

A Guide to Youth Justice in Scotland: policy, practice and legislation

Section 7: Vulnerable Girls and Young Women

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1. Introduction

Why guidance for girls?

“Effective working with girls and young women who have been drawn into the criminal justice system is considerably hampered by a set of interrelated problems” (Batchelor & Burman, 2004:2)

Despite some criticism of gender-specific approaches to supporting females who offend (Leese, 2018), there appears to be broad consensus that females who engage in offending behaviour “have a distinctive criminological, health and social profile and a gender specific approach to their difficulties is advocated” (Bartlett et al., 2015:132). There has historically been a tendency to group girls’ and young women’s offending and risk taking behaviours alongside those of boys and young men (Galardi & Settersten Jr, 2018). This is due in part to the relatively low numbers of girls and young women and their invisibility within systems predominantly designed for males. Literature and evidence on offending behaviour in young people has tended to be presented under the assumption that girls and boys are the same, however, it is now generally accepted that although there are similarities in some risk factors associated with offending behaviour in both boys and girls, some are more strongly associated with girls.(Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018) Research regarding females who have come into conflict with the law have also tended to focus upon adults, with less attention given to adolescents. (Shepherd, Newton, Harries, Fix, & Fullam, 2018)

A general perception of girls and young women involved in the justice system is of a group which is extremely troublesome and difficult to engage, displaying a range of emotional difficulties ([CYCJ, 2014](#)) and utilising manipulative means by which to control situations. (Ellis, 2018; Galardi & Settersten Jr, 2018). Despite this, little priority has been given to the development of services and gender specific interventions for girls and young women until recently. Most current services available to address offending and other risk taking behaviours are derived from the principles of ‘What Works?’ which stem from theories of male, white offending and often do not meet the needs of females. Indeed, research has shown that some approaches have been found more successful than others with girls in comparison to boys. (Adler et al., 2016)

Girls and young women involved in the justice system “often have a range of unmet needs related to drug/alcohol usage, poverty, abuse, self-esteem issues, complex family circumstances and physical and mental health problems” (Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2018:645). These additional layers of complexity make work in this area challenging.

Research completed by McNeish and Scott (2014) highlights that girls exhibit the behavioural manifestations of early childhood experiences and unresolved trauma in different ways to boys, whilst Vaswani (2018) details the differences in prevalence of adverse childhood experiences amongst girls who pose a high risk of harm when compared to their male contemporaries. Girls and boys respond differently to external pressures in that girls are more likely to internalise difficulties, whereas boys may tend to ‘act out’ in the form

of external, antisocial behaviour ([CYCJ, 2014](#)). However, girls and young women can present challenging behaviour which is unpredictable, violent and manipulative, and prevalent themes within this are substance misuse, negative peer association, absconding and sexually risky behaviours (Batchelor & Burman, 2004).

There is also still a marked difference in societal attitudes towards girls and boys - girls continue to have a tendency to be regarded as being in greater need of moral protection, due in part to the nature of their risk-taking behaviours. It is acknowledged that some girls are placed in secure care (Gough, 2016) due to the impact of sexually risky behaviours, victimisation and a range of mental and emotional disorders (Roesch-Marsh, 2014). To date, in Scotland, there remains little in the way of suitable alternative services ([CYCJ, 2014](#)), particularly in the community, which protect vulnerable girls and young women, manage high risk situations whilst simultaneously addressing complex needs (Mitchell, Roesch-Marsh, & Robb, 2012).

Many girls who are placed in residential or secure care have histories of being sexually abused (Kendrick et al., 2008) and having encountered significant levels of adversity, including child sexual exploitation (Walker et al., 2005). The residual effects of trauma can often manifest in high risk behaviours including sexual exploitation and perceived promiscuity, therefore understanding the relationship that exists between both is imperative in formulating risk management plans (Ellis, 2015, 2018).

Girls are often placed in secure care as a result of risk of harm to themselves. Changes to the criteria for admission to secure care, as stipulated in the [Children's Hearings \(Scotland\) Act 2011](#) s. 83(6)(b), has seen the introduction of "...likely to engage in self-harming conduct", and which may account for a large number of the admissions into that environment.

In this respect, girls and young women who enter the secure estate encounter similar challenges to their older contemporaries, who are acknowledged to be deeply vulnerable people who have been the victims of abuse – physical, sexual or mental - in their childhoods and for whom offending is a result of chaotic lifestyles, mental health difficulties and severe addiction problems (Scottish Government, 2012).

