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	Which area of the review are you responding to? (please mark X)
Prevention strand	X
Review of disabled children	
Strategy for youth services	X
Review of high cost, high harm families	X

**YWCA England & Wales response to a call for evidence -
DfES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young
People**



Summary

YWCA England & Wales is the leading charity working with young women facing poverty, discrimination or abuse. We provide support, information and the opportunity to learn. We campaign with young women and carry out research with them on issues they feel are holding them back.

Children and Young People's Review – Prevention

Young mothers and their children - Prejudice against young mothers continues to perpetuate their social exclusion. Many young mothers do aspire to achieve, but often lack the support required to realise their goals. YWCA has found that with the right support young mothers thrive and so do their children, but this work is intensive and needs investment and time. YWCA remains concerned that young mothers' social exclusion and disadvantage is perpetuated by low benefits and poor educational opportunities.

Vulnerable young women - YWCA is able to reach out to the most vulnerable young women by offering women-only, culturally-appropriate services that meet a variety of needs in one place.

Young women's poverty - Tackling young women's poverty is the only way to secure young women's prospects for a better future. We want to see improved support to look at career options and to try out non-stereotypical work. Most young women from poorer backgrounds go into the cleaning, catering, caring, clerical and shop work sectors, which are lower paid and perpetuate their financial exclusion. Young women working in these sectors should not be financially penalised, and should be paid an adequate living wage.

A strategy for youth services

Safe spaces to go and things to do – Sadly, too many young women have been attacked, assaulted or feel at risk in the places they go and play, hang out or meet friends. Young women need safe spaces to meet and do the things they want to. Young women enjoy different activities to young men but they also enjoy trying out non-stereotypical activities in a safe atmosphere. Young women often hang out on the streets because there is nothing else for them to do and nowhere to go. Home is not always a safe place and when it is, there is often pressure to look after siblings and not meet with friends. Many youth clubs are run down with limited facilities and dominated by the needs of young men.

Support to participate – YWCA welcomes the government's proposals to ensure that young people have a say in youth facilities. However, we know that participation takes confidence, self-esteem and the ability to speak up, something many young women don't have. In the diverse communities in which we work, young women can have set roles; these often do not include speaking out or taking the lead on decisionmaking. We want to make sure that all young women have the support they need to build their confidence and abilities so that they are able to fully participate. Needs assessments and service reviews must make sure they involve young women in meaningful ways. They must also target young women from diverse communities to achieve an accurate picture of young women's needs.

Women-only space – YWCA provides support in women-only spaces. Young women and young men have different needs. Women-only youth work allows young women to build their self-esteem and discuss their feelings and experiences in a safe space. Women-only space allows young women to try out new activities and challenge gender stereotypes that may set them back later in life.

Diversity - An overarching strategy for youth services government must address the impact local service delivery has on diverse groups of young people. We are concerned that some ethnic minority young women find that there are few activities or places to go that are culturally suitable or of interest to them and they risk being disengaged from other support services too. Diversity must include gender.

Youth work - YWCA would like to see youth work training available in more locations across England and Wales. We want to see youth work promoted as a valid career and financial incentives to help students take up the JNC qualification.

“High cost, high harm” families

As this review aims to improve services’ effectiveness in preventing families from getting caught in a cycle of low attainment, high cost and high harm, YWCA would like to raise concerns about some young women in society at risk of social exclusion and severe negative outcomes. We would however, strongly stand against labelling any group as a social problem or being “high harm”.

Young mothers – with the right support there is no need for young mothers and their children to become high cost, high harm families.

Young women in poverty - YWCA found that young women often feel powerless to escape poverty. Children and young people’s services have an enormous role to play in addressing these barriers.

Young women disengaged from education - YWCA remains concerned about the situation of young women who are unhappy at school and disengage from the education system. These young women have now been clearly documented as those most at risk of social exclusion or likely to become unintentionally pregnant at an early age.

