Evaluation of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service

Prepared for the Department for Work and Pensions

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By Andy Hirst, Roger Tarling, Morgane Lefaucheux and Sini Rinne of Cambridge Policy Consultants Ltd
Professor Alan McGregor and Andrea Glass of the Training and Employment Research Unit, Glasgow University
Trinh Tu and Claire Simm of MORI
DISCLAIMER

The views in this report are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Work and Pensions.
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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The following abbreviations and acronyms appear in the text of this report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>New Deal for Lone Parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>New Deal for Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEOS</td>
<td>Minority Ethnic Outreach Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILM</td>
<td>Intermediate Labour Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERU</td>
<td>Training and Employment Research Unit, Glasgow University</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction
The Chancellor announced the introduction of the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service in the 2001 Budget. The aim of the programme was to increase referrals to the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and New Deal for Partners (NDP) programmes. Customers were expected to be lone parents and partners who are some distance from the labour market and NDLP/NDP, and living in spatially defined ‘isolated communities’.

The introduction of an outreach service was seen as a possible approach to overcome both the suspicion of ‘government’ and the lack of involvement in NDLP and NDP among lone parents and partners living in ‘isolated’ communities. Key to the delivery of Outreach was the use of external organisations with a background in and experience of these communities.

The evaluation has involved face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Outreach provider front-line staff and managers, Jobcentre Plus local office Business managers and NDLP/NDP Personal Advisers in 20 case study areas. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with customers in 10 of the case study areas. Subsequently, the scale of the interview programme was reduced to reflect the much lower numbers of customers being recruited through Outreach. Qualitative work was supplemented by analysis of administrative data.

Main Findings
For those customers engaged and referred to Jobcentre Plus provision, Outreach has usefully addressed an information deficit around the support available to enter work. It has also helped to address negative pre-conceptions of the Jobcentre and increased the confidence and motivation of participants.

However, the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service does not provide an effective solution for engaging with large numbers of target customers. The 148 local Outreach projects set up following a competitive tendering exercise collectively aimed to successfully refer just under 20,000 clients over two years. However, actual referral rates are well below this target with just over 5% of the ‘contracted for’ number of customers caseloaded 12 months into the two year service. By March 2003, a quarter of the contracts had delivered no referrals and half had referred fewer than 10 customers to the Jobcentre. The number of Partners engaged by the Outreach service has been particularly disappointing (just 2% of all Outreach customers).

Most Outreach provider organisations had previous delivery experience of employment and training related activities, while around a third had provided community and social activities (e.g. benefit rights, debt advice, community development work, etc.). About 35% reported they had previously undertaken outreach work, either with lone parents or with a wider client group (e.g. long-term unemployed).

Outreach activity typically involved a mix of active and passive marketing to potential customers and networking with local organisations. The effectiveness of most marketing was low: even large scale events generated only a handful of leads. Providers have had slightly more success by initially engaging customers in general discussions around the
idea of work rather than talking immediately about the prospect of referral to Jobcentre Plus provision.

Four in five customers have not previously been on NDLP. ‘Not being the Jobcentre’ is significant in their initial engagement with the Outreach Service. The support of their Outreach provider was vital in overcoming their often negative preconceptions of the Jobcentre and most reported they would not have visited the Jobcentre without that initial support. However, once in touch with the Jobcentre, most customers quickly overcome concerns or negative pre-conceptions. Compared to mainstream NDLP customers, Outreach customers tend:

- To be younger and have fewer children (both factors are associated with higher NDLP participation rates);
- To have children who are pre-school age (associated with lower participation rates);
- To be significantly more likely to be Black (though this may be attributed to the specific locations in which Outreach operated).

According to analysis of administrative data, job outcome rates for lone parents referred under Outreach, measured as a proportion of those joining the NDLP caseload, are around 30%. This is below rates for the programme as a whole. One reason for the more modest job outcome rates may be the high proportion of customers who said they were starting training courses (and therefore not interested in an immediate return to work).

Conclusions and Lessons learned

A policy concern to minimise duplication of roles and provision between Outreach providers and Jobcentre Plus staff has had important implications for the delivery of Outreach:

- Outreach providers were given little resource or scope to challenge more fundamental employment-related barriers faced by potential customers. As such, and perhaps not surprisingly, the service has appealed primarily to customers who (only) required ‘independent’ information and reassurance about the process of engagement with Jobcentre Plus provision, but who were, in all other respects, ready to move quickly into a work-first programme. At the same time:

- It has contributed to an awkward division of responsibility between Jobcentre Plus and Outreach providers. The Provider payment model reflects this division - providers were dependent on the performance of Jobcentre Plus staff in persuading the customer to join the New Deal caseload following referral, before an outcome-related payment could be made to them.

In effect the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service is relatively ‘near market’; most customers are ready to consider work. Very few customers engaged with the Outreach Service and then did not subsequently agree to be referred to Jobcentre Plus provision. In this context, the appeal of the Outreach service to customers cannot be divorced from the appeal of NDLP (and NDP). There remains an important question around the extent to which NDLP, as a work-first initiative, can address the needs of two particular customer sub-groups – those wanting to follow a career development (longer term) path back to work and those with multiple barriers to employment.

Few Outreach providers believe there are large numbers of lone parents just waiting for a ‘more appropriate’ outreach service (however defined). Most argue that significant improvements in childcare, making sure that work pays, as well as addressing the
associated costs and practicalities of transport would have a much more significant effect on take-up of Jobcentre Plus programmes and movements into work. Jobcentre Plus staff have also argued for a more effective national marketing campaign to boost programme take-up.

We have found no compelling evidence to suggest that it is worthwhile continuing with the Outreach Service. Although the Service has engaged with customers new to NDLP, overall numbers are low and at this stage would make a negligible contribution to the Government’s 70% employment rate target for lone parents by 2010.

We believe that the continued roll-out of work-focused meetings for Lone Parents and their planned roll out for Partners of benefit recipients should deliver similar market penetration (in terms of the type of customer engaged and distance from the labour market). The customers engaged by Outreach have responded to better information and re-assurance – the same sort of services that a ‘good’ Personal Adviser might offer as part of the mandatory work-focused meeting.

Greater thought also needs to be given to the organisation of external provider engagement and mechanisms for local Jobcentre Plus involvement in policy design, to avoid the operational difficulties sometimes experienced under Outreach. In future initiatives, consideration should be given to:

- The need to develop a greater sense of local ownership among Jobcentre staff, firstly through more extensive consultation with Personal Advisers.
- The need to offer additional opportunities and support to external providers to develop learning and exchange of best practice – some providers saw Outreach as an opportunity to engage in a new ‘market’ and as such, had a limited initial knowledge of the customer group and the workings of NDLP/NDP;
- The relationship between the payment model and policy design. In particular we would recommend that provider payment should not depend on the actions of Jobcentre Plus; and,
- The need for adequate resources to manage effective inter-working between Jobcentre Plus and external providers.
1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1. This report presents the findings of the evaluation of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service. Interviews with Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service providers and Jobcentre Plus staff were undertaken between November 2002 and February 2003 and fieldwork with customers of the programme was completed in June 2003.

*Background to the programme*

1.2. The Chancellor announced the introduction of a new referral service for lone parents and partners of people of working age who are receiving a qualifying benefit in the 2001 Budget. The aim of the programme was to increase referrals on to both New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and New Deal for Partners (NDP) through local jobcentres. Target customers were expected to be lone parents and partners of benefit recipients who are some distance from the labour market and NDLP/NDP programmes living in spatially defined ‘isolated communities’. The Outreach service was expected to:

- identify lone parents and partners who are eligible to join NDLP/NDP provision;
- encourage lone parents and partners to consider accessing Jobcentre Plus services;
- promote the benefits of participating in NDLP and NDP;
- arrange for New Deal Advisers to carry out in-work benefits calculations as part of the above;
- work to overcome specific local barriers which prevent target customer groups participating in Jobcentre Plus provision; and,
- provide outreach activity which will last for two years from mid April 2002 to early April 2004.

1.3. NDLP and NDP are key elements in the Government’s ‘Welfare to Work’ agenda. NDLP aims:

- to help and encourage lone parents on Income Support (IS) to improve their prospects and living standards by taking up and increasing paid work; and,
- to improve the job readiness of lone parents on IS to increase their employment opportunities.

Since November 2001, eligibility for NDLP has been extended to all lone parents working less than 16 hours per week.

1.4. NDP aims are:

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1 The qualifying benefits are listed in Annex A
• to help partners of benefit recipients achieve a successful and sustainable entry into employment; and,
• in cases where those partners are not immediately job ready, to create the conditions for them to begin to make or regain contact with the labour market.

1.5. The introduction of an outreach service was seen as a possible approach to a more informed and responsive gateway for both programmes. The rationale was to use outreach to overcome both the suspicion of ‘government’ and the lack of involvement in NDLP and NDP among lone parents and partners living in ‘isolated’ communities. In short, the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service aimed to:
• to increase the number of lone parents and partners gaining access to Jobcentre Plus support and services (i.e. act as an initial point of contact);
• to move lone parents and partners living in ‘isolated communities’ closer to the labour market and employment by referral to, and caseloading on NDLP/NDP; and,
• to complement and dovetail with other existing local outreach provision.

1.6. ‘Isolated communities’ were defined as being “[…those] with little or no contact with Jobcentre Plus/government agencies and programmes”. They were categorised further as local rural communities, local inner city areas or housing estates with high levels of work inactivity or a local minority ethnic community.

1.7. Jobcentre Plus invited bids from local private public and voluntary and community sector providers from across Great Britain to deliver the Outreach Service and provide an initial point of engagement with lone parents and parents. The rationale for using organisations external to Jobcentre Plus was a concern that potential customers may be reluctant to engage with government institutions.

1.8. The programme was launched in mid April 2002 and was expected to last for two years (with a possible extension to a third year subject to a performance review). A national tendering competition was undertaken in which local organisations where invited to bid to provide the service across small geographical areas. Successful Outreach providers were required to offer a referral and customer progress monitoring service only. This is in contrast with other pilot initiatives such as the NDLP Innovation Fund and, in particular, the Minority Ethnic Outreach Service which has explicitly set out to test different and more substantive delivery models. The Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service process might therefore be summarised as:

i. provider establishes contact with customers
ii. customer agrees to be referred by provider and to meet with NDLP/NDP Adviser
iii. customer attends New Deal Personal Adviser meeting
iv. customer agrees to join NDLP caseload/NDP approved activity and is active on caseload
v. customer remains active on caseload for 13 weeks
vi. customer gains employment within 13 weeks of joining NDLP caseload/NDP approved activity which is expected to last 13 weeks.

1.9. It is also important to recognise that the operational context for the Outreach Service changed during its design phase:

- Since the start of NDLP the main route into the lone parent programme has been through an invitation letter/self-referral, followed by an initial interview at which customers were told about the programme and invited to participate. Coinciding with the announcement of an Outreach Service in April 2001, lone parents on Income Support have been required to attend regular mandatory meetings. This requirement has been introduced on a phased basis, beginning with customers with older children. The roll out is expected to be completed during 2004. As such, all lone parents making a claim for or receiving IS will be given information on NDLP and have an opportunity to participate in the programme at the mandatory work focused meeting stage. Given the phased introduction of this intervention regime, the immediate implications for the Outreach Service were expected to be limited2.

1.10. To summarise, there are a number of contextual issues relevant to this evaluation:

- The definition of outreach activity is limited to one of providing a simple referral to Jobcentre Plus service;
- Providers external to Jobcentre Plus were viewed as essential to support engagement with the isolated communities;
- The introduction of mandatory Personal Adviser meetings for lone parents potentially reduces the need for the service in the medium term (see further below); and,
- The introduction of the service for partners of benefit recipients coincided with a temporary decline in the profile of NDP in Jobcentre Plus offices.

Evaluation Methodology

1.11. The aim of this evaluation has been to review the performance of the Outreach Service, to assess which models of Outreach worked well, to identify the range of impacts of Outreach on customers and to inform future

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policy development and discussions on whether the Outreach service should be extended for a further 12 months.

1.12. The evaluation involved in-depth interviews with Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service provider front-line staff and managers, Jobcentre Plus Local Business managers and NDLP Personal Advisers in 20 case study areas. A couple of interviews were carried out with staff who had some experience of NDP delivery. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with customers of the Outreach Service in 10 of the case study areas. The original research design involved returning to the case study areas some 9-12 months after the initial round of fieldwork to explore how the Outreach service had developed. Some longitudinal survey work was also planned with customers to assess how their attitudes to the Outreach service and Jobcentre Plus support had developed over time and whether they had been successful in finding work.

1.13. In relation to customers, the initial fieldwork programme allowed for a structured sample of interviews with both NDLP and NDP customers and with customers who engaged with the service but then subsequently declined to be caseloaded with Jobcentre Plus (a total of 200 in-depth interviews and 20 group discussions). However, the scale of the interview programme was reduced to reflect the much lower numbers of customers using the Outreach Service. In total 12 semi-structured interviews were carried out in each of the 10 ‘detailed’ case study areas, with the exception of one area where only 10 interviews were completed. Moreover, almost all customers recorded as registering with the Outreach service subsequently agreed to be referred to Jobcentre Plus. Whatever the reasons behind this, the practical implication is that we have not been able to undertake the planned comparison of those who agree to refer to Jobcentre Plus and those who do not. In turn, this limits the opportunity for the evaluation to comment on the characteristics of ‘non-participants’.