Aims of the Good Practice Guidance for Girls and Young Women

This section attempts to draw on some of the literature and evidence and suggests how outcomes for girls and young women might be improved by applying good practice principles more holistically and more tailored to the individual needs of girls and young women. It is aimed at practitioners with direct responsibility for providing services to girls and young women, but it is also relevant for managers and other professionals who may be involved in service design, commissioning and procurement. It aims to provide an understanding of what approaches are effective with vulnerable females for practitioners and other professionals involved in service delivery and decision making processes, which may have a long-term impact on the lives of girls and young women and into adulthood.

This section should be read in conjunction with other sections in ['Youth Justice in Scotland: a guide to policy, practice and legislation'](#) which outlines the overarching legislative and theoretical context in which youth justice sits, and details principles and best practice with specific reference to [Getting It Right For Every Child' \(GIRFEC\)](#), [Preventing Offending: Getting it Right for Children and young people](#) and the [Whole System Approach \(WSA\)](#).

Appendix 1 includes further information on 'What Girls Want'; a summary of girls' views relating to support offered to them to address multiple areas of risk and need, including involvement in offending behaviour.

Risks and Needs

Those working with girls and young women cannot merely deliver a 'gender-blind' service which replicates the model of intervention and support offered to their male counterparts (Sharpe, 2015). Rather, it should be acknowledged that the very fact of being female brings with it additional structural inequalities that have lifelong implications (Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2018). Similar criminogenic risk factors apply to both boys and girls, i.e. anti-social attitudes, pro-criminal families and associates, lack of parental supervision and unstructured leisure time (Galardi & Settersten Jr, 2018). However, it is suggested that due to societal attitudes and expectations, girls and young women can be punished more harshly than their male counterparts (Roberts & Watson, 2017). These expectations surround the socially constructed image of what a 'girl' ought to be. Those who act outwith this image face the double bind of being both 'an offender' as well as being 'unfeminine' (Burman, Batchelor, & Brown, 2017). Girls and young women who offend present a challenging dichotomy of views to society. They may be treated more harshly based on the view that they should not be involved in behaviour that is more affiliated with that of young boys and young men.

Despite evidence which indicates that girls' offending, vulnerability and desistance follows a different pathway from that of boys, (Burman & Batchelor, 2009) and that focusing on male criminogenic factors is less likely to impact on girls' behaviours, there remains a lack of gender appropriate services which address girls' complex needs (Mitchell et al., 2012). Girls are less likely to be referred to existing services, as the actual numbers are relatively low in comparison to boys. They are also more likely to fail to engage as these services have been designed primarily around the needs of boys (Rigby, Jardine, & Whyte, 2011; Wilson, 2015) and may lack the features that are described in Appendix 1 of this section. Where services or programmes for girls do exist, they tend to have a focus around sexuality and sexual health, which, while useful in addressing one aspect of problematic behaviour, is restrictive in meeting a wide range of complex needs.

Girls require a more individualised and gender specific assessment process as risk factors related to recidivism in females are more associated with poor parenting, dysfunctional family environment and absconding. Girls and young women respond to relationship-based support and the use of strength-based holistic models of intervention (Wilson, 2016). Offending and risk taking behaviour is frequently a result of family breakdown where girls may have been thrown out of, or may have left the family home and do not have appropriate or stable accommodation. Poor relationships within the family home, bullying, bereavement and loss, and experience of the care system are just some pre-disposing static and dynamic risk factors that may contribute to girls offending and at times affiliating themselves, albeit in a very small number, with the gang culture (Batchelor, 2009). Overall, the background of girls and young women involved in significant levels of offending are replete with multiple adversities and oppression (Ellis, 2018; Henriksen, 2015).

Violence and Relational Aggression

Forms of male aggression have received greater levels of study whilst those more prevalent to girls have had less attention over the preceding years. Because of this, the knowledge base regarding girls who are aggressive is also limited (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006).

What is known, however, is that young women who do go on to offend into adulthood generally do so for different reasons than their male counterparts. Studies in England and Wales reported that where violence has occurred, girls' accountability for their behaviour included the need to be self-reliant and to protect others they cared about. Violent behaviours were also linked to issues around control, self-respect, self-protection and victimisation (Arnull & Eagle, 2009).