Young Gypsy and Traveller women - Young Gypsy and Traveller women face a number of barriers that affect them both because of their race and ethnicity and because of their gender. They risk extreme social exclusion, particularly poor health outcomes. Children and young people’s services must take a dual approach to supporting these young women.

**YWCA England & Wales response to a call for evidence -
DfES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young
People**



Introduction to the work of YWCA

YWCA England & Wales is the leading charity working with young women facing poverty, discrimination or abuse. We provide support, information and the opportunity to learn. We campaign with young women and carry out research with them on issues they feel are holding them back.

Our goal is to help young women change the world they live in and become the women they want to be.

In a safe environment, we support young women to challenge violence or abuse, learn new skills, finish their education and improve their health and self-esteem. In all our work, we listen to what young women need and work with them to influence policy, overcome barriers and change negative attitudes.

Children and Young People's Review – Prevention

Life chances of young mothers

YWCA welcomes new government plans to increase support for new mothers, including young mothers, and for increase in access to contraception and improved quality of sex and relationships education. We also welcome plans to act on the fact that disengagement from school and low educational achievement are pivotal factors in unintended or early pregnancy. All such initiatives are certain to reduce the number of socially-excluded young women and unintended pregnancies.

However, YWCA remains gravely concerned about the government's presentation of young mothers as a "social problem". The young women we work with do often have complex needs and are struggling with life, but they are also mothers working hard to do the best for their children. It is the poverty and current and future social exclusion they are facing that is the social problem, not them and their children. Such attitudes from government are perpetuated by the media and public and become prejudice and discrimination against a group of young women. This simply adds to their social exclusion, makes them wary of asking for help and using statutory services and only has a negative impact on young women.

Many young mums tell us that they are determined to get a better future for themselves and their children, and to achieve in work and education once they are ready. YWCA believes that it is not the case that they do not aspire to achieve, but rather that they often lack the support required to realise their goals. YWCA has found that with the right support young mothers thrive and succeed and so do their children, but this work is intensive and needs investment and time.

Poverty and social exclusion of both mother and child

YWCA remains concerned that young mothers' social exclusion and disadvantage is perpetuated by low benefits and poor educational opportunities.¹

Young women, including young pregnant women and young mothers continue to receive £22.85 less in benefits than their 25-year-old counterparts, despite having to meet similar costs. This not only jeopardises the life chances of the young woman herself, but also those of the child and any future children.

The health of the mother-to-be during pregnancy is critical for the outcomes of mother and child. We are particularly concerned with the situation of *young* pregnant women, most of whom cannot afford the amount recommended for a modest but adequate diet².

As a result of these concerns, we have called on the Government to offer additional financial support during pregnancy to promote the wellbeing of mother and child and alleviate poverty. This should include earlier access to income support when pregnant, paid with a 'pregnancy premium' to ensure young women can afford a healthy diet.

The rate of income support should be equal for younger and older mothers to promote fairness and inclusiveness and to put an end to mother's and children's poverty.

We feel that tackling young women's poverty, and in particular young mums' and young pregnant women's poverty would result in much faster progress to achieving the government's child poverty target at a relatively modest cost. We also feel it would result in much greater progress towards the target on teenage pregnancy.

Improved education

Evidence has shown that young mothers are at a particular disadvantage due to the poor educational opportunities available to them. YWCA wants to see:

- Every local education authority have specialist educational provision for young mothers, which raises their aspirations and leads to sustainable employment or further education and training.

¹ See attached YWCA documents *Too Much Too Young? Teenage pregnancy and young motherhood in England and Wales* and *Great Expectations: How realistic are the government's targets to get 60 per cent of young mothers into education, employment or training?* for further evidence

² Burchett H. and Seeley A., (2003) *'Good Enough to Eat? The diet of pregnant teenagers'*, London, Maternity Alliance and Food Commission

- Government strengthen and reinforce guidance to schools to ensure that pregnant teenagers and young mums are treated fairly and don't face discrimination.
- Ofsted undertake an across-the-board review of all education and training provision for pregnant teenagers and young mums to ensure that in availability and quality it is supporting young mums to have a better future.

