

Introduction

The aim of this briefing sheet is to give an overview of the main themes that arose from a networking session in May 2016 facilitated by Partnership for Young London that looked at the emerging themes in work with girls and young women across London and how this knowledge can inform policy and practice in this field. There were representatives from 16 different agencies/organisations present on the day including speakers from, Girlguiding, Aspire Creativity, Caxton Youth Organisation and Partnership for Young London. Details of reports cited in this briefing paper can be found in the reference section.

The overarching aim of work with girls and young women is to empower them to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives where they are afforded opportunities to reach their full potential. Kabeer (1999) argues that to empower girls and young women the following criteria, which are indivisible, must be met. Girls and young women must have:

- Ownership of resources
- The power to participate in decision making processes that allow for self-agency
- Well-being/Achievement

A focal point underpinning all discussions was the acknowledgement that the impact of varying levels of oppression does not occur to individuals or communities in isolation; there is a point where these factors intersect resulting in greater levels of disadvantage. Crenshaw (1991) talks about this in relation to the lives of African American women who are subjected to sexual and domestic violence. She describes the process of multiple forms of discrimination overlapping, and thereby compounding discrimination, as intersectionality. Her theoretical model is now widely used to examine the effects of domination and inequality on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups from every social strata.

Summary of the Key Themes

Spaces for girls and young women

Providing the opportunity for young women to engage with their peers in a single gendered environment on a regular basis enables opportunities for girls and young women to explore topical issues and also creates room for them to build knowledge, learn new skills and build meaningful relationships with professionals, as well as their peer group.

A holistic approach to delivering work with girls and young women

Underpinning best practice is the need to continue working across sectors to build better pathways of referral for girls and young women and optimise the potential to utilise resources. However, research suggests that those with the greatest need are still the least likely to access services so more needs to be done to ensure that professionals are working in a joined up way and developing better networks amongst other service providers. For example, there is a scarcity of provision for young women with learning disabilities. It is recognised that more needs to be done to identify support for young women with learning disabilities once they leave formal education. Dartington Social Research Unit (2015) has developed a useful report that investigates how professionals and volunteers involved in youth work can better support vulnerable young people facing major disadvantage. The findings outline conversations with service users and the importance of building strong relationships.

Building resilience and raising self esteem

There is a strong expectation on professionals to address high levels of trauma experienced by young women by providing therapeutic support to build resilience and raise low levels of self-esteem. Fulfilling this need can often be problematic with the stretch on resources in the current climate of austerity. In addition to this significant numbers of young women may be extremely vulnerable but still not meet increasingly high thresholds of need. This reinforces the necessity to strengthen the practice of working in collaboration; pooling resources and intelligence around the requirements of girls and young women. Research by Sally Armstrong (2010) highlights that the greatest seismic shifts in gender equality both at a local and global level come when agencies work together to align services.

Professionals should also support grassroots organisations with expertise, they are often small charities operating on very tight budgets and most vulnerable to closure if not accessed by other partners and service users, such as those delivering services on VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls). Professionals are encouraged to research the VCS (Voluntary and Community Service) in their boroughs and fully utilise the resources available.

Darlington et al (2011) have compiled a comprehensive report with Demos on how low self-esteem can affect the successful transition into adulthood for young women.

Measuring outcomes

Partnership for Young London has compiled a briefing sheet of various tools for measuring outcomes in youth work. Measuring 'soft outcomes' can be more challenging than those deemed more tangible however, there are more resources available to assist with this process. The 'Talent Toolbox' was cited as being effective as it allows young people to measure the 'distance travelled'. There is also a 'Soft Skills Forum' developed by Yes Futures. A professional peer forum previously called the Youth Work Evidence Group has merged with the Soft Skills Forum and is now referred to as the Regional Impact Network. This is lead by London Youth. Colleagues can discuss, debate and analyse the work of measuring outcomes in more depth and gain invaluable support and guidance from each other. These meetings are attended by professionals with a range of different experience around measuring impact. Details of how to get involved are at the end of this briefing sheet.

Presentations

Speakers from the event were invited to give more in depth analysis of work being done to address the needs of girls and young women in mainstream work and more specialised initiatives.

