



# Girls in the Criminal Justice System

*A Joint Inspection by:*  
*HM Inspectorate of Probation*  
*Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales*  
*Care Quality Commission*  
*HM Inspectorate of Constabulary*  
*HM Inspectorate of Prisons*  
*Ofsted*

**December 2014**

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An Inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation

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Most of all we would like to thank the girls we met, both in the community and in custody. By sharing their experiences and views they helped us to see the impact and importance of the work undertaken by youth offending staff. We do not underestimate the commitment and generosity they showed, especially given the number of people they encounter, to retell their story, and the difficulties that many have faced in their lives that had made it difficult to trust the adults around them.

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## Foreword

It sounds obvious, but it needs to be said. Fewer girls than boys offend. In England and Wales, they make up just one in five of the caseload of youth offending services and the population of children in custody. Girls tend to commit less serious crimes than boys and normally pose little risk of harm to other people. Their offending is often a response to emotional problems and relationship difficulties, with parents, partners and friends. Because of their relatively low number the distinct needs of girls sometimes get overlooked in a juvenile criminal justice system primarily designed to deal with offending by boys.

The aim of the inspection was to assess how effectively youth offending services and secure establishments, in conjunction with other organisations, are in helping to stop girls offending and in reducing the risk of harm girls present to other people. We were particularly interested to find out whether these services were helping to make girls less vulnerable. The inspection also explored whether alcohol misuse was a factor in girl's offending.

What we found was that alcohol played less of a factor than we thought it would. Perhaps surprisingly, the misuse of alcohol was not a significant factor contributing to the offending behaviour of most girls in our inspection sample, although some girls drank to excess as a way of coping with the difficult situations in which they found themselves. But what we were extremely concerned about, and in the light of recent revelations about the extent of child sexual exploitation, was that many of the girls we came across during this inspection were vulnerable to exploitation. Many had experienced situations and circumstances which they were struggling to understand and come to terms with. These individuals are children and, especially in this context, subject to particular vulnerabilities. They are entitled to the rights and protection a child should receive. Unfortunately, in too many cases this protection was absent, and staff were often ill-prepared to deal with, or unaware of the problem of actual or potential sexual exploitation. There was a complex interplay between offending and sexual exploitation. Some girls were more vulnerable to exploitation because of their offending; their offending behaviour put them into situations where they were more likely to be sexually exploited. Others were being sexually exploited, which often acted as a trigger for offending behaviour.

So how did staff respond? Most Youth Offending Team workers and staff in secure custodial establishments recognised that to work with girls effectively, methods used to work with boys were inappropriate, and that girls, more so than boys, needed to develop secure and trusting relationships with staff. Gender did make a difference. Girls had distinct needs that needed a tailored response.

We found that working with girls was often complex and that where promising gender-sensitive approaches had been developed, this was due to individuals who were committed to improving the lives and outcomes for girls and not through a nationally or locally led drive to recognise and meet their particular needs. We also noted a pattern of reoffending for girls who were Looked After by local authorities, many who were also extremely vulnerable.

Overall, staff in Youth Offending Teams and the secure custodial estate were working hard to try and make a difference to the lives of the girls for whom they were responsible. However, if the lives of girls currently in the criminal justice

system are to change, and if they are not to go on to become adult offenders and to protect them from exploitation, effective joined-up work between agencies needs to take place. In particular, they should more rigorously evaluate what works in diverting girls from crime and reducing their vulnerability. In this report we make a number of recommendations designed to focus attention on the paramount importance of improving these outcomes.

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**December 2014**

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# Summary of findings

## Context

In England and Wales, girls comprise around 20% of the caseload of youth offending services. We know from previous inspections that girls tend to commit less serious offences than boys, and their offending is often a response to emotional well-being and issues concerning relationships with parents, partners and friends. Girls tend to have high levels of welfare needs and are vulnerable to the actions of others. Because of their relatively low number the needs of girls can sometimes be overlooked within a juvenile criminal justice system primarily designed to deal with offending by boys. There has also been significant concern recently about the prevalence of child sexual exploitation in a number of areas where vulnerable girls have been victims.

## The inspection

This inspection was agreed by the Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors' Group and formed part of the work stream identified in the *Joint Inspection Business Plan 2012-2014*. The objective of the inspection was to assess the effectiveness of youth offending services, in conjunction with other organisations, in reducing the likelihood of girls offending and in reducing the risk of harm girls present to others and making them less vulnerable (with particular reference to alcohol misuse).

We visited six Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) to assess the quality of work in a sample of 48 cases. We also interviewed key managers and operational staff in the YOTs and other agencies. We also interviewed 20 girls who were serving sentences in custody and custody staff.

## Overall findings

The best work in YOTs was characterised by an approach to assessment and intervention that recognised that girls often had different needs to boys. The assessment and management of the risk of harm posed by girls to others was generally sound and there were some promising examples of interventions that were designed for girls.

Unfortunately, this approach was not consistently applied. In some cases, assessments and interventions did not take into account gender differences. Many of the girls were vulnerable and presented challenges to those who worked with them. Efforts were made to reduce this vulnerability, but in too many cases there was a preoccupation with process rather than effective action.

Child sexual exploitation presented a serious risk to girls in all the areas we visited. We saw some effective preventative work to help girls understand the risk in their lives and increase their resilience. However, the responses to girls who were victims of sexual exploitation were highly variable in quality and effectiveness and the links between their offending behaviour and the serious risk of harm that they faced were not always considered properly. Although all areas had multi-agency procedures to identify girls at risk of sexual exploitation, these often concentrated more on information sharing rather than targeting work to reduce risks to them.

Girls in custody spoke positively about staff and their key workers. These relationships had helped them to develop good insight into what they needed to do in order to resettle successfully on release. However, work to address offending behaviour in custody was often not recognised as such by girls, and YOT workers could do more to maintain or build relationships with girls in custody in preparation for their release.

More work needed to be done in monitoring performance data about girls by YOT managers in order to target interventions more effectively and improve outcomes.

## Specific findings

### Approaches to working with girls: an overview

All the YOTs, to a greater or lesser extent, had considered the needs of girls when configuring services. For example, in one YOT, there was a partnership approach with children's services designed to focus on the needs of girls, including the need for protection; one team in Wales had given careful thought to responding to an individual girl's unique situation, and one service had adopted a 'rights-based' approach which emphasised the importance of listening to what girls were saying about their situations and responding to them constructively.

Whilst it was encouraging that attention had been given to developing these approaches by managers, there had been little evaluation of the effectiveness of practice in the YOTs we visited.

### Protecting the public and reducing reoffending

Assessments of the risk of harm which girls posed to others were accurate and risk of harm to others was effectively managed. However, assessments analysing why a girl had offended and whether she was likely to offend again did not always take into account issues connected to gender, such as health problems and the impact of friends, family, or associates. This was a major omission.

Alcohol was not a significant factor in the offending of most of the girls we came across in this inspection. Alcohol was used, however, by some girls as a mechanism to deal with emotional problems.

The range and availability of interventions to address offending behaviour varied, with some good gender-specific programmes in some YOTs. In some areas, however, girls were undertaking interventions designed for boys which had not been properly adapted to make them suitable for girls.

Some effective services were in place to help prevent girls entering the criminal justice system.

### Keeping girls safe

Many of the girls supervised by YOTs were very vulnerable and had a high number of welfare needs. This posed difficulties for those agencies trying to keep them safe and, in many cases, there was a plethora of workers who were in contact with them. Their work was not sufficiently coordinated to ensure that girls were properly protected.

There was a complex interplay between vulnerability and offending. For some girls their offending made them vulnerable (to drug use, for example), whilst for others their vulnerability (for example, as a result of having nowhere to live) had contributed to their offending. Almost half of the assessments of vulnerability lacked sufficient detail, with many failing to recognise the reality of day-to-day life for the girls, including the impact of relationships, alcohol, emotional and mental health issues. This led to unclear plans that were not sufficiently outcome-focused or based closely enough on identified need.

In all the YOTs, child sexual exploitation was a major risk to the girls in the area. This was often related to their involvement in gangs or from older men. We saw examples of good preventative work to help them increase girls' resilience to the risks of sexual exploitation. In the best YOTs, risks of exploitation were recognised, sensitive work undertaken to reduce the risks, and multi-agency support galvanised to protect the girls and apprehend the perpetrators. However, the work of professionals was often not well coordinated. We saw examples of agencies focusing too closely on the offending behaviour of the girls rather than the reasons for their behaviour. Sometimes, girls had been moved to live in other parts of the country rather than active efforts being made to apprehend the perpetrators.

## Experience of girls in custody

We interviewed 20 girls in custody to gather their views about how they had been treated and spoke to custody staff.

Girls' relationships with staff in the 'home'<sup>1</sup> YOT were not always well-maintained. It was particularly concerning that, for those girls who had been 'Looked After' by the local authority before their sentence, links with their social workers were often weak. In such cases, local authorities were failing to meet their legal duties.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the girls we interviewed felt safe and, where there had been safeguarding concerns, they felt that their concerns had been heard and appropriate action taken. Work to address sexual exploitation was a developing area.

Many of the girls came from disrupted and difficult backgrounds and had complex needs. Custody staff were trained to work with girls and had a good understanding of their needs and the importance of building a trusting relationship with girls. Girls reported positive relationships with staff and most felt that they had been helped by their key workers. Although girls had training plans and offending behaviour work was taking place, many girls reported a poor awareness or understanding of this.

Some girls had re-engaged with education whilst serving their sentences. Most activities were attended by boys and girls although there were some examples of gender-specific activities being provided.

## Did the work with girls make a difference?

There was little use of data and information in YOTs to track outcomes for girls. As a result, managers and practitioners were unable to demonstrate whether they were providing an effective service to this group.

Girls experienced better outcomes when their needs had been accurately assessed and they received the right support that was adapted to the specific needs of girls.

The frequency and seriousness of offending had reduced in the majority of cases we assessed (although girls who were Looked After did less well than other girls). Some factors that related to offending had been successfully addressed, and compliance with supervision was good. However, it was not surprising, given the complex history of many of the girls, that some deep-rooted problems remained. We could not be confident that in all cases girls had been protected, given the deficiencies we found in the work to assess and manage vulnerability. There was frequently a lack of support for girls once their contact with the YOT ceased, even when they continued to have welfare needs.

## Conclusion

The reasons that lead to offending by girls differ from boys and their responses, when they are supervised by YOTs, can differ dramatically. This inspection highlights the varying ways girls are dealt with in the criminal justice system. We found some very good targeted and sensitive work, which enabled girls to recognise the factors that led to their offending, that managed the risk they posed to others appropriately, and that identified when girls were not safe and responded appropriately. There were, however, some serious deficiencies. Too often, there was a poor assessment of the links between girls' specific vulnerabilities and their offending behaviour. In particular, in some areas, there was insufficient consideration of the high risks associated with child sexual exploitation. Multi-agency work was often poorly coordinated. Because of these variations in the delivery of services, it was difficult to avoid reaching the conclusion that if you are a girl who comes into contact with the criminal justice system, the quality of support and assistance you receive varies both within and between YOTs.