What works in reaching out to the most vulnerable families to ensure they are able to take full advantage of service provision, especially in the early years?

YWCA is able to reach out to the most vulnerable young women in areas of socio-economic deprivation. We work with young mothers, lesbian and bisexual women, refugee and asylum seeking young women, young women experiencing violence or abuse or with substance use problems and Black and minority ethnic young women including Gypsy and Traveller young women and Pakistani and Bangladeshi young women. Our centres work because they combine a safe welcoming environment with informal education, IT skills, job seeking skills, signposting to education, benefits and support along with parenting skills, first aid and health information. All of this is delivered in a women-only environment which works for vulnerable young women.³ We provide counselling and information in addition to our core group work activities and we provide a crèche for young women's children. This combination addresses young women's needs according to their situation in life and they are involved voluntarily.

To reach the most vulnerable young women services must reflect their diversity. Some young women avoid services because they do not provide activities that are suitable for them as young women; others find the practicalities, for example having a child or inappropriate and inconsiderate scheduling inhibit their involvement. Other young women avoid using some services because they are not culturally appropriate.

YWCA recommends that the effectiveness of all services for children and young people are assessed in part according to their impact on diverse groups of young people. This must include gender as part of the analysis.

What would be the impact of more preventative services and early intervention on the life chances of children and young people and on the value for money of public spending on children, young people and families?

YWCA's work is successful but intensive. It requires long-term one-to-one contact with professionals and small group work. An investment in work with young women both before they display specific needs and as they begin to struggle with school, become pregnant or get involved in substance abuse or crime is cost effective in the long run. Such work reduces the long term need for benefits, support services and it can reduce negative health outcomes.

However, funding remains orientated around number crunching and targets. YWCA worked with 4,500 young women last year and this work was of a very high standard with good

³ For evidence of this work see a summary of our literature review in *Youth Matters: YWCA response and Why only women?*

outcomes. Such outcomes are measured in distance travelled rather than as targets and this remains difficult to secure funding for.

Support for employment

The difficulty that young women who grow up in poorer areas have in escaping and remaining out of poverty in the long-term underpins many perceived social problems such as teenage pregnancy. Tackling young women's poverty is the only way to secure young women's prospects for a better future. Whilst we warmly welcome the government's efforts to reduce child poverty in the UK, we are dismayed at the lack of gender analysis in its existing strategy, and the lack of acknowledgement given to the need for support to make positive choices that lift young women out of poverty in the long term during their teenage years. YWCA is working on a new project to examine how young women can escape poverty, focussing on the choices that young women growing up in poorer communities make about work.

The research strand of the project will look at the financial effect of work choices on young women's persistent poverty; at best practice in supporting young women to make choices about work that don't prolong their poverty; at gaps in current support for young women to find out about work; and at young women's own experiences of the youth and careers support systems. The research reports will be published in early 2007. We would be happy to keep DfES and the Treasury up-to-date with the results of our research to feed into this review. The research findings will support YWCA lobbying for better support for disadvantaged young women to break the cycle of poverty.

Services for children and young people have an enormous role to play in supporting young women, particularly those who are not achieving in the formal education system. YWCA has several models of informal education that work with young women facing poverty, discrimination or abuse:

Case Study – YWCA St Helen's Access to Opportunities (A²O)

YWCA St Helens runs an Access to Opportunities (A²O) group for young women. A²O is an alternative education provision aimed at young women in school years 10 and 11 who are not attending mainstream education for numerous reasons. Many of the young women attending have had very difficult times in school and need support to deal with this and numerous other issues. The informal setting enables YWCA staff to build relationships with some of the most hard-to-reach young women. The programme works alongside the pupil referral service to ensure that the young women are receiving the best alternative to mainstream education.

