative such as this which involves working on something untried and untested and which is also a new way of working to those involved.

Related to this, interviewees involved in both Centres identified that there were potential improvements to be made in relation to communication, in its broadest sense. Future initiatives of this nature should commence with an agreed communication strategy, and thus information flow. Regular communication should be maintained through both formal and informal means and ensure that marketing or publicity strategies for events are visible, comprising a range of direct and indirect approaches. Participants in site 2 suggested that more could be done to 'spread the word', perhaps via social media but certainly by using the communication skills, knowledge of the area, and social networks of the women involved in the development of the Centre to help with this. Participants in site 1 felt that engaging with local women in local spaces would have been an effective next step, building on the diverse range of approaches (including a largely public survey, radio bulletins, the distribution of posters, and e-communications through existing networks). Communication difficulties were perhaps most acute in site 1, with different perceptions about what happened and why being conveyed, and an expressed perception of a lack of information about why the decision not to fund a Centre was taken. Managing a decision not to fund an initiative is always going to be challenging and disappointing to those involved but what emerges from our interviews is that there was not enough or insufficiently clear enough information provided about the reason for the decision, or an opportunity for those involved to clarify or respond to concerns before getting to the point of a decision being made.

Some interviewees in site 1 felt that the notion of the Women's Centre had been too vague and the instructions that they had been given not to steer development meant that in hindsight, they stepped too far back from the process. They made the point that there had been so much emphasis on the need for them not to develop a vision but to leave it up 'to the women', yet at that stage, no local women had been directly involved. It could be suggested from this that there was a lack of structure, lack of a clear mandate and lack of focus. However, what also emerged from both our observations and interview data in site 1 was a lack of a shared vision. There is a strong sense that those with a lead role in the process were waiting for guidance from the consultant and the project management team and they had markedly different perceptions of their own role, and capacities, than the project

management team. Ultimately, it was felt by those we interviewed in site 1 that there was no ownership, or there was no opportunity for that ownership to be developed, because there wasn't enough clarity about who should take it forward. What also emerges as a learning point then is the need for clear leadership.

In similar vein, while having a facilitator or Development Worker is crucial to any participatory or coproductive endeavour which includes a range of stakeholders, the use of an expert consultant on Women's Centres may have engendered unintended effects. While participants in site 1 expressed respect for the consultant's expertise, it was generally felt that she did not need their input and this prevented them coming forward with ideas; it inhibited participation. This underlines, then, the importance of selection decisions around *who* can occupy the role of *Development* Worker, as we note above.

In site 2 the development phase, based on strong interest and support from agencies initially, has been very much driven by women from the community, and a shared vision has emerged from them of a Centre focused on positivity, fun and women's strengths. The agency representatives have deliberately stepped back to allow the women from the community to drive this initiative, and they were very conscious of their traditional focus on responding to needs and vulnerability, and the limitations of this approach.

Understanding who to include, and when, is a challenging balance to negotiate in any project of this nature and this will necessarily vary from context to context and from place to place. It was suggested, however, that the right people were not included in the process of project development in site 1, particularly 'ordinary' women (outwith organisations) and that the process of consultation and engagement was primarily agency led from the outset. What emerged from this, as an area to be mindful of in any future venture is that, when engaging primarily with agencies, there is a risk that a level of territorialism between agencies can emerge. Participants' focus might be more concentrated on their own agenda than a new project in which they may or may not be involved in directly, as we learnt from the very early stages of the process of development in site 1. At this stage, then, stakeholders with a vested interest in their own service and with a concern surrounding the potential implications of the development of a Women's Centre for their service outweighed the presence and contribution of stakeholders who might have a more constructive stake in the development of a Centre. Relationships with other agencies, then, emerged as a complicated dimension to the creation of these Women's Centres. In site 2, there was a careful balancing act of agencies being involved to support the Centres, but stepping back to allow the new ventures to be shaped by the community, and stepping in to offer support, resources and expertise. The nature of the relationships here are both complex and also potentially in conflict at different points. Site 1 demonstrated how difficult it can be for agencies to play a role which involves facilitating members of the community to develop a Centre like this. Whilst, in site 2, overall, the involvement of the agencies worked well in this early development phase, there is something clearly to take care around as a physical venue is sourced, and thus agencies potentially become more involved in the centre, in

offering supports and services from the new Centre. This will be an important stage in the further development of the centre, as it thus balances the culture and ethos of agencies and support services, along with a peer-led, strengths-based approach.

Questions were also raised about processes of decision making and the need to have transparent governance arrangements in place to make decisions. These issues hadn't resulted in significant concerns to date in site 2, where the process of development has necessarily progressed further than the project in site 1, but there were clear indications that a robust and transparent structure for decision making was not in place. Due to high levels of trust and consensus, concerns around this lack of structure have not thus far been an issue but we would respectfully suggest that it is an area to be mindful of during the next phase of development. Once the Centre is involved in managing staff and budgets, it will be particularly important to ensure the oversight and implementation of an appropriate governance structure and ways of managing differences of opinion as they, inevitably, emerge.

The final issue to highlight is around the long term sustainability and funding for the Women's Centre. During the development phase of the Centre in site 2 those involved were very conscious and aware of the aspiration for the Women's Centre to contribute to its long term future through community fundraising, providing services or producing goods for sale or securing funding from other funders. There is, then, evidence that those involved are aware of, and committed to, being as self-reliant as possible which, combined with a clear understanding of the role and purpose of the Women's Centre, is a strong position from which to progress from the design and development stages to delivery. However, it is worth noting that funding streams tend to be available for services designed to respond to or ameliorate need or vulnerability, in accordance with specific, often externally prescribed, outcomes. There is, therefore, an important next step in the development process, to develop a plan for longer term sustainability which does not compromise the vision and ambition of the Women's Centre. This is potentially going to require support and understanding from relevant agencies and again emphasises the need for clear and appropriate governance and decision making structures, discussed above.