1.14. Such were the customer numbers that we were unable to structure the sample for either customers who declined to be caseloaded or partners of benefit recipients (though a handful of the former are included in our analysis). We also had to extend the period of the fieldwork to allow time for sufficient customers to join the Outreach service. In practice, the majority of customers we interviewed had agreed to be referred to the Jobcentre while a few more were yet to make that decision or were awaiting their initial meeting with a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser. Topic guides were used to explore customer perceptions of Jobcentre Plus, Outreach providers, client labour market histories and aspirations and their immediate plans both pre and post involvement with the Outreach service. Further details on methodology relating to clients can be found in Annex B.

1.15. An initial scoping study was undertaken to select the 20 case studies. This involved a short survey of all providers in July 2002 to assess the nature and scale of the Outreach service, characteristics of the local labour market and links to other community and outreach activity. The results of the survey were used to classify Outreach provision into a typology which included the following criteria:
• urban/rural nature of the catchment area
• level of deprivation of the catchment area
• labour market dynamics
• combination of the Outreach service with other regeneration (SRB, Sure Start, New Deal for Communities) or employment/training programmes (New Deal, etc)
• size of the contract (level of funding)
• number of referrals and expected retention rate
• previous experience of work with the client group
• involvement in Minority Ethnic Outreach Service (MEOS) contracts
• marketing and recruitment methods
• delivery arrangements (staff and premises).

1.16. The typology was then used to select the 20 case-studies based on the following criteria:
• urban/rural nature of the area
• nature of the provider (delivering employment/training related activity or community/social services and/or outreach work); and,
• discontinuities between the operational areas for Jobcentres and Outreach Service providers – where services overlap (ie one jobcentre has more than one contractor) or are shared (ie one Outreach Service provider has more than one Jobcentre);
• MEOS contractors and Jobcentre Districts where MEOS is being delivered by other organisations.

Initial typology work was followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews and supplemented by analysis of project monitoring data. The outcome of the typology exercise is summarised in Annex B.

Summary of performance

1.17. Monitoring information to March 2003 highlights the disappointing performance of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service compared with ‘contracted for’ referral numbers. A total of 1758 customers had registered with Outreach providers of which 1595 had been referred to Jobcentre Plus and 1,070 had agreed to join either NDLP or (in a very few cases) NDP. Some 12 months into contract delivery:
• Of 158 contracts, 39 had made no recorded referrals;
• A further 79 had referred fewer than 10 customers to NDLP or NDP (average anticipated referrals were 130 customers per project over the 2 year contract period);
• The two best performing contracts were just over 25% of their ‘contracted for’ targets at the half way point of the contract period.
2. DESIGN, SET-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

2.1. Scope and Nature of the Outreach Service

_Rationale for the Programme_

2.1.1. An outreach service was one of the six key recommendations of the New Deal Task Force Report on lone parents. While evaluations of NDLP have consistently reported good results from the programme, there has been a concern among policymakers to engage with a greater number of lone parents. Currently, it is estimated that around 9% of lone parents claiming Income Support are participating in NDLP, and improving the degree of participation will be crucial to achieving the Government’s target of 70% of lone parents in work by 2010.

2.1.2. The reasons for non-participation are complex with the majority of customers not being able to give a clear reason for not participating. This, in itself, suggests that many lone parents and partners might be ‘open to persuasion’ if it were possible to engage them in a constructive dialogue. Other research findings indicate that a number of factors come into play which in turn also suggest an outreach approach might be appropriate to engaging with more customers:

- Customers experience a number of barriers to employment (linked in some cases to inadequate information) including:
  - lack of childcare,
  - low confidence and motivation,
  - lack of clarity concerning what Jobcentre Plus-based provision has to offer, and for some,
  - a more general negative pre-conception of the ‘Jobcentre’.

- Economic inactivity is a stable state and can be difficult to break out of without an external impetus – recent research of a pilot outreach service suggests that many customers can also be classed as ‘inactive’ across a range of social and personal networks and as such also require an ‘external’ impetus to engage with support services;

- Direct marketing of the programmes cannot respond to the particular circumstances of each customer.

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4 Martin Evans et al, Op cit, p xi, [based on a sample of non-participants selected to be comparable with participants].
5 Professor Alan McGregor et al, Evaluation of Regenerate, TERU. Unpublished report for Scottish Enterprise Glasgow. Regenerate is a community development organisation, working in a number of high unemployment communities in Glasgow with a view to reaching people inactive in the labour market and bringing them forward for Glasgow Works and other employment programmes.
2.1.3. The Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service is therefore based on the premise that customers’ (mis-)perceptions of NDLP and NDP need to be challenged in order to increase participation from ‘isolated’ communities.

Design and set up

2.1.4. ‘Not being the Jobcentre’ was considered an advantage in engaging with these ‘isolated’ communities and drawing on non-Jobcentre Plus organisations with experience in these communities was seen as integral to effective delivery. However, the design of the Outreach Service has had a number of implications for delivery. Relevant issues here are:

- The division of key elements of customer support (and the sequence in which they are provided) between external providers and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (PAs);
- The depth of Outreach provider knowledge of Jobcentre Plus services in general and the specific support available to customers in NDLP and NDP; and,
- The balance between process and output-related payments and the associated administration and monitoring procedures.

2.1.5. The Outreach model of delivery6 implied a strong dividing line between the role of the provider and Jobcentre Plus. Providers were expected to engage with potential customers and refer them directly to the Jobcentre where all support services would be provided. The guiding principle throughout was that Outreach staff focused on initial engagement and referral while Jobcentre Plus focused on (more substantive) service delivery.

2.1.6. In practice, providers were asked to engage with customers with ‘few tools in their kitbag’ – training, specific advice and guidance on job search and in-work benefits were to remain the preserve of Jobcentre Plus. This created some anomalies in delivery. In one case study area, a provider who had previously seen in-work benefits as part of their ‘standard practice’ had to stop these under the terms of the Outreach contract.

2.1.7. Moreover, the division of responsibility required a much greater level of inter-working between the external provider organisations and Jobcentre Plus. While not a problem in principle, this raised a number of practical issues relating to providers’ knowledge of Jobcentre Plus operations, arrangements for the referral of customers and the ability of local Jobcentres to resource this activity.

2.1.8. The provider payment model in Outreach has also served to emphasise the significance of joint working between providers and Jobcentre Plus.

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6 Early policy plans considered a range of potential delivery options for the Outreach Service including delivery by Jobcentre Plus staff, staff secondment as well as the external provider model. Contracting with external providers was seen to encourage local flexibility, avoid overlaps with other Jobcentre Plus services, offer synergy with other outreach initiatives and bridge the gap between Jobcentre Plus and local communities.
Outreach service contracts had two distinct payment elements which aimed to strike a balance between the need to support the delivery of Outreach services in isolated communities and provide performance incentives for providers:

- A management fee of £20,000 over the two year lifetime of the contract for a minimum of 100 successful referrals to NDLP/NDP caseloads. In circumstances where providers could reasonably demonstrate that lone parent numbers could not support this size of caseload the management fee was reduced pro-rata (for example, 40 clients would give a management fee of £8,000). Additionally, providers were able to reclaim the costs of registered childcare and transport incurred by customers accessing their service;

- Two output related payments: the first when the Outreach customer joined the caseload (£150) following a second meeting with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the second for customers remaining active on NDLP/NDP for 13 weeks or finding a job within 13 weeks (£50).

2.1.9. It is clear from this payment model that the efforts and responsibilities of Jobcentre staff (in relation to caselading) were integral to the level of payment received by providers. We return to this issue later.

Selection of Isolated Communities and the contracting process

2.1.10. The organisations bidding for the delivery of the Outreach service were free to propose the areas over which they planned to provide a service. The Outreach service Prospectus and Invitation to Tender set out the types of area as:

- Rural communities;
- Inner-city areas or housing estates with high levels of workforce inactivity;
- Minority ethnic communities.

2.1.11. The Prospectus and ITT made it clear that it was the bidders’ responsibility to research potential demand for the service in their chosen area(s) and, as far as possible, ensure that their offer dovetailed with other local outreach provision and the services of the local Jobcentres.

2.1.12. It is also clear from our research that the choice of areas was subject to negotiation at the post-tender negotiation stage (between providers and Jobcentre Plus Regional offices). Meanwhile, local Jobcentre staff were typically not involved in this negotiation process.

2.1.13. Outreach areas were defined according to a wide range of spatial criteria – while some bids used postcodes, others used wards, and names of housing estates. This limits scope for analytical comparison of areas though DWP analysts were able to establish that 84% were concentrated in Districts which they categorised as ‘deprived’ or ‘relatively deprived’ (although this is not, of course, a direct measure of the status of the Outreach areas themselves).
2.1.14. A competitive tendering exercise was launched in October 2001 through local and national advertising. The assessment criteria emphasised that providers should be able to demonstrate previous experience and existing links with target communities. A series of Regional Briefing Events was undertaken by Jobcentre Plus and the Prospectus and Invitation to Tender documents gave guidance on sources of information bidders should use to inform their bid and made it clear that it was the responsibility of bidders to obtain further information about their target client groups.

2.1.15. A total of 262 bids were received and, following regional assessment and national ratification, 152 were given preferred bidder status. Of these 148 proceeded to sign a contract to deliver the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service.

2.1.16. The vast majority of tenderers were successful with more than one contract: in total 68 organisations were responsible for the 148 contracts. The funding structure and in particular the upper limit of £20,000 per contract for the management fee, regardless of expected numbers of referrals, encouraged providers to tender for multiple contracts (though bidders were still expected to demonstrate why separate management fees were required). While ‘corporately’ committed to bidding and delivering the Outreach contracts, discussions with a number of providers have highlighted that contract bidders had only limited links to those provider staff subsequently involved in delivery. This may go some way to explaining why a number of Outreach staff were unhappy at contractual issues which were clearly spelt out in the bid documentation. A lack of clarity is reflected in the following examples:

- In some case study areas contractors report that they were initially given the impression they could operate across the whole of their existing area of operation (e.g. city-wide) but were subsequently told by local Jobcentre Plus staff to work within specified postcodes;
- In some areas there were overlaps between the designated isolated communities operated by different contractors – initially causing some confusion between providers and Jobcentre Plus local offices. In these cases providers subsequently operated on the basis of an informal agreement;
- In a small number of cases, local NDLP advisers maintained their own outreach activity and in at least one area the local Jobcentre and provider had to co-ordinate activities to avoid different teams turning up at the same shopping centre. In this case of course it should be noted that it was incumbent on providers to ensure their service dovetailed with that of other outreach providers, including those of the local Jobcentre;
- One case study provider had bid for an area where they had been working closely with local Sure Start providers but found they had been awarded a contract in a neighbouring area where they had no existing infrastructure or links [though we would recognise that the provider was not obliged to accept the contract and again, the Prospectus and ITT specifically mentioned that Outreach services
linked to Sure Start initiatives should establish a clear case for additional referrals;

2.1.17. In the event, three quarters of contracts awarded focused on urban ‘isolated communities’ while the remainder focused on rural areas (though some contracts covered both rural and urban areas) A fifth of the contracts identified ethnic minority isolated communities among their target groups.

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Source: DWP Monitoring Data

2.1.18. The targets for the Outreach contracts were set by the contractors themselves. In many cases they based their assessment of the number of referrals on the guidance provided by Jobcentre Plus which (while not aiming to specify numbers) suggested a minimum service of around 100 successful referrals. On average the contracts were expected to refer just over 130 customers per contract over the two years of the programme, giving a total target of just under 20,000 successful referrals.

2.1.19. Expected retention on the caseload averaged two-thirds of those successfully referred. However, discussions with case study contractors suggest that this was rarely based on direct evidence of the effectiveness of similar services and in many cases was little more than an ‘educated guess’.

2.1.20. Around three quarters of provider organisations had previous delivery experience of employment and training related activities; while 35% had provided community and social activities (e.g. debt advice, benefit rights, community development activity etc.). About 35% of organisations had done some outreach work, either with lone parents or with a wider customer group (community outreach with long-term unemployed for example). Some organisations were clearly involved in a greater range of activities.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CPC telephone survey of Contractors

2.1.21. Almost all the contractors said they had existing links to all or part of the area they were contracted to provide an Outreach referral service to. In the vast majority of cases organisations had previously worked with the same customer group but provided different types of services, or provided similar
services to different customers. Around 10% said they were providing a new service to a different customer group.

Premises and Staffing

2.1.22. The majority of contractors have operated from existing premises. In some cases this has been expanded to accommodate Outreach activity. A minority operate from shared premises with a small number being entirely peripatetic. No organisation has set up wholly new premises to deliver Outreach.