In 2003, the A²O programme at YWCA St Helens was recognised as a model of good practice by an Ofsted inspection of voluntary sector provision. It was funded by the Single Regeneration Budget for St Helens and by individual schools.

The 2003 A²O group was made up of young women who were excluded from school and regularly participated in risk-taking behaviour, for example, underage drinking, drug use and risky sexual activity.

The young women participated in a programme of personal development delivered within a group work setting. This included learning about the facts surrounding their behaviour – e.g. the physical affects of drug and alcohol use – as well as exploring the underpinning reasons

why they were behaving in this manner. Without addressing these underpinning reasons it was unlikely that a reduction in these antisocial behaviours would be achieved. Young women are under a variety of pressures to behave in certain ways. It is necessary to explore these pressures and support them to establish and confirm their own identities. When young women feel secure within themselves they are more likely to challenge peer pressure, social pressure and teasing about their behaviour and make their own decisions and choices.

External factors contributing to antisocial behaviour also include a lack of places to go and things to do in the evening; the cultural divide and different expectations between young people who achieve at school and young people who do not; the fact that young women still do not have equal status with young men; poverty; lack of opportunities; and the sexual exploitation experienced by young women.

The A²O group continues to be successful because the young women are treated with respect and their views and opinions are recognised as important. Young women who participate in antisocial behaviour benefit from a single-sex environment because it encourages them to explore their own issues and take responsibility for their choices and actions. Similarly socially-excluded young men benefit from a single-sex environment where they can explore stereotypes of masculinity in a safe, non-judgemental setting.

Tackling antisocial behaviour is more than simply looking at the physical affects of drug and alcohol use, although that is important. It is about addressing fundamental inequalities that teach young women how to behave, reinforcing their low status in society.

How can we build the capacity of parents, families and communities to shape the design and delivery of services for children and young people?

YWCA welcomes the government's commitment to increasing consultation with young people. YWCA knows that young women will use services that are tailored to meet their needs. The best way to achieve this is to consult with young women and make sure that they take part in designing the services they need.

YWCA is committed to developing its research, policy and campaigning work with young women so that they are able to contribute meaningfully to our work. We feel young women's participation in designing youth services is essential if we are to get it right.

We are also pioneering new methods of Participatory Action Research (PAR) with young women in our 'It's a Sex Thing' project. This allows young women to take control of the research themselves as the power differential between the researcher and subject is removed⁴. In PAR, action takes primacy and the process directly connects young women's needs with local service commissioners. This project will contribute new awareness of young women's interests and concerns about sexual health and sex and relationships to policymaking in this area.

⁴ for more information visit <http://www.ywca.org.uk/itsasexthing.asp> or contact YWCA

In practice, we know that participation takes confidence, self-esteem and the ability to speak up, something many young women do not have. We have found that young women face a number of barriers to participation.⁵ Some lack the confidence and sense of self-worth to speak up; some face so many other barriers in their lives that they cannot consider participating in activities outside their immediate lives:

“...if you haven’t got a nice place to live and have a baby and have got to keep warm and fed you need to think about that. You can’t deal with the rest, you can’t participate. The young women come here to recognise their own abilities and feel respect for themselves.” Project Manager, YWCA Northampton.



Case Study: The ability to participate meaningfully. Candice from YWCA St Helens young women’s centre

“Two years ago I didn’t believe that I could do anything. I was depressed, alone, had no confidence and was suffering from anorexia. Since then, YWCA has changed my life.”

“My Mum disappeared from my life when I was very little and my Dad died when I was six, so I grew up with distant relatives. I was referred to YWCA because my family circumstances had become really traumatic. When I first attended YWCA I was really nervous and very scared. But the staff were welcoming and so supportive. At last for the first time in my life everything began to change for the better. I had people I could talk to, who genuinely cared, supported me and encouraged me. With their help I could begin to face my past. I began to realise that I could achieve anything I wanted to and that no one could hold me back.”