1 Refers to the YOT where the child or young person normally resides or, in the case of a Looked After Child, the YOT of the placing authority.

2 *Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Local authority responsibilities towards former looked after children in custody*, DfE, 2010 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-former-looked-after-children-in-custody](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-former-looked-after-children-in-custody)

# Recommendations

## **The Chairs of the Youth Offending Team Management Boards should ensure that:**

- work is undertaken to understand and identify needs which are specific to girls and that appropriate services are commissioned to meet those needs
- the effectiveness of interventions for girls is evaluated in order to support the development and continuous improvement of practice
- they regularly review data by gender to understand the trends of offending by girls, and then use that data to develop the shape and content of future provision
- there is effective liaison and cooperation between Youth Offending Teams and other agencies working to safeguard girls at risk of sexual exploitation and that the effectiveness of this cooperation is regularly monitored and evaluated: including any out of area placements for girls
- staff working with girls are suitably skilled and trained to assess and meet the specific needs of girls effectively.

## **Youth Offending Team Managers should ensure that:**

- assessments of likelihood of reoffending and risk of harm take into account the impact of gender
- appropriate interventions are offered to meet the needs of girls
- assessments of vulnerability take the impact of gender into account and for all girls consider the possibility of child sexual exploitation
- health practitioners are sufficiently involved with the work carried out, in particular, in relation to assessment, interventions and information sharing
- exit strategies are developed to ensure that girls have access to appropriate ongoing support when their involvement with Youth Offending Teams ends.

## **Local authorities should ensure that:**

- senior corporate parents<sup>3</sup>, including Directors of Children's Services and elected members, routinely review the offending rates of Looked After Children by gender to ensure that they understand patterns of offending by girls and are able to take action to address this where necessary
- where girls are known to children's social care, regular contact should be maintained while they are in custody so that plans for their release are made in a timely way and involve them fully, in line their legal duties.

## **Police forces should:**

- ensure that early intervention schemes, commissioned, provided or used by the police, take account of the needs and interests of girls.

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<sup>3</sup> As corporate parents, all those who are responsible for Looked After Children should act for the children as a responsible and conscientious parent would act for their own children.

# Inspection background and methodology

1

# 1. Inspection background and methodology

## Summary

This chapter outlines the background to this inspection, the methodology used and provides an overview of the profile of the cases inspected.

## Key Facts

- All of the cases we looked at in this inspection were of girls aged between 11 and 18 years old, most of whom had a conviction.
- We looked at some cases where work was taking place to prevent girls coming into the criminal justice system.
- Half of the girls supervised by YOTs in the community had committed offences of violence.
- 38% of the girls in the community sample were currently, or had been Looked After by the local authority.
- We obtained the views of 20 girls who were serving a custodial sentence.

## Terms of reference and background

- 1.1. This joint thematic inspection was led by HMI Probation with support from HMI Constabulary, HMI Prisons, Care Quality Commission, Ofsted, and Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. The Criminal Justice Chief Inspectors' Group commissioned the inspection as part of the *Joint Inspection Business Plan 2012-2014*<sup>4</sup>.
- 1.2. There has been concern in recent years about the number of girls entering the criminal justice system. There is also some evidence that the offending patterns of females are becoming more like those of males, for example, the commission of offences involving violence often whilst under the influence of alcohol. In 2010, the thematic inspection report *Message in a Bottle*<sup>5</sup> on substance misuse and young people led by the Care Quality Commission and others, highlighted the growing concerns about the drinking patterns of girls who had offended.
- 1.3. An All Party Parliamentary Group on Women in the Penal System was set up in July 2009, chaired by Baroness Corston. In October 2011 it launched a year long enquiry into girls. The published report *From Courts to Custody*<sup>6</sup> concluded that:

*"Girls are far less likely than boys to end up in the penal system but when they do, their needs are often ignored or overlooked. A gender neutral youth justice system based on the risk of offending has the potential to discriminate against girls, particularly when welfare needs are confused with risk. There is a lack of understanding about the different needs of girls who end up in the criminal justice system, little evidence of what works for girls and few programmes designed specifically for girls. Girls are effectively pigeon-holed into a criminal justice system designed for the male majority."*

4 *Joint Inspection Business Plan 2012-2014* available at [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/cji](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/cji) Publication No. CP001:812

5 *Message in a bottle: A joint inspection of youth alcohol misuse and offending*, An Inspection by the Care Quality Commission, HMI Probation, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and Estyn, 30 June 2010

6 *From Courts to Custody* (2012), All Party Parliamentary Group on women in the penal system, <http://www.howardleague.org/appg-inquiry/>

- 1.4. A joint thematic inspection report on women offenders, *Equal but Different*<sup>7</sup>, published in 2011 described the reasonably good progress made in developing provision for adult women in response to concerns about the increased numbers of women sentenced to custody. However, the national attention given to the treatment and response of women offenders had not been replicated in youth justice. Where action had been taken in response to the findings of *The Corston report*, this had been instigated through committed individuals rather than a nationally coordinated consistent strategy or policy.
- 1.5. The number of girls in custody is low (around 60 at the time of the inspection). Whilst there has been no specific gender based approach, other strategies aimed at reducing the use of custody for all children and young people have been implemented. These include the Government's launch of the *Transforming Youth Custody* programme, in January 2014, which amongst other things, contains new plans to improve resettlement services. Other strategies include the overhauling of sentence planning and casework processes in custody and a renewed focus on education in custody. There has also been reforms to remand powers in the *Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LAPSO)*. In the YOTs we inspected most had implemented strategies to keep girls out of custody, with three (Blackburn with Darwen, Swansea and Sunderland) not having had any girls go to custody for at least a year at the time of the inspection.
- 1.6. In recent years there has also been concern about girls and their consumption of alcohol and whether this leads to violent offending. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism additionally highlights gender differences in that women develop problems associated with alcohol after drinking lower levels of alcohol than men, and that alcohol does affect women differently<sup>8</sup>.
- 1.7. In terms of the picture in England and Wales we know that:
- fewer girls than boys commit offences, and when they do, they tend to be less serious offences than those committed by boys
  - since 2009-2010 the number of girls entering the criminal justice system for the first time has fallen by 67% (50% for boys)
  - in the last decade, girls have made up between 16% and 22% of YOTs caseloads in England and Wales
  - in 2012-2013 9,486 girls were supervised by YOTs compared to 39,722 boys
  - in 2012-2013 the most common types of offences for girls were violence against the person, theft and handling stolen goods, criminal damage and public order. This pattern is the same as boys<sup>9</sup>
  - in June 2014 there were 53 girls under 18 years old in custody (5% of the children in custody<sup>10</sup>).
- 1.8. In recent years there has also been widespread concern at the extent of child sexual exploitation which has led to a number of inquiries, most notably the Jay enquiry into events in Rotherham<sup>11</sup>.

## What did we inspect?

- 1.9. The inspection terms of reference were to:

*Assess the effectiveness of youth offending services, in conjunction with other organisations in reducing the likelihood of girls offending and in reducing the risk of harm they present to others and making them less vulnerable (with particular reference to alcohol misuse).*

7 *Equal but Different An inspection of the use of alternatives to custody for women offenders*, An inspection of the use of alternatives to custody for women offenders A Joint Inspection by HMI Probation, HMCPSI and HMI Prisons, October 2011 Manchester

8 <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/special-populations-co-occurring-disorders/women>

9 From YJB/MoJ (2014). Youth Justice Statistics 2012/13 England and Wales. YJB/MoJ Statistics Bulletin.

10 From [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/342521/youth-custody-report-june-2014.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/342521/youth-custody-report-june-2014.xls)

11 Jay, A (2014) Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013. Rotherham

- 1.10. Specifically the inspection sought to focus on what was happening to girls within the criminal justice system, if their gender differences were recognised and if there was a different approach to work with girls.
- 1.11. We wanted to identify if there were accurate assessments of any gender-specific needs and to establish if girls could access suitable interventions that were likely to reduce their chances of offending, and manage any risks they faced or posed. Crucially, we were keen to identify if work with girls was making a positive difference to their lives in preventing them from offending.
- 1.12. A decision was also made to consider how girls were kept safe including their vulnerability to child sexual exploitation. Both the work on the pilot inspection and the publication of *If only someone had listened*<sup>12</sup> the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, reinforced our view that this was an issue that was likely to be a feature of some of the girls and was a factor that needed to be considered when the YOTs were working with girls.
- 1.13. Fieldwork for the inspection was undertaken between October and December 2013 and involved visits to Secure Children's Homes (SCHs), Secure Training Centres (STCs), youth offending services, local authority education and children's services, health services and police forces.
- 1.14. Inspectors visited six YOTs, these being Blackburn with Darwen, Brighton, Lambeth, Leeds, Sunderland and Swansea. Visits to interview girls in custody were also undertaken in Medway STC, Hassockfield STC, Vinney Green SCH, Redbank SCH and Swanwick Lodge SCH. Visits were also made to partner agencies and specific projects used for girls.
- 1.15. We selected our community case sample by gender; all were girls, aged 11 to 18 years and had involvement with a youth offending service. These comprised of cases already sentenced (33) and a smaller number of cases of girls who were known to prevention services or who had a pre-court disposal such as a final warning or a youth conditional caution (15). From the 48 cases we selected, just over half had committed an offence of violence. However, very few of these were classified as severe violence (one sexual offence and two of robbery). Most of the cases, where the conviction was for a violent offence, consisted of common assault. In eight of these cases the assault was towards staff in care homes and in one case against a teacher in a pupil referral unit. In five cases the victim had been a friend, usually female, in three cases the assault was against an unknown person of the same age and in two cases the assaults against adults are known to the girl. The next most common offence type was theft (12 cases).
- 1.16. Some of the characteristics of the of the girls in our community case sample were;

Ethnicity:

- 71% were White British or White other
- 16% were Black British: Caribbean or Black British: Other
- 6% were mixed white and Black British or mixed other
- 2% were Asian
- 5% did not disclose their ethnicity.

Looked After Child status:

- 14 were currently Looked After
- 4 had been previously Looked After.

<sup>12</sup> Berelowitz, S. et al (2013). "If only someone had listened" *The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups Final Report*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

### Types of order:

- 13 referral orders
- 5 youth rehabilitation orders (YROs) with supervision
- 2 YROs with intensive supervision and support
- 10 YROs with other requirements
- 1 detention and training order (DTO)
- 2 section 91 custodial orders<sup>13</sup>
- 10 cases open to Prevention Services
- 2 final warnings
- 3 youth conditional cautions.