2.1.23. Contractors have used an equal mix of existing and new staff to deliver Outreach. In many cases, the contractors have expanded existing staff teams with new full-time or, in some instances, part-time staff. One organisation operated an intermediate labour market (ILM) project in which the ILM workers delivered the Outreach Service. In a number of cases the Outreach workers were themselves lone parents.

2.1.24. For the most part, organisations that were able to devote full-time staff to Outreach were able to engage customers on a more consistent basis - dedicated staff learn lessons faster and are on-hand to follow-up with customers and maintain momentum. However, while some providers did recognise the benefits from having staff focus exclusively on Outreach activity, many felt that the financial incentives (from additional caseloading and sustainability payments) were outweighed by the risks of still not being able to source sufficient eligible customers.

2.2. Implementation Issues

Marketing the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service

2.2.1. The overwhelming focus of providers has been on lone parents with very few making any distinction in their services for partners. While the emphasis placed on different approaches varied by provider many employed a similar set of techniques:

- Passive marketing involving leaflets and posters left at local community centres, doctors’ surgeries, nurseries etc;
- More active marketing through visits by Outreach provider staff to other organisations such as nurseries and community centres to explain their services mostly to groups of customers;
- Running stalls at local markets, shopping centres, community events, fun days, etc;
- Networking activity linking with other local organisations to promote the Outreach Service and encourage referrals of interested lone parents or partners;
- Diverting existing customers of provider services towards Outreach and referral to Jobcentre Plus.
Over time marketing approaches have become more sophisticated. So while initial contacts with local organisations focused on schools, childcare organisations, community groups and lone parent organisations (Gingerbread, for example), many providers also contacted providers of health services – GP surgeries and health visitors, etc. Few of these connections produced significant numbers of eligible referrals. Where lone parents were engaged through these organisations, many were found to be already working (this was especially true of childcare organisations).

Building a strong network was considered essential, not only to get referrals of interested customers from other organisations but also as part of the package of support available to the customer: “at the end of the day, if I get say a lone parent Dad and he hasn’t got the information for childcare or he needs to go to college or whatever, unless all those pieces fit in and unless we work with other partner organisations, then it just can’t, it doesn’t work” [Outreach worker].

“It’s not about expecting lone parents to come to you, in your environment; it’s actually going out and integrating into their areas”. [Outreach provider manager]

The effectiveness of much of the marketing effort was low: providers reported very low take up rates across the piece. Large scale events and mailshots absorbed a large amount of staff time but would typically generate only a handful of leads.

“We did all types of advertisement, leaflets, we posted information to all our clients, and we posted information to other organisations. Unfortunately that’s not new information; they know that... whatever they are offering is not good enough for people that have been unemployed for quite a long time. If you are going to be worse off than when unemployed, or even if you are just £5 better off, you are not going to go to work. I think that is the major problem really” [Outreach provider manager]

This led a number of providers to develop other marketing approaches where potential customers could be approached when the ‘time was right’. For example, some providers made contact through training courses often delivered by other parts of their organisation.

Eligibility Criteria

Some Outreach providers claimed that they were led to believe that any lone parent or partner not currently seeking work would be eligible for referral regardless of current status in relation to Jobcentre Plus programmes. There is, however, no documentary evidence to support this. The ITT and other documentation are clear that customers must not be currently engaged with Jobcentre Plus. To be eligible customers had to be:

- eligible for either NDLP or NDP programmes and,
- not currently active on programme caseload – (in practice this was defined as not undertaking any activity for at least six months).
2.2.7. Regardless of the cause or source of this confusion, the practical outcome was that the eligibility checking process presented a more significant hurdle than many providers had originally anticipated. In a number of cases it became clear to Outreach providers that although they were in touch with relatively large numbers of lone parents through their other programmes and activities (a number of organisations used this information to inform their bids), these lone parents were often already on the NDLP caseload.

2.2.8. Some providers had assumed that if they engaged with a lone parent who was not currently looking for work they would get paid if they agreed to join the NDLP or NDP caseload regardless of their previous engagement with the programmes. Others, perhaps frustrated by the relatively low numbers, argued that they were still providing a valuable service by ‘re-invigorating’ ‘inactive’ lone parents and partners, even if they were technically on the NDLP or NDP caseload. This raised tensions between some providers and Jobcentre Plus and in some cases it highlighted that NDLP caseload information was not always up to date (there is no automatic procedure to remove customers from the caseload if they have been inactive for 6 months).

2.2.9. Many Outreach workers viewed the eligibility criteria as unnecessarily restrictive, which in turn limited the scope for marketing and engagement. Concerns were expressed by Outreach provider representatives along two dimensions:

- Outreach workers had to invest time in gaining the trust of the customer in order to obtain the personal information required by the Jobcentre to confirm eligibility. Nevertheless, there remained a risk that the customer may prove to be ineligible to participate in Jobcentre provision because of previous engagement;
- The terms of the contract and its associated payment model dictated that there was no scope to offer anything other than a ‘work first’ route (through referral to NDLP and NDP). This did not always coincide with customer needs/preferences (particularly in relation to those facing multiple barriers or aspiring to longer term skills development).

“We could offer a full service, including some of our own services, without trying to increase ‘trade’, but we are well aware that we are not able to do that. We get asked whether they can join other [Outreach provider] activities but they are told that those discussions are purely between them and their NDLP PA” [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.10. The policy rationale for Outreach, to engage genuinely isolated communities, required providers to go beyond the usual sources for customers (including those customers previously engaged by Jobcentre Plus). At the same time, bidding documentation makes it clear that Jobcentre Plus was not able to

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7 Though Jobcentre Plus guidance emphasises that caseload records should be monitored and internal exercises have been undertaken to check activity levels of caseloaded customers.
provide individual-level information on potential customers because of Data Protection rules. It would seem therefore, that such provider confusion also reflects a poor understanding of the full implications of delivering Outreach to the target client group (and levels of Jobcentre Plus engagement) among some providers at the bidding stage.

2.2.11. The combined effect of these difficulties was to undermine provider confidence. In many cases providers had long experience in delivering programmes for the unemployed but, as one manager put it, the experience of trying to find lone parents “came as a bit of a shock”. The Outreach Service, with a particular focus on lone parents and partners, was seen as a natural extension of previous activity and an opportunity to get involved in a new more significant market involving non-JSA claimants.

2.2.12. In practice, provider knowledge and experience of working with lone parents varied – most had some experience of lone parents but few had in-depth knowledge. Others were more aware that achieving targets was not going to be easy from the experience gained locally through Jobcentres:

“I think they have done outreach work to a great extent themselves ... they were aware it was not going to be a matter of just going out and pulling them in.” [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.13. Some providers recognised that there were fewer customers because of the wider introduction of compulsory Personal Adviser meetings:

“There is not many fish in the sea for us after the Jobcentre has dragged its net with its personal adviser meetings” [Outreach provider manager]

Problems with NDP

2.2.14. While recruitment for NDLP was slow, the difficulties in caseloading partners of benefit recipients were much more fundamental. It is clear that there has been little interest in pursuing this group among providers. One provider when interviewed said “I don’t understand, how can lone parents have partners?” Moreover, the introduction of the Outreach service also coincided with a temporary downgrading of NDP marketing and a reduced profile within Jobcentre Plus local offices:

“NDP is again an idea that I think on paper sounds really good, right, in reality it literally became a clerical exercise because we were posting out an awful lot of letters and got very very few people...you know” [Jobcentre staff]

“[New Deal for] Partners is a dodo ” [Jobcentre Business Manager]

2.2.15. There were also significant problems with the eligibility criteria for NDP. Outreach providers report that they were not made fully aware of the eligibility procedures for NDP until September 2002. The process is as follows: before any eligibility check can be carried out for the partner, the

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8 The 2003 Budget has since announced the future enhancement of the NDP programme, in particular, to bring the level and range of provision available through it in line with NDLP.
benefit recipient has to give their permission to have their benefit records checked. This was considered by the vast majority of providers as a significant barrier to participation. Many partners (mostly female), however interested in returning to work, were not prepared to ask their (mostly male) partners for permission – as one potential customer said “if I muck up his benefits, he will batter me”. Few providers bothered to market NDP to potential customers once this became clear to them.

“All we were setting them up for was to fight with their partner because of messing up the benefits” [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.16. The profile of NDP within Jobcentre Plus was also cited by providers as being a reason for not placing much emphasis on recruiting partners. However, such was the emphasis on lone parents, relatively few providers saw this as a problem. In short, very few providers were actively seeking partners in their outreach activity. All were prepared to work with partners if they were to approach the service but, for the most part, active marketing to partners did not continue beyond Autumn 2002.

Engaging with customers

“There's no rocket science to any of this – it's about establishing trust” [Outreach worker].

2.2.17. All providers shared this view. Earlier we introduced some of the forms of marketing used to introduce the service. In this section we focus more on how referral to NDLP9 was sold to customers. The direct sell of NDLP was tried but quickly found wanting as many customers associated the “New Deal” brand with compulsion (a number of providers report that using the New Deal logo on marketing material meant that it was left behind after marketing events). Only when customers were engaged in one-to-one dialogue was it possible to explain that NDLP was in fact voluntary. In turn the process of client engagement tended to become more subtle with an emphasis on selling the concept of work rather than NDLP per se:

“...sometimes it’s not even going straight in with the sell of NDLP, I think, it's starting off by talking to them about things they are interested in... ”[Outreach worker]

“You can’t just sell New Deal. New Deal is very good, but why?, What really is it going to do? So you know where are you now and have you thought about working, would you be interested developing a new skill, are you interested in the short or long term going back into employment? Helping people to start thinking about some of that and then just sort of show why New Deal would help...quite personal, because everyone’s’ situation is different.” [Outreach provider manager]

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9 In practice, and as already discussed, marketing was largely directed at lone parents, despite the formal aims of the policy to engage partners as well.
2.2.18. It is also clear that word of mouth referrals have been significant for some provider organisations. A few providers have been able to build on their organisation’s reputation for work with lone parents: “Everybody knows somebody who has been on a [Outreach Provider] training course”. In a few cases, Outreach workers have also used strong personal contacts with the local community.

“The Outreach worker’s] background is from the area –she basically grew up in the area and has a big extended family – gives us the contacts and ways into the community and gives people confidence in her” [Outreach provider manager]”

2.2.19. When the appropriate time came to introduce NDLP to customers, Outreach workers frequently used concrete examples of what NDLP had done for lone parents in the past to help overcome concerns or mis-perceptions about the programme.

Provider views on the attitudes and barriers faced by customers in engaging with the Jobcentre and work

2.2.20. The primary concern reported by Outreach provider staff was that customers were worried about going to the Jobcentre where they would be obliged to undertake work search and enter employment (regardless of preference).

“I think there is a fear that once you are through that jobcentre they won’t let you go, you know and you are on their system so coming here first can break down that barrier and yes definitely make it more user friendly.” [Outreach worker]

2.2.21. However, while some customers were put off by the image and environment of the Jobcentre providers felt that this was not the case for the majority.

“[We] feel it is a minority of people who have that stereotypical image of the Jobcentre. There is a lot more awareness now” [Outreach worker]

2.2.22. Engaging with lone parents when the ‘time is right’ was seen by most Outreach workers as the key to successful engagement. The general perception was that “the majority of [lone parents] want to get back into the workplace – they just need to weigh up all of the difficulties they've got” [Outreach worker]. These difficulties (often financial, family and emotional problems), according to providers, can be significant:

“At the end of the day if they have other problems getting a job is the last thing on their mind” [Outreach worker]

“Until people deal with their problems they are not going to move forward” [Outreach worker]

2.2.23. Working in isolated communities also makes a difference. Some customers are third or fourth generation unemployed and for them “[a]ll they have ever known is living off benefits – [and it is] very challenging to get them to change their minds.” [Outreach worker]. Outreach workers also reported
other needs, for example ESOL, which meant customers were very unlikely to volunteer to go down to the Jobcentre unless supported in person.

2.2.24. Providers recognised the significance of lone parents being substantially better off through paid work. They report that many customers were broadly aware of the ‘typical’ job vacancies available in their area and for the most part did not feel that the level of wages would be sufficient. However, while being better off through work was a fundamental concern, this was not the only motivation for returning to work:

“For most of them, you know, if it’s gonna leave them what they consider to be significantly better off, that might be the winning thing, although for some it is a matter of wanting to do other things other than looking after children” [Outreach worker]

“The younger generation – their idea is having kids, getting on benefit (often like their own mum) but when the child is 10 months old its not what they were expecting. So it is easier to move young mums towards training as a break from the kids” [Outreach worker]

2.2.25. Outreach staff also stressed the variation in customer needs. Just because a customer might want to return to work did not necessarily mean they were ready to do so immediately or without substantial support. Some customers come to the Outreach provider having read their leaflet, knowing what they want to do and ask to be caseloaded. They require very little support from the provider. Other customers are much less sure of themselves and need to be seen a number of times before referral can be considered “...this lady, she was physically shaking when she came into the building. Now it was obvious she was going to take a lot more support before she gets there” [Outreach worker]. Self-confidence was consistently reported by Outreach workers as being a key barrier.