“Before coming to YWCA I would never have stood up for myself and told people my views. Now I have strong opinions on lots of things and I know other young women do too. But I’m aware of how few speak up because they have no confidence or are not encouraged to do so. That’s a shame. I’ve recently been elected as a member of the UK Youth Parliament. It’s so important to stand up for what you believe in. YWCA has shown me respect, helped me build my confidence and has given me back my life. Now I really want to learn things so that I can get on and be successful in life. At the moment I am studying at college and I want to go to university in the hope that eventually I can become a solicitor or join the RAF. There’s so much I want to do and nothing is out of reach!”

Additionally, in the diverse and often very disadvantaged communities we work in, young women can be expected to fulfil very traditional roles based on gender stereotypes. This occurs not just in minority ethnic communities but also in majority-white deprived areas too. These roles often do not include speaking out or taking the lead on decision-making. We want to make sure that all young women have the support they need to build their confidence and abilities so that they are able to fully participate.

YWCA knows that these barriers can only be overcome through periods of one-to-one work, targeted group support work and personal development work with specialist youth workers. Personal development work includes looking at a young woman’s self-esteem and sense of worth. It may look at anger management, behaviour problems or risk-taking and self harm. It will involve working with her to think about her future, where she wants to go and what barriers

⁵ YWCA Turning Opinion into Action: young women and participation [2003: YWCA: Oxford]

are standing in her way. Participation, particularly at an advanced enough level to engage in planning children and young people's services, is for many young women a great challenge. However, the only way to engage those who are most in need of support and most likely to be disengaged is to incorporate them in the design of consultations and services from the start.

This is not to say that young women cannot participate but it is important to note that some need a lot of support, possibly over a period of a few years, along with encouragement and development before they are able to contribute and feel engaged. It is also important to note that young women engage best when the opportunities are tailored to their needs and available at a level they can comprehend.

Youth engagement

YWCA is also concerned that current plans for children and young people assume a level of overall engagement with the community from young people that is not necessarily there. Plans to tackle youth disadvantage based on high levels of engagement will always fail the most excluded young people. Many young women have had such appalling experiences from school, social services, the police and similar agencies, that they are alienated from and wary of any statutory service, and sometimes even from leisure opportunities. They often only engage occasionally with drop-in, non-statutory support which requires little commitment and does not need personal details to be shared. YWCA would recommend that such support is recognised for its value.

Consultations

The government also needs to invest more effectively in young people's consultations in the future. YWCA invests significant finances, time and energy into its consultations with young women, many of whom faced enormous disadvantages in their lives. This could never be done without the considerable effort invested by youth workers over the past years to build up the young women's confidence and ability to engage with a set of government policies. Where the voluntary and community sector is successful in reaching the most socially excluded young people, it needs resources to ensure they can participate in consultations.

Strategy for Youth services.

YWCA has been working with a coalition of youth organisations to respond to government in August⁶. The response highlighted the following matters:

- Young People with Complex Needs
- The role of the Trusted Adult
- Accessible Youth Services
- Investing in Personal Development
- The Involvement of Young People

YWCA would strongly urge government to work closely with organisations such as ourselves to secure positive outcomes for even the most excluded young people.

Diversity

As an overarching strategy for youth services government must address the impact local service delivery has on diverse groups of young people. YWCA is concerned that young women often do not engage meaningfully in consultations and their needs are overlooked. We are also concerned that some ethnic minority young women find that there are few activities or places to go that are culturally-suitable or of interest to them and they risk being disengaged from other support services too.

