

They know what you are going through': a service response to young people who have experienced the impact of domestic abuse

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Abstract

Riverside Women's Aid offers a specialised youth service for young people who have experienced or been affected by domestic abuse in one town in Scotland. This article discusses findings from a research evaluation that examined the advantages of participating in this service. The experiences of young people and youth workers involved showed a commitment to youth work values and methods that contributed to support and helped reduce feelings of isolation. The findings suggested that one-to-one support and group work sessions brought benefits in establishing empathy and generating positive experiences. This helped the young people to better understand domestic abuse and to feel safe and confident about working through their feelings and making new friends. Analysis also suggested that young people valued the services provided by qualified and experienced Women's Aid youth workers, which they perceived as different from other youth work services. The arguments for this kind of specialist service were compelling, yet analysis highlighted a need for caution in order to avoid creating dependency. There were also calls for improved communication and understanding among partner agencies involved in work with young people.

Keywords: domestic abuse, young people, specialist youth work,

Introduction

This article is drawn from an evaluation of a children and young people's service, run by a Riverside WA. The evaluation was commissioned to help gain understanding of young people's perspectives on a specialised youth service that centred on dealing with issues related to domestic abuse. Specifically the research aimed to examine advantages and disadvantages of participating in this service and to consider areas for improvement. It established how the service had a positive impact on the lives of the young people. It also questioned whether the young people's understanding of domestic violence was increased through participation and if they felt safer because of the support available.

The research was commissioned as part of an on-going campaign for investment in services for young people who were, or remained, impacted by domestic abuse. In addition to the young people involved, the study also sought the views of workers and partner agencies, to strengthen the veracity of claims and any subsequent funding applications. While appropriate levels of rigour were applied to data collection and analysis, this corroborating data helped to triangulate information from different sources and so established aspects which merit further exploration.

The article begins by exploring literature around the impact of familial domestic abuse on children and young people. It then explores the background to the creation of a specialised service for young people who have experienced domestic abuse and discusses the methodological approaches adopted. The findings are used to explore different elements of the service including the one-to-one support, group work sessions and whether engagement in this service had practical outcomes for the young people involved, such as increased

understanding of domestic abuse, tangible coping strategies or feeling safer and/or more supported.

What is domestic abuse and what impact does it have on children and young people?

An examination of literature established the definition of domestic abuse that was applied in this study. It also identified impacts of domestic abuse among children and young people and introduced policy contexts that underpinned service development.

Definition of domestic abuse

Throughout this research we used the definition from the National Strategy to address domestic abuse in Scotland:

Domestic abuse [as gender-based abuse] can be perpetrated by partners or ex-partners and can include physical abuse [assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviour], sexual abuse [acts which degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape] and mental and emotional abuse [such as threats, verbal abuse, racial abuse, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends]. Scottish Executive (2000 Scottish Executive. 2000. *National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Partnership on. Domestic Abuse., 3)

This definition is gendered in responding to feminist perspectives on the experiences of women and children who, living in a patriarchal society, are subject to ‘interlinked systems of oppression’ (Heywood 2007 Heywood, A. 2007. *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*. London: Palgrave MacMillan., 237). It differs from the definition used by the UK Government, which includes recognition that young people can be victims of domestic violence and abuse, and that victims of domestic violence are not specific to one gender or particular ethnic group (Home Office 2013 Home Office. 2013. *Crime against Women and Girls*. London: HMSO. Accessed March 15, 2013. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime/violence-against-women-girls/domestic-violence/>.). It is significant that the work with young people who have been affected by domestic abuse in Scotland is underpinned by a gendered analysis because it aligns with the feminist perspective of Riverside WA, in highlighting the gendered structural inequalities apparent in patriarchal society and the impact this can have on the individual.

The impact on children and young people

The prevalence of those experiencing domestic abuse is difficult to ascertain, due to the ‘hidden’ nature of the crime. Police records suggest a continual increase since 1999–2000, the first year that data were available (Scottish Executive 2007 Scottish Executive. 2007. “Domestic Abuse Recorded by Police in Scotland, 2006–07.” *Statistical Bulletin, Criminal Justice Series*. Accessed May 11, 2012. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/22153700/33>.). In 2008–2009 there were 53,681 incidents of domestic abuse, a rise of 8% on the previous year (Scottish Executive 2009 Scottish Executive. 2009. “Domestic Abuse Recorded by Police in Scotland, 2008–09.” *Statistical Bulletin, Criminal Justice Series*. Accessed May 11, 2012. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/23112407/0>.). This trend suggests that, either there is more reporting of domestic abuse or more domestic abuse is occurring;

nevertheless, it is known that more children and young people will be either directly or indirectly affected by domestic abuse. Yet, the specific impact of domestic abuse on children in Scotland can only be estimated:

A United Nations Secretary-General's study on Violence against Children [2006] estimated that between 240,000 and 963,000 children in the UK were exposed to domestic abuse. We don't yet know how many children and young people in Scotland experience domestic abuse. Scottish Women's Aid (2010 Scottish Women's Aid. 2010. "Children and Young People's Exposure to Domestic Abuse." Information Briefing No. 4. Accessed May 11. <http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/publications.>, 1)

Where domestic abuse occurs, any children or young people in that household can also be adversely affected. Whether directly involved or in close proximity to such abuse, young people can respond, internalise or deal with abuse in differing ways, to differing extents. Their experiences bring varying levels of lasting impact. A number of external factors such as aggression, hostility, non-compliant and/or violent behaviours may be evident in young people who experience family disruption (Buehler and Gerard 1995 Buehler, C., and J. M. Gerard. 1995. "Divorce Law in the United States: A Focus on Child Custody." *Family Relations* 44: 439–458. 10.2307/584999.; UNICEF 2006 UNICEF. 2006. *Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*. New York: UNICEF.). There may also be less visible factors such as depression (Calder, Harold, and Horwath 2004 Calder, M. C., G. T. Harold, and E. L. Horwath. 2004. *Children Living with Domestic Violence: Towards a Framework for Assessment and Intervention*. London: Russell House.; UNICEF 2006 UNICEF. 2006. *Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*. New York: UNICEF.). Nevertheless, the response depends on a range of factors:

Whether a child's exposure to violence leads to withdrawal or to increased aggression and violence is likely to depend on a variety of factors, including the age at which the trauma occurred, the supports in the environment, and the characteristics of the child. Osofsky (1999 Osofsky, J. D. 1999. "The Impact of Violence on Children." *The Future of Children, Domestic Violence and Children* 9 (3): 33–49., 36)

Howe also suggests:

... if children are exposed to both abuse and neglect, their attachments are likely to be insecure, and most probably disorganised/controlling. (2005 Howe, D. 2005. *Child Abuse and Neglect: Attachment, Development and Intervention*. London: Palgrave MacMillan., 183)