- 1.17. An inspector from Ofsted assessed the effectiveness of joint work between children's social care services and the YOTs and the also the educational provision made for the girls. In Wales, Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) assessed the joint work with social services. In both England and Wales, this included interviewing managers and directors of children's services, social workers and specialist workers.
- 1.18. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessed the arrangements and joint work with health care providers including services for physical; sexual; emotional; mental health and substance misuse services in the English YOTs we visited.
- 1.19. HMI Constabulary assessed the work of the police with girls including decisions in relation to charging and schemes to divert girls from the criminal justice system.
- 1.20. Members of the inspection team visited a range of projects and services that were involved in the work with girls, in order to assess the quality of joint work. We have also interviewed a number of people who have either a special interest or knowledge of girls within the criminal justice system.
- 1.21. Wherever possible we tried to identify good and effective practice examples in order to share what works with other interested bodies, a number are included in the main body of this report.
- 1.22. Where possible, we interviewed the case manager for the girls selected in the sample, examined records and planning to reduce reoffending and manage risk of harm to others and risks to individual girls.
- 1.23. In addition to our inspection activity in YOTs, inspectors from HMI Prisons and Ofsted interviewed a separate sample of girls (20) in custody to obtain information about their experiences and perceptions of the criminal justice system. In addition, at STCs we spoke to relevant staff.

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<sup>13</sup> A section 91 order comes from the *Power of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000* and is given by a crown court, for an offence for which an adult could receive at least 14 years in custody. The length of sentence can be up to the adult maximum sentence including life

# Approaches to working with girls: an overview

## 2

## 2. Approaches to working with girls: an overview

### Summary

This chapter outlines the way in which YOTs approached their work with girls.

### Key Findings

- In each of the YOTs we visited we saw different approaches to working with girls, which had generally developed in a piecemeal fashion rather than from any strategic guidance, however, all recognised to a greater or lesser degree the need to provide differentiated services.
- Owing to a lack of evaluation, it is not possible for agencies to demonstrate if one approach to working with girls was more effective than others.

### Introduction

- 2.1. Strategies for working with girls can range along a continuum from a position where no or very little distinction is made between girls and boys (gender-neutral), to a practice framework that makes adaptations to services designed primarily for boys to accommodate the needs of girls (gender-sensitive), to one that provides a range of services solely for girls (gender-specific). We found that no YOT had adopted a totally gender-neutral way of working; all acknowledged to a greater or lesser extent that girls did not normally respond well to the methods of working used with boys.
- 2.2. In some cases the strategy appeared not to have been chosen on the basis of clear empirical evidence; practice had developed over time, often driven by the motivation of key staff or the prevailing configuration of resources. This chapter provides a picture of the ways YOTs worked with girls that we found during our inspection.

### A gender-based approach

- 2.3. Leeds Youth Offending Service (YOS) had taken a specific gender-based approach to working with girls who have offended. The YOS accounted for the known differences between girls and boys, and responded in a way that best suited girl's needs and engagement preferences. In 2009 they developed a policy for working with girls. Since then work has been undertaken to work in a way that was best suited to engage the girls and then to meet their specific needs. Following the findings from the *Corston Report*, two operational managers had been recruited and then trained a number of staff who became girl's champions. They held a female only caseload and were able to concentrate on working with the girls. The approach was gender-sensitive with assessments demonstrating that case managers understood the way in which girls internalised feelings, how these were demonstrated, and importantly, how to make the girls feel safe enough to develop key relationships, so that interventions were likely to have the best impact.
- 2.4. The YOS had also developed a range of gender-specific interventions, utilising the key concepts of a gender-based programme, which addressed offending behaviour and the underlying issues such as self-esteem and identity work. These were offered on a one-to-one and group basis depending on the needs and preferences of individuals.
- 2.5. A voluntary contact scheme was in place to provide ongoing support to the girls once they had finished their orders. This was well intentioned and responded to the view that the ongoing support was likely to prevent future offending, however there were some difficulties with this. The voluntary nature of contact was not always understood by partner agencies, including children's social care.

The reasons for the contact, the level of contact and the outcomes were not sufficiently clear. As a result, a number of girls were managed within the YOS when their needs were not linked to offending and they clearly met the threshold for support from children's social care. Exit strategies for ongoing support were not sufficiently supported by partner agencies.

- 2.6. The potential benefits of this approach were that any girl who came into contact with the YOS was assured that her individual needs would be identified and that staff and work would be sensitive and appropriate to gender issues. Safeguarding would be taken seriously and that agencies would work together to keep girls as safe as they could.
- 2.7. Girls had access to a wide range of gender-specific programmes, including those to increase self-esteem, to manage anger and emotions, and to promote healthy relationships.
- 2.8. Work was needed to clarify the nature of the voluntary engagement with girls once their order had ended, and this included how partner agencies were going to provide ongoing support to meet wider needs.

### **An individual approach**

- 2.9. Sunderland YOS worked in a way that was intended to meet the individual needs of all children. The recognition that each child was different had meant that the needs of the girls were usually identified.
- 2.10. A number of case managers were qualified social workers. In these cases, the holistic needs of the girls and their families were considered. A 'whole-family' approach had been adopted in order to strengthen the key relationship between mother and daughter.

### **Good practice example: Sunderland**

Caroline, a 16 year old girl, was living at home with her mother who was drinking heavily. This caused some difficulties in their relationship, as Caroline found it difficult to cope with her mother's behaviour when she was drunk. On occasion Caroline used alcohol to help her cope. The case manager recognised that in order to stop Caroline's drinking and subsequent offending, she needed to relieve the issues at home. The case manager developed a good relationship with Caroline and gained a good understanding of what was happening at home. Caroline's mother was supported to get help with her drinking and as a result the stress within the home was reducing, the relationship between mother and daughter was improving and Caroline was not drinking as a method of coping. Her chances of reoffending had therefore reduced.

- 2.11. The YOS did not place single girls in groups or on programmes. A female worker was available to deliver one-to-one reparation with girls where this was assessed to be the best course of action. Much work was undertaken on a one-to-one basis. Achievements noted included successful reintegration into education, building self-esteem through positive activities. Sunderland YOS offered up to six months of voluntary contact once a court order has finished, or by referral from other agencies, this was intended to prevent individuals from offending and to support the development of self-esteem.
- 2.12. The approach taken meant that the individual needs of girls were likely to be identified; however there were few gender-specific interventions available for the girls. The work undertaken was reliant on the knowledge and skills of case managers of working effectively with girls. There was some strategic evaluation of practice and managers had produced a report that compared the outcomes of girls and boys.

2.13. The links between the YOS and partner agencies for protecting girls from sexual exploitation were underdeveloped and in some cases the lack of practical support meant that case managers were left with their concerns with no robust method of reducing the risks to the girls. We saw examples of girls being moved to other parts of the country to protect them from abuse rather than the active engagement with other agencies to pursue the perpetrators.

## **A rights-based approach**

2.14. Swansea local authority had adopted the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child<sup>14</sup>, enshrining the rights of children into council policy. Article 12 highlights the rights of young people to be involved in decision-making, planning and reviewing actions which affect their lives. Article 2 (non-discrimination) can be applied to providing equal access to services irrespective of gender. Article 33 states that the government should use all means possible to protect children from use of harmful drugs and from being used in drugs trade, and in Wales this includes harm from alcohol. Article 36 states that children should be protected from any activity that takes advantage of them or could harm their welfare.

2.15. The rights-based approach adopted by the local authority supported the approach of the YOS. The views of the girls who were in contact with Swansea YOS had been sought over all aspects of practice, and as a result services were focused on their specific needs.

2.16. Meeting the needs of girls have been a priority since 2008, and had in part been prompted by a significant increase in the number of girls entering custody in a particular year, added to an increase in violent crime committed by females. The YOS management team knew that the girls had complex needs including family breakdown, poor education, inappropriate accommodation, substance misuse and low self-esteem. They had identified that provision and programmes were mainly targeted towards the needs of males. They had also seen that other agencies could quickly reduce support services due to a perceived 'lack of engagement' from the girls. The YOS had ensured that concerns about the girls' safeguarding and risk of suicide were given equal priority with concerns for public safety.

2.17. A working group was established and staff explored with the girls how things could be done differently, and critically, what could be done to reduce the number of girls coming into the criminal justice system and going to custody.

2.18. Swansea YOS also provided ongoing support to girls once their order had finished or following diversion from prosecution, although there was a need for better support from partner agencies to help girls achieve in education, training and employment (ETE).

2.19. Swansea had developed the strongest links with academics we saw in this inspection and are involved, both in Wales and internationally, in evaluation and research to find out what is working and to demonstrate the impact of their approach on offending behaviour.

2.20. The approach taken in Swansea has been effective in reducing the number of girls coming into the criminal justice system. The effective use of the Bureau (triage and diversion scheme), meant that girls could be supported long term to refrain from behaviour likely to lead to criminal activity.

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<sup>14</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with Article 49

## **A cooperative approach**

- 2.21. Lambeth local authority has adopted a cooperative council model of service delivery. As a result, the YOS has worked in partnership with other agencies to ensure that joint comprehensive assessments were undertaken on girls who had committed offences. These thorough assessments had led to focused and targeted interventions. Work with the girls that had offended was driven strategically and senior managers and councillors were committed and focused on improving the lives of the girls and to keeping them out of offending lifestyles.
- 2.22. Cooperative working had led to the development of a three-year intervention strategy which included gender-specific provision, such as work around relationships, responding separately to the perspectives of boys and girls. There was good understanding of the respective roles of workers across services, thus avoiding duplication of effort and work. There were clear exit strategies specifically designed for girls, the best we saw during this inspection, who were provided with ongoing suitable support, from partner agencies, after their order had finished, thus removing the need for the girls to remain in the criminal justice system.
- 2.23. The approach taken in Lambeth meant that girls who had offended were supported through an understanding of their offending-related needs. Girls were able to develop effective and trust-based relationships with staff and were provided with good ongoing support from other agencies once their order had finished. Self-esteem of girls was effectively promoted, as the staff understood and reflected the contribution that girls and women made within the local community. Work was based on developing the skills and resilience of the girls, so that they were able to make a positive contribution to the community and to their families.

## **Other approaches**

- 2.24. In the other two YOTs we visited, we found that, whilst there was less evidence of an over-arching strategy related to work with girls, it was apparent that case managers had, for the most part, worked in ways that tried to meet the needs of girls and that staff were aware of the differences that working with girls brought. In particular, this included recognition that the factors linked to the offending behaviour of girls often revolved around issues of self-esteem and perception.

## **Conclusion**

It was not always evident how far resourcing and practice were based on a good understanding of the needs of girls in terms of numbers, characteristics or offending behaviour. It was clear that strategies had emerged over time in differing circumstances and were constantly evolving, however it is not possible to state with certainty if any particular approach was better than another.