Access to youth activities for young women

Sadly, too many young women have been attacked, assaulted or feel at risk in the places they go and play, hang out or meet friends. Young women need safe spaces to meet and do the things they want to. Young people are as diverse as the rest of society and so safe spaces for them also means diverse spaces. Young women enjoy different activities to young men but they also enjoy trying out non-stereotypical activities in a safe atmosphere. We need to banish the days of the youth club where young women can only sit around the pool table to watch or hide in the toilets. This needs investment in quality youth venues, youth worker support, women-only spaces and culturally-appropriate spaces to mention a few.

Young women often hang out on the streets because there is nothing else for them to do and nowhere to go. Home is not always a safe place and when it is, there is often pressure to look after siblings and not meet with friends. Many youth clubs are run down with limited facilities and dominated by the needs of young men.⁷

Building on the Youth Green Paper, is there more that could be done to improve and sustain the effectiveness in the delivery of existing services and activities?

Government should demonstrate a visible and active commitment to diversity in its youth strategies. Although the government is committed to engaging young people from diverse

⁶ See *Children and Young People's Review of Youth Services: Voluntary Youth Agencies Evidence Base*, BYC, Fairbridge, Foyer, NCVYS, The Princes Trust, The Scout Association, YMCA and YWCA submitted August 2006

⁷ For more information on young women's needs see *Youth Matters: YWCA response*

communities, the reality is that diversity has been mainstreamed into indifference. YWCA is extremely concerned that gender is not taken into account. YWCA provides support in women-only spaces. By addressing young women's needs directly we have reached those that are often excluded.

Young women's participation

There needs to be more financial support for the voluntary and community sector to engage young people. We know that many socially excluded young people can be wary of statutory services and avoid them. We also know that the voluntary and community sector works with some of the most excluded young people and engages them in a meaningful way. Such services must be acknowledged and valued for their work. When government wants to engage such young people this can be done by the voluntary sector but it costs a lot of money. Government should show willing to meaningfully engage such young people by investing in the community groups they feel confident to engage with.

What are the particular barriers faced by different groups of young people, including disabled young people, in accessing services, and what are the policy issues that arise? What encourages young people to try new and different kinds of activities from those they already do?

Women-only space

Some young women find that mixed sex youth work settings alone do not meet their needs. They can find that young men dominate or that activities are not sensitive to cultural and gender roles and expectations. YWCA provides support in women-only spaces. Young women and young men have different needs. Women-only youth work allows young women to build their self-esteem and discuss their feelings and experiences in a safe space. There are lots of opportunities for young women and men to do things together yet young people still tend to choose their main friendship groups on a gendered basis. Women-only space allows young women to try out new activities and challenge the gender stereotypes that may set them back later in life.⁸

Q. What evidence is there of the benefits that arise from young people's involvement in design and provision of their activities? What evidence is there of how outcomes have improved as a result?

Case Study: *It's a Girl Thing*

It's a Girl Thing was a one-day event for young women aged 11 to 19 to encourage their participation in democratic processes and their communities. It aimed to bring engagement with political processes alive for young women, build their skills, confidence and knowledge of participation, and encourage them to get involved locally and nationally.

The event achieved a tremendous atmosphere of excitement and inspiration combined with a very friendly approach to meeting and working with new people. It achieved many of its aims

⁸ See *Youth Matters: YWCA response* and *Why Only Women?* for evidence on the effectiveness of women only spaces.

including attracting a very diverse group of attendees in terms of background, abilities and ethnic heritages. The workshop leaders and speakers reflected this diversity and allowed young women to explore new issues and consider new opportunities for participation in public life. Most importantly the event facilitated young women to speak to the conference and to run workshops. Young women opened the event and did all the announcements; they introduced the speakers and closed the day. Young women designed their own workshops and ran them for other young women supported by youth workers. Both staff and participants invested a terrific amount of time and effort into making this day the success it was.

'It's a Girl Thing' encouraged and enabled young women to become more active in public life, politics and their communities, through its innovative and varied programme. This included political speakers, issue-based and practical workshops which raised awareness and developed skills, understanding, confidence and self-esteem, and a moving dance performance on the theme of domestic violence developed by a group of young women. Participatory methods were used to deliver workshops, with a high level of involvement from young women, which enabled young women to engage at whatever level they found most appropriate.