Girlguiding

Jo Hobbs is the Director of Guiding Services at Girlguiding. Jo was invited to give an overview of the work that Girlguiding does generally and then to address work being done to support young women from LGBT communities. Jo's presentation can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2elAjlh>

Aspire Creativity

Janett Plummer-Akinfie is the founder member of Aspire Creativity. Janett was invited to share knowledge and expertise on work being done to support girls and young women from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. Janett's presentation can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2dmtEf2>

Caxton Youth Organisation

Rosemary Swainston is a youth worker for Caxton Youth Organisation. Rose was invited to share knowledge and experience on working with young women with Learning Disabilities at this Westminster project. Rose's presentation can be found here:

<http://bit.ly/2dJLyeh>

Ascent

Sandra Vacciana gave an overview of the work being delivered through the Ascent programme. Ascent is delivered through the VAWG Consortium and funded through London Councils. The Consortium is made up of 22 organisations working in partnership to deliver a range of services from intervention to prevention, in diverse communities across the Capital to raise awareness around VAWG issues and provide front-line services for those directly affected by the issue. For more information on the Ascent programme go to: info@solacewomensaid.org

In-Align

Anita Bhardwaj is an Independent Development Consultant at In-Align. Anita has expertise in delivering services to raise awareness on VAWG issues. She recently shared information regarding addressing the needs of BAME young women in relation to VAWG.

Anita's presentation can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2dfMpoJ>

FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development)

An African Diaspora led charity Safeguarding the health and rights of girls and women. FORWARD's presentation can be found here:

<http://bit.ly/2d5j3HK>

List of Agencies Delivering Girls and Young Women's Work in London

Name	Organisation	Job Title	Email
Kay Doragh	Plan UK	Youth Engagement Coordinator	Kay.Doragh@plan-uk.org
Hajra Daly	Comic Relief	UK Grants Officer	h.daly@comirelief.com
Erika Jenkins	Barking and Dagenham CVS	Chief Executive	erika.jenkins@bdcvs.org.uk
Sarah Robertson	Future M.O.L.D.S. Communities	MD of Services	sarah@futuremc.org.uk
Lorraine Faissal	Clean Break	Education Manager	lorraine.faissal@cleanbreak.org.uk
Jennifer Ball	Mousetrap Theatre Projects	Youth Engagement Manager	jennifer@mousetrap.org.uk
Venessa Bobb	A2ndVoice	Managing Director	a2ndvoice@gmail.com
Jennifer McDermott	CEO	Cassandra Learning Centre	jennifer@clcentre.org.uk
Claire Cowper	Nia	Volunteer Coordinator Rape Crisis	ccowper@niaendingviolence.org.uk
Sonia McCollin	Epic CIC	Programme Coordinator	sonia.mccollin@epiccic.org.uk
Aileen Hamdan	Daulo	Director	aileen@daolu.co.uk
Almond Torres	Epic CIC	Princes Trust Advisor Epic CIC	almond.hillard-torres@epiccic.org.uk
Mark Gale	Young Women's Trust	Campaigns Manager	mark.gale@youngwomenstrust.org
Jo Hobbs	Girl Guiding	Director of Guiding Services	Jo.Hobbs@girlguiding.org.uk
Rose Swainston	Caxton Youth Organisation	Youth Worker	rose_caxtonyouth.org@btinternet.com
Janett Plummer-Akinfie	Aspire Creativity	Director	aspirecreativity@googlemail.com

Reference List

Armstrong, S. (2010) IdeaCity10. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2bk3rAz> [Accessed August 2016]

Crenshaw, K. (1991) Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour. Available from: <http://bit.ly/1g8k3Xo> [Accessed August 2016]

Darlington, R et al. (2011) Teenage Girls' Self Esteem is More Than Skin Deep: Through the Looking Glass. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2b92UQh> [Accessed July 2016]

Dartington Research Unit. (2015) Bringing Everything I am into One Place. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2aXpldn> [Accessed July 2016]

Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, Agency Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2buO3xL> [Accessed July 2016]

Partnership for Young London. (2016) Links Sheet. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2fh06Tc> [Accessed July 2016]

For further details on the Regional Impact Network contact Laura Blazey Head of Learning London Youth Laura.Blazey@londonyouth.org