# Protecting the public and reducing reoffending

# 3

## 3. Protecting the public and reducing reoffending

### Summary

This chapter examines the way in which YOT staff undertook work with girls to reduce their offending and manage risk of harm to others.

### Key findings

- Assessments of the risk of harm that the girls posed were accurate and risk of harm to others was effectively managed.
- Assessments of the likelihood of reoffending did not always take into account issues of gender.
- The use of alcohol was a factor in offending in only one-quarter of cases.
- Some girls who were Looked After committed further offences once they had entered care; in some cases a lack of a gender-sensitive approach to managing their emotions on the part of staff was evident.
- The range and availability of interventions to address offending behaviour varied, with there being some good gender-specific programmes. In some areas however, girls were undertaking interventions designed for boys which had not been properly adapted.
- Services were in place to help stop girls entering the criminal justice system.

### Assessment and management of risk of harm to others

- 3.1. The cases we examined showed that assessments of risk of harm were accurate and appropriate.
- 3.2. Within our sample of 48 cases, YOT workers had assessed that: 22 were low risk of harm to others, 19 were medium risk, 2 were high risk and 1 was very high risk of harm. We agreed with the vast majority of the levels of risk of harm to others, assigned by the case manager, however, in a small number of cases, we saw that the assessment of the risk of harm did not fully explore the link between relationships; emotions and risk were not always fully taken into account. This included situations where a girl was upset or angry about a family breakdown, or was trying to disrupt other care arrangements, in an attempt to get back home.

### Practice example

Claris was 17 years old when she was convicted of possession of a knife, which she had used to threaten a member of the public whilst she was out begging. She felt unsafe after being thrown out of home by her mother and felt the need to protect herself. Whilst this might seem extreme, Claris had been the victim of a serious knife attack previously. She stated that she got herself arrested in order to feel safer in police custody than she had on the street.

- 3.3. In 26 of the 48 cases in our sample, the offence was one where violence was used. In relation to this we identified three key themes:
  - instances where the individual felt vulnerable or threatened. This included situations where the girl felt that she was at risk of harm from others, if she did not do what she had been directed to
  - girls could commit acts of violence if they were attempting to fit in or be accepted by a peer(s) sometimes this was in response to problems with parents/carers or within intimate relationships

- some girls who were Looked After committed offences of common assault against care-staff often at a time of crisis or conflict, including when they felt under threat of being restrained.

### Case example

Kerry returned back to her children's home following a contact visit with her parent. The visit had upset Kerry and she was asked by staff at the home if she wanted to talk about it. Kerry said that she was not ready to speak to staff and wanted to be left alone for a while. Later that same day another staff member went to talk to Kerry and he stood between her and the TV, interrupting the programme she was watching. He asked Kerry if she was ready to talk about the contact and at this point she did not want to talk to the staff member. She wanted to get out of the room, she knew that she would become upset and then angry. She tried to leave to go to her room and the staff member blocked her way, in effect pushing her back onto a sofa. Kerry retaliated and hit the member of staff. Kerry was arrested, charged and convicted of common assault.

- 3.4. YOTs were able to offer a range of interventions to respond to violent offending. Leeds and Lambeth had well developed gender-specific interventions or strategies to address offending behaviour including knife crime, violent offending and general offending programmes. Most of these programmes have an element looking at relationships and the impact of relationships on offending.

### Good practice example

The 'Express Yourself' emotional management programme developed by Leeds YOS, is an eight day programme which aims to assist girls to understand what triggers their anger and strong emotions; to identify when physical changes occur when they are angry; to learn how to be assertive (rather than aggressive) and to express themselves; to learn how to step out of situations; and know their rights and the those of others.

- 3.5. We assessed cases where the girls posed a high risk of harm to others. In the two high and one very high risk cases, the risks were clearly identified and plans were in place to manage and reduce risk to victims. There was effective engagement with Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in the four cases where it was needed. This included effective transitional arrangements when girls had to move areas in order to protect victims.
- 3.6. An area of risk that was rarely considered was the potential for girls to be involved in sexual exploitation, to be used to draw in or groom other girls into exploitative situations, including the way in which girls can be used to befriend vulnerable, often younger, potential victims into meeting adults that pose a risk to others.
- 3.7. Overall, we found that actions had been taken to keep risk of harm to others to a minimum in 83% of cases where it was assessed as being needed and to protect victims and potential victims in 79% of relevant cases.

### Reducing reoffending

- 3.8. An accurate and sufficient assessment of likelihood of reoffending had been completed in 69% of the cases. We also noted good assessment of ETE issues in over 80% of assessments. Very few assessments included reference to gender issues and the difference this might make. This was most evident in the area of relationships and emotional health. The impact of this was that some of the trigger factors that caused girls to offend were missed, including the girls' ability to appropriately express their frustrations and emotions.

- 3.9. In many of the assessments we saw, the recording was insufficient, but the YOT worker's knowledge and understanding of the girls was better. The Asset<sup>15</sup> intervention plans were not always useful in identifying specific actions or objectives for the girls to achieve, few plans included the development of a relationship, despite most case managers knowing this was critical in undertaking work to achieve this. Most plans failed to include the role and support that many girls needed from parents/carers, despite much work by case managers to improve these relationships.

### Good practice example: Planning

The integrated action plan used in Lambeth provided a detailed account of girls' strengths and areas of concern. The plan was written with them and from their perspective. In one case the section titled '*what support I need to complete the order*' included the following: '*to listen and understand what I am saying*', '*to answer my questions*', and '*for workers to do what they say they're going to do*'. To have these basic needs recognised helped the girl to engage with the court order and served as a reminder to the case manager to listen without interrupting and to follow through on their undertakings. This process was aided by the fact that a speech and language therapist had modified assessment tools to take account of the more expressive presentation of girls.

- 3.10. When we talked to case managers about how they worked with girls, the majority were able to describe steps they had taken to meet needs. We saw numerous examples of girls being seen away from the YOT when they did not feel comfortable on YOT premises, or flexibility in appointment times and good use of home visits (these were used by case managers to assess and monitor home situations and to help girls feel at ease). This happened although we found that only a third of the girls had been asked if they felt safe attending the YOT.
- 3.11. A third of the girls in the sample had been offered a female case manager. It is important that gender is considered in the allocation of case managers to ensure that the girl feels comfortable in discussions and in order that the girls engaged in supervision and offending behaviour interventions. In practice, we found that most of the girls in the sample had female case managers, but there was a range of allocations systems, ranging from automatic female to female allocation, individual matching and allocation according to available resources. When girls were referred to partnership workers they were rarely asked if they had any preference about the gender of the worker and in some YOTs there was no alternative other than to see a male worker. Some case managers were sensitive to this and would reassure the girl and introduce the worker, but this was not always the case. Given the experiences some of the girls had been through it was not surprising that many had difficulties in developing relationships with workers (both male and female) and distrusted adults. More thought and planning was needed to ensure that girls' preferences and experiences were respected. In 1 case of a 15 year old Looked After girl, we counted 17 different workers involved in the case; she was constantly described as '*difficult to engage*'.

Quote from Helen, a girl on a community order:

*"I did not get on with one of my workers and I wouldn't go and see her, then I was asked if I wanted to change workers. I chose the worker I wanted and he was great, he did not pretend to know what was going through my head, he asked me and I was able to tell him. He got to know me and I could trust him. He helped me get into college, he helped me sort my problems out, he talked to me straight and that's what I needed."*

<sup>15</sup> Structured assessment tool based on research and developed by the Youth Justice Board looking at the child or young person's offence, personal circumstances, attitudes and beliefs which have contributed to their offending behaviour

- 3.12. The provision and availability of gender appropriate interventions varied. Whilst some YOTs were able to offer gender-specific programmes, other YOTs were reliant on staff adapting existing interventions. In our visits, we saw a number of programmes for girls which, in reality were not appropriate because, for example, the materials used were based on the experiences of boys and men. It was difficult to see how girls could relate to such programmes. Three YOTs had a menu of interventions for girls but the others had none.

#### **Good practice example: Increasing self-confidence**

Sunderland YOS had developed a programme with the Fire Service that was designed to increase the self-confidence of children and young people and to help them develop self-reliance and skills of team working. The programme was available to girls and boys, but after developing the programme, evaluation showed that when a mixed group was selected, behaviours changed. Tutors decided to try separating boys from girls, and for girls they found that this was more beneficial. The course was based at a local fire station and concentrated on challenging girls to try things they would never have had the opportunity to do before, including operating equipment and working closely with others to achieve difficult tasks. Key to the successful completion was the need for precise and effective communication skills in high pressure situations. At the end of the programme parents/carers were invited to attend a demonstration of new skills performed by the girls, as part of a passing out ceremony. Feedback gathered from girls who had completed the course, from parents/carers and workers showed that the outcomes for those girls who had attended included better communication with others, increased self-esteem and self-value and a positive change in attitude.

- 3.13. There were factors other than gender that had impacted on girls. In only half of the cases were there a sufficient assessment of diversity factors other than gender. For some girls their ethnicity, religion and expectations from the community brought about very different pressures.

#### **Good practice example: Diversity**

In Swansea, we visited the Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) Project. It was started in response to the added difficulties faced by ethnic minority young people where having a different race, faith, language or culture can make it harder for the children and young people and their families to get help and support when they need it. They have a range of projects including a drop in session for girls. The YOT can refer a girl to the project if needed. EYST workers can also support girls and their families if they have contact with the police. The impact of this was that the girls referred to the project were better equipped to make constructive choices about their future direction in life.

- 3.14. We saw examples of support to help girls get back into education, but some girls had poor experiences. In two areas, links with education at a strategic level were limited and education workers within the YOT were not in a position to easily escalate any problems for resolution. However, in four YOTs the relationship with ETE providers meant that education workers were well placed locally to resolve access issues as they arose. Some girls had a disrupted education, especially those girls who were Looked After and had moved between care placements. This often resulted in girls having to change educational provider and this frequently caused disruption in learning and motivation.

#### **The impact of alcohol use**

- 3.15. Alcohol was a factor in the offending in only a quarter of cases we assessed, although it was clear that alcohol was used by a number of girls as a mechanism to cope with emotional problems, and

the nature of alcohol related offending varies from area to area. We requested information from the police about detentions for alcohol related offences<sup>16</sup> during 2013. We asked for the total number and then breakdowns in age (under and over 18 years old) and gender.