The impact of domestic abuse on children and young people is thus varied and contested (see for example Edleson 2004 Edleson, J. 2004. "Should Childhood Exposure to Adult Domestic Violence be Defined as Child Maltreatment under the Law?" In *Protecting Children from Domestic Violence: Strategies for Community Intervention*, edited by P. Jaffe, L. Baker, and A. Cunningham, 8–29. New York: Guilford.; Humphreys and Mullender 2002 Humphreys, C., and A. Mullender. 2002. *Children and Domestic Violence: A Research Overview of the Impact on Children*. Dartington: Devon.; Mullender et al. 2002 Mullender, A., G. Hague, U. Imam, L. Kelly, E. Malos, and L. Regan. 2002. *Children's Perspectives on Domestic Violence*. London: Sage.; Smith, Berthelsen, and O'Connor 1997 Smith, J., D. Berthelsen, and I. O'Connor. 1997. "Child Adjustment in High Conflict Families." *Child Care, Health and Development* 23 (2): 113–133. 10.1111/j.1365-2214.1997.tb00888.x.). Yet, most authors agree that living with and experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse will have

negative implications for a child's mental and emotional health (Brandon and Lewis 1996 Brandon, M., and A. Lewis. 1996. "Significant Harm and Children's Experiences of Domestic Violence." *Child and Family Social Work* 1: 33–42.). Regardless of the severity of impact Riverside WA aimed to support the young people irrespective of individual circumstances but tailored the level of support accordingly.

Understanding of domestic abuse

McCarry (2009 McCarry, M. J. 2009. "Justifications and Contradictions: Understanding Young People's Views of Domestic Abuse." *Men and Masculinities* 11 (3): 325–345. 10.1177/1097184X06294008.) has provided an in-depth assessment of young people's understandings of domestic abuse in Scotland. This highlighted a gap in research literature about the views of young people and what kind of support structures could benefit those who have experienced domestic abuse. McCarry (2009 McCarry, M. J. 2009. "Justifications and Contradictions: Understanding Young People's Views of Domestic Abuse." *Men and Masculinities* 11 (3): 325–345. 10.1177/1097184X06294008.) interviewed 77 young people in 10 schools in Glasgow to ascertain their views and attitudes on domestic abuse and why it happens. She found that young people held conflicting perspectives in initially agreeing that men were more aggressive, yet they did not see them as more abusive in relationships. Mullender et al. (2002 Mullender, A., G. Hague, U. Imam, L. Kelly, E. Malos, and L. Regan. 2002. *Children's Perspectives on Domestic Violence*. London: Sage.) identified additional concerns in suggesting there is a normalisation and acceptance of male violence against female partners.

The Riverside evaluation sought to examine whether young people's understanding of domestic abuse was enhanced through participating in specialised services. Moreover, it sought to establish understanding of what young people, who had experienced or been affected by domestic abuse, felt about a specialised youth service focussed on this issue. The literature suggests that multiple and iterative impacts on children cannot be overlooked, and so this study adds to knowledge on how the development of early intervention methods can mitigate potentially damaging effects (Osofsky 2003 Osofsky, J. D. 2003. "Prevalence of Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment: Implications for Prevention and Intervention." *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 6 (3): 161–170. 10.1023/A:1024958332093.). These negative impacts, in all their guises, are what Riverside WA work towards eradicating. Thus, the views expressed here, primarily from young people, contribute to understanding of the kind of support structures needed.

Creation of the specialised service

Initially, Riverside WA engaged with a national campaign, calling for the Scottish Government to address gaps in services. The Listen Louder Campaign began in 2002 and was coordinated by Scottish Women's Aid. A series of newsletters was written by young people and multimedia exhibitions of their art work were displayed throughout 2002. In 2003, postcards, posters and education packs were sent to every secondary school in Scotland and a 'textathon' helped gain additional support. In 2004, various artistic and creative means were being used to tell politicians, policy makers and practitioners of young people's experiences of domestic abuse and how their lives could be improved.

In 2005, Humphreys and Mullender advocated that discussion in focus groups should underpin an educational campaign based on participative discussion and examination of peer and media pressure and parent/teacher attitudes.

In 2008, the Scottish Government provided £10 million to support the National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People (Scottish Government 2008 Scottish Government. 2008. "National Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People." Accessed June 10, 2013.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/17115558/0>). This plan highlighted the need to work alongside, listen to and act upon the views of those children and young people who have been affected by domestic abuse. Four priority areas were identified for action: Protection, Service, Prevention and Participation. These priorities underpinned the development of youth services at Riverside WA.

The National Plan was the first of its kind in the UK, in taking opinions from young people affected by domestic abuse into consideration when shaping service development. Riverside WA took a leading role at national and local levels in campaigning for and developing specialised children and young people's service. Talking of the campaign and the role of Women's Aid, Houghton suggests:

... it transposed, enhanced and developed this expertise to empower young people to have a say in service development and engage in the world of politics ... the close network of children's and young people's support workers in Women's Aid [and the young people they worked with] were acutely aware of the continued existence of gaps in their service. (2006, 82)

The Listen Louder Campaign not only sought to put domestic abuse on the political agenda, but it also ensured the voices of those most affected were both listened and responded to appropriately.

Recognising the detrimental impact of domestic abuse, a specific service, for 11–15 year olds, was established at Riverside in 2008. Funded by the Big Lottery, the service aimed to provide one-to-one and telephone support, information on keeping safe and opportunities to meet other young people who had experienced domestic abuse. It included group work, residential trips and day trips during school holidays. It also provided a drop-in service in four local schools which offered a safe environment for young people to speak to Women's Aid staff. This responded to calls for service development among wider populations:

Surveys of general populations of young people reveal a degree of tolerance towards violence against women, especially amongst boys and young men, which suggests that work in schools is needed as a preventative measure. For those who have lived with domestic violence [*abuse*], individual and groupwork that focuses on practical safety planning and emotional recovery can be of enormous value but is not yet comprehensively available. (Humphreys and Mullender 2005 Humphreys, C., and A. Mullender. 2005. "Children and Domestic Violence: A Research Overview of the Impact on Children." *Research in Practice*. Accessed May 20, 2012. <http://www.icyrnet.net/UserFiles/mullender.pdf>, 26)

In this extract, Humphreys and Mullender assert a need for two different kinds of service: a generic and preventative approach to address complacency and tolerance among a wider population and a more targeted and pragmatic approach that is sensitive to the specific

recovery needs of young people who have experienced the impact of domestic abuse. It is the targeted approach which was evaluated in this study.

Methodology

The research was developed as a case study drawing on ethnographic methods to observe and make sense of the youth work setting. Findings were grounded in the views of participants rather than seeking to test an existing theory (Boyatzis 1998 Boyatzis, R. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information*. London: Sage.; Robson 2002 Robson, C. 2002. *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell.). Data were collected using desk-based review of literature and relevant policy documents, face-to-face and telephone interviews and film animation. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. These formed the basis of thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998 Boyatzis, R. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information*. London: Sage.) and helped generate findings by inductive open coding that enabled similarly coded items to be grouped together into themes for discussion.