Although exposure to and fear of violence are common amongst young women, this could be perceived as a reflection of the disproportionate experience of violence in their own lives at the hands of families, peers and other associates. Many studies attribute these poor quality attachments and social bonds as a driver for gang affiliation and feature in those young girls/women involved in acquisitive crime, sex work and drug related offences (Batchelor, 2009; Khan, 2013).

A study undertaken in HMPYOI Cornton Vale in 2005 looking at the evidence of young women's involvement in violent offending highlighted a prevalence of past abuse in their lives (Batchelor, 2005). Two-fifths of the young women were reported to have been sexually abused, generally by someone in their family. A similar number reported witnessing serious physical violence between their parents, or being the victim of serious violence from their parents predominantly as a result of alcohol abuse. Despite their conviction for violent offending, the young women did not describe themselves as violent but made a distinction to have the potential for violence through becoming angry when mistreated or let down by others and being denied respect. Recent American studies suggest that for those girls who display acts of violence, this occurred at a more frequent rate than boys although each episode was less acute in nature (Tisak, Tisak, Baker, & Graupensperger, 2016).

The growing 'problem' of violent girls and girl gangs has been perpetuated in the media since the mid-1990s, suggesting that violence amongst girls is increasing due to a 'ladette' binge drinking culture, where young women mimic the masculine behaviour of their male counterparts. An exploratory study, however, of the views and experiences of violence by young women in Scotland found little evidence of a rise in physical violence by girls nor of girl gangs (Batchelor, 2009). The use of the term 'gang', of course, is contested, with particular connotations of anti-social and deprivation (Southgate, 2011).

UK research on violent youth gangs typically focus on the experiences of young men, and studies emphasise gangs as a male phenomenon with little attention paid to girls and young women (Southgate, 2011). While many youth gangs are recognised as having some mixed gender membership, the majority of participants are male, and the gang has therefore been conceived of as a masculine arena. Young men living in areas of extreme deprivation and in places with a tradition of gangs have been encouraged to engage with gangs and their violent practices as a means of securing masculine identities. Where attention has been given to the role of young women in gangs, and of gender relations, young women have generally been depicted as accessories, girlfriends or referenced in terms of their sexual activity and as victims of male violence and sexual exploitation (Southgate, 2011; Trickett, 2015).

Whilst most gangs are predominantly male, recent studies about young women and gang related crime seeks to dispel the myth that girls join gangs simply because they are either violent tomboys or 'put-upon' victims (Batchelor, 2011). The motivation of girls joining gangs is often to achieve a much sought after emotional connection and to ultimately feel a sense of belonging, perhaps not in society as a whole but certainly within the gang itself (Khan, 2013).

Young women and young men report membership of a gang as delivering physical protection from others. One Scottish study concludes that girls are not just passive members but that, like boys, will spend time with groups from the same territory to achieve both status and a sense of belonging (Batchelor, 2009). Young women have also reported being directly involved in gang fights and in instigating and encouraging violence. Some admit to carrying or concealing weapons or drugs on behalf of boys, however, boys are still twice as likely to carry knives as girls (McAra & McVie, 2010).

Relationships are particularly important for girls, reflecting the difference in how they socialise and develop their sense of identity. Boys develop their identities by differentiating themselves from others and are more likely to target their aggression towards victims unknown to them. Girls develop their identities and sense of self-worth more through connection with others (Girard, Tremblay, Nagin, & Côté, 2018).

While girls do engage in some direct and physical forms of aggression, relational aggression is more prevalent in girls (Björkqvist, 2018), Relational aggression is generally described as any behaviour which is intended to harm someone by damaging or manipulating relationships with others. It is the use of exploitative, exclusionary or hurtful behaviours to undermine status, self-esteem or inclusion (Blain-Arcaro & Vaillancourt, 2016). Unlike other forms of aggression and bullying, relational aggression is not as overt and can therefore be more difficult to identify; however, it is equally as damaging. It should be noted that relational aggression is not social or class specific. Raising awareness amongst more universal providers might lead to earlier and more effective interventions.

Relational aggression can take many forms but can include ignoring, exclusion, negative body language or facial expressions, sabotaging the relationships of others, gossip and rumour spreading, name calling taunts and insults, intimidation, manipulative affection and alliance building.