- Lancashire Police gave us the following information for Blackburn: which showed that over the year (January to December 2013) the total number of people detained for alcohol related offences was 2,659 of these 482 were females, 145 were for under 18 year olds; 34 were girls.
- West Sussex Police gave us the following information for Brighton: which showed that over the same period the total number of people detained for alcohol related offences was 454 of these 93 were females, 33 were for under 18 year olds and of these 15 were girls.
- Northumbria police gave us the following information for Sunderland: which showed the total number of people detained for alcohol related offences was 1,782 of these 358 were female, 149 were for under 18 year olds and of these 56 were girls.

- 3.16. In Lambeth, the Metropolitan Police had had no detentions of females under 18 years old; this was consistent with information held by Lambeth YOS about the girls they worked with: alcohol was not a feature in the offending for their girls, although we saw the same pattern of emotional difficulties and early trauma as we saw in the other areas.
- 3.17. The initial assessment, of the factors that contributed to the girls offending, sufficiently covered the impact of alcohol in the girl's life in two-thirds of the cases where it was relevant. Case managers spoke to the girls about how and when they drank alcohol. Although case managers often told us why the girls were drinking, the recorded assessment often failed to specify what had triggered the drinking. Records tended to state the type and volume of alcohol drunk and when and where this occurred. The case managers hypothesis or judgement about why the individual drank was often not recorded, in our view it would not be unreasonable to record if the use of alcohol was part of normal experimentation, part of peer pressure or, more significantly, used to mask or block out difficult emotions.
- 3.18. We found that an intervention around substance misuse including alcohol, had been planned for and provided in 68% of cases where needed, however, a positive impact of these interventions was evident in just 43% of cases.
- 3.19. We saw little evidence of evaluation to identify the effectiveness of interventions, and reviews of factors linked to offending tended to deal with alcohol misuse separately from emotional and mental health, despite there being evidence that the two factors were often linked.

## **Meeting health needs**

- 3.20. There was little consistency in assessments and referrals to health services, thresholds varied in each YOT and there were different referral pathways. These were not always clear and sometimes very complicated to access. In addition, many health staff spoke about how much more difficult they found working with girls as opposed to boys and that they also found that engagement with girls was generally more difficult.
- 3.21. YOT staff did not always make use of the physical health section of the Asset to assess how health issues can link to offending. In one case we saw in Sunderland, the girl was not turning up for YOT appointments. A simple health screening and subsequent eye test found a significant sight problem that had resulted in the girl not being able to read bus numbers. She was provided with contact lenses and she subsequently complied with her appointments. We saw cases where the physical impact on health of regular or binge drinking was not assessed or considered.

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<sup>16</sup> By alcohol related offences we requested information on: Drunk and Disorderly, Drunk and Incapable and public order offences where the offender was drunk.

- 3.22. Awareness of health issues for girls were often based on experience and general knowledge rather than holistic assessment. The outcomes of completed assessments were not always incorporated into the Asset assessment, and health plans tended to be separate from the main YOT intervention plans.
- 3.23. We saw that information about health issues was usually shared, but often informally. It was difficult to see how health staff had contributed to the assessments of vulnerability, despite them often having key information around, for example, substance and alcohol use and sexual health.
- 3.24. We did, however, see examples of good pathways helping to direct girls into appropriate health interventions. We also noted that written health reports to inform multi-agency meetings were of good quality and comprehensive.
- 3.25. We saw few health interventions that supported girls' emotional health needs. In a number of cases, referrals had been made to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), but only where there were mental health issues. Access to CAMHS varied and we saw no evidence of a strategy to engage girls differently that reflected their gender or life experiences.
- 3.26. We saw a few cases where girls had become pregnant and in these cases we saw specialist support from the midwifery service, together with examples of how YOT staff had supported the girls to make appropriate bonds with midwives and improve the chances of the girls accessing antenatal care.
- 3.27. At the end of the order, it was not clear what health information was being passed on to general practitioners so that the outcome of health interventions could be monitored or supported or to inform future practice. This was of particular importance given that girls' alcohol use was often linked to emotional health issues, which were enduring.

### **Girls who were Looked After Children**

- 3.28. There were 18 girls in the case sample who were either currently a Looked After Child (14) or who had previously been in care (4). The Looked After status of these girls brought additional complexities to the management of cases, including the need to work with a wider range of other workers; responding to and understanding the issues of separation experienced by girls when they were estranged from family and friends; and disruption to many areas of the girls lives if placements were away from home areas. In addition, some of these cases also had more workers involved, if the case was transferred between YOTs.
- 3.29. Most local authorities we visited knew about offending rates for Looked After Children but they had not disaggregated the data by gender. Lambeth had considered the issue as nine out of the ten Looked After Children who had offended in the last year were girls and all were convicted of offences in residential establishments. The authority had considered this by reviewing their commissioning strategy and the YOT was working with the placement finding team to ensure appropriate placements. However, this has not been successful for girls or reduced the rate of offending.
- 3.30. In YOTs where the local authority had their own children's homes, work was being done to support behaviour management including YOT staff working with social workers and care staff to deal with response to emotions, without for example, having to restrain the girl. However, where girls were placed out of area, this was not so successful. We saw some cases of girls who were placed in foster care. While carers tried hard to support them, the training and support given about the specific needs of girls who offend, particularly around behaviours that may indicate their risk of sexual exploitation, was not sufficient to ensure the stability of the placement.

### Practice example

Lucy was in foster care, she was vulnerable due to her age and own behaviour including running away from home. She had been reported missing on numerous occasions, with the foster carers and social worker trying to work with her to find out what was causing her to run away. There was a tension between the police and children's social care about the best way forward and how to prevent her going missing. Lucy ran away from home again and was reported missing to the police. Later that day, the foster parents rang the police to inform them that Lucy had returned. The police went to the foster home and arrested Lucy for wasting police time.

### Practice example

At 14 years old, Liz had been placed in several care homes, she was challenging to staff as she did not want to be in care and resented being separated from her family. It was suspected that she was being sexually exploited. She also ran away from the home on occasions. Following her return to the home, when she had been missing staff asked her for the mobile phone she had, but was not allowed to have. Liz did not want to give the phone to staff. She ran out of the home and staff followed her as they were concerned about her safety. She was followed by a number of staff who were in a car. When they caught up with her they chased her on foot and three staff restrained her in public. Liz assaulted staff during the restraint and was convicted of common assault. Vulnerability and intervention planning for Liz did not provide any guidance about how being restrained might affect Liz and how this could lead to assaults on staff.

## Work to prevent girls from offending and entering the criminal justice system

- 3.31. Youth Justice Board (YJB) guidance<sup>17</sup> on dealing with out of court disposals for young people, although not gender-specific, does support agencies in working with girls. In England and Wales young people who commit an offence, which is of low seriousness, and who have had previous involvement with the police or previous convictions are referred to the youth offending service for an assessment.
- 3.32. We found a variety of responses to the guidance across the YOTs we visited; the most developed was in Swansea. Swansea YOS and South Wales Police introduced the Swansea Bureau in May 2008. All young people arrested for low and medium seriousness offences<sup>18</sup> were referred to the YOS for assessment as opposed to receiving an immediate decision to caution or prosecute at the police station. Following a two-week assessment period the young person and their parent/carer attended a meeting, chaired by a sergeant and attended by the YOT police officer. Before the formal Bureau meeting, the YOT police officer, police sergeant and a YOT volunteer considered the reports provided by the YOT worker and agreed on the outcome. Options included a youth restorative disposal, youth caution with voluntary intervention or a youth conditional caution with mandatory intervention. The Bureau was subject to external academic evaluation by Swansea University. A significant reduction in first-time entrants had been noted (over 60% between the four years 2008-2011).
- 3.33. We assessed 15 prevention cases held by YOTs. In seven of these cases the initial incidents had been for violence, but at a very low level. Other incidents included theft from shops and causing some disruption in town/shopping centres. Parents/carers were fully involved in the preparation for interventions and in a number of cases we saw interventions delivered to strengthen the relationship between the girl and her parents/carers. We saw a range of responses to meeting potential needs that might lead to offending, most of which were appropriate. These included a decision for a YOT not to become involved, and for children's services to respond to a Looked After girl who had broken

<sup>17</sup> *National Standards for Youth Justice Services April 2013* Youth Justice Board for England and Wales  
<sup>18</sup> *Sentencing Guidelines Council Definitive Guideline: Overarching Principles-sentencing Youths 2009*

a window at school. Equally we saw interventions to target very specific needs including a number of cases where girls had stolen items, under peer pressure from friends. Work in these cases focused on developing self-esteem so that girls recognised that they had value in their own right and did not need to 'prove' their worth to peers by committing offences.

- 3.34. We saw exactly the same percentage of cases that were alcohol related in prevention cases as we did in the other cases in our sample (27%). The views of girls were incorporated into 60% of assessments.
- 3.35. Assessments were effective in assessing any risk of harm and in identifying factors likely to contribute to offending behaviour. In the prevention cases, we saw good attention being paid to the girls' perception of self and others, attitudes to offending, motivation to change and thinking and behaviour. The assessment tool used for prevention cases is Onset; it differs from the Asset assessment and does not cover emotional and mental health. Nevertheless, we found that although there were issues of emotional health for the girls subject to prevention interventions these were recognised and responded.

## **Conclusion**

The assessment and planning of risk of harm was generally effective, although there were issues in relation to the management of girl's behaviour within residential care. Staff did find it difficult to incorporate all the known information about the factors that can lead to offending (including health concerns) into the assessment in a way that reflected gender issues. The impact of this is that girls may not always be consistently provided with a service that impacts positively on their offending behaviour.

The range of interventions available to girls was variable in terms of quality, and access was inconsistent. Although staff tried hard to meet the needs of girls, in some YOTs interventions did not meet their needs and there was a lack of evidence about whether the interventions were effective. There were some critical characteristics that we were able to identify as making gender appropriate intervention programmes for girls more likely to be successful. These included ensuring that girls felt safe both physically and emotionally so that they would engage with the programme; developing a strengths based approach that separated the behaviour and the person; the recognition of past victimisation and trauma experienced by some of the girls; and finally, raising expectations of girls and helping them to see that they were able to take control.

# Keeping girls safe

# 4

## 4. Keeping girls safe

### Summary

This chapter outlines the specific vulnerabilities faced by girls who are in the criminal justice system and how effective YOTs were at recognising the issues and responding to them.

### Key findings

- Many of the girls supervised by the YOTs were very vulnerable and had many welfare needs. They posed difficulties for those agencies trying to keep them safe. No single agency could keep girls safe by themselves.
- Almost half of the assessments of vulnerability were lacking sufficient detail with many failing to recognise the reality of day-to-day life for the girls, including the impact of relationships, alcohol and emotional and mental health issues.
- Child sexual exploitation was a risk for girls in all the YOTs that we visited. The response by the YOT and partners was variable and tended to focus on process rather than direct action to protect or reduce risks.
- Overall, there was a wide variation in the understanding and responses to vulnerability. In some cases there was a lack of effective joint work reduce and manage with vulnerability issues.