“The majority of clients, you mention the job they say – ‘Oh I don't know I've got kids’ – but it's not really that, it's because their confidence is so low” [Outreach worker]

“A lot of people come with huge pasts and our job is to turn this around” [Outreach worker]

Working with Customers

2.2.26. The first step with many customers is simply to explain the referral and caseloading process and what that will involve: “you take for granted that people know things, but they don’t, they don’t know, you’ve got to tell them, you’ve got to explain point blank, basic, what it’s all about” [Outreach worker]. Demystifying the process and re-assuring customers that they have no obligation to take any job offered and that their benefits are not under threat is an important first step.

“It could be that it’s taken five visits or five meetings with the lone parent before they even got to the Jobcentre” [Outreach worker]
2.2.27. While many newly engaged customers understood the terms of engagement (that actual provision and support into jobs was the domain of Jobcentre Plus), there was a significant minority, who having developed a relationship of trust, looked to the Outreach provider for guidance on job search support, advice on in-work benefits and the availability of childcare and in other cases advice on education or training courses and access to potential funding sources.

2.2.28. This presented a difficult dilemma for Outreach providers. To fail to fully engage clients in discussion about work and training would risk losing them prior to referral. However, to offer detailed advice and guidance was to contravene the terms of their Outreach contract. For a number of customers this implied a careful, though difficult steer between not offering advice and information but at the same time, persuading the client to meet with a Jobcentre PA (and engage with someone they had yet to build a trusting relationship with).

“We could offer a full service, including some of our own services, without trying to increase ‘trade’, but we are well aware that we are not able to do that. We get asked [by lone parents] whether they can join other [Outreach provider] activities but they are told that those discussions are purely between them and their NDLP PA” [Outreach provider manager]

“Very clearly we are not here to give advice but you have to show people that there are a number of opportunities that they can access, that could help them and I think it is very important to give this knowledge (...) to show there are opportunities and also you know that it is not only about going straight into work, it’s about re-skilling or developing the confidence and that New Deal allows you that time.” [Outreach provider manager]

Inter-working with Jobcentre Plus

2.2.29. Relationships with Jobcentre Plus were on the whole very positive: “Never had anything less than helpful people” [Outreach worker], but the organisational inter-dependence within the process has led to some tension. Local Jobcentre Plus staff had not been closely involved in establishing the service and were generally suspicious of the Outreach service at the outset. However, most have overcome their initial concerns and have tried to support Outreach providers. The views of Outreach providers on this relationship are presented in this section (The views of Jobcentre Plus staff follow in the next section).

2.2.30. The speed and flexibility with which Jobcentre staff were able to respond to requests from Outreach providers was one source of tension. Outreach providers expressed a preference for Jobcentre Plus PAs to visit potential customers at their premises, recognising that they were likely to feel more comfortable in this environment. However, pressure on Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser time, especially in the context of the roll out of mandatory PA meetings, has meant that PAs have sometimes been unable to respond immediately to requests (particularly where a visit to provider premises was requested).
[Failing to see a Personal Adviser soon after expressing an interest]... “destroys the objective as once these women decide they are coming to see someone and she is not here, they are not coming back” [Outreach worker].

[The] “whole process seems to take longer than it should – you certainly can’t phone up and get an interview that day” [Outreach worker]

“... it needs to be something much more flexible than to call a helpline and make an appointment, instead they should have PA in the organisation for at least one time a week – even if she wouldn’t see anyone – but we have women coming in and out of this building all the day” [Outreach worker]

2.2.31. Nevertheless, while providers recognised the significance of ‘striking while the iron was hot’, they also recognised that this was not always practical. In this context, many providers welcomed being able to access the Adviser Appointment System, especially as it allowed them some scope to influence which Adviser would be assigned to the customer because “Some advisers are more approachable than others” [Outreach worker].

2.2.32. Provider organisations with wider links to the community and those who had worked extensively with lone parents in the past were often reluctant to channel customers down a single (work first) path if they felt that was not appropriate for the customer. In many cases these Community organisations had developed a reputation and degree of trust with their customers and communities and were reluctant to jeopardise this relationship by promoting one service to the neglect of customer preferences: “The problem is we don’t like pestering people” [Outreach worker]. Meanwhile, other organisations (often with fewer links to the community), took a more pragmatic and output-driven perspective:

“I’m being paid to get people into the Jobcentre so I will do that with every client”. [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.33. On the whole Outreach staff say that customers are positive about the Jobcentre once they are there. Many Outreach providers would take their customers to the Jobcentre and subject to the permission of the NDLP Adviser would sit in on the initial meeting: “I never ever send them on their own you know, because obviously I am their contact, I’ve built a trust relationship with them” [Outreach worker].

“One client got false information from someone who lived in her street, trying to put her off. I said to her come back in for a chat and I’ll go with you [to the Jobcentre] so that you know exactly how the programme works and how we can link in. A senior adviser was sitting in and confirmed that there was no effect on benefit and that the programme was voluntary. The girl’s been brilliant – that’s partnership working” [Outreach worker]

2.2.34. There were, however, some reported difficulties at the point that customers first engaged with the Jobcentre which seem to reflect the greater work focus of the Jobcentre:
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“It’s just their [Jobcentre staff] manner, you spend time building them [the clients] up, encouraging them and you go and if you get a sort of harsh edge there, it kind of breaks down a lot of what you have done, you try to sell it, you know that they are there to help you (...) and maybe sometimes you know, it’s how well they understand the work we are trying to do.” [Outreach worker]

“the first interview is mainly looking on the screen for jobs and only later do they get to what they need, which can be quite off-putting” [Outreach worker]

“While we are very good at making the initial contact, getting them interested in taking the first step, but then if it [NDLP] is not the experience they were expecting or they got misinformation, that confidence, that motivation has been knocked again” [Outreach worker]

“We can send them into Jobcentres until we are blue in the face but they are not going to retain them because they have so many [non-employment related] problems and issues that are not being supported” [Outreach worker]

2.2.35. Underpinning the relationship between the Outreach provider and Jobcentre Plus is the contractual and financial incentive to secure referrals and in turn, caseload customers. However, the capacity of the provider to ensure such outcomes is partly dependent on the follow-up activities of Jobcentre Plus advisers. This undoubtedly raised tensions between Outreach providers and Jobcentre Plus. Any perceived flaws in NDLP Advisers’ support were thrown into sharp relief, while busy NDLP Advisers did not always appreciate outside interference in the delivery of what they perceive as their programme. Moreover, NDLP Advisers sometimes expressed concerns around the unrealistic expectations some customers had been given by Outreach providers of what NDLP might offer. All these tensions are symptomatic of the division of labour implied in the design of the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service (we return to this issue later).

“We can’t have outreach and Jobcentre Plus staff saying different things to the clients” [Outreach worker]

“Once a PA told me [the outreach worker] ’you are an outreach worker, you are not an adviser’, you know which is fine because that’s true I do recognise that ... hopefully we are enhancing what they do because all we do is bring more people to them, we are not trying to take their job because we can’t do their job” [Outreach provider manager]

“We’ve stopped working with them [the customers] but how active are Jobcentre Plus?” [Outreach worker].’

2.2.36. Wherever possible, Outreach providers kept in touch with customers after they had been caseloaded. In almost all cases this was by telephone though the cost associated with this did limit such activity in some cases “13 weeks of chasing is not on” [Outreach provider manager]. Nevertheless, Outreach providers were keen to ensure their customers were able to remain active on
Design, Set-up and Implementation Issues

the caseload. In some cases, customers who had caseloaded still returned to their Outreach provider to request their advice on next steps and more generally, to keep in touch.

**Service delivery and customer needs**

2.2.37. The nature of the Outreach Service is unusual in that it formally offers no support other than referral to the Jobcentre:

“It’s quite a different contract, because we always deliver services, it’s kind of strange to actually in a sense have a contract where you actually get people to go somewhere else, you know, quite a different way for us to think” [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.38. Not all providers were comfortable with this arrangement as they had differing views on the quality and relevance of some of the services on offer. While many praise the support on offer from Jobcentre Plus advisers, others argue that advisers vary considerably in knowledge, approach and attitude:

- some start the interviews with the issue of financial benefit, rather than focusing on the positive motivation to work;
- many customers want to do training but are often told to go and source their own training and then come back - which conflicts with the official leaflets;
- Personal Adviser knowledge of local training provision is sometimes limited;
- customers are often not shown how to use or guided to basic job seeking services. “If they had the job seeking skills required, they wouldn’t need the service provided by Jobcentre Plus in the first place!” [Outreach worker]

2.2.39. A concern about the limits of Jobcentre-based services among some providers is demonstrated in the following:

‘The idea was, that a great number of women come to the centre to train and after training ... after they have been assessed in general according to their skills they can join the scheme’...[In the event not many women joined NDLP, preferring instead to continue with training or]... “just go home” [Outreach worker]

“It’s almost like well we see they are not ready, are they? ... we’ll just send them back home, what have you achieved, they’ve got this far, you know, we should be supporting them that extra bit. If they’re not nearly job ready, then I’ve the feeling that as soon as they get to NDLP advisers ... nothing is happening ... or they send them to a basic skills centre. One of my clients came back with 100% - she should not have gone there! She needed confidence building not basic skills” [Outreach worker]

“Having sourced, worked with a client, enthused them and built up their aspirations and then having them blocked or not progressed – this is damaging” [Outreach worker]
2.2.40. It is important to disentangle concern about the poor quality of advice from a wider concern that the service on offer from NDLP did not suit the needs of a significant group of lone parents who saw work as a long-term aim. Customers were often characterised as being interested in doing something to prepare for work (in general, building skills) but their lack of confidence held them back “people think that a job is way off, you know, not achievable” [Outreach worker]. On both fronts (skills development and confidence building) there are limits to the level of support that NDLP offers (Evans et al, 2003).

“This project is more about people who are ready to look for work”. “It’s fair to say that the people who would benefit from it most are the people who are at the stage of thinking about going back to work...” [Outreach worker].

2.2.41. At the same time, providers report that there was widespread customer preference for a long-term career:

“The interesting thing we found in our other contract with lone parents is that whilst they wanted to go back to work they didn’t want to go to any job ... they actually wanted a career ... it was quite interesting for us and sort of you know make us think about the way we were working because it’s not about getting any job, it is about the training, the skills and things like that.” [Outreach worker]

2.2.42. They reported that some customers were frustrated by the types of jobs available and the willingness of NDLP advisers to support a longer term/higher quality path back to work. Sometimes customers had reported that the Jobcentre had a limited range of vacancies available: “offering only catering jobs is just another way to put them down” [Outreach worker].

2.2.43. To try and overcome this, some providers offered taster or short (i.e. one day or less) courses in IT etc to show customers what it would be like and encourage their interest in doing something. Customers would then agree to be referred to the Jobcentre and ask to go on the full course in their initial interview. This led to some accusations from Jobcentre Plus staff that the Outreach Providers were ‘feeding’ their own downstream services.

“... the irony is really, that part of our project for lone parents is that we get the Jobcentre to come in and the Lone Parent adviser will talk about the benefit of NDLP and we try to get our clients to go on New Deal as part of our programme. So really to get our outcome, we have to, you know, if a client was interested in the work we do here, we would obviously have to get him to go register, and be caseloaded first and then referred back...” [Outreach worker]

Provider views on the Impact of the Outreach service

2.2.44. Not surprisingly, no provider claimed that the Outreach service was having a substantial impact. All were either substantially or just below their expected profile of customer referrals and caseloading. They felt strongly, however, that they were having a significant effect on the (mainly) lone parents that did
engage with the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service. The range of primary impacts were usefully summarised by one Outreach provider:

“To raise awareness, explain and remove false ideas. A lot of people have fear and association that the Jobcentre will take benefit away; and a lot of people not used to deal with authority so it can be frightening. So to explain it, make people understand that will not be obliged, can take their time... A lot of people are keen to go into work. They appreciate the one to one and being asked what they want to do and the personal approach” [Outreach worker]

2.2.45. Other organisations felt they were now better networked with a very wide range of community organisations, often from outside the typical employment-orientated services. At the same time, a minority of providers – often those who had previously worked with lone parents – said that the Outreach service had had little impact.

“It's had no impact [on the number or type of referrals to NDLP] because we were already working with the clients anyway”. [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.46. A number of Outreach workers felt that the true impact would take time to emerge. Some noted that a number of customers had gone on to education or training courses but felt these would translate into a return to work for many on completion. Others felt that the Outreach service had provided a useful foundation in terms of developing confidence and starting to introduce a work discipline: “this scheme might actually start to put the foundation in place for what they might want to develop later on” [Outreach worker].

Funding and performance incentives

2.2.47. All Outreach provider managers considered that the Outreach Service was under funded and that the structure of incentive payments did not reflect the level of effort required to achieve an outcome.

“Following the investigation of performance and the adverse effect financially you have to look at how much [the provider organisation] is subsidising this.” [Outreach provider manager]

“There is a huge leeway, you know you could put endless amount of time into it ... really you could make it a full time job but the resources within the contract don’t allow it.” [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.48. The payment of an administrative fee was welcomed but many providers suggested that it provided only a starting point for building the outreach service and did little to support pre-referral marketing and initial customer engagement. A number also felt that the administrative payment should have been larger in order to cover overheads associated with a more substantial publicity and marketing campaign.
2.2.49. Meanwhile, the level of performance payments were universally considered to be too low. Most providers said that the level of payment was not sufficiently high to persuade them to invest heavily in outreach activity.