The young women who participated in the conference formed a very diverse group, with differing needs and experiences, which influenced the level and extent to which they engaged with different aspects of the conference. A safe, supportive and enabling environment, however, ensured that the conference was generally experienced as very inclusive and young women were able to participate on their terms at different levels, and all take something

positive away from the conference.

Young women were generally successfully supported to increase their knowledge, awareness and understanding of political and democratic processes. Young women did gain confidence, skills and understanding of issues of concern to them and were more able to raise those issues and work together to look at solutions. Young women also became more aware of the needs and concerns of young women across the country. Young women became more aware of the key role that they can play in shaping their communities and the opportunities available to them in public life. At an individual level, young women from a range of backgrounds and capacities gained understanding, confidence and skills, which will enable them to actively participate in public life and decision-making at local and national levels, and strengthen their ability to act as effective and active citizens.

There was a recognition that there is no one blue-print for participation, and that flexible, participatory approaches are needed nationally to enable young women to pitch in and contribute at whatever level they feel is most appropriate. This also requires a reflective learning process, flexible structures, a real commitment to young women's participation at

every level, adequate resourcing, and a willingness to engage in change; that is, a mixture of structural and individual factors⁹.

Q. What attracts people to the youth work workforce? What is less attractive about membership of this workforce?

In YWCA's experience people join the youth work workforce in two different ways, some join because they plan to make a career out of it and start by becoming qualified and then move into management. Others may find that they get involved in youth work almost by accident. They volunteer at their children's youth club or take an interest in activities and eventually become a permanent volunteer leading to qualifications and paid work.

Youth work is attractive to many people because of its flexible hours and evening and weekend work that can be managed around other working and family commitments. However, such flexible hours are also a disadvantage for many people wanting to make youth work their career. Salaries are often low and the short term and volatile nature of funding means that many youth work posts are only funded for a short time, and so lack the security many would want from a career and income.

It is expensive to gain a JNC qualification for youth work. This puts a significant strain on organisations like ourselves who are committed to supporting our staff to develop their qualifications but cannot afford to support large numbers of part time staff to study for 3 years or more. Few universities offer the JNC course; there is a particular shortage of course opportunities in Wales. It would be useful to have a nationally recognised initial qualification in youth work, perhaps equivalent to an NVQ, that volunteers and new staff could aim for before going on to a higher level course.

YWCA would like to see youth work promoted as a valid and enjoyable career to young people, with adequate training and resources to support students available across England and Wales. We would like to see financial incentives, including a reduction in course costs, to help students take up the JNC qualification and encourage new students.

⁹ Includes extracts from an independent evaluation. Evans, R, *It's a Girl Thing: an evaluation of the YWCA young women's participation conference* [2003: ESRC]

“High cost, high harm” families

Who are these families? How can we define them and how many are there?

As this review aims to improve services’ effectiveness in preventing families from getting caught in a cycle of low attainment, “high cost and high harm” YWCA would like to raise concerns about some young women in society at risk of social exclusion and severe negative outcomes. We would however, strongly stand against labelling any group as a social problem or being “high harm”.

Young mothers

There is no need for young mothers and their children to become “high cost, high harm” families. Without doubt many young mothers need additional support and tailored services during pregnancy and in the early years of motherhood. However, YWCA has found that with the right support young mothers are more determined to get an education and a good job to support their children and make them proud. Children often act as a catalyst for motivation and YWCA has learnt to harness this enthusiasm by meeting young mother’s needs, providing informal education and accreditation alongside childcare and family health education in a friendly, women-only environment with crèche facilities. This model has been successful in supporting young mothers to finish their education and move onto further education or work as well as improving their well-being and self esteem.

