



Pulling together for the girls!

Briefing

In October 2014 Up-2-Us organized an event to raise awareness of the challenges and solutions to working with high risk and vulnerable young women in Scotland. The event brought together partners, policy makers and interested parties from statutory and non-statutory services. The inputs at the day came from young women, experienced workers, police, academics, politicians and the prison service.

Challenges

The day was about sharing learned experiences and the mix of attendees allowed for wide ranging discussions;

- A key challenge identified was the lack of resources for gendered needs. We know that girls can find themselves in crisis and they can need support from services outside of 9-5. Up-2-Us' on-call service means we can support girls in person at crisis points 24/7, this should be common practice, services should be there for young women at the times that matter.
- Another challenge was the lack of significance placed on transitional stages. Welfare approaches are often withdrawn when girls turn 16, for example supervision orders end and instead of being dealt with by the hearing system girls are introduced to the criminal justice system. The switch in system severity and consequence highlights a policy gap concerning transitions of young women between child and adult systems and a lack of time given to young women to develop and mature at a pace which is in line with their historical background and the support around them.
- Another factor was difficulty engaging young women. Girls often have very troubled upbringings, and as a result they develop particular attachment styles which means they can struggle with communicating their needs. Yet relationships are so pivotal to girls' desistance and success that knowing how and when to engage is essential. Up-2-Us has learnt that girls respond most openly to practitioners who are respectful, patient and non-judgmental.
- It was noted that between agency communication and information sharing can be a struggle, yet it is essential to ensure holistic support is provided. It is important to have respect and understanding of the roles of each agency involved in the care plan.
- Another key challenge was about society and patriarchal culture. Inequality remains in society and with it a need to promote non-stereotypical attitudes. Furthermore stigma is incredibly debilitating for young women, and especially to those who have lived in care, who have been secured or in prison, and for those with mental health problems. On top of attitudes towards mental health, the time it can take to access support can be frustratingly lengthy.

Solutions

Up-2-Us wanted to gain insight into how other sectors and organisations conceptualize what works for young women. After identifying the challenges delegates came together to think about best practice;



- Only one factor was raised about direct interface with girls, this was about the relationship between the worker and girl and how important the consistency of the relationship is.
- The other solutions focused on wider challenges. About being co-ordinated and ensuring open communication between partners. However, it was noted we need to move further than this and start to invite each other to events across authorities and encompass all sectors in meetings and reviews respectfully.
- There was also interest in influencing the direction of policy. Delegates are calling for a more welfare based approach in criminal justice and to make use of the Children's Hearing System in preventing the criminalisation of girls. With this comes an undertaking to understand girls and patterns of desistance much more acutely.
- The delegates were more than aware of the lack of resources they and others have to combat the issues girls face. They state that greater commitment from government and funders would ensure the continuation of services specifically designed for the needs of young women, particularly in relation to health and bridging the gaps between services.
- Accommodation was raised as another important factor, girls' rate this as being one of the vital elements to re-imagining their lives. Throughout the day it was accepted that more support was needed for those in care and moving on, and for those who experience homelessness. Some issues may be alleviated by the new Children and Young People's Bill. However it is clear that more appropriate housing options are needed for girls moving on, from local authority and resources at crisis points/out of hours are needed to support young women when they find themselves without a safe place to sleep.
- Group discussion also focused on the impact early intervention could have, and the need for more family support. Targeting families to keep them together with intensive support will help to lessen the need for secure accommodation and custody which often follows.

Delegate Feedback

From the beginning of the day it was made clear that Up-2-Us wanted the event to be more than a talking shop, we wanted people to share in their learning and consider their own practice;

- The feedback from the day sums up what Up-2-Us wanted to achieve, delegates indicated that they had learned more about the difficulties girls face, acknowledged the gaps in service provision for young women, and were encouraged by the practice experience demonstrating the importance of gender specific work.
- The attendees were asked if the event made an impact on how they think about or will work with high risk young women. Respondents indicated that the event was useful for thinking about common challenges and how partners can work together to help address them. Others indicated that the day raised their awareness of the resources used and the research that has been undertaken about girls.
- Moving forward from the day the delegates want to explore ways that partners can collaborate to effectively address the challenges, see through the development of a similar service for vulnerable girls who do not meet CAMHS criteria, and support more work at early year stages. They specifically want to see Up-2-Us continue to lobby for better provision for young women, requested future events which would emphasize how to move forward and a regroup in the near future to look at the progress made. Others requested further training or awareness raising about the factors which influence risky and



criminogenic behaviour, and to share the statistics and information at local and policy levels to make real change.

Commitment

Up-2-Us are committed to learning from practice and from partners. As part of our action plan around the girls and young women's initiative Up-2-Us are writing papers to disseminate findings about risk, vulnerability and desistance and girls pathways to these, what is best practice for working with girls, and with professionals. Furthermore Up-2-Us use a Strength & Resilience Monitor for young women and the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice has recently become involved to support us to pilot this and conduct research about its usefulness. In regard to this we are in talks with local authorities, prison service, voluntary sector, and secure accommodation about rolling out trialing of the tool in 2015. Finally, Up-2-Us will continue its intensive support advocating for young women and working with others to bridge the gaps in service provision.

Gail Wilson, Research and Policy Officer for Up-2-Us.

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