Examination of records and reports held by Riverside WA provided background information about the creation of the service and its continued operation. Secondary sources from policy and research literature were used in conjunction with information from grant makers and community partners to triangulate data where, 'triangulation entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena' (Bryman 2008 Bryman, A. 2008. *Social Research Methods*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press., 379). These included end-of-year reports, attendance records, young people's evaluation and feedback, funding applications, media interest and relevant literature. This located the study within the context of the wider Women's Aid setting.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with three staff involved in the youth service. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and sought to establish their views on the service including the background, advantages and disadvantages. Interview prompts questioned individual worker's role, their use of funding and their responsibilities whilst working in the youth service. They were also asked to identify any positive aspects, their aspirations for the service and how young people's views were utilised to progress or improve it. These interviews provided situational information and showed how young people were integrated throughout the service.

Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with six participants aged 11–15 years. Although the sample size for young people was relatively small, it provided data that could be used to conduct analysis of this specialised service. There was also engagement with two more young people through the film animation process which provided additional informal contextual data. Thus, the research provides information on a specialised service, and together with the three staff interviews, four partner interviews, contextual information and the creation of an animated film, it provides a useful, if somewhat limited overview based on a total cohort of 15 participants. If the service was to expand further or time constraints were less prevalent, then in-depth longitudinal research in this area would be beneficial.

The interviews were conducted individually within the youth work setting or the school where Riverside workers carried out one-to-one sessions. A Riverside worker was always on hand to speak with any young person who, for example, found that interview prompts caused them to recall experiences that were upsetting. Although this additional support was never

needed, it was important in reassuring both young people and researchers that support was available.

The sample was opportunistic, comprising young people who were involved in the group work aspect of the service. Ethical scrutiny was achieved through independent institutional review and by Women's Aid, who determined that researchers should only engage with those involved in the group work sessions who had already gone through one-to-ones and so could discuss both elements of the programme. This was instead of young people who had only recently began the one-to-one sessions and therefore may find it traumatic to engage in the kind of reflection that might be prompted by the evaluation process, particularly if they had just left the refuge or had recently been identified as needing a support worker due to domestic abuse occurring in their household.

All the young people were white, Scottish and were from the same local authority area where income deprivation is higher than the rest of Scotland (Scottish Government 2013 Scottish Government. 2013. "Deprivation – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation." Accessed May 25, 2013. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/TrendSIMD>.), over 14% of children classified as living in poverty (Save the Children 2011 Save the Children. 2011. *Severe Child Poverty in Scotland Briefing February 2011*. Accessed June 10, 2013. http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Severe_Child_Poverty_In_Scotland_February2011.pdf.) and 26% of children live in poverty, compared to a Scottish average of 20% (Save the Children 2012 Save the Children. 2012. *Child Poverty in Scotland: A Local Snapshot*. Accessed June 4, 2013. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/child-poverty-scotland-local-snapshot>.). The interviews involved six female participants. Although there were males involved in the creation of the film animation, they did not participate in interviews. There may have been a number of reasons for this, such as the researchers being female, the young males feeling uncomfortable or reticent in speaking about their feelings. Yet, despite seeking to involve young men, their lack of participation is undoubtedly a weakness of the study. Furthermore, Riverside WA does not allow young men over the age of 16 to live in the refuge, which prevented older young males from engaging. This may also mean that services providing referrals to Riverside WA pick up familial problems in relation to young females but not in relation to young males. Thus, gender aspects require further analysis, and there may be a space for additional targeted work from Riverside WA, but this was not developed in this study.

As all of the young people involved were under the age of 16, they had to gain parental consent to participate in the research. Each young person was given an information sheet and consent form for themselves and their mother or carer. Following a series of briefing meetings with researchers, the workers from Riverside spoke to each of the mothers, explaining the reasons for the evaluation and seeking their consent for their child to participate. The young people were also asked to give their consent. Their right to anonymity and to opt out of any aspect of the evaluation or to withdraw from the study was explained. In the light of this dual process of obtaining consent, and despite all mother's agreeing for their children to be involved in the research, two of the young people preferred to solely be involved in data collection via the film and opted out of interviews.

The young people who chose to participate in interviews were asked how long they had engaged with the service, if they attended both group work and one-to-one services. They were asked to identify any advantages from participating and their views on the specialised

nature of the youth group, compared to more generic youth clubs. This led to follow-up questions about any drawbacks and or negative aspects, how the service could be improved and if their understanding of domestic abuse had increased. Further questions asked how they felt about approaching staff and what the impact might be if the service stopped.

Producing an animated film was used to engage young people and to capture data. When edited in collaboration with the young people, it showed their views about the service. This offered a creative and participatory method of engaging with eight young people over a four-week period. Researchers made field notes after each film-making session, for example, recording aspects of the conversations about scripting or what images to use, which offered valuable background information about the young people's experiences of the youth service. The series of workshops involved the researchers and young people working collaboratively to produce a short film that explained the youth service and what young people thought of it.

To protect identity, the use of film animation and anonymised clips recorded by the young people meant there were no clearly identifying features. Two researchers engaged in this process: one encouraged participation in discussions about the type of film they wanted to make; the other engaged in informal conversations with young people which facilitated both film making and data collection.

These sessions helped the researchers build rapport with participants and offered a participatory method for researching with young people. It was only after four weeks of this process that the semi-structured interviews took place. Time spent building rapport and developing trust was hugely important. Taking an interest in the young people, spending time and engaging in conversations beyond the immediate research topic, and utilising active listening or observation skills while engaging with the group through participatory activities all contributed to the levels of rapport and trust achieved (Roberston 2005 Roberston, S. 2005. *Youth Clubs – Association, Participation and Fun*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.; Spence 2007 Spence, J. 2007. "What Do Youth Workers Do? Communicating Youth Work." *Journal of Youth Studies Ireland* 2 (2): 3–18.; Spence, Devanney, and Noonan 2006 Spence, J., C. Devanney, and K. Noonan. 2006. *Youth Work: Voices of Practice*. Leicester: National Youth Agency.). In this sense, the study aligns with a growing literature about researching young people's lives which emphasises an interest in hearing the voices of young people that have previously gone unheard (Blackman 2007 Blackman, S. 2007. "Hidden Ethnographies: Crossing Emotional Borders in Qualitative Accounts of Young People's Lives." *Sociology* 41: 699–716. 10.1177/0038038507078925.; Conteh et al. 2005 Conteh, J., E. Gregory, C. Kearney, and A. Mor-Sommerfeld. 2005. *On Writing Educational Ethnographies*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.; Heath et al. 2009 Heath, S., R. Brooks, E. Cleaver, and E. Ireland. 2009. *Researching Young People's Lives*. London: Sage.; Walford 2008 Walford, G. 2008. *How to do Educational Ethnography*. London: Tufnell.).