### Assessment of vulnerability

- 4.1. Both boys and girls can be vulnerable as a result of their own actions and due to the actions of others, either from adults or other children. Gender, for example the way in which girls perceive themselves and their image, can make a difference to vulnerability both in terms of identification of risk factors and the response required to reduce the vulnerability.
- 4.2. The YJB guidance<sup>19</sup> for the Asset assessment vulnerability screening tool is clear that the screening focuses on the possibility of the child or young person being harmed either physically or emotionally. It is not a full assessment, but is designed to trigger wider investigation when needed. It identifies four levels of vulnerability (from low to very high). If a child or young person is assessed as being medium or above then a vulnerability management plan should be completed. We assessed that in 37 of the 48 cases we inspected, the girls were medium or above. The YOTs had identified 34 cases.
- 4.3. Many of the girls had experienced relationship breakdown with parents/carers and siblings, had witnessed domestic violence or had been subject to violence within a relationship. When we examined the record of the assessment on the Asset vulnerability screening tool, we noted a discrepancy between what was recorded and what the case managers knew and thought about the case. It was often difficult to clearly see the exact nature of the vulnerability using the screening tool which, for the needs of girls, seemed to limit case managers. The impact of this was that plans to manage vulnerability sometimes lacked specific actions to keep the girls safe.
- 4.4. In 77% of the vulnerability assessments, we found that consideration was given to the nature and level of the factors that might make the girl vulnerable, in the community or as a result of the girl going into custody. In the same percentage of cases, we found that staff had considered emotional and mental health related issues. However, only 50% of the assessments considered risk of sexual exploitation and 54% considered the potential for the girl becoming a victim of crime. Vulnerability that can occur because of relationships was assessed well enough in 48% cases.

<sup>19</sup> Asset Guidance Published by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales available at <http://yjbpublications.justice.gov.uk/en-gb/Resources/Downloads/Asset.pdf>

## Practice example

16 year old Zoe received a referral order for an offence of theft from a shop. The initial assessment classified her as low vulnerability, despite it being clear that when she stole, it was to get money to buy alcohol and drugs. Her relationship with her mother broke down, and her mother told the case manager that she could not keep her daughter safe and that she was going off with men in cars. Her mother moved away from the area and this resulted in Zoe becoming homeless and she stayed with friends sleeping on their sofas. Her circumstances were not reviewed to take into account the impact of her binge drinking, her substance use or potential risk of exploitation. Zoe later became pregnant and the case manager had not recognised how Zoe's lifestyle put the health and well-being of her self and her unborn child at risk.

- 4.5. In most YOTs work to help girls recognise their own vulnerability was evident. Some YOTs offered specific programmes to look at issues including safety in relationships and the development of self-esteem. Often girls needed a safe place to talk and someone who would listen to them. The development of a trusting relationship with a professional was critical in safeguarding the girls. We saw many examples of how staff worked with the girls to develop a relationship, some of which took time. Girls were given some flexibility about when and where they could be seen, and how contact could be kept including the use of text messaging to check the girls welfare or to remind them of appointments, phone or face-to-face meetings. We saw that girls were often seen at home or off site from the main YOT building, with the exception of one YOT who wanted the girls to attend the office.
- 4.6. Work with girls was often undertaken on a one-to-one basis and involved the case managers talking to the girls about things that mattered to them. The girls we spoke to appreciated this. When we talked to case managers about the content of the sessions they consistently told us that they were trying to develop and then maintain a relationship with the girl, to give her a place where she could talk about her feelings and emotions and where she would feel safe. This work was often invisible on case recordings, however, and we saw few plans with objectives to develop a relationship with the girl.
- 4.7. Reviews of vulnerability were sufficient in only just over 60% of cases. All the YOTs had management panels set up to over-see vulnerability, but these panels did not always identify deficiencies in the initial assessment. This included cases where there was new and emerging information that indicated that vulnerabilities had increased. In some cases it was difficult to see the impact of the panel other than monitoring the case and there was also often a lack of clarity about the threshold for referral to children's social care services.
- 4.8. In order for work with girls to have the best chance of a successful outcome, the girls needed to engage and build positive relationships with case managers. We found that the nature of relationship building had been given attention and planned for in Lambeth and Swansea.

## Vulnerability and Alcohol

- 4.9. One of the issues that we wanted to consider was how the use of alcohol contributed to vulnerability. We found that in 67% of assessments undertaken by YOT case workers, the difficulties that girls could face when under the influence of alcohol had been effectively considered. When we spoke to YOT managers about the profile of alcohol use with girls, we received the consistent message that for girls that had offended or who were at risk of offending, they tended to use alcohol as a method of coping, managing or dealing with their emotions.
- 4.10. Assessments tended to identify the amounts and patterns of alcohol use as described to them by individual girls. The main impact of alcohol was that girls did not make good decisions when under the influence of alcohol and this led to them putting themselves into risky situations. There was a tendency for staff in YOTs to see the use of alcohol as a health problem rather than a contribution to offending and vulnerability. However, in one area there had been a proactive response to this issue.

### Good practice example: Keeping girls safe

In Sunderland two rapes had been committed against women who were vulnerable due to their alcohol consumption. Following a police review of the cases, consideration was given to who could have intervened and prevented the offences from happening. As a consequence, door staff and taxi drivers were given training on how to identify and help potential victims and to identify potential offenders. Sunderland also has a mobile treatment unit for people who are vulnerable through drink in the city centre and 'street pastors' were deployed supported by an exploitation prevention officer.

- 4.11. Generally, we found that health workers were not fully engaged in assessments about vulnerability despite them having the potential to provide considerable input on issues such as previous and current physical and mental health. Assessments around alcohol use that were recorded in Asset tended to list the range and timings of alcohol use such as *'Drank a bottle of vodka with peers during the evening'* rather than analysing the reasons for drinking. We saw little assessment of the girl's perception of alcohol use. The exception to this was the health workers in Blackburn with Darwen, who undertook extensive health assessments and then recorded the outcome of assessments directly into the assessment tool.

### Good practice example: Meeting health needs

Blackburn with Darwen YOT health team were meeting the needs of girls, primarily due to their individualised and flexible approach to all case assessment and interventions. Good overall health assessments were undertaken by health workers and these linked to Asset assessments. Health workers had sole responsibility for the assessment of physical and emotional health, ensuring that girl's needs were assessed by specialist practitioners. Where specific needs were identified they were referred on quickly, making use of established relationships. Vulnerability was an element of all health assessments. In practice this resulted in a rounded health assessment at the start of the order, with YOT staff having the benefit of reliable and consistent information on which to make decisions.

## Vulnerability to child sexual exploitation.

- 4.12. In each of the YOTs we visited for the inspection, we found cases of girls who were at risk of, or who were being sexually exploited. Five of the six YOTs had a clear system in place to identify and refer cases where they suspected that girls were vulnerable to or being sexually exploited. We found that for YOT case managers, the identification of sexual exploitation and vulnerability was often complex and difficult, and some struggled to understand the impact of the offending behaviour of girls and how this was influenced by the risks of sexual exploitation in their lives. This lack of understanding was illustrated in one area, where a group of girls who were at risk of exploitation were barred from using public transport which would have allowed them to safely travel home. In one area we saw some very effective practice that recognised the difficulty in girls making disclosures but this was not common practice.
- 4.13. In some local authorities, complex systems had been developed to manage the risk of sexual exploitation but this often resulted in a concentration on processes rather than ensuring that the vulnerabilities were properly managed and monitored. In one area, we noted at least four different meetings that could be held to discuss concerns. Staff in this area were confused about the route to take to raise concerns about the girls welfare and some specialist child sexual exploitation workers reported that they needed to spend so much time in multi-agency meetings that they did not have time to work directly with the girls at risk.

### Good practice example: Police action to tackle child sexual exploitation

In Leeds there was a weekly meeting between a detective sergeant, the lead for the Child Protection and sexual exploitation team and a full time missing from home and sexual exploitation coordinator employed by the council. During this meeting, all referrals were discussed and a risk assessment matrix completed. The meeting triggered a further multi-agency strategy meeting where an initial plan based on the basic information was put in place. This included a police investigative plan and potential care plan for the victim. Girls at high risk of exploitation were also the subject of a rolling intelligence log so that all intelligence was easily accessible and in the same place. This approach provided options to disrupt criminal activity and allowed the girls space and time to develop trust and confidence so that they felt safe to make direct disclosures.

- 4.14. It was of concern that in two areas YOT case managers recognised the indicators and had suspicions that girls were at risk, but without appropriate support from the police and social care and the YOT managers, effective action was not taken. In these two areas the block to responding seemed to be the need for a disclosure of abuse from the girl, before action to investigate could be taken. In another area, recognition of, and responses to, sexual exploitation were also inadequate. Processes for the police and multi-agency management of those who were subject, or vulnerable, to sexual exploitation included referral procedures that were ineffective in addressing the problem.
- 4.15. In each inspected area, there were services to support girls who were vulnerable to sexual exploitation usually provided by third sector organisations<sup>20</sup>. The working relationships with YOTs varied and in some areas the YOT did not know which girls the support service was working with, or what to do to support this specialist intervention. The outcomes for girls as a result of this joint-working varied, but it was promising to see that there are some good support services for girls; however, they needed to be better integrated with the YOTs to ensure that information was shared to assist with the direct work and protection of the girls.

### Practice example: Supporting victims and potential victims of sexual exploitation

Engage! is a multi-agency team made up of public and voluntary organisations that work together to help protect young people from sexual exploitation in Blackburn with Darwen. The team work to plan for, and respond to, the girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation. This was achieved by preventing the girls involvement, protecting victims and prosecuting offenders. The team was based in an anonymous community centre. There was no waiting list which was unusual. Children were supported by a specialist worker, given a health assessment by the specialist nurse and provided with witness support during any trial process.

## Conclusion

There was a complex interplay between offending and vulnerability in that some girls had offended because they were vulnerable and others became vulnerable because of their offending. In order to protect girls YOT staff needed to accurately identify what vulnerabilities existed. Gathering information from other agencies and the girls themselves was critical in forming an informed perspective about the circumstances of individual girls, so that the exact nature and level of vulnerability could be identified. Without effective partnership working, effective safeguarding and protection from abuse could not be achieved. For too many girls, in the case sample, assessments identified some but not all the factors that could cause harm to these girls. Without knowing as much of the picture as possible it became difficult to form meaningful plans.

20 A third sector organisation is one which is either a run by a charity or on a voluntary basis as opposed to a statutory service.

Child sexual exploitation was a major risk to girls in all the YOTs we visited. Actions to identify, respond to, and act upon sexual exploitation concerns varied widely. We found some effective work but also came across areas where this work was in its infancy and where girls were not being protected. The links between offending behaviours and sexual exploitation were not always considered properly, particularly by some partner agencies. In essence, being known to a YOT did not automatically mean that vulnerability to sexual exploitation would be considered or recognised or that girls would be protected, even when the offending behaviour was directly linked.