“If you don’t put the time, then you lose people” [Outreach provider manager]

“Yeah we have an initiative specific to the client group but we really only just scrape the surface without real investment” [Outreach provider manager]

2.2.50. Providers had decided at the outset whether to devote full or part-time staff to the contract and in the majority of cases they stuck with their initial decision – the potential gains from additional referrals did not persuade contractors to increase their investment in the service. This reflects a recognition among providers of the additional (financial and administrative) costs and risks inherent in customer engagement and referral.

Investment decisions were also influenced by the more fundamental issue of the division of responsibilities between the provider and the Jobcentre and a provider perception that they were not entirely in control of the process (a process which was intimately linked to the level of payment providers received):

“it’s the most unusual contract ... the worse contract I’ve ever known for funding that’s held up because somebody else hasn’t done their job; and I don’t say that they have or they haven’t but we’ve no control over the way that it’s done.” [Outreach provider manager].

“It’s not as simplistic as a pot of money. It's prescriptive and detailed...” [Outreach provider manager].

2.2.51. Providers and some Jobcentre Plus staff noted that the problems of the programme have been exacerbated by its administrative procedures:

- Jobcentre Plus NDLP staff were not properly briefed on the pilot;
- Jobcentre Plus NDLP staff were not properly trained in relation to the processes associated with the pilot, including the paperwork;
- There is no support for the provider in relation to the problems of chasing up and processing the paperwork.

2.2.52. All monitoring data were collated on a single form (LPP07). While this kept paperwork down to a minimum in principle, the different sections of the same form had to be completed at different stages in the process:

“By the time you have got them through the whole thing you have got four LPP07s in the file here and then copies at the Jobcentre and the Finance department. We might not have many clients but there must be millions of LLP07s in the world...” [Outreach worker]
“There are photocopies of photocopies going about, and when you do that, even with the original signature on it, it is difficult to determine which is the original” [Outreach provider manager]

“It never should be about completing paperwork. It's very important as it has to be there but not to the detriment of building the rapport with client. If you don't have the client, you don't have the initiative” [Outreach worker]

2.2.53. Although Outreach staff and Jobcentre Plus staff came to understand the process many considered it “fundamentally poor administrative practice” and it was another source of tension between providers and Jobcentre staff.

“[We] would prefer to spend more time tracking clients and less time tracking Jobcentre Plus paperwork” [Outreach provider manager]

2.3. The views of Jobcentre Plus Staff on the implementation and delivery of Outreach

Context and Background

2.3.1. We have already noted that relations between Jobcentre Plus staff and the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service providers were largely positive once initial misunderstandings had been resolved. A number of issues were raised by local Jobcentre Plus staff which, they argued, limited their opportunity to take a proactive role in relation to the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service:

- Capacity constraints on NDLP Advisers associated with Personal Adviser Meetings which limited the time they were able to devote to supporting the Outreach service;
- Limited investment of local Jobcentre staff in the establishment of the service and as a result a lack of ownership;
- Scepticism among some staff about the value of a service they felt they could do (and had been doing) themselves – for many advisers undertaking outreach was reported as one of the most rewarding aspects of their job10;

“When they talked about it at first [the Outreach service] I must say I was appalled because that meant we would be stuck in the office doing interviews all day. We wouldn't get the opportunity to go out and market our services” [NDLP Adviser]

10 It is worth noting that policy guidance required only that the new provision should dovetail with existing provision –there was no requirement for existing Jobcentre Plus provision to cease. Though in the context of the roll out of mandatory work focused meetings, local activity often did cease and local advisers have, erroneously it seems, attributed this to the introduction of externally provided Outreach.
Rationale for the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service

2.3.2. Many of the Jobcentre Plus staff could see no long term need for the Outreach Service, especially since the widespread introduction of Personal Adviser Meetings.

“Can't think that there are many who slip through the net – well they mustn't because we're not getting many referrals” [NDLP Adviser]

“Maybe there was before the Personal Adviser Meetings came in, the compulsory work focused interviews, but now it's hardly worth it” [NDLP Adviser]

“once you've got them on board they don’t see us as the Jobcentre, part of government” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.3. Other staff thought that the use of external organisations was a good idea because of customer suspicion of Jobcentres, but views on effectiveness remained mixed.

“People probably go back to their early experience where there were long queues, right, it’s predominantly men, right, the whole atmosphere can be fairly intimidating for a woman, and in terms of the lone parents, a lot of the women have never come near a jobcentre before” [NDLP Business Manager]

“the lone parent group are very nervous about coming to jobcentres” [NDLP Adviser]

“The programme for Lone Parents would probably perform better if it was not run by the Jobcentre – if it was totally independent – because it is not just the suspicion that clients have its also the suspicion that community organisations have” [NDLP Adviser]

“In theory it's a good idea but in practice it doesn't work” [NDLP Adviser]

Contracting and Selection Process

2.3.4. None of the local Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed had been involved in any part of the contracting or selection process and there was only limited recognition of the ‘isolated communities’ identified under Outreach:

“I don't know where they got the number from when they were agreeing the contract. They must just have pulled numbers out of the air!” [NDLP Adviser]

“We're just told there it is – get on with it. These are the figures you've got to meet, get on with it and do it” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.5. Others saw the mis-match of performance and targets almost as par for the course: “Organisations will always put down on a piece of paper that which they think we want to hear” [NDLP Business Manager].

2.3.6. While many were neutral or accepted that the external providers might make a difference others were not convinced by the level of expertise shown by some contractors.
Design, Set-up and Implementation Issues

“If they ever asked at grassroots level who should get the contract we would say 'don't touch this lot' – they run the Programme Centres and 'they are not the best thing since sliced bread’” [NDLP Adviser]

Jobcentre Plus staff attitudes to providers

2.3.7. There was a general interest among Jobcentre Plus staff in the performance of the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach service and the approaches adopted by the providers. Many NDLP Advisers were interested to compare the methods they themselves had used in undertaking outreach activity with those adopted by the providers. Most felt some professional satisfaction that (a) many of the approaches had already been used by NDLP Advisers and (b) that Outreach providers were producing similar results in terms of caseloding.

“It's all been done” [NDLP Adviser]

“There is no more innovation that we haven't already tried” [NDLP Adviser]

“They are not reaching the parts of the client group that we have not been able to reach ourselves in the past” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.8. Some Jobcentre Plus staff felt that external organisations might be able to push the boundaries and engage with more customers because they were ‘not the Jobcentre’.

“It allows a new set of eyes to look at the issues rather than the same old eyes looking at the same old issues” [NDLP Adviser]

“I don’t think she [the outreach worker] is doing anything different – it’s just that she isn’t in the Jobcentre. I think she can break the barriers down even further than we can” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.9. Some were not convinced by the quality or appropriateness of Outreach provision and some were suspicious of provider motivations.

“I don’t think they got enough in-depth information” [NDLP Adviser]

“One person ended up being referred from one [provider] to the other before they’ve actually got their appointment with the jobcentre, so it’s not very professional” [NDLP Adviser]

“To be a lone parent adviser you get a feel for the client group, you get to know the problems they face, and you get to know the barriers that they face to get back into work. Because the lone parent adviser has all this knowledge, it gives you an edge on how to approach people; unfortunately with people like [the provider], they are just another client group to them (...) I think that’s the difference.” [NDLP Adviser]

“Jobcentre Plus’ job is to get people into jobs – training providers want to get people into training – their training” [NDLP Adviser]
Service integration

2.3.10. There were widespread concerns over the demands operating the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service made on Jobcentre Plus staff time. All offices were very busy with Personal Adviser Meetings and many accepted that they could only respond to Outreach Service providers’ requests as and when time was available.

2.3.11. One area which concerned a number of Jobcentre Plus staff was the accuracy and quality of the information being given to customers. For most, there was a concern that customers were being given unrealistic expectations of what NDLP could provide – particularly in terms of funding for training and other forms of support (Adviser Discretionary Fund, etc).

“I think that they have been spinning a line” [NDLP Adviser]

“As much as to say ‘Go along and see the lone parent advisers they’ve got pots of money to throw at you’” [NDLP Adviser]

“If you did this training you would be able to get extra money for doing that” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.12. Some Jobcentre Plus staff felt that providers were talking up the programme to get customers to refer and then leaving Jobcentre Plus to revise customer expectations. This meant that the initial interview with customers would tend to focus on downplaying expectations rather than more positive discussion. NDLP Advisers were aware that this had an effect on customer motivation and willingness to join the caseload. It would seem that the communication issues referenced here are again symptomatic of the uneasy split of responsibilities between providers and Jobcentre Plus in this instance.

“What we’ve asked [the provider] to do...is sell a product that they themselves don’t actually deliver” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.13. Other NDLP Advisers found provider requests for initial interviews and the associated administration a source of tension because many providers wanted very quick responses and did not always appreciate that the NDLP Advisers had other commitments.

“when they want things they want them yesterday – [it always] needs to be a speedy process” [NDLP Adviser]

“By the time you’ve booked an appointment for them from the outreach they have lost interest” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.14. Some Advisers did try to respond to the Outreach Service demands by altering procedures: “to try getting the client back on track quicker than perhaps we would have done if they were not an outreach client” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.15. A few Jobcentre Plus staff recognised that the split in service delivery inherent in the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service raised wider issues about the way in which some Advisers work.
“We made the decision in April this year to bring lone parent advisers under local management and I think that’s gonna help in terms of a greater understanding...historically they have never really worked I don’t think in any real sense with programme providers before, you know their responsibility is to be the adviser for this individual and to take on all that responsibility and to share that responsibility with another provider sometimes is not something that some advisers feel comfortable with” [Local Jobcentre Plus Business Manager]

Barriers faced by customers

2.3.16. Not surprisingly, the perceptions of Jobcentre Plus staff of the barriers faced by customers largely reflect those identified by the Outreach Service providers.

“Most are terrified that they are going to lose their benefits.” [NDLP Adviser]

“Some of our lone parents, certainly in this Jobcentre, can’t talk to their peers in their community because their peers will make it difficult for them to do the training that they want or go to work” [NDLP Adviser]

“Lot of these clients don't want to be fantastically better off, they just want to be out of the house and talking to adults” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.17. However, their views also reflect a closer appreciation of some of the practical issues facing lone parents aiming to return to work.

“Where they live and then childcare will dictate what job they get and what hours they do” [Local Jobcentre Plus Business Manager]

“[We] have a long way to go to educate employers to take on this client group” [Local Jobcentre Plus Business Manager]

2.3.18. Other advisers reported that a number of Outreach customers faced multiple barriers. One adviser had some referrals that he was not in a position to help because of their domestic problems and other issues including homelessness:

“[it was a case of]... when you’re ready, this is what we are here for [support to find work]. Get yourself sorted out first of all” [NDLP Adviser].

“... she will be aiming to bring in lone parents who don’t have multiple barriers but she sees that if we’re going to get them into work then it’s better if we can target people with maybe just one barrier or two” [NDLP Business manager]

Jobcentre Plus staff perceptions of the impact of the programme

2.3.19. Views on the impact of the programme were mixed. Most Jobcentre Plus staff felt that Outreach had made little or no difference. Many felt that customers would have been engaged (through mandatory Personal Adviser Meetings and existing local marketing). Others noted that Outreach providers had in some cases, succeeded in establishing contact with some customers but
have failed to engage them sufficiently to persuade them of the value of joining NDLP/NDP.

2.3.20 Others were more keen to recognise the additional contribution of Outreach though even here this was tempered by an awareness of the limited scope to engage and address the needs of harder-to-help groups prior to and following referral: “the clients that we are seeing are clients that we might actually had contact with but who did not want to know first time around ... whereas when they then see the outreach worker and the outreach worker talks about it on their territory, it may be in the mother and toddler group or wherever, that lone parent then comes forward and is now on the lone parent caseload doing some stuff with the lone parent adviser even though they have actually seen the lone parent adviser before but they did not want to know” [Local Jobcentre Plus Business manager].

2.3.21 At the same time, some Jobcentre Plus staff appreciated that the Outreach Service was engaging with a new customer group, indeed to the extent that in some cases it was then difficult for NDLP to support the referred customer.

“They are clients we wouldn’t otherwise have seen but they are not job ready when they are coming to us” [NDLP Adviser]

“If they end up finding harder to help clients, then we really could do with them having some of their barriers dealt with before ... that would be helpful if they could do more” [NDLP Adviser]

Outsourcing issues

2.3.22 The limited involvement of local staff in the initial development and set up phase of the service meant that most Jobcentre Plus staff were suspicious of external organisations delivering part of what they perceived as ‘their’ service. Personal Adviser experience of the delivery of the Outreach Service to date has done little to allay many of their concerns.