Four interviews (two telephone; two face-to-face) were also conducted with local partner agencies to establish their views on the partnership with Riverside WA and how the service impacted on their work with children and young people. The partners interviewed were a head of school, a teacher, a child protection officer and a council employee who worked closely with the organisation. All face-to-face interviews with young people, staff and partners were recorded, and detailed notes were taken during the two telephone interviews. All recorded data were kept in a secure location and destroyed on completion of the project.

During fieldwork researchers were aware of the need for flexibility. For example, at one stage two young people, having experienced a traumatic event the night before, chose to sit alone with a youth worker and have one-to-one conversations rather than participate in animation activities. This showed how an increased understanding of the context of these young people's lives helped ensure that appropriate welfare decisions were taken, and that going with young people's choices remained central to the research project. Despite having extensive youth work experience the researchers were guided by the Riverside workers to ensure empathy, understanding and flexibility. Not wishing to overemphasise the point, we were conscious of the emotionally demanding aspects of the fieldwork for all involved and made sure that young people would be supported by project workers beyond the duration of the research project. Researchers also spent time, often in the car on the way home, in processing their own feelings on hearing the young people's accounts of their experiences. Yet, despite dealing with difficult topics, the involvement of young people in animation planning and development meant that fieldwork was often full of fun and laughter.

Findings

Our analysis identified five aspects of practice that were found to be present in Riverside Youth Service: one-to-one support; group work; specialist support; increased feelings of understanding and safety; and service development. Each of these aspects is now discussed in order to draw conclusions.

One-to-one services

Since the youth service began in 2007, Riverside records showed that there were 202 beneficiaries from the Children and Young People's. This incorporated two forms of one-to-one service: follow-on support and outreach. The one-to-one services took place once a week for an hourly session. Services were held in places that were most convenient to each young person. These were generally held in their school or in the Riverside WA premises. Similarly, those who engaged in the follow on work would have hourly sessions in the WA offices, in their new house or in other places where workers could provide support. One-to-one services offered opportunities for staff, who were trained in youth work and domestic abuse, to work with the young people to explore their experiences and develop coping strategies or increased understanding. They aimed to provide support, guidance and empathy outside of the family unit.

The follow-on service incorporated a six-week series of one-to-one sessions with young people who had recently left the refuge. Primarily, this service aimed to assist with resettlement of the young person and facilitated transition out of refuge living. Outreach one-to-one services were accessed through referral. These were for young people who were not necessarily in or leaving a refuge but were still living with their parents and where concerns around domestic abuse had been raised from services such as schools or police. These sessions began with a 12-week block; thereafter they were reviewed and if the worker and young person agreed the period of support could be extended. This further demonstrated that young people's views and wishes were integral to decisions taken in regard to engaging with the service and the period of support offered. These services were utilised to provide additional space for young people to discuss any issues they may be experiencing within their personal lives.

Views on one-to-one services

These services sought to address individual needs, as this worker explains:

One-to-one sessions are centred around the young person's needs and what they want to talk about ... providing a consistent amount of time that allows that young person to go through things ...

Thus, one-to-one support gave the young person enough dedicated time to enable full discussion of issues they raised. Sessions were valued by young people as a source of support and guidance:

It has made me feel a lot better and they help with ... like it's not just domestic abuse it is other things as well. They help with other things and you can get information for ... like eating problems, they helped me with that, like just anything really you can talk to them.

In addition to maintaining individual support relating to the general well-being of young people who had experienced of domestic abuse, Riverside youth workers provided information and signposting towards bespoke support services.

Another young person suggested that one-to-one sessions supported discussion of feelings:

They are really good and I enjoy talking to people about how I feel.

Similarly this young person reiterated:

I think they help a lot, if you ever need to talk to someone they are always there to listen to you, and like if there was a time you don't want to speak you don't need to, so it's good.

In wider youth work terms, these skills are not remarkable (see for example, Coburn and Wallace 2011 Coburn, A., and D. Wallace. 2011. *Youth Work in Communities and Schools*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Press.; Jeffs and Smith 2010 Jeffs, T., and M. K. Smith, eds. 2010. *Youth Work Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan., 2005 Jeffs, T., and M. K. Smith. 2005. *Informal Education, Conversation, Democracy and Learning*. 3rd ed. Derby: Education Now.; Roberston 2005 Roberston, S. 2005. *Youth Clubs – Association, Participation and Fun*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.; Young 2006 Young, K. 2006. *The Art of Youth Work*. 2nd ed. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.). Yet, when combined with specific insights that Riverside youth workers brought to this service, these skills were enhanced by deeper understanding and empathy about the situations of domestic abuse that the young people wanted to talk about. Although under-researched, the impact of this kind of specialised service was explained in one worker's description of the service when asked to describe one-to-one services:

It is their time, it is a time for them to talk about their experiences, to have more understanding of their experiences of domestic abuse, talk about how it is impacting on them, how it is affecting them, how it is maybe affecting on relationships with friends, relationships with mum, relationships with their peers, how it is impacting on their education, stuff like that ... all the different areas that we know that domestic abuse affects, so that is their time.

This breadth of support was achieved through having one-to-one protected time with a youth worker. It provided young people with an opportunity to explore their experiences and showed that one-to-one, individual sessions supported and facilitated them to address issues

that impacted on their lives. Accordingly, the one-to-one service appeared to help the young people in developing capacity for working through their feelings and seeing their experiences of domestic abuse within the wider context of their lives.

Group work sessions

Group work sessions incorporated a 10-week programme aimed at teenagers and focused on working together. Ten young people regularly attended these sessions. Participants were generally chosen from those who were currently undergoing one-to-one sessions or who had finished one-to-one sessions but still needed structured support. This provided additional space to engage with other young people experiencing similar issues around domestic abuse and who understood the complexities of living in a family where domestic abuse was occurring or had previously taken place.

It was in these sessions that the researchers primarily engaged with young people and built rapport. These were closed groups, other young people could not drop-in to them, and they comprised group activities and discussions. To help young people feel comfortable in discussing their feelings and emotions specialised resources were used. This included prepared worksheets, emotion focussed board games, support information and art and craft materials that helped young people to create conditions that enabled them to be open about their feelings. To ensure young people's safety, transport was provided to and from these sessions, with any delays immediately communicated to mothers or carers to avoid unnecessary concern. Analysis suggested that these sessions were important in two key areas. First, in showing empathy and second, in offering an experiential activity programme

The importance of empathy in group work sessions

Empathy is identified as an important emotion in relation to domestic abuse:

Some children lose the ability to feel empathy for others. Others feel socially isolated, unable to make friends as easily due to social discomfort or confusion over what is acceptable. UNICEF (2006 UNICEF. 2006. *Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*. New York: UNICEF., 7)

Knowing that others have gone through similar experiences has been suggested as a helping mechanism for discussing and speaking about how problems might be addressed, without feeling stigmatised or isolated (Baker et al. 2004 Baker, J., K. Lynch, S. Cantillion, and J. Walsh. 2004. *Equality: From Theory to Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.; Mertens 2005 Mertens, D. M. 2005. *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.).