# Experiences of girls in custody

# 5

## 5. Experiences of girls in custody

### Summary

This chapter outlines the views and experiences of 20 girls in custody at Secure Children's Homes (SCHs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs) obtained via face-to-face interviews and interviews with relevant staff.

### Key findings

- Links with social workers and relationships with YOT workers in the community were not always maintained.
- Girls reported good relationships with staff and found the work of key workers in custody helpful.
- Most girls felt safe.
- Work to address sexual exploitation was a developing area.
- Work to address offending behaviour was often not recognised as such by girls.

### Girls in custody

- 5.1. As part of the inspection we wanted to identify girls' perceptions of life in custody and if they were being supported to reduce their offending and being kept safe. We interviewed 20 girls in Medway and Hassockfield STCs and Vinney Green, Redbank and Swanwick Lodge SCHs. Work at STCs was undertaken by HMI Prisons researchers and by an Ofsted inspector at the SCHs.
- 5.2. There are three types of custodial establishments for children and young people: Young Offenders Institutions; Secure Children's Homes and Secure Training Centres. The YJB makes the decision about which secure place a child will go to, based on who can deal with the child or young person's needs safely (for example if they have a health problem), suitability for their age, gender and background and proximity to the child or young person's home. In 2012, the YJB published a plan<sup>21</sup> to develop the secure estate for children and young people. The plan responded to the specific needs of girls, recognising their past experiences of violence and abuse and greater levels of depression and mental health issues. The plan focused on ensuring that the commissioning of services met specific needs. Girls are no longer sent to Youth Offender Institutions and instead are all placed in Secure Children's Homes or three of the four Secure Training Centres. It should be noted that, although girls are accommodated in their own units, they do mix with boys during education and some other activities.
- 5.3. All but one secure children's home is run by a local authority children's services department and they are overseen by the Department of Health and the Department for Education in England, and in Wales, Social Services for Wales. Of the three types of establishment, secure children's homes have the highest ratio of staff to children, and are generally smaller, ranging in size from 6 to 40 beds. They are usually used to accommodating younger children (those aged 12 years to 14 years old), as well as girls up to the age of 16 years old, and 15 to 16 year old boys who are assessed as needing extra care.
- 5.4. Secure Training Centres are purpose-built centres for children and young people up to the age of 18 years old. They are run by private operators under YJB contracts, which set out the way in which the centres are to be run. There are four STCs in England: the typical ratio in an STC is three staff to eight children.

21 YJB (2012) *Developing the Secure Estate for Children and Young People in England and Wales Plans until 2015* London.

- 5.5. Girls make up only 5% of the youth custody population. In our sample we interviewed 12 girls who were: White British or White other, 3 girls who were Black British, 2 girls of mixed race, and 1 Asian, 1 Arab and 1 Roma girl. We asked the girls if they had a disability, four stated that they had, including personality disorder and literacy difficulties.
- 5.6. It should also be noted that when a child or young person enters custody on remand, they are deemed to be a Looked After Child under the care of the local authority<sup>22</sup>.

## What we found

- 5.7. Girls held in Secure Children's Homes and Secure Training Centres have complex needs. Those at STCs were more likely to have been in custody before (6 of the 7 girls who said this were at STCs) and say they had been in care (8 of the 11 girls who said they had spent time in care).
- 5.8. Most sentenced girls we spoke to were due to be released within the next few months; but two did not know when they were to be released.
- 5.9. We asked the girls about their contact with their social worker, Half of the eight girls who were currently Looked After prior to sentence had seen their social worker since being in custody. Staff told us that Looked After Children reviews usually took place but that social worker attendance at training plan meetings varied by individual social worker. Social workers retain responsibility for children and young people when they enter custody and work should be undertaken with YOT staff to plan for resettlement and release: only four girls found their social worker helpful. One said her case had been 'signed off' as she was in custody and told us it "*seemed like she preferred me to be in here*". Another said that her case had been closed as she would be 18 years old when released. One girl said that her review had been cancelled which had angered her as she did not know what was going to happen to her on release. The support and protection intended from being classed as a Looked After Child had not ensured that there was robust planning for some girls in preparation for release from the local authority. This was a serious gap and is not compliant with the legal duties that local authorities have for Looked After Children who enter custody.
- 5.10. Since coming into custody 19 of the 20 girls said they had seen a YOT worker at least once (the one who had not seen a worker had only recently been sent to custody) and staff reported good YOT worker attendance at training planning reviews. However, a few girls reported issues when trying to contact their YOT worker by phone. Within the STCs half of the girls said that they had a positive relationship with workers and that this was helpful. Girls in the SCHs raised issues about a lack of contact and not seeing the same YOT worker. In two cases the girls stated that they did not feel that they had been able to build up a relationship with the YOT worker, which was in contrast to the good relationships many girls in the community had. As in the community cases, we saw the nature of the relationship with YOT workers can be critical to ensure that the right offending behaviour interventions are provided and supported on release, but in the main these were not being developed well enough with the girls in custody.
- 5.11. Relationships with staff in general were good and staff recognised the importance of building trust and spending more time with girls to achieve this. We were told that all staff were trained to work with girls and to be aware of their needs and difference of approach required. This included higher levels of self-harm and mental health needs amongst girls; that building trust/relationship was important; and that the type of bullying that might be present was different to a male establishment. There was also consideration of the importance of ensuring gender balance of staff on residential units and efforts to make units more homely.

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22 Section 104, *Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012* [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/section/104/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/section/104/enacted)

- 5.12. Most of the girls said that they had a key worker within the establishment and that they saw them regularly. The girls felt that the key workers in particular, were helpful in resolving practical issues for example adding phone numbers to phone lists, and in contacting community based workers. One girl in a Secure Children's Home said this about her key worker:

*"They are fabulous - they have been really great as they listen to you and help you sort out your problems."*

- 5.13. Although training plans were in place, just less than half of the girls said they had a training plan and that they knew what their targets were. These girls had felt involved in the development of their plan. However the rest of the girls said they did not know what plans were in place or being developed for them.
- 5.14. In custody, four of the girls had felt unsafe, it was positive to note that they had all been able to tell somebody about this, and that three of them said that things got better as a result. Safeguarding procedures seemed robust and there was good multidisciplinary working with the girls which included family involvement. Staff also reported that they had good links with placing local authorities and YOTs. Both Secure Children's Homes and Secure Training Centres had links with a charity or third sector organisation to address sexual exploitation. This was positive but seemed to be a developing area.
- 5.15. The girls were asked if they needed help to stay healthy, seven girls in the STCs said they did. They reported that they had experienced delays in seeing a doctor. In particular one girl felt that she was not getting the help she needed for a medical condition.
- 5.16. We asked the girls if they had any emotional or mental health needs, six indicated that they did. These included personality disorder, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Three girls said that they could see a psychiatrist within the custodial establishment, but the other three girls who identified issues did not feel that they were receiving the help they needed. For one girl she should have seen the mental health team in the community, but once she had gone into custody had not seen anyone, and did not know what arrangements were in place for her.
- 5.17. Just over half of the girls interviewed stated that they had problems with drugs and alcohol when they arrived in custody. One girl committed an offence of supplying drugs and another stated that she offended to fund her drug use. The other girls related their offending to not thinking straight due to being "off their head". We assessed that 11 of the girls had substance misuse linked to their offending, 7 said they had received help and interventions in relation to substance misuse.
- 5.18. Other reasons the girls stated for their offending included "It just happens". This was linked to the issues of drinking, anger and lack of money. In the Secure Children's Homes, the girls tended to be the younger and less engrained within the criminal justice system; seven said they got in with the wrong crowd, this included being in a gang and becoming friends with somebody who was offending. This was similar to the girls in the community where peer pressures and relationships were often issues associated with offending.
- 5.19. Of the girls who reported issues with substance misuse, five said they had received help and had found it helpful, they had undertaken group sessions and one-to-one work. One girl with an alcohol problem said that she had received help but it was not helpful as it was about education rather than treatment and had not addressed the underlying reasons for the use of alcohol. She stated that she would still have a problem when released. One girl said that her offending was due to things that were happening at home and that she used to use alcohol to forget and offend to have some fun. This is similar to our findings in the community that girls often use alcohol as a coping mechanism, albeit inappropriately.

- 5.20. A number of girls described having difficulties with education before they went into custody, Access to education improved significantly in custody with 18 of the girls reporting attending some form of education or training. One girl was undertaking a gym course and had been able to go to a gym in the community and had achieved NVQ level 2. This was a positive step towards rehabilitation and her eventual release.
- 5.21. We were interested to find out what work was going on to reduce offending behaviour. Girls had access to the same interventions as boys - custody staff told us that all work with young people was tailored to the individual so felt gender needs would be picked up and met that way. Interventions work was provided in the form of programmes, group work or one-to-one work. Although dedicated sessions on offending behaviour had taken place these were not always recognised as such by the girl themselves. Just eight of the girls stated that they had done some work to address offending behaviour. This was mainly reported as one-to-one work with their key workers. It was not surprising that girls were unable to relate activities they were doing to offending behaviour work, given their reported lack of awareness of their training plans.
- 5.22. Most activities were attended by boys and girls, although there were examples of activities tailored or specifically for girls. Half of the girls we spoke to said that there were activities that they found useful, and gave examples of hair and beauty courses, while the others said that there were sports activities for girls to attend. The girls said that they found the vocational training most helpful and thought that this would help them gain qualifications and improve their employability on release.
- 5.23. When asked if they thought they were less likely to offend on release and what if anything had made a difference, only one girl was able to clearly describe how work completed in custody had impacted on her thinking and why she had offended. Other girls stated that the experience of being in custody had acted as a deterrent and that they did not want to go back to custody.
- 5.24. The girls were very clear about the problems they would have on release that they would need support with. These were: accommodation for four girls; ETE for seven girls; difficulties with peers was cited as an issue for two girls, and one girl said that she would have problems with alcohol.
- 5.25. There was no strategic direction or policies specific to girls in the establishments we visited. Some equality impact assessments had been conducted on policies which included consideration of gender. It is difficult to assess how gender-sensitive work with girls was promoted, supported or evaluated without a policy framework.

## **Conclusion**

As in the community the experiences of girls in custody varied, but access to education and training improved for a number of the girls. The girls had complex needs, but planning to undertake work to address offending related needs was not always clear to the girls.

Links with workers in the community were not always maintained and the girls related some difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships with them. This was a missed opportunity, as the time in custody had provided an opportunity to reflect on their ability to form relationships which could be capitalised on upon release in order to support resettlement, and undermined the progress girls may have made whilst in custody.