The importance of relationship based work with girls and young women therefore cannot be overestimated. Relationships are central to effectiveness and good practice throughout both the assessment process and service delivery, and should be used as the foundation for capacity building, empowerment and developing potential. Attitudes, knowledge and abilities required by workers can be described in terms of the following principles:

- individuation
- purposeful expression of emotion
- controlled emotional environment
- acceptance
- non-judgemental attitude
- client self determination
- confidentiality (Trevithick, 2003)

Trauma

The word 'trauma' is derived from the Greek term for wound. Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extremely frightening or distressing events which causes difficulty in coping or functioning normally after such experiences. Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety; however, any situation which leaves a victim feeling overwhelmed, helpless and vulnerable can be traumatic, even if there is no physical harm. Emotional and psychological trauma can be caused by both one-off events such as a violent attack, or by ongoing stress, for example, living in abusive or threatening circumstances, or witnessing violence.

Not all potentially traumatic events necessarily lead to lasting psychological or emotional damage. Yet there are a number of risk factors which make certain individuals more susceptible to this. An event will most likely lead to trauma if it happened unexpectedly; the individual was unprepared for it; powerless to prevent it happening; it happened repeatedly; someone was intentionally abusive; or it happened in childhood (EASA, 2019). Individuals are also [more likely to be traumatised](#) if they are already under significant stress or have recently suffered a series of losses.

Those who have strong support networks and healthy relationships with family and peers are less likely to experience mental ill-health (Moore et al., 2018). Girls and young women in the youth justice system, however, are often alienated and have unhealthy relationships with family, peers and partners (Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Rigby et al., 2011) and experience significant levels of mental ill-health as adults (Bartlett & Hollins, 2018). This is often linked to a background of sustained physical, sexual or emotional abuse and parental neglect. Girls and young women may become involved in substance misuse as a form of self-medication in response to stress and feelings of depression, which can in turn increase the risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour (Burman & Imlah, 2011).

In order for services and interventions to be effective, they need to become trauma-informed. Trauma-informed services need to deal with problems and symptoms other than the trauma directly, whilst possessing the knowledge and expertise regarding the impact of the trauma.

Trauma-informed services should:

- Take account of the trauma
- Seek to understand the causation of behaviour and its relationship with the residual effects of trauma
- Avoid triggering reactions or exacerbating the trauma
- Support girls and young women's coping capacity
- Enable girls and young women to manage their symptoms successfully

In addition, a therapeutic environment needs to be created which is safe, supportive, and involves and empowers girls and young women to develop and sustain change in the longer term.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Whilst instances of young women displaying sexual behaviour that is harmful to others are relatively rare (Balfe, Hackett, Masson, & Phillips, 2019) professionals ought to be mindful

that proportionate assessment, risk management and interventions remain necessary when behaviours of this nature are identified. Section 5 of this guidance on [Managing Risk of Serious Harm](#) provides a comprehensive overview of approaches to working with young people displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). Research suggests that girls who display such behaviours are often slightly younger than boys and have often experienced considerable trauma in their lives (Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2006). A combination of holistic and targeted approaches that help young people move forward in their lives and make sense of past experiences while assisting them in modifying behaviour have been found to be the most beneficial (Halstenson Bumby & Bumby, 2004).

More recent concern has been focused on young people, particularly the impact on girls, in relation to 'sexting' - a terminology used in the media and by researchers over the last few years to refer to sexual communications with content that includes pictures and text messages, sent using cell phones and other electronic media. Although some studies have indicated that this behaviour is prevalent amongst adults, of particular concern is youth produced sexual images defined as "images of minors, created by minors, that could qualify as child pornography under applicable criminal statutes" (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011:1).

Sexting can cover a range of behaviours from consensual and experimental activities between peers who are romantically involved through to aggravated behaviours that involve a criminal element. Aggravated sexting includes the online coercion of a child to take sexual photographs, or which involves abusive behaviour by other minors such as threats, malicious conduct, sexual abuse, or sending images without the consent of the individual concerned. Wolak and Finkelhor (2011) provide a useful typology of sexting involving young people, which can help practitioners in scaling the seriousness of 'self-victimising' behaviour involving new technologies. It is important to recognise that every nude or sexual image of a person under the age of 18 can be deemed an indecent image of a child under [current legislation](#).

Risks and needs: Some key points to note

There are proportionally higher numbers of young women in prison with significant care histories (Roberts & Watson, 2017). Girls rely on relationships to work through key areas in their lives, and this level of disruption and chaos may impact on their emotional development and contribute to the decisions and choices to engage in offending and anti-social behaviours (Khan, 2013).

Girls experience education differently from boys, encountering a wide variety of sociological pressures unique to them. These may, in turn, impact upon their engagement with education, and in some cases lead to self-exclusion (Fisher, 2019). Education plays a role in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and the limiting of opportunities, but can also be the means by which girls can reach their potential (Kollmayer, Schober, & Spiel, 2018).