“This is what we used to do” [NDLP Adviser]

“Given the opportunity to get a few people in I'm quite happy for them to do it, but why are we both knocking on the same door?” [NDLP Adviser]

“They are too specialist a client group to have outsiders doing anything on a one off basis.” [NDLP Adviser]

“if we had the opportunity and the time out from our diaries to go out we could get rid of the stigma” [NDLP Adviser]

2.3.23 A minority of Jobcentre Plus staff still saw advantages in working with external organisations.

“...a tool to get to clients we can’t get to because they are in to places that we can’t go say because this suspicion or other reasons – like some community groups such as credit unions, lone parent support groups, parent and toddler groups. Some are very suspicious of you when you want to go there” [NDLP Adviser]
2.3.24. More remain suspicious that providers have become involved in order to generate business for their other services.

“Only takes one person to have a bad experience and if you only have a few people involved in a location then word gets out very quickly” [NDLP Adviser]

“They [the provider] tend to wear their guidance hat and they’re hoping to catch lone parents and partners while they’re doing their other job.” [NDLP Adviser]

“It is an opportunity for them to in effect recruit for their programme centre” [NDLP Adviser]
3. WHO ARE THE OUTREACH CUSTOMERS?

Take-up of the Outreach Service

3.1. During the first year of operation Outreach has helped just over 1,750 customers. As we have already noted, this is some way short of original projections. Moreover, there is no evidence from the pattern of total starts by month recorded in Figure 1 to suggest that the numbers of referrals through Outreach Service is improving over time (though start rates were higher in September 02, coinciding with the beginning of the school year).

Figure 3.1: Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monthly Starts

3.2. In the following section, we outline the characteristics of Outreach customers. The low take-up of NDP by partners limits what can be said specifically about partners (Table 3.1 refers). Nevertheless, where possible, we include separate analysis of customers referred to NDLP and NDP.

Table 3.1: NDLP and NDP customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of outreached</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1758</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03
3.3. Both NDLP and NDP customer groups are dominated by females and this is reflected in the characteristics of customers using the Outreach Service (Table 3.2 refers).

Table 3.2: Gender of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lone Parents & Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

3.4. The age distribution of participants is shown in Table 3.3. It would seem that in comparison with mainstream NDLP, the Outreach Service has attracted more young lone parents (see Figure 3.2).

Table 3.3: Age Distribution of Outreach Service Customers (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>NDLP</th>
<th>NDP</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>up to 18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 to 25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 45</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 and over</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 At the time of signing declaration

Source: Lone Parents & Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

Figure 3.2: NDLP Outreach and Mainstream NDLP Customer Ages

Source: Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03 and New Deal for Lone Parents: Findings from the Quantitative Survey, March 03.
3.5. On average, each customer has 1.3 children. Table 3.4 shows that just over half of customers have only one child and around one third have two children.

Table 3.4: Number of children per customer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NDLP/NDP.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>835 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 children</td>
<td>492 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 children</td>
<td>188 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 children</td>
<td>59 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 children or more</td>
<td>28 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1648 1602</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

3.6. Table 3.5 shows that just over half of the customers in the programme have at least one child under the age of five, and over 10% of customers have two or more under five-year-olds. 45% of customers also have children between the age of 5 and 11 and one in five have children that belong to the oldest age group of 12 to 16 years. Comparison with mainstream NDLP suggests that the Outreach Service has engaged with a group of lone parents who are younger, and who not surprisingly, have younger children.

Table 3.5: Age of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children in Age Group Under 5 Years</td>
<td>1078</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Age Group 5-11 Years</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in Age Group 12-16 Years</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2148</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. Customers with more than one child mean that the total represents the number of children, not the total number of Lone Parent and Partner Outreach participants.

Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

3.7. Outreach participants are predominately White, although there is a significant minority of Black participants. Participation for this group in the Outreach Service is double that for the mainstream programme (although numbers are small this difference is significant). We would suggest that the greater participation of Black lone parents reflects the focus of Outreach activity on geographical locations with relatively high concentrations of minority ethnic communities compared with the picture for NDLP as a whole.

Table 3.6: Ethnicity of Outreach Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>NDLP</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>NDLP Mainstream %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1313</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed/Other</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03 and SFR Data on NDLP Customers April 02 – March 03.
3.8. In short:

- Outreach participants are younger in comparison to mainstream NDLP customers;
- Outreach customers tend to have at least one pre-school child, and few have no children under five; and,
- Outreach service has reached significantly more customers from the Black ethnic group in comparison to mainstream NDLP provision (though this may be attributed to the specific locations in which Outreach has operated).

**Previous involvement in NDLP**

3.9. As noted in the previous section, the primary aim of the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach service has been to engage with isolated communities. While we cannot assess the degree of isolation facing an Outreach customer per se, we can identify previous participation in NDLP and use this as a measure of the extent to which Outreach has engaged ‘new’ participants rather than ‘repeat or lapsed’ participants. Just over 4 in 5 lone parents had no NDLP record prior to the start of Outreach in April 2002, suggesting that the programme had made some inroads into the target groups.

**Progression through the Outreach Service**

3.10. Almost all customers registering with the Outreach Service are eligible (99.5%) and a high proportion (91%) are referred on to the Jobcentre. Table 3.7 presents the number of customers at various stages in the Outreach process. The measured drop out rate between engagement by the Outreach Service provider and Jobcentre Plus is relatively small. The vast majority of customers (91%) on whom personal details were recorded were referred to Jobcentre Plus and attended their initial interview.

**Table 3.7: Customer Progression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outreached</th>
<th>Referrals</th>
<th>% of Outreached</th>
<th>Caseloaded</th>
<th>% of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>1566</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>1051</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1758</td>
<td>1595</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

3.11. Table 3.8 identifies the stages at which customers left provision following referral but prior to successful caselading. Based on monitoring data, it shows that at least 16% (of all referrals) did not join the caseload. We suspect that the actual drop out rate may be higher – monitoring data (Table 3.7.) also shows that one third of registered customers are not recorded as caseloaded. Some of these customers will be in the process of joining the caseload and administrative data will capture them in due course.
Table 3.8: Customer Drop-outs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Attend Initial Interview</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Agree to Participate</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not Commence Caseload/Approved Activity</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. Customer reasons for not caseloding are recorded after they are referred to the Jobcentre. In Table 3.7, 525 referred customers are not caseloded but only 257 have recorded reasons at March 2003. The remainder are either between referral and caseloding or they have left the Outreach service without a reason being recorded. If all 525 referred but not caseloded clients never joined the caseload, the drop out rate between referral and caseloding would by around 33%, based on these statistics.

Source: Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

3.12. An analysis of the characteristics of those customers who do not progress to caseload on NDLP/NDP does not suggest that they possess significantly different characteristics when compared with those that have caseloded.

3.13. Table 3.9 shows that just under 40% of customers who have been on the caseload for at least 13 weeks are still active at that stage. The figures for NDP are very small but are included in the Table below for completeness. Meanwhile, analysis of the NDLP evaluation database suggests that around 30% of those joining the caseload following Outreach referral have subsequently entered work (equivalent to 11% of all those registering with Outreach). This job outcome rate is low when compared with rates achieved by the NDLP programme as a whole (Evans et al, 2003).

Table 3.9: Retention on Caseload

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caseloaded for at least 13 weeks</th>
<th>Active at 13wks check</th>
<th>% of caseloaded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1011</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Monitoring Data April 02 – March 03

11 Monitoring data records a job outcome rate of just 10% for customers caseloaded following Outreach referral based on the first 12 months of operation. This is considerably below that revealed by the NDLP evaluation database and points to the under-reporting of monitoring data both in relation to continued caseload activity and job outcomes.
4. CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF THE LONE PARENTS
AND PARTNERS OUTREACH SERVICE

4.1. Customer Attitudes

Long-term Aspirations

4.1.1. Many of the customers engaged by Outreach Providers have relatively high aspirations. Over the longer term most are aiming to achieve full time work, largely because this is seen as being financially the most viable option. Occupations typically mentioned include childcare, administration, customer service related jobs, social and/or health care. Indeed, ‘career preparation’ was a consistent theme in customer interviews – very few thought these jobs were directly accessible without further training or education.

4.1.2. Relatively few had done anything to pursue these aspirations prior to Outreach engagement. Some had contacted their local college for courses related to future career plans. One or two said they had occasionally visited their local Jobcentre to review job vacancies. Typically, efforts to realise longer term ambitions had, to date, been sporadic and rarely amounted to any concrete progression. At the same time, there was a general perception that the Jobcentre would not be able to assist customers in their longer term ambitions (we return to this theme below).

Barriers to Employment

4.1.3. Many customers cited a lack of skills and qualifications as being the main barrier to securing work. Most had no or few formal qualifications, often only to GCSE level. Their childcare needs (especially for pre-school children) and associated cost meant that, while they would be prepared to work, they needed to “get a job worth having” in order to be better off (or in a number of cases no worse off) in work. Indeed, financial worries were a major concern – lack of money makes going back to work or into education “seem so daunting”.

4.1.4. Many respondents felt there were plenty of jobs available in their areas (often retail, cleaning jobs and ‘bar work’) but most suggested that these would not pay sufficiently well to be worth their while. Most implied that these jobs were open to them but that they were ‘holding out’ to get a better job with career prospects.

“there’s nothing much there...just like cleaning jobs and things like that...you either have lots of qualifications or none” [Outreach Customer]

“It sounds awful but if I’m only £10 better off as what I’m getting now, I can’t afford it” [Outreach Customer]

4.1.5. A general lack of confidence was consistently identified by customers. In many cases their identification of a lack of confidence coincided with a desire to update skills to facilitate a move into work. In this sense, skills acquisition
was also seen as a mechanism for gaining the confidence needed to enter work.

4.1.6. A few respondents did believe that their job prospects were worsened by the area in which they lived but this was by no means a universal perspective. Some areas were seen as having a bad reputation which stigmatised all residents in the jobs market.

“It’s because it’s [name of local community]. It has a big stigma - no-one wants to work in [name of local community]” [Outreach Customer]

4.1.7. Other respondents reported that they faced high travel-to-work costs linked to poor public transport. This was sometimes compounded by the need to travel to access childcare facilities as well as travelling to work.

4.2. Customer views of the Jobcentre and NDLP/NDP

Perceptions of the Jobcentre before participating in the Outreach service

4.2.1. Few customers had visited a Jobcentre. Of those who had been in contact, their visits were typically occasional, ‘one off’ enquiries often made some time in the past. The general pre-conception was typically negative:

“I thought it was only for people that couldn’t be bothered looking for work properly”

“full of men”

“they were friendly enough but they didn’t have any information specific to lone parents”

“They just want to get you off benefits and I just feel they want you to have any job – they are not bothered what job it is, it is them getting their targets”

“Just lots of people feeling inadequate”

“It’s a joke ... never got a job in it and the ones they do give you are completely different to what’s on the board”

4.2.2. There is some evidence that the new Jobcentre Plus environment has helped to change perceptions of customers. Some thought it was ‘okay’, ‘clean and spacious’ and ‘pleasant’. However, others mentioned the lack of childcare arrangements and the difficulties of keeping young children in control in an open plan office: “my son was running around and I couldn’t speak, and I was just getting really frustrated”.

“[It’s] not very personal. It’s a bit too open ... you are talking about things that are really very personal”

Awareness of NDLP/NDP pre-Outreach

4.2.3. General awareness of NDLP was quite high among customers interviewed, although few customers, prior to engaging with the Outreach service, had an
accurate understanding of the programme. Most customers had some level of interest but had never got around to joining (mostly) NDLP, often because of a limited understanding of what participation entailed. A few had heard mixed reports from friends: “Some people said it was rubbish and they just want to get you back into work... others said it was more positive”.

“I thought it (NDLP) was okay until I went to see a lone-parent adviser. He told me that if I got a job, I would be worse-off with child care costs” [Outreach Customer]

4.2.4. Others felt that it would not be helpful to them. One thought that she had been for a PA interview in the past but she didn’t continue because ‘it didn’t help me- it was just talk and leaflets’. One person had considered joining up but she dropped out because of childcare difficulties which made it impossible for her to get to her appointments every 2 weeks (she could not find a registered childminder and the Jobcentre would not pay towards an unregistered one).

4.2.5. Other reasons for non-participation included the age of their (pre-school) children, not thinking it was applicable to them (often because ‘New Deal’ was associated with people ‘who do not want to work’) and a general lack of confidence:

“When you haven’t worked for a long time, you need encouragement and support from outside” [Outreach Customer]

4.3. Participant views on Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service Delivery

Engagement with the Outreach Provider

4.3.1. Some customers had had previous contact with their Outreach provider, often linked to training and personal development provision (e.g. short IT courses and confidence building activity).

4.3.2. Most customers, however, found out about the Outreach Service via a leaflet either through the door or handed out on stalls (e.g. at a lone parent exhibition, community festival, college open days, shopping centres, etc). Others heard through a visit by Outreach staff to a wide variety of community organisations: lone parent and parent and toddler groups, voluntary projects, homeless shelters, etc. Some had been told about the service by their Health Visitor. Those who had received leaflets were frequently followed up by personal contact (including home visits) following an initial expression of interest in the service. Word of mouth was also a significant recruitment means.