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

A core challenge, and opportunity, associated with the model was that The Robertson Trust were committed to a community-led approach which is arguably more challenging and uncertain than the more traditional approach of a professionally designed endeavour. A further challenge that runs alongside that is resisting the risk of statutory or public sector services co-opting new initiatives of this nature into their own, often related, agendas. The clarity of and commitment to that vision coupled with the independence associated with being both the funding organisation and the project management team enabled The Robertson Trust to resist any such attempts.

A further enablement, or opportunity, was the support that the project management team have enjoyed from their trustee group. One of the challenges with centrally funded initiatives, such as the Women's Centres funded by the Scottish Government, is the short term funding arrangements within which projects must be both implemented and established. The flexibility granted by the trustees, with regard to the length of time that is required to implement and establish projects that are coproductive and community-led is not only a rare opportunity to do things differently, but a necessity in terms of realising that opportunity.

With regard to funding, another opportunity resides in the relationship that The Robertson Trust have with other funding bodies with similar interests which, in the short to medium term at least, has potential to financially support the Centres beyond the initial funding available to the project management team. Notwithstanding this, just as with statutory agencies, the project management team were also cognisant of the need to resist co-optation by the agendas or interests of other funding bodies.

For any project in its infancy, issues of sustainability are a core consideration and a challenge. One avenue under consideration by the project management team in July 2015 was the development of a social enterprise attached to the Centres. Another was 'buy in' from statutory agencies who could provide the relevant services in and through the Centre which would suggest a distinct role for and relationship between statutory services and the Women's Centres following their establishment. While a social enterprise might generate some income to support longer term sustainability, the project management team also recognised the need to continue to engage 'the key players', be they commissioners, businesses, or charities, for example, who might be in a position to continue to support, invest and engage with the Centres.

The importance of mutually trusting relationships also emerged as a significant consideration in developing a coproductive approach to the implementation and establishment of a community-led Women's Centre. The role of trust in coproduction has principally been discussed in terms of the attribution of trust by service users and communities to more formal agencies. However, coproduction cannot work without the investment of trust by services into those who use services. However, and particularly in the early stages, the development of mutually trusting relationships can be a challenge. An enablement to the development of these relationships is the establishment of

clear boundaries, being clear about and managing expectations, not least given the fragility of trust and the challenges of restoring trust, once it has been lost.

Managing expectations without steering or shaping the design and the development of the Centres, and thus *creating* expectations, was recognised as a core challenge. Then, in turn, for others to be able to visualise the shape the Centre might take in accordance with that vision. Moreover, it was recognised by the project management team that a community-led approach was quite a distinct if not unusual approach to designing and delivering services for those involved which can itself challenge those involved.

In addition, then to the site specific opportunities and challenges that arose in the development of the Centres, which we outlined in the preceding sections, this section has outlined some broader opportunities and challenges. These opportunities and challenges are, in part, opportunities which can be attributed to The Robertson Trust's commitment and vision, their independence and thus flexibility, and their pre-existing relationships with and to a range of services and funding bodies.Many of these opportunities and challenges are likely to be generic to a project of this nature; that is to a community-led initiative which requires a radical reinterpretation of the relationships between agencies and citizens but from which an inherently different way of 'doing' services, in its broadest sense, emerges. In what follows, we provide some guidelines as to what a project of this nature requires in the early stages of development.

WHAT A PROJECT OF THIS NATURE REQUIRES

In the early stages of development a project of this nature requires:

Engagement

- Agree an inclusive, visible and clear plan for engaging stakeholders
- Engage with all stakeholders in the early stages to assess the need and appetite for a Centre, including with 'ordinary women'

Communication

- Develop a communication strategy to ensure the flow and regularity of information to all key stakeholders, both formal and informal

Shared vision and mandate

- Enable stakeholders to visualise what the next steps might be, through developing a shared vision in the early stages or providing a sufficient steer
- Ensure a clear and shared understanding of the mandate for the work

Development Worker and lead agency

- Appoint a Development Worker or facilitator and intermediary agency at an early stage, with sufficient capacity and skills

Relationships

- Support fun, passion, enthusiasm and commitment amongst all those involved
- Develop strong relationships, trust and understanding between the project funders, the intermediary agency, other agency representatives, and women from the community

Clear roles and decision making

- Ensure people feel they know what they can and can't do – as well as what they ought to be doing and when
- Agree the expectations for the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder (or stakeholder group) involved
- Agree clear structures for making decisions and for communicating the decisions once these are made

Project planning and monitoring

- Ensure a project development plan, which includes:
    - events across local areas using a range of methods that encourage dialogue (and ideally also activities) with and between different groups of women
    - milestones and core tasks that reduce ambiguity surrounding expectations and responsibilities, but remain flexible
    - opportunities to reflect on and raise concerns about progress at an early stage

Sustainability

- Ensure a population of at least 10,000 for feasibility and sustainability
- Consider sustainability in the early stages, in terms of long-term funding and leadership to continue the work if/once paid posts are not possible.

NEXT STEPS

As at February 2017, the Women's Centre in site 2 is expected to open its physical premises in March 2017. Plans for developing a second Women's Centre elsewhere are also underway.

The Robertson Trust will use and continue to build upon and share the learning from this evaluation, and will undertake further research, as the Women's Centres develop.