According to one worker the support from other young people who had experienced similar issues helped participants to develop socially and prevented feelings of isolation as a counteraction to negative impacts of domestic abuse:

They have said ... that it is so important to meet other people with similar experiences to them, because when you are living with it you think you are the only one and then when you realise that actually there is a lot of young people who are living through similar experiences ... it is like, such a relief for them and to be able to speak to other people about it

and ... that people are not going to be really shocked about what they have been through. There is that shame element gone then ... they have said that talking to each other is actually the best support that they could get other than maybe a specialist worker.

Laing (2000 Laing, L. 2000. *Children, Young People and Domestic Violence*. Sydney: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.) finds that living with the secrecy of domestic violence could lead to feelings of shame and hinder relations with peers. So having space to discuss these feelings is hugely important for young people's personal well-being. The above worker's view on the importance of empathy and connecting with young people, whose experiences were similar, was also highlighted by young people:

It's like ... before you came to the group you were like, no one is like me ... then you come to the group and see you are not the only one.

Knowing they were not alone in experiencing domestic abuse also appeared beneficial in reducing young people's feelings of isolation:

It has just been great because there's ... it gets you mixing with people that have been going through the same thing. It helps you make friends and helps you get through all the problems and stuff. *And is that important for you to meet people who have been through similar sort of stuff?* Hmhm yes, 'cause it makes you feel that you are not alone and there are people there that can help you.

Feeling 'different' from others due to their experiences (Buckley, Holt, and Whelan 2007 Buckley, H., S. Holt, and S. Whelan. 2007. "Listen to Me! Children's Experiences of Domestic Violence." *Child Abuse Review* 16 (5): 296–310. 10.1002/car.995.) can adversely impact on children and young people. Being with young people whose experiences were similar, who understood what was happening and so, did not judge them, seemed to enhance their feelings of support and reassurance:

... because like I'm tired all the time, my friends don't really understand, but I think the people at the group understand because they know what is going on ...

In this sense, group work sessions facilitated mutual understanding and support which contributed to prevention of isolation through facilitating empathy with others in the group. These sessions were also reported as a source of fun, where young people felt safe and comfortable in an environment where it was OK to have a bad day or feel down, but also to relax and have fun, away from any stigma or awkwardness associated with domestic abuse:

I just love the way it is dead comfortable, when we go out it is never awkward, we all just have a laugh and it is fine but you can still be serious as well, like if you are having a bad day they will understand and they ... [workers and other young people] ... are fine with it but they will have a laugh.

Thus, group work sessions offered flexibility in responding to young people's feelings, yet also sought to create a space where they could have fun and move forward from their experiences of domestic abuse. This was summed up in one youth worker's view of the Riverside youth service:

... you are with them having fun ... you are with them just being themselves. Yeah, all children and young people who have accessed the service have experienced domestic abuse but that isn't the sum of them, their problems aren't the sum total of them ...

In this sense, empathy and understanding of the young people's experiences helped create conditions where they could be open and honest about their feelings and emotions and where they could relax in a comfortable environment and engage in activity beyond their immediate circumstances or experiences of domestic abuse.

The importance of experiential activity programme in group work

Riverside youth service organised a summer programme for young people during the school holiday period. There were two-day trips each week and a week-long residential, where young people participated in various outdoor activities. Those interviewed appreciated this week away from daily routines that were dominated by their experiences of domestic abuse because it enabled them to participate in exciting and challenging activities:

It was actually good to get out and do other stuff ... it was so funny; I was the first one to go down like the thirty foot cave ...

You get to get all your feelings out and you get to have fun compared to your normal day-to-day life and it takes all your memories away and brings new memories.

On one level, the residential experience modelled youth work practices that promoted having fun in association with others (Davies 2005 Davies, B. 2005. "Youth Work: A Manifesto for Our Times." *Journal of Youth and Policy* 88: 1–23.; Jeffs and Smith 2010 Jeffs, T., and M. K. Smith, eds. 2010. *Youth Work Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.) and the kind of transformative learning (Mezirow 2009 Mezirow, J. 2009. "An Overview of Transformative Learning." In *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists in Their Own Words*, edited by K. Illeris, 90–105. Oxon: Routledge.) that helps people to change perspective and move their lives forward in new directions. However, on another level, the residential was also consistent with the concept of therapeutic landscape (Gesler 1992 Gesler, W. 1992. "Therapeutic Landscapes: Medical Issues in Light of the New Cultural Geography." *Social Science and Medicine* 34 (7): 735–746. 10.1016/0277-9536(92)90360-3.) which suggested a healing aspect of the Riverside youth service that facilitated renewal among the young people, building strength by creating new memories based on positive or challenging outdoor experiences.

One worker also suggested a multiple impact from displaying their art work in a public gallery:

They exhibited ... in the galleries and for the young people it was a brand new experience, having their art work exhibited obviously, but even a trip into ... [town] ... A lot of them had never been on the subway [*underground railway*] before and had never gone into ... [the] ... city centre before.

Young people also suggested an important aspect of group work in creating capacity to step outside of their routine environment:

They have really helped me through it and have done groups for you to get out of your house, so you're not always in your house with your mum all the time.

Taken together, the flexibility of the group work sessions seemed to create an environment where feelings of empathy and personal safety offered a supportive, yet relaxed atmosphere, in which to socialise and have fun with peers. This meant the young people were comfortable about discussing issues, if they wanted to, or to be themselves and engage in activity that was not tied to their identity, as someone who is impacted by domestic abuse. In the development and growth of those involved, the lack of pressure to discuss emotions could be argued as just as important as having space to relax, to be safe or to take time to experience positive, trusting forms of social interaction. All of the young people in this study held the group work sessions in high regard, citing the opportunity to meet others, to experience a new environment and to have fun as invaluable to developing confidence, socialisation skills and personal growth. Again, this is consistent with more generic youth work (Coburn and Wallace 2011 Coburn, A., and D. Wallace. 2011. *Youth Work in Communities and Schools*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Press.; Jeffs and Smith 2010 Jeffs, T., and M. K. Smith, eds. 2010. *Youth Work Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.; Ord 2007 Ord, J. 2007. *Youth Work Practice – Creating an Authentic Curriculum in Work with Young People*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.; Roberston 2005 Roberston, S. 2005. *Youth Clubs – Association, Participation and Fun*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.).

So ... what makes this youth service special?

In addition to benefits identified in one-to-one and group work sessions, research participants highlighted the specialist nature of dedicated services as an advantage because youth workers were trained in matters related to domestic abuse, rather than a more generic youth work service or school-based support. According to one partner agency, this filled an important gap in services:

No statutory organisation could provide the empowerment and specific counselling that the young people are currently gaining through women's aid.