“I just heard about it from the other mums at school, they told me it would help me into education” [Outreach Customer]

4.3.3. Outreach Service customers reported a range of reasons for joining the Service:
“to make a new start for the future”

“I didn’t know how to go about things myself as I was doing something new”

“[I was looking for] long term preparation that would ensure I would easily walk into a job that I was capable of doing with confidence”

“Just generally that they would point me in the right direction towards a job or training”

“I needed a CV- it’s the door to everything”.

“Basically they were offering more help than the Jobcentres I’d come across in the past”

4.3.4. Others were fully aware that the Service aimed to refer them directly to the Jobcentre and (since engaging with the Service) had discovered they could access additional financial support (from the Adviser Discretion Fund): “[It would] help with anything financial, anything to get you back to work”. Some also mentioned that the additional £15/week allowance for lone parents attending courses through NDLP had been a strong motivating factor in the decision to engage with Outreach providers in the first instance.

“I thought it would help me to get back into society again”.

“A friend had been and she told me that it had lifted her confidence up”

4.3.5. Most of the interviewees decided to get involved because they found the staff they talked to initially very helpful, persuasive and willing to listen. Engagement by Outreach staff who were or had been single parents themselves made a difference to customer perceptions and trust. Others were drawn particularly because it was “someone other than the Jobcentre”.

“They knew who to contact and get answers ... they were people like myself who had been in that scenario”

“They make you feel welcome ... I suppose being a single parent there is a stigma ... and getting involved with people in the same situation helps”

“You don’t know what to expect...[I was] scared of admitting that I needed help”

“I felt in control of the situation...I felt like I could drop by any time”

4.3.6. However a few interviewees were less positive. One was disappointed as she found the staff seemed to have little time for her. Another reported feeling unclear as to the purpose of Outreach:

“I felt confused... why am I here?  I didn’t feel independent... like I was at school again”

“On the pushy side”

“A bit slow at trying to find me something”
While such views were in the minority, others did report a concern that there would be too strong a work focus. At the same time, a few were worried that the work focus would not be strong enough: “I was worried it would be too much like a group therapy session... I'm too young to be sitting around drinking tea talking about my problems”.

Customer views of the support received from Outreach providers

In the majority of cases, customer expectations of the Outreach service were either met or exceeded. Most expected nothing other than referral to NDLP, or to get general information on education or training, childcare and benefits from the Outreach service. Customer responses highlight the contribution of Outreach in building up confidence and giving information about NDLP and the Jobcentre:

“Brilliant [they acted as a] guideline on what I could and couldn’t get”

“It’s not scary, you’re not bullied into ‘you must find a job’ at the end of it”

“It’s a meeting service. They are there if you are struggling with anything. They are there as a friend if you want to just chat”

In most cases customers rated the Outreach service as being highly accessible, both in terms of location and in terms of getting hold of people by phone. In practice, a significant minority of customers had only seen their Outreach adviser once prior to referral. A few had never met face-to-face but kept in contact by telephone and by post. Having the same person to speak to was seen as an advantage in building trust and avoiding repetition:

“You feel more comfy with just the one’

“It’s far better, you don’t have to keep explaining yourself and going down the same road”

Referral to NDLP and NDP

Lone parents (and the few partners) typically agreed to referral onto NDLP (and NDP) to gain additional and specific information about benefits, work and training. All said that initial contact with the Outreach Service had made them more likely to get involved with NDLP/NDP. However, despite the reassurances of Outreach providers, many said they had concerns about the referral process. These centred on being forced in to taking any job, and more generally a concern that the Jobcentre would be an unpleasant and intimidating environment (because of the presence of other customer groups). For most, these concerns were quickly overcome by the friendliness of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers: “they put me at ease and helped by filling out the forms for me”.

Nevertheless, it is clear that for some customers the process of going to the Jobcentre was a big step. We have already noted that some Outreach providers helped manage these fears by accompanying customers to their first
appointment: “[I wanted to back out of my appointment at the last minute, I was so scared] without her I wouldn’t have got through the door”.

4.3.12. Providers also helped to alleviate fears by giving a detailed outline of the referral process and customers’ rights and responsibilities:

“[the outreach provider] basically told me that I haven’t to do anything if I didn’t want to”

“I was told it was informal and there would be no pressure”

4.3.13. A few customers had declined to go for a Jobcentre interview. Most said that this was because they were not planning to look for work, but that they would contact the Jobcentre, when they were ready to do so. Most felt comfortable that the Outreach provider had referred them at the right time, though a small minority felt that it was a little too soon and was “too big a step towards work”.

The views of Outreach participants following referral to Jobcentre Plus

4.3.14. Many customers said their experience of NDLP/NDP and Personal Advisers was better than they had expected but others were either neutral or more negative. The ability to support specific job search and guidance on training in relation to jobs were mentioned as positive aspects of NDLP. Others mention the usefulness of advice on childcare and better-off calculations and the additional £15 per week for education or training courses. Many customers remarked on the friendliness of the NDLP Personal Advisers. A common suggestion was to improve the publicity surrounding NDLP to make people more aware of it.

“When you are first on your own you don’t know what’s on offer”

 “[You] can do a lot more when you know what’s out there”

“They should use one of us to tell other people how happy you are – my life has changed completely”

“I would not have had the confidence to apply for a part-time job before, I thought childcare and benefits were bigger barriers.”

4.3.15. Suggested improvements to the referral process centre on being given more time to decide whether to join NDLP, explaining the process more clearly upfront, and improving service levels at the Jobcentre – a minority of customers reported that they did not get a sympathetic hearing from their PAs

“I felt like a little piece of dirt”

“it was going too fast for me...there was too much pressure to work”

“me and the Outreach worker had to sit and say this is what we want to know, and we are not leaving until you tell us”

“I feel that the jobs that they offer to lone parents have to be flexible. I think they should encourage people to work in their own community ... I don’t feel
that they really listen to you and what your needs are. I just feel that it’s a government thing to get you off benefits”

4.3.16. Some customers felt that the level of interest shown in them by NDLP/NDP PAs varied according to whether they were willing and able to start work immediately. A number said that there was little patience for those who wanted to prepare for a better job – something which the experience of the Outreach Service had encouraged them to consider.

“If I wanted to stack shelves they would give me lots of help. But you have to work in a 2 year work plan and I am looking for a 6 year plan so it wouldn’t help me”

“They are trying to fill a gap in the job market which is for low pay and low skills and I want to go into university”

“A lot of lone parents feel under pressure to find work that the Jobcentre want you to do”

“[It] depends if they would fit into the category … I don’t think the service is focused towards people with higher levels of qualifications and who have had long periods of being out of work”

4.3.17. Most of those interviewed feel at least ‘fairly confident’ they are taking positive steps towards employment, and that the additional Outreach service and Jobcentre support has helped them address some of their barriers at least to some degree. However, others suggest that arguably more fundamental barriers to work have still to be broken down – they see their return to work as a more incremental, longer-term process and one which, in some cases, is dependent on the completion of further training and education and/or the age of their children.

“I feel I’m heading in the right direction and will get into work when my son starts school”

Impact of support

4.3.18. A majority of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service customers said that the contact with Outreach providers had improved their confidence and motivation:

“They explain everything to me, they are so positive they make you feel motivated”

“I have much more confidence. I am more organised – better at time management”

“If you’re stuck at home you can get into a rut. This can get you out of it”

“It helped me to get out and feel confident. Sometimes I can feel isolated in the house day in day out”

“It benefited me so much. At the time I was in a real low and they showed me how to believe in myself”
"It’s down to confidence and knowing there is someone to back you".

Drawing a clear distinction between the (often limited) level of support provided during Outreach and that offered by NDLP PAs is not straightforward. Given the particular split between engagement (by Outreach providers) and subsequent support (from the Jobcentre) it is perhaps not surprising that customers have sometimes conflated the benefits from these services.

4.3.19. Many customers said that the initial support offered by Outreach providers gave them the confidence to go to the Jobcentre in the first place: “I don’t think I would have found this job without the Outreach Service, it would have taken me much longer to get back into the work environment.” Most said that the support they had received from their Outreach provider had made it more likely that they would join the (NDLP) caseload. Where customers had subsequently joined the caseload, the majority said they would recommend the programme to their friends and appreciated that it had made a significant contribution:

“[NDLP] is specifically for lone parents - it gives you help and advice without the pressure”

4.3.20. Most felt more positive about achieving goals since they became involved with the Outreach service, attributing this to the support they have received which in turn has helped build confidence and encouraged them to ‘aim high’ to achieve longer term aspirations.

“the support network of the local groups and the college courses not only boosted my personal development but led me onto do more than I thought I could”

“I have proved to myself I can do something more than I was”

4.3.21. Customers sometimes reported wider benefits from participation including relieving stress, improving social and personal networks and advice on benefits and financial management:

“When I first moved here I was depressed and I have got involved with something, I have met a lot of people and got a lot of friends”

“It helped me to get out and feel confident. Sometimes I can feel isolated in the house day in day out”

“It’s sorted my debts out, benefits out and hunted down my ex-husband”

“Because they are there to help you in a difficult situation ... and when you feel so lonely you have people who can help you”

4.3.22. A number of customers reported that their increased self-esteem had led them to look for better jobs or aim for jobs with career prospects:

“[I’m] doing a job I never thought I would get”

“It has made me more ambitious – I won’t just settle for any job”
“If you’ve already got a job, it’s easier to get another job”

4.3.23. However, not all interviewees felt more confident. Reasons given include not benefiting from the services provided and not having long-term support: “it all stopped after a couple of visits”. Others also reported some frustration at the limited help available from the Outreach Service and NDLP/NDP on job search and provision of training and education courses:

“I expected more courses available for people in my position of not being able to pay, but [there was] nothing affordable. Disappointing”

“They were supposed to help me but I have not had any help from them to find a job”

Suggested improvements in the Outreach Service

4.3.24. The most frequent improvement identified by customers was more publicity and awareness-raising for the service:

“It’s like, I didn’t know anything about it and some of my friends don’t know about it”

4.3.25. Other suggested improvements included:

- More frequent contact
- More face-to-face contact
- More information on job vacancies
- More links with employers and opportunities for voluntary work
- Ensure staff don’t pass on incorrect information
- Encourage more personal contact and follow-up support.

“They could do more] to give you that push to go and do something”
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

Programme effectiveness

5.1.1. While large numbers of lone parents who are without work remain outside of NDLP, there is sufficient evidence both in terms of time elapsed since the programme commenced and in terms of the evaluation evidence presented here to suggest that the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service, as currently conceived, does not provide an effective solution for engaging with large numbers of lone parents and moving them into NDLP and then onto employment.

5.1.2. The numbers of Partners engaged by the Outreach service has been particularly disappointing. Their involvement was effectively curtailed by the procedures used to determine eligibility for NDP. This would seem to be an issue for NDP more generally. At the same time, few Outreach providers have regarded partner services as integral to their delivery plans – the focus has been on lone parents throughout.

5.1.3. A high proportion of those customers who have agreed to get involved in the Outreach Service have agreed to be referred to their Jobcentre for an initial interview (90%) and at least two-thirds of these have subsequently agreed to join the New Deal caseload (mainly NDLP).

5.1.4. When compared to mainstream NDLP customers, Outreach customers tend:

- To be younger and have fewer children (both factors are associated with higher NDLP participation rates);
- To have children who are pre-school age (associated with lower NDLP participation rates);
- To be significantly more likely to be Black (though this may be attributed to the specific locations in which Outreach has operated).

5.1.5. The qualitative evidence presented suggests that those customers successfully engaged by Outreach (in terms of aims in relation to work and substantive barriers faced), were broadly similar to other ‘mainstream’ customers. Nevertheless, administrative data analysis has also shown that most customers had not engaged with NDLP prior to Outreach referral. These findings, taken together with other qualitative evidence, highlight the significance of Outreach in providing ‘independent’ reassurance, information and support to customers who, prior to engagement, lacked that support, confidence and information. Whether these customers would have subsequently engaged with Jobcentre Plus, in the context of the continued roll-out of mandatory work focused meetings for lone parents (and for Partners in due course) is perhaps a moot point (see further below).
Outcomes and additionality

5.1.6. Job outcome rates for lone parents referred under Outreach and subsequently caseloaded appear fairly low when compared with the NDLP programme as a whole (30% of those joining the NDLP caseload following referral, have moved into work). Meanwhile, according to monitoring data, just under 40% are still active on the caseload at 13 weeks (though NDLP evaluation database figures suggest some under-reporting here). One potential reason for the relatively low job outcome rates may be the relatively high proportion of customers who said they were starting or aiming to start training following referral.

5.1.7. At the same time, we have found clear evidence that Outreach has helped participants make some progress towards their employment and training goals. Many, regardless of current status, reported that they were now much more positive and confident in their abilities, which in turn, had helped several overcome previous inertia often attributed to a lack of confidence and fear of the unknown.

5.1.8. Most customers said they would not have become involved with NDLP without the intervention of Outreach. Customers, Outreach staff and Jobcentre Plus representatives all report that “not being the Jobcentre” is significant at the point of initial engagement. However, negative preconceptions were generally quickly overcome once actual contact with Jobcentre Plus staff had been established. Only a small minority continued to have concerns, typically relating to the responsiveness of Personal Advisers and the range of services available.