Many behaviour problems experienced by girls are related to dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, in many instances family relationships. In contrast to boys' aggression, which is more likely to be directed towards strangers, girls' aggression during adolescence is more often the result of breakdown of significant relationships or associated issues (Björkqvist, 2018).

Gender differences exist in the strategies and mechanisms to cope with anxiety and stress. Boys may act out frustrations and problems via overt physical aggression and self-serving rationalisation, while girls will internalise problems and display negative emotional behaviours such as self-blame, self-harm, risky sexual behaviour and low mood (Tamm, Tõnissaar, Jaani, & Tulviste, 2018).

Vulnerable girls may display highly chaotic behaviours, have complex needs and display higher rates of mental health and emotional problems than their male counterparts. High levels of sexual vulnerability linked to substance misuse and lack of supportive and nurturing relationships highlights the need for effective community based measures to manage risk and reduce vulnerability. There is a need for support and services to address anger issues and emotional distress often exhibited through self-harm (Batchelor & Burman, 2004). Risk assessment tools - often designed with white males in mind – may not be best placed to evaluate likelihood of offending or risk taking (Pusch & Holtfreter, 2018) despite similar risk factors affecting both genders (Galardi & Settersten Jr, 2018).

Support and services for girls should be based on a therapeutic approach addressing problems in a holistic way with a focus on addressing behaviour problems within an interpersonal context (Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2018). Consistency in contact with motivated, trained workers is crucial in the engagement of girls, and staff should be trained in gender identity and development. Research has shown that girls - in general - value social justice and relationships more than their male counterparts (Bondü & Elsner, 2015). Girls generally respond positively to supports which involve the minimum amount of professionals required in face-to-face contact.

3. Assessment and Intervention

Early and Effective Intervention

Girls may first come to the attention of police and other services for both offence and non-offence reasons. Police may also become involved due to incidents of running away from the family home; incidents where the girl is considered to have placed herself at risk in the community; as a victim of abusive behaviour or neglect directly or indirectly. Other agencies may identify escalating concerns in terms of behaviour or vulnerability.

Local authority multi-agency Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) processes provide support and diversion away from formal systems wherever possible on a voluntary basis - see [Section 4](#) of this guidance for more information.

It is essential that workers involved in EEI understand that for the majority of girls an offending episode is potentially symptomatic of a range of underlying difficulties. Assessment and decision making processes should always take this into consideration and appropriate supports should be available to girls to divert them from statutory measures of care whenever possible.

Intensive Supports

[Movement Restriction Conditions](#) compliance rates for boys were found to be higher than girls in one small study, with boys perhaps more likely to adhere to the rules, and possibly

more mindful of the need to avoid the consequences (Orr, 2013). Boys often respond positively to the large numbers of workers involved in an intensive package of care, however girls were found to benefit more from a holistic care plan delivered by a small number of female staff (Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2018).

Custody

Plans for a new small national prison for women on the current site of HMP&YOI Cornton Vale and up to five small community-based custodial units across Scotland were announced in 2015. The new units will each provide accommodation and support appropriate to the needs of up to 20 women offenders and help them maintain links with their families and be accommodated close to their communities.

The new, smaller national prison will be run using therapeutic community principles and will incorporate gender-specific and trauma-informed practice. Construction on the new national prison began in 2018. The design and development of up to five Community Custody Units (CCUs) located across Scotland are sited to ensure that women are held in facilities as close as possible to their own communities. The CCUs will focus on rehabilitation and reintegration and will ensure women are held in conditions of appropriate security. [Sites in Glasgow and Dundee](#) have been chosen to date, with the other three yet to be announced.

This development reflects recommendations made by the Scottish Government (2012) Commission on Women Offenders regarding female custody; to keep more women prisoners closer to their families and engaged with wider services in the community, and keeping a national prison for those who need greater support or security.

What works for girls and young women?