Young Gypsy and Traveller women

Young Gypsy and Traveller women face a number of barriers that affect them both because of their race and ethnicity and because of their gender. They risk extreme social exclusion which can lead to high cost, particularly in poor health outcomes. YWCA has significant concerns about young Gypsy and Traveller women’s educational engagement, health outcomes, particularly maternal health and their uptake of support services and exclusion from decision making processes that affect them.

Children and young people’s services must take a dual approach to supporting these young women. Firstly all universal services must be challenged to tackle racism and prejudice within the service. Professionals must be trained and informed about cultural needs and differences. Secondly, Gypsy and Traveller young women need targeted services designed to meet their specific cultural and gender needs.¹⁰

Young women in poverty

YWCA found that young women often feel powerless to escape poverty. This is strongly linked to their role in the home. Young women’s powerlessness can be understood in relation to the 3Is, a YWCA model for working with and helping us understand young women and the barriers they face.

Institutionally, young women can be powerless to escape poverty because:

¹⁰ Please see YWCA’s publication *A long way to go: Young Gypsy and Traveller women* for more information

- They have limited access to the labour market.
- They are poorly paid.
- They are financially dependent on others.
- They have less influence over policies that affect them.

Institutional factors such as policies and social norms about women's role in society can contribute to their poverty. These are issues YWCA, and young women, can campaign on.

Inter-personally young women may be powerless to escape poverty because:

- Women sacrifice their own needs and wants for the sake of other family members, especially when children are present.
- Young women hand over money to their boyfriends.
- Women are more likely to manage household debt and the household budget. The strain of this can result in depression and mental health problems, which can affect opportunities for employment.
- Young women in poverty can react to their situation by taking part in anti-social behaviour or self-harming which may affect employment prospects, especially if it leads to imprisonment.
- Young mothers can also be very determined to escape poverty to provide a better future for their children.

This is where young women's relationships, behaviour and expectations of each other come in. These affect whether, or how much poverty a young woman experiences. These are issues YWCA can work with young women on individually or through group work.

Individually young women can be powerless to escape poverty because:

- They have low confidence.
- They have low self-esteem.
- They feel their aspirations are limited because they are poor and female.

This is about how a young woman feels about herself, her attitudes and beliefs. These are also areas YWCA can work with the young women on.

It is important to recognise that young women *do not* all experience poverty in the same way. There are layers of disadvantage which mean that some women are more vulnerable to poverty or that they experience poverty more intensely e.g. carers, BME women, those with disabilities and so on.

YWCA's work in its centres tackles the individual barriers young women experience by building their confidence and self esteem and working with them to explore new opportunities and aspirations. Group work with young women can also tackle how young women work together to both manage and overcome poverty. Children and young people's services have an enormous role to play in addressing these barriers. YWCA will be exploring this matter further in the coming 12 months and is happy to keep DfES and HM Treasury informed.

Young women disengaged from education

YWCA remains concerned about the situation of young women who are unhappy at school and disengage from the education system. These young women have now been clearly documented as those most at risk of social exclusion or likely to become unintentionally pregnant at an early age.

YWCA has consistently urged government agencies to recognise the pivotal role disengagement from education can play in teenage pregnancy. It therefore welcomes initiatives unveiled in the teenage pregnancy action plan to encourage and support young women to achieve in education. YWCA remains concerned however, that some young women experience such complex problems in their lives that school will never be a safe place where they can achieve. New strategies for support for young women focus on deliver through or with schools, this will sadly always exclude a number of young women for whom school was a negative experience. When this is the case, Local Authorities need to make sure that such young women don't become excluded from all educational opportunities or from support services.

YWCA publications attached:

Too much too young? Teenage pregnancy and young motherhood in England and Wales

Great Expectations? How realistic are the government's targets to get 60 per cent of young mothers into education, employment or training?

A long way to go: Gypsy and Traveller young women

Why only women?

Youth Matters: YWCA response