Diversion from Prosecution Case Study

Sarah (name changed) was referred to Justice Services for the first time following a series of offences over a short period of time including Police Assault and public disorder. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) indicated concerns in regard to her mental health, alcohol use and wider vulnerability.

Sarah's children were no longer in her care, and she was living in temporary accommodation. The diversion worker prioritised a clear need for different housing due to concerns regarding the suitability and safety of her temporary accommodation. The worker linked with the Blue Triangle and Housing Services to explore options and was able to agree new accommodation within a hostel.

Sarah's alcohol and drug use continued in the hostel and there were concerns about her repeatedly placing herself at harm. Police Scotland contacted the diversion worker and they discussed the supports and services available to Sarah. Attempts were made to link Sarah with homeless nurses and hostel staff tried to support her to appointments but due to risks to herself she had to be removed from the hostel into further temporary accommodation.

The diversion worker explored rehabilitation and stabilisation options - the START team liaised with the diversion worker and the service user to explore a hospital-based detoxification programme however this was unable to be progressed and there were concerns Sarah was not ready or prepared to undertake this.

There were multiple vulnerable adult referrals and the diversion worker and the locality Team Leader for adult services, worked together to assess Sarah in relation to Adult Support and Protection concerns. Justice Social Work scheduled a meeting linked to the ASP assessment to coordinate a plan which would not overburden her, but which would meet her needs.

Sarah had multiple hospital admissions linked to her underlying health needs and following the vulnerable adult and adult support and protection referrals, support was put in place via Meals on Wheels. Hostel staff were able to link her with Riverside Community Trust who would visit her daily for a period and Connect 4 Change also undertook regular home visits. UPW colleagues also assisted with the plan by visiting. The diversion worker and third sector colleagues also provided support with personal care and medication prompts – services ensured there was a shared understanding of Sarah's medication needs and access. Support services also helped Sarah manage vulnerabilities within personal relationships.

The allocated worker did not feel it was safe to close Sarah's case at the usual three-month stage and kept the case open for an extended period. The case was closed later, when the worker was sure support services were firmly in place and ongoing support was available.

At the point of closure Sarah had made contact with friends, she was making more social connections, she remained in her temporary accommodation and was managing this as best she could. It was recognised at the point of closure her alcohol use would still fluctuate and there remained concerns about her vulnerability, however remaining support services were alert and acted upon these concerns.

Sarah's story demonstrates how Diversion from Prosecution can provide a timely and proportionate response when offending behaviour is closely associated with unmet needs like health, alcohol, housing and support issues. Through coordinated support from housing, health, social work and third-sector partners, Sarah was able to access services capable of addressing the issues underlying her offending behaviour, helping to reduce risk and improve stability. Whilst these interventions can also be delivered through statutory justice services, this case highlights the benefits of early intervention before further escalation within the justice system occurs. By focusing on the underlying causes of offending behaviour rather than the offending alone, diversion supports sustainable outcomes for individuals and communities and can reduce the need for more intensive justice interventions at a later stage. This reflects the ambitions of the National Strategy for Community Justice to improve health and wellbeing, increase access to support, and promote effective, person-centred approaches that reduce future involvement in the justice system.