Involving youth workers who were trained in facilitating specific exploration of the impact of domestic abuse was suggested as vital, by one Women's Aid youth worker:

First and most foremost if domestic abuse is an issue in a young person's life then they have somebody who specialises in that area, so having that specialist knowledge is vital.

Another Women's Aid worker commented on differences in approach:

I think general youth work in the area doesn't necessarily have the same approach because they are not specific to the issues ... because we are very specific, it makes it safe and that is a big positive.

This suggested that because of the specific issues and feelings associated with experiences of domestic abuse, a specialist service offered additionality to the kind of services that might be available as part of generic or open access provision. The young people also believed this kind of specialist knowledge was an advantage:

The Women's Aid ... they know a lot better than the school people do ... I don't know whether that's from experience but they do seem to know a lot more about it and they do understand more than the school do.

This young person asserted that Riverside youth workers knew more than other professionals that they come into contact with, such as school teachers. This suggests that accessing workers who were specially trained in dealing with issues associated with domestic abuse was crucial for young people who have, or still are, experienced the impacts of abuse within their family.

Confidentiality was another aspect of what made the service special. The young people trusted the Riverside youth workers to keep their discussions confidential:

I would never speak to anyone in the school ... I know everything is confidential at ... [Riverside] ...

Further, when asked specifically about confidentiality in conversations with Riverside youth workers, one young person suggested:

You talk to them and it feels safe talking to them ... no one is listening in or going to hear what you are going to say.

These extracts offer credence to Riverside's decision to treat confidentiality as a basis for work with young people. According to Larcher (2005 Larcher, V. 2005. "Consent, Competence and Confidentiality." *British Medical Journal* 330: 353. <http://www.bmj.com/content/330/7487/353.pdf%2Bhtml>), confidentiality, based on mutual trust, is critical to young people's future relationships with professionals. Without high levels of confidentiality, young people may not feel safe or secure in engaging with staff. However, there appeared to be underlying concerns that formal reporting procedures in other professional areas may override confidentiality (Millstein 2000 Millstein, K. 2000. "Confidentiality in Direct Social-Work Practice: Inevitable Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas Families in Society." *The Journal of Contemporary Human Services* 81 (3): 270–282. 10.1606/1044-3894.1018.) and had left an impression of stories being shared beyond those who really 'need to know'. While this might not actually be the case, the perceptions among participants in this study were inclined towards the level of confidentiality they experienced at Riverside.

A third aspect of making the service special was in the young people's distinction between their experiences of the specialist youth service compared to generic youth work. This suggested that the specialist service offered a positive response to their specific circumstances:

Everyone in it ... [Riverside youth service] ... has gone through the same thing, so you have nothing bad to say about each other and you are all friends in it.

This comment seemed to infer that, in other settings, the young people could be subject to negative comments through lack of understanding, which did not happen at Riverside. When asked whether the same service was available elsewhere, participants suggested that generic youth services could not provide specialised resources or knowledge about domestic abuse:

I think they ... [Riverside youth workers] ... are a lot better because like, they ... [Riverside youth workers] ... know what you are going through and what you have been through and like they know how to handle it better.

A section of this quotation was taken as the title of this article because it seemed important in establishing the distinctiveness of the Riverside service. This further raises a number of interesting points about the differences between generic and specialised services. In health and social care, for example, it is recognised that a combination of both kinds of service is effective (Kiima and Jenkins 2010 Kiima, D., and R. Jenkins. 2010. "Mental Health Policy in Kenya – An Integrated Approach to Scaling up Equitable Care for Poor Populations." *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 4:19. <http://www.ijmhs.com/content/4/1/19>.) Reporting on community care for differing ethnic groups, Radermacher, Feldman, and Browning (2008 Radermacher, H., S. Feldman, and C. Browning. 2008. *Review of Literature Concerning the Delivery of Community Aged Care Services to Ethnic Groups: Mainstream versus Ethno-specific Services: It's Not an 'Either or'*. Melbourne: Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and Monash University., 4) argue that it should not be an either or situation:

A fundamental principle for service delivery is that a blanket approach, or single model of service delivery, may be inappropriate.

Dixon (2011 Dixon, A. 2011. *Do We Need More Generalists in Hospitals? The Kings Fund: Ideas that Change Health Care*. London: The Kings Fund. Accessed July 20, 2013. <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/blog/2011/10/do-we-need-more-generalists-our-hospitals>.) has also called for 'a radical rethink ... to find ways of integrating specialist and generalist care', yet, on paper, children and young people's services are already integrated (see for example, Brown and White, 2006 Brown, K., and K. White. 2006. *Exploring the Evidence base for Integrated Children's Services*. Edinburgh: SEED.; Anning et al. 2010 Anning, A., D. Cottrel, N. Frost, J. Green, and N. Robinson. 2010. *Developing Multi-Professional Teamwork for Integrated Children's Services*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill.; Scottish Executive 2001 Scottish Executive. 2001. *For Scotland's Children: Better Integrated Children's Services*. Edinburgh: The Stationery Office.). This literature demonstrates interest in both generic and specialised services for young people with differing needs and capacities. Nevertheless, these young people valued the knowledge of domestic abuse from trained workers as positive suggesting that service integration does not go far enough. Those interviewed worried that people in generic youth clubs, potentially non-trained workers or young people who had not been through similar experiences, may bring negative impacts. The young people believed that Riverside youth workers, trained in dealing with domestic abuse, offered a better response than generic youth workers, with little or no experience of 'how to handle' specific concerns about domestic abuse. While the veracity of these claims maybe contested, participants were clear on the benefits of a specialist service and argued that these should be continued.

A tailored domestic abuse provision was previously created for Bangladeshi women in Camden to cater appropriately for the cultural and religious needs of women who experienced domestic abuse. The specialised programme was found to be extremely beneficial as previously women had experienced difficulty in accessing more generic support service (The Jago Nari Project 2008 The Jago Nari Project. 2008. *The Jago Nari Project Report*. Accessed July 30, 2013. <http://www.hopscotchawc.org.uk/?download=JagoReportc.pdf>.) Yet, having a specialist worker in a particular area is not a new phenomenon, and there is scope to train more youth

workers on the subject of domestic abuse, or to have specialist workers engaging alongside generic youth workers. For example, in a recent article on young people's risk of getting hepatitis C whilst in the criminal justice system, findings identified that:

... placing a specialised HCV worker alongside youth focussed post release services is feasible and acceptable to both young people and the majority of service staff ... (Lenton et al. 2012 Lenton, E., B. White, C. Aitken, M. Hellard, and P. Higgs. 2012. "Preventing Hepatitis C Virus Transmission among Young People in the Justice System." *Children and Youth Services Review* 35 (5): 834–836. 10.1016/j.chidyouth.2013.02.005., 834)

However, this argument for specialisation might be grounded in the nature and purpose of this particular evaluation, and so more research is needed to consider any wider contribution of specialist services in this area. Despite this, by using field notes and partner agency comments to triangulate data from within the setting, we remain convinced that the specialist nature of this service was of meaningful benefit to participants. This raised a question about what would happen if the service was withdrawn.