Fit with customer needs

5.1.9. A key consideration for this evaluation has been the degree to which the Outreach service corresponds with the needs of the target client group and, as a consequence, is able to engage with target isolated communities. The Lone Parents and Partners Outreach service was essentially a referral service, offering limited advice and information, confidence building (loosely defined) and personal support. Substantive support and provision clearly remained with NDLP and NDP. In this sense, the appeal of Outreach is intimately linked to the appeal and appropriateness of NDLP (and NDP).

5.1.10. In practice very few customers decided that they did not want to be referred to Jobcentre Plus (and, in the majority of cases, to subsequently join New Deal) following their initial engagement. Regardless of the reasons behind this, the effect has been to limit what this evaluation can say about those who either following discussions with providers choose not to engage, or those who Outreach providers have failed engage in any sense. Providers report that those who do not get involved must just “walk on by...” their stalls, events and presentations. The failure of Outreach providers to engage this ‘market’ may reflect an acceptance among this community that work is just not viable
Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1.11. Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service was designed to minimise duplication between provider, Jobcentre Plus and other provision. The practical implication of the particular division of labour between Outreach providers and Jobcentre Plus has been:

a. That Outreach providers had little scope to challenge customer barriers (beyond offering general support and confidence building);

b. That, by extension, Outreach has appealed primarily to customers whose needs were a reflection of the level of service provided – i.e. they required ‘independent’ information and reassurance about the process, but were essentially ready to move quickly into a work-first programme; and,

c. That the mutual dependency implied in the Outreach referral process (and in particular, provider dependency on the activities of Jobcentre Plus to secure caseloading and in turn, payment) has produced an awkward tension.

5.1.12. We believe that all of the above have contributed to some extent to the under-performance of the Outreach Service. However, we also believe that the underlying variable quality of relationships between providers and local Jobcentres has also been important here, demonstrated perhaps in the limited examples of and commitment to collaborative remedial action aimed at improving Outreach performance.

5.1.13. In effect the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service is relatively ‘near market’: most customers are ready to consider work and are in a position where they can envisage themselves being better off in work. This is not necessarily a straightforward financial calculation: many lone parents expressed aspirations for a longer-term career, as part of a programme of self development. This does raise the question of the degree to which the NDLP programme itself, as a work-first initiative, can address the wider range of customer needs that an effective Outreach Service (or indeed a mandatory work-focused meeting regime) may identify. In the small number of client interviews we undertook for this study, we have identified two subgroups who claimed that NDLP, in its current guise, did not suit their needs:

- those willing to look for work but who wanted to follow a career development (longer term) path into it; and,

- those with multiple barriers who needed some form of substantive pre-programme support before considering a work-first path.

5.1.14. Many Outreach customers were interested in developing their skills and were aiming to get a ‘good’ job. Most considered the vacancies on offer at the Jobcentre to be of poor quality, low waged and with limited future prospects.

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12 Evans et al, op cit, pp3-4, present a summary of recent research on lone parents’ motivations to work and the various barriers to employment they face.
While generally viewed as ‘available’, these jobs were such that most customers were not interested in them.

5.1.15. Other customers in rather different circumstances were facing significant (and often multiple) barriers, many of which were not directly related to employment issues (e.g. ex-partner, accommodation and debt problems etc.) which may well be beyond the scope of a ‘work-first’ employment programme.

5.1.16. Moreover, our analysis of client interviews suggests that the major barriers to participation remain childcare, limited financial benefits from working and associated costs and practicalities of transport. Action on these issues is perhaps more likely to bring significant changes to the employment rate of lone parents (and partners).

5.1.17. Timing was seen by most Outreach staff as the key to engaging with lone parents (and partners). As one Outreach provider said “This is much more about farming...than hunting”. Very few providers suggested a more proactive approach to challenging the position of customers and actively responding to their barriers.

5.1.18. In terms of Outreach activity, we suspect that there is no real role for a service founded on information giving and (limited) moral support in the context of the continued roll out of mandatory work focused meetings for these customer groups. We believe that the roll-out of Personal Adviser Meetings should deliver similar market penetration (in terms of the kinds of lone parents and partners that might be engaged and their degree of job-readiness). Typically the clients who have been engaged by Outreach are those that have responded to better information, support and re-assurance – the same sort of services that a ‘good’ Personal Adviser might offer as part of the mandatory work focussed meeting (and offered in the context of a wider marketing and communications strategy).

5.1.19. There was also an appreciation among most Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed that the key to successful engagement for the Jobcentre was to get customers to appreciate the service and, importantly, recommend it to their peers. Asking lone parents (or partners) to come back when they are ready to enter work does not engage prospective customers and will send the wrong message out to the wider customer group.

Provider Capacity

5.1.20. Tapping into ‘expert’ organisations with established links to isolated communities was a key rationale for Outreach. However, the degree to which that ‘expertise’ was revealed in practice is questionable. The extent of previous knowledge of working with the customer group and in some cases provider involvement with particular communities varied significantly. In several cases providers were seeking to expand the range of their activities and had relatively limited direct experience of working with lone parents or partners and their respective Jobcentre Plus employment programmes.
5.1.21. While ‘corporately’ committed to bidding and delivering the Outreach contracts, discussion with a number of providers has highlighted a division of responsibilities, in a number of cases, between provider bidders and provider delivers. This may partly explain confusion over contractual issues and terms and it may also partly explain the arguably unrealistic nature and scale of initial targeting.

5.1.22. At the risk of presenting a schematic analysis, it seems clear that some organisations were able to make a much stronger claim to an expert knowledge of the target communities (at least those relating to lone parents) than others. Lone parent support organisations typically had:

- A wider understanding of customer needs, especially those not directly related to employment;
- Established trust with local organisations and often enjoyed a positive reputation with lone parents as representing their interests;
- Practical experience in working with NDLP; but at the same time,
- see NDLP only as part of a wider solution – customers are referred to Jobcentre Plus provision as and when appropriate and other services are accessed if these are thought to fit better with customer needs.

- Training/Employment advice organisations were typically:
  - Familiar with Jobcentre Plus contracts often associated with New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25+; and saw,
  - Working with lone parents as a logical extension of their activity into ‘new and expanding markets’;
  - But at the same time, often underestimated the difficulty of engaging with significant numbers of (mainly) lone parents and the extent of their current engagement with NDLP, reflecting in part a limited understanding of the client group, at least in the early stages of the Service;
  - Sometimes able to offer other support services but compared to lone parent support organisations these activities were relatively narrow – focusing on employment/skills development rather than the issues facing the broader isolated community;
  - Limited in their knowledge of the practical operation of NDLP at the start of the Service and had an early tendency to oversell the potential of the programme.

- Local community organisations typically had:
  - Wide-ranging contact with customers through existing services; but,
  - The basis for many of these was often drop-in, customer-led;
  - Limited knowledge of NDLP/NDP and of the workings of Jobcentre Plus;
5.1.23. There is no consistent evidence to suggest that any one particular type of organisation is likely to deliver a better outreach service. Rather, what the typology highlights is that all providers need support to ensure their contribution can be deployed to best effect (though the nature of that support will vary). In this context, the knowledge of front-line local Jobcentre Plus staff should be more actively drawn upon as part of the contracting process both as a means of identifying the support needs of provider organisations and as a means of securing greater local ‘buy-in’.

Learning effects

5.1.24. Although many Outreach Service Providers have developed their knowledge of lone parents (and to a degree, partners), the operation of Jobcentre Plus and (mainly) NDLP over the course of the programme, there has been no central process to co-ordinate either the Outreach Service providers themselves or the providers and those with experience of Outreach activity undertaken by Jobcentre Plus in the past. Some networking between providers has occurred at a local level often co-ordinated by Jobcentre Plus staff. However in general, providers have been left to implement their own plans in isolation.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. There is little evidence to suggest that it is worthwhile continuing with the Outreach Service. Although the Service has engaged with customers new to NDLP, overall numbers are low and at this stage would make a negligible contribution to the Government’s 70% employment rate target for lone parents. In this context, the recommendations that follow reference wider and future practices rather than changes to the current programme. Given the very limited scope to undertake analysis of the partner client group in this evaluation, these recommendations relate largely to lone parents.

5.2.2. We have found no compelling evidence that a different form of Outreach, for example, offering a more in-depth service prior to referral to NDLP, would necessarily engage with a more substantial number of customers (although we would recognise the limits of our analysis in this respect). Most providers felt that an alternative service would not work significantly better without removing some of the more fundamental barriers customers face. Barriers to labour market (and associated employment programme) participation remain. Key issues here include the availability of, attitudes towards and cost of formal childcare, transport issues, the availability of well-paid employment opportunities and support through fiscal measures to ensure that work pays, particularly for lone parents and partners with limited qualifications and/or recent work experience (c.f. Evans et al, 2003).

5.2.3. Looking specifically at NDLP, Outreach workers, Jobcentre Plus staff and Outreach customers all commented on the poor quality of marketing material currently available for NDLP and the impact that this had on the profile of the programme among lone parents and the level of mis-information, (in
particular around the issue of compulsion). Customers, in particular, highlighted that few ‘official’ leaflets used actual lone parents as case studies of what could be achieved. Many of their comments suggest that information from family and friends was far more influential.

5.2.4. More widespread marketing and publicity surrounding what is possible through NDLP, alongside the continued roll out of mandatory work-focused meetings, is likely to have a greater impact than Outreach has had to date. Better information on how the programme works, what is on offer and what the obligations of the lone parent are together with lone parent case studies would help overcome some of the information gaps identified and partially filled by the Outreach Service.

5.2.5. Other key lessons relate to the engagement of external providers. Greater thought needs to be given to the organisation of external provider engagement and policy design to avoid the operational difficulties sometimes experienced under Outreach. In future, consideration should be given to:

- The need to develop a greater sense of local ownership among Jobcentre staff of such initiatives. In the first instance, this should involve greater consultation with Personal Advisers.
- The need to offer additional opportunities and support to external providers to develop learning and exchange of best practice.
- The relationship between the payment model and policy design. In particular we would recommend that provider payment should not depend on the actions of Jobcentre Plus; and,
- the need for adequate resources to manage effective inter-working between Jobcentre Plus and external providers (in particular where external organisations are ‘representing’/marketing a Jobcentre Plus service).
ANNEX A  LIST OF NDLP/NDP QUALIFYING BENEFITS

NDLP
The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) programme is a voluntary service open to all lone parents who:

a. Have a child under 16 years of age; and
b. Are not asylum seekers unless they have exceptional leave to stay or refugee status; and

c. Are not working or working less than 16 hours per week; or

d. Are in receipt of any of one of the following benefits:
   - Income support (IS)
   - Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)
   - Incapacity Benefit (IB)
   - Widowed Mother’s Allowance
   - Widowed Parent’s Allowance
   - Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)
   - Invalid Care Allowance (ICA)
   - Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
   - Maternity Allowance
   - Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit
   - War Widows/Widowers Pension/War Disablement Pension
   - Attendance Allowance
   - Working Families Tax Credit (when people have left their employment)
   - Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit

NDP
The New Deal for Partners (NDP) is a voluntary programme that is available to partners of people of working age who are receiving one of the following benefits:

- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)
- Income support (IS)
- Incapacity Benefit (IB)
- Invalid Care Allowance (ICA)
- Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)

Partners must:

- Be aged 18 and over;
- Be the partner of someone who has been claiming one of the above benefits (or a combination of these) for six months or more;
- Not have a claim for Jobseeker’s Allowance in their own right; and
- Not be an asylum seeker unless they have exceptional leave to stay or refugee status.
ANNEX B  FURTHER DETAILS ON CLIENT FIELDWORK

METHODOLOGY

Sampling
A census sample of clients was drawn from the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) Outreach Service Evaluation Database, in ten case study areas.

Slow recruitment of customers in some areas meant that successive ‘top-up’ samples were required over several months. Most fieldwork was conducted between December 2002 and April 2003.

Recruitment
Letters were mailed out informing the sampled clients about the research programme and inviting them to opt-out of the research if they did not wish to be contacted further. The letters were sent on MORI-headed paper and explained the background to the research, that participation would involve an interview to be carried out in the respondent’s home or other agreed venue nearby, and that an incentive of £25 would be paid. A two week opt-out period was allowed. In effect, almost all the clients who participated ‘opted in’ by responding to the letter, either by phone or in writing.

Data processing and analysis
Face to face client interviews typically lasted 45 minutes. MORI research executives conducted the first four interviews in each area using a topic guide. A semi-structured questionnaire was then developed from the topic guide in order to collate factual information more readily, while allowing for open-ended discussion in relation to attitudinal and ‘exploratory’ questioning.

A code frame was then used as a basis for organising analysis. Data was then entered into an SPSS file (used principally as an organising mechanism, rather than as a statistical tool) to allow subsequent qualitative analysis. Interviews were also summarised by the researchers, drawing out the key issues and illustrative quotes from respondents.

Response
In total, 118 interviews were conducted.
## Characteristics of the Case Study Contracts

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