Many elements of effective practice with boys are equally desirable with girls, however there are components and principles which are particularly advantageous when providing support to girls. The following issues may be worth considering when doing so:

- **Ensure that girls are not disadvantaged in avoidable ways relative to boys**
Girls' problems can sometimes be more difficult to recognise due to the often covert nature of their behaviour. Low numbers of girls being referred to social work and partner agencies in relation to offending behaviour in comparison to boys can lead to them becoming marginalised, as services specifically for girls are often viewed as not viable in terms of economy or scale. As most existing interventions are derived from male theories of offending, they are less likely to impact on the problems experienced by girls.
- **Be based on a therapeutic model which is evidenced based**
Interventions should be holistic in nature, derived from robust theoretical perspectives and address multiple and complex needs (including criminogenic needs), in a continuum of care. Programmes should not only be specific to gender, but also to age and stage of development, ethnicity and culture. Although interventions should be holistic in nature, the number of professionals directly involved in delivering services should be kept to a minimum to allow relationships to be built founded on mutual trust and respect.

- **Take proper account of the circumstances contributing to girls' behaviour and the associated risks of recidivism**

The nature and severity of risk taking behaviours in many girls and young women may be attributed to trauma and neglect. Because of the history and entrenched nature of some of these behaviours, a pragmatic approach needs to be taken to the reality of recidivism when attempting to address underlying problems. For many girls and young women, life will have been focused on the need to survive. They may have developed specific coping mechanisms and strategies in order to achieve this, such as self-medication and self-harm. In cases such as this, recidivism is almost inevitable as part of a change process as young women learn new skills and develop more self confidence in putting these skills into practice.

- **Recognise the importance of relationships in girls' lives and use these to construct alternative attitudes and lifestyles**

Girls and young women are more likely to engage with services that are supportive in nature, recognise the value of individuals and where relationships with staff are based on mutual respect and trust. Relationships are paramount to how young women construct their identity and relate to the outside world and they report their relationships, particularly with female peers, as the most significant.

- **Promote the constructive use of networks of support - family, professional and social**

Young women may become isolated in the community, particularly following a period of care or custody where they may have lost traditional family and social support networks. Relationships forged prior to, and whilst in care or custody, may be founded on anti-social or pro-criminal attitudes and associations. Even if young women are not returning to the family home due to internal conflict, the importance of support from immediate family, where appropriate, and significant others needs to be recognised and should be mobilised. Stable and appropriate professional support should be provided and other pro-social relationships which are stimulating and bring stability should also be encouraged. Interventions should target practical, educational and health needs including mental and emotional wellbeing. Much emphasis is placed on the need to deal with the effects of trauma and mental health; however, other needs such as physical health and access to education, training and employment should not be underestimated in terms of promoting emotional and mental wellbeing.

- **Be trauma informed**

Have the ability to deal with a range of problems and symptoms whilst being mindful of the impact of trauma, [leaning on NHS Trauma Framework as necessary](#).

- **Recognise the significance of mental health issues in girls**

It is important to recognise the significant mental health difficulties encountered by many women in the criminal justice system. (Burman, Malloch, & Mclvor, 2015). Often these issues are undiagnosed and young women are unable to access the appropriate services (Wilson, 2014).

- **Encourage girls to become more self-reliant and independent**

Often girls and young women have not had the opportunity, ability or encouragement to think or do things for themselves. Knowledge and skills required to develop into

successful adults should be imparted in a manner which is empowering and allows young women to become self-sufficient and less dependent on others.

- **Provide access to female staff**
Ensure they are trained and skilled in dealing with sensitive emotional issues, and are familiar with issues regarding gender identity and female development (Warwick-Booth & Cross, 2018).
- **Create a female friendly environment**
It is not always viable to provide a physical space which is reserved exclusively for females, however an environment can be created which allows time for girls and young women to be with other females, in a supportive, positive and non-stressful atmosphere.

4. Supporting the Workforce

Supporting vulnerable and high risk young girls can present many challenges for workers as they grasp to understand the causation of presenting behaviours. This led to the development of a robust programme for staff that would cover key themes and issues that impact on effectively working with girls and young woman. This resulted in the creation of a programme, entitled “Improving Practice for Girls’ – To Cut A Long Story Short” which in turn, developed into an SQA accredited course assessed at SCQF [level 7](#) and [level 8](#). These courses can support the workforce to develop an understanding of the causes of female offending and risk taking, alongside an appreciation of the skills and techniques required to address them. Appendix 1 of this section highlights some of the skills, attributes and features desired by girls in the provision of support.

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Appendix 1

‘WHAT GIRLS WANT’ – Youth Justice Research and Development Team, Glasgow City Council

STRATEGIES for WORKING with GIRLS

Findings from a Consultation with Vulnerable Young Women in Glasgow

In October 2010, 22 vulnerable and high risk young women in receipt of intensive social work services from Glasgow City Council were consulted by the council’s Youth Justice Research Team in order to explore how the service can better support young women. As part of the process, young women aged between 14 and 21 years were asked to describe what an ideal service for girls would look like and what kinds of things would encourage engagement with services. Findings and suggestions for maximising young women’s engagement with services, as recommended by the young women themselves are outlined as follows:

Girls say: ‘Provide us with a safe and nurturing environment’

Consider separate service provisions for girls

Young women were asked to identify the main worries or concerns for girls as well as the main worries or concerns for boys. Whilst acknowledging that girls and boys generally have a similar range of needs, young women identify girls’ main concerns as being related to **sexual health, relationships, self-esteem, unwanted pregnancy and avoiding ‘risky’ situations whilst under the influence of alcohol**. Whilst boy’s main concerns are identified as: **substance misuse, fighting with peers and being able to acquire sexual relationships**. Young women also feel there are significant differences between the way girls and boys cope with their problems, with girls preferring to talk more. As such they generally feel that this warrants consideration for separate service provisions for the genders.

“Services should be separate, in two different places because some lassies wouldn’t like to talk in front of boys”

“Boys and girls have similar things but need different type of help. Girls like to talk more about it”

“All need to be separate because the kind of problems they have are about the same, but lassies worry more than boys day to day, boys don’t worry as much which is why we do need to keep it separate”

Provide services in aesthetically pleasing environments

The consistent message throughout young women’s feedback is that girls will be more likely to engage with services and interventions if they feel comfortable in their surroundings. Décor that is aesthetically pleasing to females and has an ambiance of feeling ‘homely and safe’ is particularly recommended. Suggestions from young women include:

“You should get the lassies that are going to be going to this and get them to decide how it is going to look, what colour to paint it etc. That will make them want to come because then it makes it more theirs”

“Decorate the place so it feels homely. People need to care about stuff, feel they own it. Have a nice floor, rugs and a couch”

“Make it more comfortable so they get used to each other, like have places to sit and talk with others, more informal settings....”

“Have soft colours so it’s more relaxed”

Remove any barriers to attendance

Young women say that practical difficulties such as childcare arrangements and lack of transport can hinder girls' abilities to engage with services, and recommend provisions are readily available to girls to overcome these barriers. It is also felt that providing basics such as meals and beauty care provisions (such as shower facilities, toiletries and makeup) would be incentives for girls to want to attend.

"For those that have babies bring them in but have someone that can keep an eye out"

"Have women (staff). Women might be easier to talk to but it depends on the lassie and what problems, some have issues with having a man around them"

"Should start later. Start about 10am so you are fully wakened up"

"Putting on breakfast and lunch is a good idea. If the breakfast is good people will want to go"

Girls say: 'We need interventions that are responsive to our needs'

Provide crisis support

Young women say that they are most receptive to services that are flexible about meeting their needs. The consensus amongst young women is that girls need somebody to talk to on a daily basis about their problems, with a drop-in crisis support type of service being viewed as most desirable.

"You (should) have someone to talk to daily about problems because some girls don't have anyone around that they can just talk to... need a crisis team who help for alcohol problems, someone to get close to lassies..."

"Don't force people just have it like, it's here to use if you want, someone always there to talk to, you just go"

"The help should be there, an addictions worker should be there if you need it, but lassies won't go unless they want to. You could have it like a drop in"

Offer interventions that are tailored to the specific needs and concerns of females

Young women identified the need for a range of focused interventions that will equip them with the knowledge and skills to address problems in their everyday life. The types of structured interventions that young women say they need include:

- Education around female sexual health, including contraception & pregnancy

- Strategies for staying safe in the community; including avoiding being drawn into prostitution and exploited whilst under the influence of alcohol
- Counselling or interventions to address feelings of trauma and bereavement
- Addictions support and information around the impact of substance misuse on the appearance and relationships
- Supports to increase family functioning; communication skills to reduce conflict in relationships and skills to establish appropriate boundaries
- Anger management skills focused around 'relational violence'
- General parenting skills including activities to inform decision making about becoming a parent and activities to promote bonding between young mums and their babies
- Confidence building activities to promote positive self-esteem

"We need more sex education. I don't think they get much in school these days and also if they don't go to school. This would be best by people coming in to talk to them about issues"

"I had underlying anger about my mum and family for 4 or 5 months we talked and did activities like learning anger management skills, it was useful"

"Needs to be about getting lassies more confident about themselves because you get pure paranoid about yourself, your appearance and whether people like you, you can get their confidence up by taking them places and doing team building...making them aware"

"Have that baby doll that cries and you do budgets...A class where you get to push prams and see if that's what you would want"

"Don't just have classes in, take them out, educate them to be streetwise. Show them how people's lives have gone downhill. Make it more real"

Provide opportunities to achieve academically

All young women in the sample had experience of alternative education provisions as their emotional and behavioural problems were unable to be contained within the mainstream school environment. In the main, young women say they feel it is important for girls to be afforded the opportunity for a 'fresh start' or a 'second chance' to re-address the gaps in their education and achieve their full academic potential. With regards to education young women say they would like:

- The opportunity to undertake academic qualifications and vocational training within a different type of learning environment that feels nurturing and supportive and 'doesn't feel like mainstream school'
- Additional educational support for those young women over the age of 16 who still need extra help with basic numeracy, literacy and developing life/employment skills. In particular there is an identified need for supports to bridge the gap and prepare girls for the transition between leaving school and entering college placements or employment.

"I don't want to go to school just for the sake of attendance, want to go so I'm getting something out of it, not just to please everyone else"

"A chance to do qualifications and give people that didn't get the chance to do it. People should get chance to re-sit qualifications. Should do standard grades and Access 2 & 3. Should sell it as a chance to relearn again and get better at things"

"In school I was too chaotic to sit in a classroom for a long time. I just can't keep my attention which is why I need to be able to learn at my own pace, you need more help. You should be asked how you would like it done (lessons) and not be forced into it"

“Post 16’s will need support and encouragement to go into education and training. Like girls will need help with what to write on a CV because they didn’t go [to school] and they will need support to find jobs”

“Need something for those people that are not ready for college. Some people still need help with reading and writing...Need more support education wise and physically and mentally so they don’t mess up. Like I’m not ready to go to college. I’m not mature enough, not being able to read, it’s embarrassing, what can I ever do?”

Girls say: ‘Our potential for positive change is underpinned by the quality of the relationships we establish’

Girls respond to workers that are caring and nurturing

Young women are more likely to engage positively with services if they have good relationships with staff. Characteristics of a good worker as identified by young women include:

- having a good sense of humour
- a respectful attitude
- a general enthusiasm for working with young people
- the ability to talk to and relate to young people

Above all girls say they are more likely to engage with services that promote a sentiment of positive self-regard for others. Young women feel that girls will engage more positively with workers if they feel their participation is valued. In particular, where care planning is done in collaboration with the young person to ensure it is meaningful, and where the young person

is given some choice; where workers show commitment to young people by always following through contacts; where behaviour management strategies adopted by workers are always fair and don't exclude the young person.

"You need to have good workers that you can trust. Have good personalities. Know how to work with young people. A sense of humour. No judging, no eyeing you up like they're better than you. Good talking skills to young people. Acts yourself around you so you feel you can act yourself"

"How young people get on with staff depends on the bond. You should get to choose the keyworker. Have an allocated one for a wee while until we can choose who we get on with"

"I don't like having too many people to work with...You ask them to do one thing and they do the complete opposite, things have not been carried out ... Some workers don't do a lot with you, they just sit and talk to you and bore you. I recommend you avoid that"

"They can make it more fun by having compromise, don't tell you what you're doing, have a choice what you are doing"

"Like have a quiet (room) to themselves so when (the young person's) angry they can get on with their work and not be put out or suspended"

Provide activities that promote learning and support through shared experiences

Young women feel that enabling girls to support each other through their shared experiences can have significant benefits; providing an incentive to engage with services and widening girls social support networks. Young women recommend:

- The use of peer support groups and facilitation of group working to empower girls to help each other to make positive changes
- The use of recreational and self-development activities to promote social cohesion and foster good group dynamics between peers and reduce the risk of conflict

“You should have group-work, a group where anything you want to improve or change, you have like a talking session where you get people’s opinions and help”

“Have all the girls together and have counselling, group sessions where you do like what can be made better from this weekend to last weekend? and they talk through it with you”

“Get young people to talk about their experiences, like an AA group for alcohol. Instead of tea and coffee have ginger”

“I was pure worried about not knowing anyone when I first came to XXX. You should explain to girls that everyone is in the same boat and can help each other. That will make them more likely to feel not that bad about coming”

“Should do stuff to help with confidence, working with other people. Do team building like outdoor stuff and quizzes. Learning to work as a team. That will also help lassies get on so there’s no bullying going on”