**Did the work  
with girls make  
a difference?**

**6**

## 6. Did the work with girls make a difference?

### Summary

This chapter outlines the outcomes for the girls in the case sample who were managed in the community by YOTs.

### Key findings

- There was little use of data and information to track outcomes for girls.
- Girls had better outcomes if their needs had been accurately assessed and received the right support that was adapted to the specific needs of girls in a predominately male environment.
- The frequency and seriousness of offending had reduced in the majority of cases.
- Girls, in the sample, who had reoffended were more likely to be a Looked After Child.
- Some factors that related to offending had been successfully addressed.
- Some deep rooted problems remained.
- Compliance with court orders was good.
- Not all girls had been protected.
- There was a need to identify how some girls could be supported once their contact with the YOT had ended.

### What we found

- 6.1. A number of things made it difficult for YOTs and their partner agencies to measure success with girls. There was little use of data or evaluation of the outcome of services to identify similarities and differences in outcomes between girls and boys, as a result some YOT managers did not know if girls were doing better or worse than boys. Another factor resulted from the lack of specific objectives and targets in some of the plans we saw; measuring real progress against them was very difficult when initial plans were unspecific about what the outcomes work was intended to achieve. In some cases it was only possible to tell if a process had been followed, for example that a referral had been made or a group attended.
- 6.2. In addition, staff struggled to easily reflect in plans and records some of the most important but more general outcomes such as, increased self-esteem, growing confidence, better understanding of how to manage emotions and the development of appropriate and trusting relationships.
- 6.3. We found that in the cases we assessed where there was consideration and attention to the distinct needs of girls, outcomes tended to be better in relation to the management of risk of harm to victims, in the reduction of vulnerability and in the frequency and seriousness of reoffending.
- 6.4. In half of our case sample we were able to judge whether there had been any changes to offending. In 16 of the relevant 26 cases we noted a decrease in the frequency of offending (62%) and a decrease in seriousness in 16 of 23 relevant cases (70%). In the other cases it was not possible to make this judgement due to the nature of the cases (prevention or first offences).
- 6.5. We found the most significant difference between those girls who were Looked After or not in reoffending. We assessed if there had been a reduction since the start of sentence in frequency of offending. For non Looked After girls this was 62% but for Looked After girls this was 38%. We also assessed if there had been a reduction in the seriousness of offending. For non Looked After girls this was 91% but for Looked After girls it was 50%.

- 6.6. We assessed what progress had been made, where required, in relation to the individual key factors which made a girl more likely to reoffend. In cases where it was needed, we saw improvements in ETE, thinking and behaviour, attitudes to offending, and motivation to change. This reflected the work we saw in many areas to support girls to attend school, education or training. This also reflects the work undertaken by case managers in their direct work with the girls. Intervention in these areas was often based discussions and reflection, and the girls responded to this type of approach.
- 6.7. We saw cases where we could see some improved relationships with parents/carers, girls making better choices about who they classed as friends and in a number of cases the girls were able to relate better to other professionals including social care.
- 6.8. We saw least progress in substance misuse, family and personal relationships and living arrangements. This was often to do with the entrenched nature of these issues, and a number of girls had longstanding histories of family and relationship difficulties and some of them had resorted to substance misuse as an inappropriate way of dealing with their emotions. These areas were linked for a number of girls and it is not surprising that these areas proved difficult to impact.

### **Good practice example: Diversion from prosecution and reducing use of custody**

Swansea YOS had developed two strands of work: one to prevent and divert girls from coming into the system and a second strand to reduce the rates of reoffending and stop girls going to custody. To prevent girls being prosecuted, they went through a system where the factors that had contributed to offending were identified, the girls were then offered a range of suitable support to meet their needs as an alternative to prosecution. Parents/carers were involved in this process in order that they could maintain responsibility for their child or young person and be part of the work. For those girls who had been convicted, the YOS ensured that there were individualised programmes in place to address offending and allow the girls to develop trusting relationships with staff at their own pace. As a result, the staff were able to introduce them to new ways of thinking and problem solving in a natural and non-confrontational way. The girls also knew that the support and relationships would continue even when the order finished. Some of the girls we spoke to recognised that this had made a difference, they knew that the staff were committed to them for as long as they needed. The results were very impressive. There has been an 84% reduction of female first time entrants since 2009. They have also achieved a reduction in violent offending and reoffending. No girls had been sentenced to custody since 2010.

- 6.9. Due to the efforts of staff to engage with girls we saw good compliance with court orders in 70% of cases. Where girls had not complied it was most often due to a lack of understanding of the reason for non-compliance, including identifying if the girl felt safe in the YOT.
- 6.10. Overall, three-quarters of cases demonstrated that action had been taken which had helped to safeguard and protect individuals. Analysis of the data broken down to individual YOTs showed that in all but one YOT there were occasions where not all the appropriate action had been taken.
- 6.11. A number of girls required support after the formal contact with the YOT had ended. Some of the YOTs had continued to work with these girls on a voluntary basis but there was a need for a clear exit strategy in all cases. Without strategic support it became very difficult to plan and acquire effective support at the end of the order. Where girls continued to be supported by YOTs post-order it is critical that this does not act as a barrier to the provision of mainstream support and that partner agencies are clear about the nature and limits of such contact.

### **Good practice example: Desistance from crime**

Karen had a baby girl and shortly after, the baby's father died. Karen found it very hard to cope with this and it affected her bond with the baby. She then formed a relationship with another boy, he was a heavy drug user and Karen started to use drugs. The relationship was violent and in order to protect her baby she chose to place her in care. The relationship with her partner deteriorated, the violence escalated and she began to retaliate. She assaulted a police officer and was found with drugs. She was unable to have access to her baby and Karen attempted to kill herself.

She came to the YOS, shy and withdrawn, uncomfortable in groups. Over the course of a year, Karen has taken part in activities that increased her confidence, she completed sections of a Duke of Edinburgh Award, and she feels her life is more stable. She has been given support to find accommodation and has stopped using drugs. She is now having contact with her baby. She has not reoffended.

Karen identified that having a variety of activities was important as it occupied her mind and stopped her going over her past mistakes and regrets; she enjoyed new challenges and achieving goals. The continued support of staff through voluntary involvement was a crucial factor in helping Karen achieve longer term objectives. Most importantly she had the time to change given the voluntary involvement and she felt safe.

### **Conclusion**

At a strategic level the fact that outcomes for girls are not monitored or analysed in a sophisticated and comprehensive manner means that the providers of services do not always know what works for this group, and are unable to tell if girls are doing better or worse than boys. At an operational level the current broad measures (such as return to education) do not pick up the subtle but necessary small changes the girls need to make.

There are some grounds for optimism that indicates that YOT staff are having an impact on the thinking and behaviour of girls, even if they are not always clear about how they achieve this. The downside to this is the very disappointing findings in relation to girls who are Looked After and are also subject to supervision by the YOT.

Given the nature of the problems many of the girls face who are in the criminal justice system there is a need for careful thought about how help and support continues to be provided when their contact with a YOT ends. If attention is not paid to this, there is a danger that many will return to offending.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Glossary

Asset	Structured assessment tool based on research and developed by the Youth Justice Board looking at the child or young person's offence, personal circumstances, attitudes and beliefs which have contributed to their offending behaviour
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: part of the National Health Service, providing specialist mental health and behavioural services to children and young people up to at least 16 years of age
CSSIW	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales
DTO	Detention and training order: a custodial sentence for the young
ETE	Education, training and employment: work to improve an individual's learning, and to increase their employment prospects
Looked After (Child)	Term used to identify a child or young person whose care and welfare has been taken by a local authority. This status can be directed by a court or through a voluntary arrangement with the parents/carers or individual child or young person. Different rights and responsibilities are assigned by law dependent on the looked after status
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements: where probation, police, prison and other agencies work together locally to manage offenders who pose a higher risk of harm to others
Risk of harm to others	This is the term generally used by HMI Probation to describe work to protect the public, primarily using restrictive interventions, to keep to a minimum the individual's opportunity to behave in a way that is a risk of harm to others
Safeguarding	The ability to demonstrate that all reasonable action has been taken to keep to a minimum the risk of a child or young person coming to harm
SCH	Secure Children's Home: Secure children's homes have the highest ratio of staff to children, and are generally smaller than other custodial establishments. They accommodate younger children (those aged 12 years to 14 years old), girls up to the age of 16 years, and 15 to 16-year-old boys who are assessed as needing extra care. Further information can be found at <a href="http://www.securechildrenshomes.org.uk/">http://www.securechildrenshomes.org.uk/</a>
STC	Secure Training Centre: Secure training centres are purpose-built centres for children and young people up to the age of 18 years old. They are run by private operators under Youth Justice Board contracts, which set out the way in which the centres are to be run.
YOI	Youth Offender Institution: a custodial establishment intended for offenders aged between 18 years and 20 years old, although they can cater for younger offenders from ages 15 years to 17 years old.
YJB	Youth Justice Board for England and Wales
YOT/YOS/YJS	Youth Offending Team/Youth Offending Service/Youth Justice Service

## Appendix 2: Role of the inspectorate and code of practice

### HMI Probation

Information on the Role of HMI Probation and Code of Practice can be found on our website:

[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation)

The Inspectorate is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

HM Chief Inspector of Probation  
1st Floor, Manchester Civil Justice Centre  
1 Bridge Street West  
Manchester, M3 3FX

### Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Information on the Role of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and Code of Practice can be found on their website:

[www.cssiw.org.uk/](http://www.cssiw.org.uk/)

The Inspectorate is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

HM Chief Inspector of Care and Social Services in Wales  
National Office, Welsh Government, Rhydycar Business Park  
Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 1UZ

### Care Quality Commission

Information on the Role of the Care Quality Commission and Code of Practice can be found on their website:

<http://www.cqc.org.uk/>

The Commission is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

CQC National Customer Service Centre  
Citygate  
Gallowgate  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA  
Cardiff CF24 5JW

### HMI Constabulary

Information on the Role of HMI Constabulary and Code of Practice can be found on their website:

[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/about-us/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/about-us/)

The Inspectorate is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary  
6th Floor, Globe House, 89 Eccleston Square  
London, SW1V 1PN

## **HMI Prisons**

Information on the Role of HMI Prisons and Code of Practice can be found on their website:

[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-hmi-prison](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/about-hmi-prison)

The Inspectorate is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons  
Victory House, 6th Floor, 30-34 Kingsway  
London, WC2B 6EX

## **Ofsted**

Information on the Role of Ofsted and Code of Practice can be found on their website:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

The Inspectorate is a public body. Anyone wishing to comment on an inspection, a report or any other matter falling within its remit should write to:

HM Chief Inspector of Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills  
Aviation House, 125 Kingsway  
London, WC2B 6SE

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