What if Riverside youth service ceased to exist?

Discussing aspects of domestic abuse openly and with trained workers was believed to be important by participants when asked about what would happen if the service ceased:

I think everything would start to get bad again because I notice it when I don't get a one-to-one or I don't go to the group that I don't feel, not as happy, but it just feels different if I don't talk to somebody and I don't want that to stop because I enjoy getting them ... [youth services].

Having trained and understanding workers was persistently suggested as important. The following comments being typical in relation to the same question:

... a bit upset, because like it is a lot of fun coming and it is just, they ... [youth workers] ... are a lot of help so it would be a bit sad to have to stop coming.

I would be upset and I wouldn't know who to talk to.

It appeared that young people believed they could not discuss the same issues in other settings because of a lack of professional insight and misunderstandings among peers about the complexities and impacts of living with domestic abuse. While these comments show that young people valued this service, a potential weakness of the project is in creating dependency. It is important, therefore, for Riverside youth workers to be mindful of finding a balance between the advantages of specialist support and the disadvantages of creating a dependency on a specific worker or one aspect of the service that could prevent the young people from moving forward. While we agree that timescales for moving beyond the service should be person centred and decided through dialogue, moving on should always be the overall aim.

Understanding of domestic abuse and feeling safe

While participating in the Riverside youth service, the young people said that they had an increased understanding of domestic abuse:

I have learnt a lot in the past year and a half. Before that all I knew was my mum and dad and all that, before, that was all I knew but I came to it ... [RYS] ... and like all the different things on why it could happen and it shouldn't have happened and stuff like that.

This young person had normalised her experiences, but this service helped her to reflect on why domestic abuse occurs and to appreciate that abusive relationships should not be routinised. The young people also reported increased levels of knowledge:

We did worksheets and stuff on it ... [domestic abuse] ... and they never say it is a right or wrong answer ... it is your opinion and then they tell you more about it, so you're not like being told off or anything ... I have definitely learnt a lot more ...

The youth service was age appropriate in helping to ensure that young people were getting information they could understand:

I understand it more because they tell you about it in a way that you can understand it, like they don't speak to you like you're an adult they speak to you like you are your own age.

Another young person agreed,

Yeah it ... [understanding] ... has got better ... they speak to you about it and I understand it ...

At Riverside young people were helped to understand events from childhood that were difficult to comprehend:

It definitely has helped ... I didn't really know much about it because I was younger when everything happened between my mum and dad, but since I came here, I think it's because there are other people who have went through it as well, and there is different things that have happened, so it has made me realise a lot more about it.

In this way, the young people claimed that their understanding had increased and their involvement in one-to-one and group work sessions helped them to express emotions. This seemed more important to the young people than any structural analysis of gender or patriarchy. For example, while these concerns underpinned reasons for the service they were not always to the fore in practice. One family resource worker agreed on the importance of increasing understanding and knowledge:

One of the biggest things is their understanding of what domestic abuse is and how that impacts on their life and how they can deal with that. So they know it is not their fault and the feelings that come with that ... it allows young people to explore that and move on with things or just be able to talk to somebody or express that, so that is a big thing and it reduces that feeling of isolation and increases their confidence.

This comment suggests that increasing levels of knowledge, understanding and confidence helped the young people to move forward. The programme also contributed to young people's subjective well-being, by building their confidence and capacity to trust and connect with others and to believe in themselves (Field 2003 Field, J. 2003. *Social Capital*. London: Routledge.). Thus, although gendered analysis was clearly stated in Riverside literature, for the young people in this study, understanding that they were not to blame for the abuse they

experienced and learning new strategies for dealing with feelings of isolation were of more immediate micro-level importance.

One young person explained how increased understanding may impact on future decisions on personal safety:

I think it's like ... you have got a safe mind, so when you are older ... you know all the consequences of what can happen, so you can always feel safe ...

By understanding domestic abuse and reflecting on their experiences, this young person made rational decisions that she believed would continue in later life. All of the young people said the service helped them to understand relationships and how to deal effectively with a range of difficult situations that could also help them to deal with future situations they may encounter. As women between the ages of 22 and 25 are most at risk of being a victim of domestic abuse (Scottish Executive 2009 Scottish Executive. 2009. "Domestic Abuse Recorded by Police in Scotland, 2008–09." *Statistical Bulletin, Criminal Justice Series*. Accessed May 11, 2012. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/23112407/0>.), it appeared useful that knowledge, understanding and coping strategies were promoted and supported at a younger age.

Some young people reported feeling safer through engagement with Riverside:

I have actually, I don't know how to explain it ... they just ... I just do, I feel a lot safer and better ... it is maybe just because you talk to them [workers] and feel safe about talking to them thinking that no one is listening in and like going to hear what you are saying and all that secret stuff because you know them and it does you feel really ... like you're not talking to a stranger and they are going to go and tell people ...

Another explained:

It just makes you feel safer because if anything is going to happen or you're worried about something you can contact them and they will look after you and if you feel like something is going to happen they will find a safe place for you to stay and stuff.

Two young people felt the office location, situated in their local community, also helped them feel secure:

We know where the office is so I think if there was anything that went wrong or I needed to talk to anyone I could just go to the office because I know the women are there until 4 o'clock so I know I could go.

Yeah because they ... [women in the local office, which included some youth service workers] ... make sure everything is fine around your area.

Citing Blanchard, Molloy, and Brown (1992 Blanchard, A., F. Molloy, and L. Brown. 1992. "I Just Couldn't Stop Them". *A Study of Western Australian Children Living with Domestic Violence: A Study of Children's Experiences and Service Provision*. Perth: The Curtin University School of Social Work for the WA Government Office of the Family.), Laing (2000 Laing, L. 2000. *Children, Young People and Domestic Violence*. Sydney: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse., 7) reported that, 'a reliable, sympathetic and

capable adult within walking distance would be a useful support'. As demonstrated in the extracts, the concept of safety is complex and not solely expressed in physical terms. In reporting increased understanding and feelings of safety, the young people suggested their relationships with Riverside youth workers were supportive and they were reassured to know that workers were there for them. This was also reflected in young people's views on how their ideas were into account in order to ensure continued development towards their needs and aspirations.

Future progression of the service

According to Wolfe and Jaffe (1999 Wolfe, D., and P. Jaffe. 1999. "Emerging Strategies in the Prevention of Domestic Violence." *Domestic Violence and Children* 9 (3): 133–144., 134):

While crisis intervention is a necessary response to domestic violence and can be highly effective at particular points in time, it alone cannot address the complex dynamics of domestic violence. There is also a strong need for proactive strategies of prevention.

Proactive strategies were developed at Riverside youth service on different levels. For example, the involvement of young people in the Listen Louder Campaign demonstrated direct lobbying of the Scottish Government that helped gain initial funding for the service, and their opinions on service development also contributed to a successful Big Lottery funding application. Involving young people in campaigning and securing funding was part of a developmental process:

You need to continually be evaluating and developing the service and because it is children and young people led, obviously their views have to be monitored and kept. We have meetings with the young people and ask them for feedback and they can do it anonymously or put their names to it ... Also on a more strategic level ... we would ask them how they felt about meeting three workers or did they just want one continuous worker because that needs to be taken on board and fed back to the Scottish Government as well.

This extract from a youth worker interview suggests that young people's views not only informed the progression of Riverside youth service locally, on a micro-level, but also informed macro-level change through direct lobbying of government to raise awareness of domestic abuse and bring new funding for addressing this issue in Scotland.

Involving young people in service development helped create a bespoke youth service which, when we asked about how to improve the service, produced only two recommendations. First, young people asked for group session to be longer in order to facilitate increased contact time, and, second, they wanted the service to be promoted in schools to facilitate increased referrals to Riverside youth service:

If more people came ... if the school listens to what has happened in their lives and finds out who ... they can refer them ... there would be more people going to it.

Highlighting the need to listen, and take more referrals, this young person's comment was consistent with concerns among partner organisations that this kind of work could be more effectively communicated among partner agencies. For example, one partner suggested that

when a young person was referred to Riverside there was a lack of information on their progress passed back to the referring agency – ‘It kind of goes into the ether’.

This is a clear weakness of the service. If partner agencies feel they are not informed of the outcome or progression of the referral they may hesitate to make future referrals. This raises questions on the development of specialised services. The service adopted a clear stance on providing information in partnership meetings or about the young people they worked with:

Confidentiality is rearing its head more and more ... you go to meetings and it is “we're all professionals here and it should be a two way flow about these women” ... [but] ... Women are here to escape. Women, children and young people are here to escape men who have abused them, and who is to say that the man is not the social worker sitting beside me at that meeting. So I am not about to give personal information about this woman. Who is to say it is not the policeman who comes to the door? The DWP you are liaising with for benefits? So these are things that even after all these years, you know there still doesn't seem to be the understanding ...

Thus, while the service supports an ethos of partnership working, it maintains a duty of care to the young people and their mothers, as primary clients in a relationship that puts their needs first (Sercombe 2010 Sercombe, H. 2010. *Youth Work Ethics*. London: Sage.). Riverside insist on having the consent of the mother and the young person prior to engagement, so it can be argued that this is not in fact youth work but rather a social care service that is tailored for young people. In this sense there may be a blurring of boundaries between conceptualising this service as social care for welfare, or as informal educational youth work.

Yet, while the lack of feedback is problematic for partner agencies, it was also symbolic of the confidential nature of the service as deciphered by Riverside WA and a commitment to its primary clients (both mother and young person). Nevertheless, this undoubtedly hinders partnership working, and there is a need to evaluate the pros and cons of adopting such a position in order to avoid jeopardising possibilities for collaborative practice. Despite these concerns, the service effectively engages with young people on one key issue: domestic abuse. It is a specialised kind of youth work that is valued by those who need it most. This is not the same as generic youth work and it is unfair and may even be unhelpful to compare the two.

According to UNICEF (2006 UNICEF. 2006. *Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*. New York: UNICEF.), every young person needs the violence to stop, and additional protective factors can support their on-going development after experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse. These factors include: having a safe and supportive environment; knowing there are adults that can listen to them, believe them and shelter them; knowing it is not their fault and understanding that violence is wrong and not an appropriate way to resolve conflicts.

Riverside appeared to create conditions in which these factors could be safely developed and explored. Yet, while findings suggest that Riverside youth service offers a means of supporting young people who have experienced or been impacted by domestic abuse, there was also capacity for increased communication among partner agencies.

There was also scope to involve trained specialist youth workers in places where young people routinely meet, to help eradicate the problem of domestic violence by challenging normalisation and acceptance of domestic abuse among the wider population (McCarry 2009).
McCarry, M. J. 2009. "Justifications and Contradictions: Understanding Young People's Views of Domestic Abuse." *Men and Masculinities* 11 (3): 325–345. 10.1177/1097184X06294008.; Mullender et al. 2002 Mullender, A., G. Hague, U. Imam, L. Kelly, E. Malos, and L. Regan. 2002. *Children's Perspectives on Domestic Violence*. London: Sage.). Spending time and building rapport with young people, whilst listening to their views and experiences, meant this research was developed 'with' as opposed to 'on' the young people (France 2003 France, A. 2003. "Young People." In *Doing Research with Children and Young People*, edited by S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, and C. Robinson, 175–190. London: Sage.). This created understanding of young people's perspectives as participants in a specialised youth service and showed that their views were taken into account. In the light of this evaluation it was possible to draw conclusions that could inform development of future practices and research in this area.

Conclusion

Riverside WA offers a response to negative experiences and feelings of isolation and confusion that are associated with domestic abuse. It offers a specific and tailored youth service with knowledgeable youth workers, trained in domestic abuse. They provide support, understanding and respite from negative environments and experiences. The methods used in one-to-one and group work services facilitated participation and gave young people choices on the kind of support they received and how long this should last.

Specialist support and peer empathy were identified as important aspects of practice. Riverside youth service offered a space that young people perceived as a safe place in which to question and consider their understandings of the reasons for abuse and how they could manage their feelings. This provided a support structure that protected them from feeling isolated. The service also helped young people to appreciate that things can change and that there are possibilities for speaking out against what is happening, in order to garner support from governments and public institutions, or peers.

The service supports the growth and development of individual young people whilst also facilitating their capacity, confidence and understanding in order to take collective action and to challenge social and structural circumstances that foreground experiences of domestic abuse.

In two areas, the research highlights a need for caution in service development. First, the risk of young people becoming dependent on the service highlights a need for balance in building supportive relationships that are mindful of the need to build relationships outside of the service. Second, the need for improved communication, to increase awareness and understanding among the wider population and in collaboration with partner agencies, is also identified.

Finally, analysis suggests that this kind of specialised youth service should be further investigated to strengthen findings from this small-scale study. A larger, more diverse sample size would establish whether this kind of service should be developed more widely or if additional training of existing youth workers would be equally effective. The United Nations (2012 United Nations. 2012. "Commitments to End Violence against Women and Girls." *UN*

News Centre. Accessed November 25, 2012.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43559#.ULICpeTG-Sp.>) is committed to the elimination of violence against women and girls. The insights discussed here suggest that Riverside WA offers one response to this commitment, providing a useful service on which to build new futures by working with young people who have experienced domestic abuse.