Reviewer's report

Title: What is the 'problem' that outreach work seeks to address and how might it be tackled? Seeking theory in a primary health prevention programme.

Version: 2 Date: 16 September 2011

Reviewer: Ailsa Cameron

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting article that explores the 'problems' that outreach services aim to address. As such it has the potential to make an important contribution to contemporary debates about the appropriateness and effectiveness of such approaches. The questions posed by the authors are well defined and the methods are appropriately described, however the relationship between the case-study and the main study is somewhat confused but this is a structural problem rather than a problem of substance and is dealt with in the comments below.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. There needs to be a much clearer account of the two sets of interviews that the authors refer to in the methods section. It isn’t clear how the 118 ‘strategically’ selected interviews relate to the case-study. Are data from these interviews presented – if so how can we distinguish between them and the data collected from the case-study? Perhaps the analysis of the ‘strategically’ selected interviews were the impetus for the case-study, if so then a much clearer statement of this should be provided. Additionally there is some confusion in terminology – are the ‘wave 1 pilots’ the case-study?

2. Perhaps the discussion of the limitations of the study presented towards the end of the paper would be better presented in the methods section. What strategies did the team use to ensure participants did not feel obliged to take part?

3. The links between the findings and the wider literature could be exploited to greater effect. For example: problem 3 seems to demonstrate many of the arguments made in the general literature about the impact of caring on carers, similarly in the discussion of problem 6 the structural challenges associated with navigating across organisational boundaries are well documented in the literature about outreach and support services developed for homeless people. Linking to these broader debates would strengthen the argument. Additionally there are few links made to the wider literature about outreach work in the concluding discussion.

- Minor Essential Revisions

4. It might be helpful to mention the ‘seven non-engagement’ problems introduced in the results section earlier, perhaps in the discussion of the use of
framework analysis.

5. Arguably some of the material presented in the description of the intervention, specifically that related to the method of access, might be better placed in the results section.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests’