

JUSTICE
FOR GIRLS

A Space to Thrive

Young women in poverty say why they need integrated support, advocacy and education services of their own



Justice for Girls Community Consultation Report

By Tracey McIntosh and Carly Stanhope
with the leadership of young women in Vancouver, B.C.

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April 2018

ABOUT JUSTICE FOR GIRLS

Justice for Girls was founded in 1999 in response to national and international calls for gender-specific programs and services for teenage girls. Recognizing and addressing the intersecting forms of oppression that young women face, including intergenerational impacts of colonization, is fundamental to our work toward ending violence against girls and young women living in poverty. We believe girls are experts in their own experience and must define solutions to issues that affect their lives.

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- Broadway Youth Resource Centre
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016-17, JFG conducted a year-long project with teenage girls, young women and community organizations in Vancouver, B.C. to learn about the current realities facing teenage girls¹ living in poverty. The project focused on their experiences within the services and institutions designed to support, protect and educate them, with a particular focus on the education system. JFG sought to identify how institutions and services are presently advancing girls' rights to education, justice and equality. While the project took place in Vancouver, many participants² spoke of their experiences throughout British Columbia.

Through focus groups and individual interviews, JFG spoke to 51 teenage girls and young women aged 14 to 24, and to more than 50 community stakeholders.³ Interviewees identified barriers to girls' success in education, including male violence, poverty, colonialism, life in ministry care,⁴ homelessness, institutional responses to violence, discriminatory school climate, inadequate school curriculum, and inhibitory school structure and policies. These consultations informed our recommendation for an innovative, integrated response — a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre — and helped JFG identify aims for future systemic advocacy.

If girls' right to education is to be substantively realized, access to education alone is not enough; we need measures and resources that support young women's educational success.⁵ Our community consultations revealed that B.C.'s public education system is not wholly responsive to the needs of teenage girls in poverty. Instead, many girls are alienated, disengaged and vulnerable in mainstream schools, increasing their vulnerability to future poverty, poor health outcomes, disempowerment, inequitable access to economic and social opportunities, and homelessness.⁶

Male violence is the greatest barrier to teenage girls' success in education. Young women described daily experiences of male violence, including sexual harassment and assault, and cited rape, sexual assault and an inadequate institutional response to violence as key factors in school disconnection and failure.

Poverty is a key barrier to young women's access to education. While primary and secondary education is free in Canada, young women reported they could not afford to attend school because they needed to earn an income to support themselves and their families. Numerous young women could not afford school fees or books, or could not complete homework because they did not have access to a home computer. Others were teased for using photocopied versions of workbooks, or coming to school in second-hand clothes.

Institutions are ill-equipped to respond to violence in the lives of teenage girls. Young women reported that, more often than not, teachers do not adequately respond to signs or reports of violence. School and addictions counsellors and mental health workers were described as unhelpful and ill-informed in their responses to sexual assault and rape. Several young women described the police response to their attack as revictimization. Young women also identified a lack of accountability within the education system in response to educational staff perpetrating violence against girls.

Vancouver lacks gender-specific, age appropriate sexual assault services for teenage girls. Front line youth service providers and educational staff describe being at a loss as to where to refer girls in Vancouver for support after a sexual assault or rape. The majority of community-based programs, projects and services that respond to gender-based violence are designed for adult women. At the same time, programs for youth are not gender-specific, nor do they offer an intersectional understanding of oppression and violence.

The legacy of colonialism continues to harm Indigenous girls and permeate the mainstream education system.⁷ Indigenous girls continue to face the deepest poverty, extreme vulnerability to racialized male violence and disproportionate institutionalization in prisons, mental health institutions and child welfare placements. The scars of Indian residential schools continue to have a profound impact on Indigenous youth. In British Columbia, 40 per cent of Indigenous People aged 20 to 24 have not graduated from high school.⁸ Across Canada, this number grows to 70 per cent for those on reserves.⁹ In our consultations, young women explained that educators “gave up” on them. Stakeholders noted “intense, visible racism” and stereotyping of Indigenous girls, which has been linked to misdiagnosed or undiagnosed learning disabilities, school failure, or girls being “pushed through” without adequate levels of literacy.¹⁰

Teenage girls in ministry care experience institutional neglect, increasing their vulnerability to violence and lower education.¹¹ Young women reported that lack of continuity in social workers and ministry care created instability and insecurity throughout formative teenage years. Young women complained that government care failed to provide them with basic life skills and experiences essential to sustaining oneself as an adult. Our research revealed disproportionate levels of school absenteeism and experiences of sexualized violence amongst girls in care.¹²

Homelessness impacts girls' ability to meet basic requirements for attendance and participation at school. Several young women identified precarious or unsafe housing circumstances as barriers to remaining connected to school. In addition to obvious poverty-related barriers, girls reported administrative barriers resulting from their lack of a home address or the ability to obtain parental consent.

Teenage girls struggle in a sexist, discriminatory and violent school climate. Young women reported that teachers hold a “double standard” for girls and boys and that sexist language and exchanges are normalized. They also noted racialized bullying as reasons for school disconnection. Our research revealed lesbian and bisexual girls face rejection, stigma and threats of violence, in addition to invisibility at school.¹³ The prevalence of school-related male violence furthers a discriminatory environment.¹⁴

School curricula fail to promote respect for human rights and full participation in society. Young women were not aware of their rights, or were unclear about how to exercise their rights in practical terms. Most young women reported a lack of curricula about fundamental life skills, such as education about healthy relationships, personal health and wellness, budgeting, independent living, child development and careers.

Inflexible school structures and policies create additional barriers for impoverished teenage girls. Young women and stakeholders cited the need for a more flexible, responsive and well-resourced school system to address the complexities of challenges experienced by girls living in poverty. Stakeholders noted that a lack of resources, multiple school transitions, and strict grading and attendance policies unequally disadvantaged vulnerable girls who feel disempowered in the mainstream education system. Conversely, alternate education programs¹⁵ were widely applauded by many young women. All participants emphasized that hiring policies and practices which prioritize seniority over suitability¹⁶ can have devastating consequences for teenage girls who are precariously connected to school.

Recommendations:

Achieve equality. Girl marginalization, school disconnection and homelessness must be understood within a context of social and economic inequality and cannot be stopped without a full-fledged fight for girls' equality. This can only be achieved by ending racism, poverty, male violence and other conditions of oppression young women and girls encounter every day.

Teenage girls need an immediate, girl-specific response to barriers. JFG will launch a Girls' Advocacy and Learning (GAL) Centre to promote girls' equality and full realization of their right to education. It will be innovative and integrated, to prevent the fragmentation of services that typically fail to meet the needs of girls in poverty and to address the root causes of inequality. By providing a continuum of advocacy, support and education services centred in an analysis of systemic social and economic inequalities, our GAL Centre aims to move young women from extreme poverty and violence to stability, health, education and independence, and mentor and empower young women to effect systemic change in the institutional policies and programs that affect their daily lives.

INTRODUCTION

From 2016-17, JFG conducted a year-long project with girls, young women and community organizations in Vancouver, B.C., to learn about the current realities facing teenage girls living in poverty. The project focused on young women's experiences within the services and institutions designed to support, protect and educate them, with a particular focus on the education system. We sought to identify how institutions and services are advancing teenage girls' rights to education, justice and equality.

Teenage girls and women who have experienced poverty and homelessness led the project's direction, content and work. Together, we identified recommendations for systemic change and envisioned an innovative response to the immediate challenges and barriers facing teenage girls in poverty — a Girls' Advocacy and Learning (GAL) Centre. We spoke with teenage girls, women and community stakeholders, read their writings and incorporated their knowledge into this report. It articulates what girls said they need to experience freedom, dignity and safety in their daily lives.

As a key institution in the daily lives of teen girls, with the potential to improve young women's social and economic prospects, the education system is a critical contact point and potential support for teen girls. As the "only formal institution to have meaningful contact with nearly every young person in Canada," schools are in a unique position to advance the girls' equality rights.¹⁷

Our point of entry is the education system, but our consultations were not limited to that system nor do we believe transformative education system change alone will achieve equality and freedom from poverty, violence, racism and other forms of oppression in girls' lives. This report also highlights systemic barriers in other institutions — child welfare, health, criminal justice — and includes recommendations for broader social change.

PART 1: ADOPTING AN EQUALITY RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

Thinking about equality

General recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* emphasizes that substantive equality — not just the equality of opportunity, but the equality of results — must be the goal.

JFG promotes equality for teenage girls who live in poverty. How we understand and define young women’s equality is critical to our advocacy. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women emphasizes that a formal, legalistic conception of equality will not suffice in pursuit of women’s equality.¹⁸ The notion of “substantive equality” emphasizes equality of **results** over equality of opportunity as the international and domestic standard for realizing woman and girls’ human rights in Canada.¹⁹ In other words, it’s not good enough to simply offer opportunities, we must ensure that girls get necessary resources and support to be successful. To achieve substantive equality, we must level the playing field by employing temporary special measures, such as gender-specific supports and services. Young women need girl-specific programs and services to realize a full spectrum of human rights, including the right to education.

By ratifying several international human rights treaties, Canada recognizes that all children have a right to education.²⁰ While Canada provides free primary and secondary education for children,²¹ girls’ right to education is undermined by systemic gender inequality.²² JFG pushes beyond simply offering young women the same opportunities as young men. We call for measures that respond to gender-specific underlying conditions of inequality and violence and offer girls substantive opportunities to rise out of poverty and oppression. Girls’ access to education is critical to their equality.

A rights-based approach

“[F]or the historically disempowered, the conferring of rights is symbolic of all the denied aspects of their humanity: rights imply a respect that places one in the referential range of self and others, that elevates one’s status from human body to social being.”

– Patricia Williams

JFG adopts a rights-based, feminist approach to identify and challenge systemic discrimination against girls and to illuminate governments' legally binding obligations to protect and promote young women's dignity, well-being and freedom. Human rights are indivisible. Young women will not achieve equality without access to a full spectrum of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, especially freedom from violence.

JFG responds to the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression that inhibit girls' freedom, dignity and security. Girls exist at the juncture of multiple forms of oppression: They are "marginalized within the category of children as female, and within the category of women as minors."²³ Even within human rights standards, girls' rights are fragmented. For instance, women's rights are enshrined in the United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*²⁴ while girls' rights are enshrined in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.²⁵ This separate entitlement for women and children often erases teenage girls' distinct needs and vulnerabilities.²⁶ If human rights instruments are to be truly meaningful for girls, they must be read together.²⁷

Additional forms of oppression, including poverty, racism, colonialism and homophobia mediate and compound inequalities that arise at the intersection of gender and age.²⁸ For example, poverty compounds young women's marginalization by acting as a barrier to social, educational and economic opportunities, increasing girls' vulnerability to violence and homelessness. The compounding impacts of colonization and poverty have led to an epidemic of male violence, exploitation and suicide amongst Indigenous teen girls in Canada. "Criminalization, systemic racism, racialized male sexual violence, especially childhood sexual abuse, and sexist discrimination against Indigenous girls are poignant examples of how colonization continues to ravage the lives of Indigenous girls in modern-day Canadian society."²⁹

Girls' right to education

Article 10 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* requires that states, "take all appropriate measures... to ensure to [women] equal rights with men in the field of education."³⁰

Girls' education is critical to achieving equality. Article 13 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* recognizes that everyone has a right to education. The broad intention of this right is to ensure that education "shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the

Education empowers girls “to shape, rather than merely endure, the change that affects them.”³²

respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”³¹ Education empowers girls “to shape, rather than merely endure, the change that affects them.”³²

While education has vast potential to “empower women, safeguard children from exploitation, promote human rights norms, protect the environment and control population growth,” attaining education is not enough to achieve substantive equality. For example, many young women in our consultations completed Grade 12, yet continue to cope with devastating poverty, chronic underemployment, unstable and unsafe housing, and vulnerability to violence.

While JFG underscores the importance of girls’ education, for many young women the present model of education does not ensure stability, safety and prosperity. For some, especially Indigenous young women whose families and communities have endured the horrors of residential schools, education can be a fundamentally alienating experience.

When we consider education as an equality issue, we look beyond simple access and consider the complexity of inequalities that limit girls’ potential within education.³³ We propose a Girls’ Advocacy and Learning Centre to transcend and challenge educational system barriers that girls in poverty face, and promote the full realization of young women’s right to education.

“There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls.”

– Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

PART 2: COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

Gathering, documenting and representing young women's perspectives and experiences in a public report is an immense ethical and social responsibility. We approach this work with humility, guided by feminist research principles and methodology.³⁴ We engage young women's leadership in our consultations with mutual respect and reciprocity and we act with the express purpose of advancing equality. The following report highlights results of JFG's community consultations and makes recommendations to create broader social change and address the need for social justice for teenage girls living in poverty.

The consultation process

In 2016-17, through a series of focus group interviews and individual consultations, JFG spoke with 51 young women, aged 14 to 24, with diverse experiences of marginalization. We also spoke to more than 50 community stakeholders, including activists, front line workers, educators, counsellors and health professionals in youth-serving institutions and agencies, and within women's, Indigenous and other equality-seeking organizations.

Purpose

JFG began this one-year project in Vancouver, B.C. to learn about current realities facing teenage girls living in poverty and their experiences within institutions that affect their daily lives. We wanted to identify how institutions and services advance girls' rights to education, justice and equality, and to define the barriers young women face to successfully complete secondary education. We wanted to learn what young women thought about a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre as a potential response to the issues affecting girls living in poverty and a catalyst for systemic change, and what services a centre should include. The project also aimed to promote young women's leadership in developing policies and programs that affect them.

Young women's leadership: Internships

Promoting young women's leadership is central to our mandate and an essential element of this project. In April 2016, JFG hired three young women interns who have experienced poverty and marginalization to co-lead our consultations.

Their contributions to our understanding of girls' realities and to the vision and priorities for our proposed Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre cannot be overemphasized.

Our interns were trained and mentored over several months, to understand how poverty, racism, colonialism, violence and other forms of oppression have shaped their experiences,

perceptions and position in the world. We educated them about domestic and international human rights, including their rights within institutions that affect their daily lives. We also gave them practical training on group facilitation, media communications, research methods, social justice advocacy, and public speaking and writing.

Young women's input: Consultations

We held four focus groups in centres typically catering to youth experiencing poverty and marginalization in various Vancouver areas.

We developed a standardized list of focus group questions³⁵ to guide our dialogues with young women. We centred our discussion on identifying girls' experiences with the education, child welfare, health and criminal justice systems, and on recommendations for the vision and priorities of a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre. We also included an educational (consciousness-raising) component, offering young women information about human rights, inequality and oppression. JFG interns played a critical role as peer mentors, encouraging participation through personal disclosures and stories.

Stakeholder consultation

We also consulted more than 50 community stakeholders through individual interviews, forums and roundtables. A series of questions guided the individual interviews.³⁶ We received limited input from parents and did not consult criminal justice personnel.

Review of research and law

To situate girls' individual experiences within a broader societal context, we also reviewed literature on violence against women and girls, the gendered nature of poverty and homelessness, and the effects of these barriers on girls' success in Canadian education. To clarify the nature and scope of girls' rights, we reviewed domestic and international human rights law standards, jurisprudence and reports.

Conclusions

This report identifies human rights infringements that girls face, particularly in education. We propose a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre as a transformative tool for achieving substantive equality for girls and young women and make broader recommendations for systemic change.

Limitations

We conducted focus groups only in Vancouver, B.C., so our report doesn't reflect the reality of young women in rural areas, who face significant, unique forms of marginalization.³⁷ Our focus groups were held on-site at local service providers, so we didn't have access to young women not connected to services. The age of consent to research participation was 14, an additional barrier. Younger girls required parental consent, barring many from participating. Few participants were under 16, providing limited input from the critical 13 to 15 age group, when girls are most likely to disengage from school.³⁸ We did not hear enough from young mothers, or young women who have experienced sexual exploitation, are newly immigrated or are English language learners.

What we learned

Young women and community stakeholders described many social and economic inequalities that limit teenage girls' potential.³⁹ They also described institutional barriers that further compound these inequalities, limiting teenage girls' access and potential within the education system.

Identified barriers

Social and economic inequalities, including:

- Male violence
- Poverty
- Colonialism
- Living in government care
- Homelessness

Institutional barriers, including:

- Inadequate institutional responses to violence
- Features of the education system
 - Hostile or discriminatory school climate
 - Inadequate and alienating school curriculum
 - Inhibiting structure and policies
 - Lack of resources
- Limited access to supports and resources

Social and economic inequalities

Male violence

Under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, children in Canada have a right to live free from violence — at school, at home or in the community.⁴⁰ This right extends to all forms of violence, including physical, psychological and sexual violence, as well as bullying and cyberbullying.⁴¹ While the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* affirms that girls have the right to benefit equally from this right, gender-based violence remains a significant barrier to girls' success in education.⁴²

Violence against girls remains one of the greatest impediments to the realization of equality. Male violence has affected the daily lives of every young woman JFG has worked with over the past 18 years. For homeless girls, it's not a question of whether they have experienced male violence, but how brutally and how often.

The Canadian Federation of University Women reports that 54 per cent of girls under age 16 have experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention; 24 per cent have experienced rape or coercive sex; and 17 per cent have experienced incest.⁴³ In the 2013 Adolescent Health Survey of 30,000 B.C. youth, the McCreary Society concluded that girls were six times more likely to have experienced both sexual and physical assault than boys.⁴⁴ And of the five per cent of sexual assaults reported to the police in Canada, girls under the age of 18 make up nearly half of all victims, with sexual assault rates highest among girls aged 13 to 15.⁴⁵

Male violence pushes girls in Canada to the margins, in their families, communities and society as a whole. Whether it's sexual abuse at home or in government care, rape by a current boyfriend, or repeated sexual exploitation and abuse by "johns," the effects of sexual violence against girls are severe and cumulative. In addition to physical injuries, girls experience chronic anxiety, panic attacks, depression, emotional numbness, flashbacks, sleep and eating disturbances, gastrointestinal disorders and more.⁴⁶ In our consultations, young women cited rape, sexual assault and inadequate institutional response to violence as key factors in their school disconnection and failure.

"I stopped going for one or two months because of a sexual assault. Everyone at school knew what happened and I was afraid for my safety."

- young woman participant

Plan Canada's 2012 *A Girl's Right to Learn Without Fear* identifies an alarming incidence of school-related, gender-based violence in Canada.⁴⁷ Plan Canada defines school-related, gender-based violence as "acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence inflicted on children in and around schools because of stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected of them because of their sex or gender identity."⁴⁸ The report reveals that for many children in Canada, violence in the forms of "sexual touching, harassment, and online sexual exploitation" are part of their daily school experience.⁴⁹

Many young women participating in our consultations affirmed this. They identified male staff and peers as perpetrators of violence. They reported experiences of "inappropriate behaviour" from male teachers in academic and counselling settings. They described feeling deeply uncomfortable when male teachers sexually objectify them by looking down their tops or touching them. They said boys trade nude photos of girls "like hockey cards" and send girls unwanted photos of male body parts. One stopped going to school for several months due to her fear of a young man who sexually assaulted her; she also feared his friends. Another arrived at school to find graffiti referencing her rape; her response to this humiliation and trauma was to misbehave at school so that she would be expelled and not have to return. Another began skipping school after being raped at age 13 by a Grade 12 male student; the young man had followed instructions on how to commit sexual assault against a child from an online forum called the "LG [little girl] Slayers." It's hardly surprising that many young women in our consultations said they did not feel safe at school.

Experiences of violence at home are also common. Research indicates that children who experience or witness domestic violence are likely to have diminished educational attainment.⁵⁰ Some told us that psychological and physical abuse at home made it extremely difficult to attend school. Others identified school as "an escape" from violent home life. These varied responses echoed research findings that domestic violence can result in a sharp decline in school attendance or, conversely, exceptional attendance as a way to escape abuse at home.⁵¹ In either case, violence adversely affects children's "cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioural functioning."⁵²

Poverty

The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* recognizes education as "the best vehicle to break cycles of poverty and disadvantage."⁵³

“You’re given the photocopied version of a workbook if you can’t afford it, so everyone knows you’re poor.”

- young woman participant

Many government policies and practices have institutionalized poverty in the lives of children in British Columbia; at 19 per cent, we have the highest child poverty rate in the country, and the highest rate of poverty of any province for children living in single

mother households.⁵⁴ For British Columbia’s Indigenous children and youth, the situation is dire, with poverty rates reaching close to 40 per cent.⁵⁵

The pressures and deprivations of poverty limit girls’ potential in multiple ways. Plan Canada identifies a correlation between poverty and precarious schooling.⁵⁶ Girls who live in poverty may have to take on part-time jobs, care for younger siblings, or may be entirely self-reliant and so cannot “afford” to go to school. This was the case for a number of young women we consulted, especially those who left ministry care. Those who can attend school may experience barriers in terms of purchasing books, supplies and accessing technology. One young woman in our consultations said she could not afford fees for schoolbooks and experienced humiliation as a result. She explained, “You’re given the photocopied version of a workbook if you can’t afford it, so everyone knows you’re poor.” Girls reported being continually embarrassed when teachers called out their name daily for not bringing in school fees. One said she “never did homework” because she did not have access to a computer after school hours.

Poverty has academic and social consequences for girls. Plan Canada acknowledges that poverty makes young women particularly vulnerable to all forms of male violence, as well as ridicule and exploitation from adults and peers at school.⁵⁷ Young women reported to us that they were “bullied” by teachers for being late to school or not completing homework, even though circumstances of poverty impeded them. Some were also teased by other students. One explained, “I was teased because they [other students] said I smelled like Value Village.”⁵⁸ In a ranking of most pressing concerns for youth in British Columbia, the RCMP National Youth Officer Program identified bullying second only to substance abuse.⁵⁹

Colonialism

Article 29 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* requires that education develop respect for the child’s cultural identity, and “in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.”

As result of colonization, Indigenous girls continue to face the deepest poverty, extreme vulnerability to racialized male violence including sexual harassment, abuse, rape and murder, and institutionalization in prisons, mental health institutions and child welfare placements. For example, Indigenous children comprise only eight per cent of B.C.'s population, but represent 55 per cent of children in government care.⁶⁰ Once in care, Indigenous girls are often placed in non-Indigenous foster homes; these can be environments of profound alienation, abuse and racism. As a result, Indigenous girls often leave government homes only to become homeless. Over-criminalization of Indigenous girls has led to a situation where, although they make up only six per cent of Canada's population, they represent 44 per cent of all girls sentenced in youth custody.⁶¹ These girls do not pose significant threats to public safety, but rather suffer from social and systemic discrimination, including poverty, inadequate educational opportunities, government care placements, violence and homelessness.

Within the education system, Indigenous girls face multiple intersecting forms of oppression that ultimately lead to diminished educational attainment. Racism permeates the education system, so their knowledge and experience as Indigenous peoples is devalued. They also face sexism that makes them vulnerable to racialized sexual violence from male teachers, school administrators and peers.⁶² From 2010-16 in British Columbia, 69 per cent of Indigenous girls stayed connected to school and completed Grade 12, compared to 88 per cent of non-Indigenous girls.⁶³ Educational attainment sharply declines for girls living on reserves, where only three of every 10 students graduate from high school.⁶⁴

One young woman we consulted, who grew up on reserve, explained that educators "gave up on her" and did not accommodate her mental health issues that stemmed from childhood trauma. A community service provider described "visible racism" and stereotyping of Indigenous students in Vancouver schools. In particular, non-Indigenous teachers may hold stereotypes of Indigenous girls as "stupid" or "incapable," which may lead to "misdiagnosed learning disabilities, undiagnosed learning disabilities, low grades, failure or being held back, or being pushed through the school system without an acceptable level of literacy."⁶⁵ It may also lead to streamlining Indigenous girls into alternative education programs, resulting in de facto racial segregation. In B.C., Indigenous students make up only eleven and a half per cent of the student population, but account for 41 per cent of all students in alternate education programs.⁶⁶

"When I moved to Vancouver, the visibility and racism being native was really intense."

- parent

Life in government care

Article 19.1 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* requires states to take all appropriate “social and educational measures” to protect children from all forms of violence including physical, psychological or sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation from legal guardians and caregivers.⁶⁷

Children in government care are under the supervision and guardianship of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.⁶⁸ Children typically come into care following physical, emotional or sexual abuse; abandonment or neglect; or because parents are not equipped to meet the child’s behavioural, physical or developmental needs.⁶⁹ Children in ministry care consistently achieve lower educational attainment than the general population.⁷⁰

Young women we consulted cited life in government care as a key reason for school disengagement and absenteeism. Community stakeholders noted that girls living in government care tend to miss a significant amount of school.

Young women also described long-term deficits due to institutionalization in government care. In group homes, staff shop for and prepare all meals, laundry is done, clothes are bought, and toiletries and household items are available. When young women turn 19, they are expected to live independently without having learned fundamental life skills. Young women in government care are not afforded many experiences typical of growing up in a family home. In one of our focus groups, young women who had rarely experienced family meals, revelled in the thought of eating a meal together they had planned and prepared.

“You just have to do it [on your own] or you’re stuck in shitty situations the rest of your life.”

- young woman participant

Institutionalization leaves young women without skills to live independently and denies them the human experience of building connections and community that something as basic as preparing and sharing a meal together can give.

Young women in our focus groups described life in government care as disempowering. They said social workers approached their concerns with professionalized authority and dismissal, assuming that, as “higher up[s]” they knew best what the young women needed. One young woman explained, “I’m telling her [the social worker] what I need, but she is saying, ‘This would be better for you.’”

“You grow attached to someone and then they leave.”

- young woman participant

A vast body of research affirms the importance of consistent, quality relationships in adolescents’ lives.⁷¹ Young women in our consultations identified lack of continuity in social workers and caregivers as a key challenge for them. They used the term “institutional neglect” and described a “revolving

door” of social workers. Many, particularly young women who were on youth agreements at 16, described a lack of connection and support from social workers.⁷² One said, “I had to find housing on my own.” Another explained, “They give you a mover’s number and they pay start-up money, but you’re not taught to cook, to budget, where to shop, how to buy groceries, how to pack, [or] what you’ll need to buy for a house.” We consistently heard those who had lived in government care describe themselves as lacking requisite skills to live independently.

Inconsistent attention and care, lack of supportive relationships and a deficit of life skills increase girls’ vulnerability to violence. Research confirms that girls who live in government care are particularly vulnerable to violence — specifically, sexualized violence.⁷³ In 2016, British Columbia’s Representative for Children and Youth authored a report detailing the pervasive issue of sexualized violence against children in government care. It revealed 145 reported incidents of sexualized violence against 121 children in government care between 2011 and 2014.⁷⁴ Ninety per cent of those children were girls, 61 per cent Indigenous girls.⁷⁵

Young mothers in poverty described an overwhelming fear of having their children apprehended by the provincial child welfare authority. One young woman explained how this fear began at her child’s birth: “Before I was out of the hospital, they sent a social worker in to see me. I thought for sure I was going to lose my baby.” Young mothers in government care must deal with the stigma [expected failure] and the deficits of being in government care. One said, “It is assumed that I am going to be a terrible mother because I’m in the system. We’re not bad mothers, we’re just in unfortunate situations.” Biases and deprivations place young women and their children at greater risk for violence and homelessness. Young women are less likely to reach out for support if they believe they’ll be punished for needing it.

“It is assumed that I am going to be a terrible mother because I’m in the system. We’re not bad mothers, we’re just in unfortunate situations.”

- young woman participant

Homelessness

In 2006, the *United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* recommended that Canada “give special attention to the difficulties faced by homeless girls who are more vulnerable to health risks and social and economic deprivation, and take all necessary measures to provide them with adequate housing and social and health services.”⁷⁶

In our focus groups, young women overwhelmingly identified violence (both from partners and parents), poverty (reliance on B.C.’s low minimum wage or welfare) and a lack of affordable housing (or unavailable housing on reserves) as the main reasons they became homeless or housing-insecure. Some were kicked out of family homes because they were using drugs to cope with trauma. Others voluntarily left home to distance themselves from drug-addicted parents. Some experienced periods of precarious housing during pregnancies and after their child was born.

Most girls become homeless before the age of 14.⁷⁷ The McCreary Society noted that 63 per cent of youth were first homeless by 14 or younger, with 28 per cent before the age of 12.⁷⁸ In Metro Vancouver, 122 unaccompanied girls and young women under 25 visibly live without safe or stable housing.⁷⁹ Given that women and girls are not often the “visible” homeless, this is likely an underestimate.

Indigenous girls account for close to 50 per cent of homeless youth⁸⁰ and girls who identify as lesbian, bisexual or transgendered are significantly over-represented.⁸¹ These young women have less access to supports and face increased vulnerability to victimization.

Young women in our focus groups identified a number of barriers to obtaining shelter when they were homeless or housing-insecure. Girls repeatedly emphasized the lack of young women only shelters as a barrier. In Vancouver, there is currently only one emergency shelter specifically for young women aged 16 to 24. This lack of women only shelter leaves girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation by adult men.⁸²

“I would have been homeless with my child two or three times in my first year of parenting” [if she didn’t stay with a man for housing]

- young woman participant

Many young women described “limited options” when they couldn’t access safe shelter, including “walking up and down streets” all night or “getting stuck in SRO’s” (single room occupancy rooms) and being unable to shower or change. One highlighted the dangers and

indignities girls face if forced to stay on the street all night: “I heard a guy urinated on a girl’s face while she was sleeping outside.”

In searching for housing, girls were blocked if their personal identification had been stolen or lost while living on the street. Landlords “judged” young women for leaving home at a young age and refused housing if they could not provide references. Sometimes landlords expected sex in exchange for shelter. One young woman explained to us the sexual abuse she faced by landlords: “At 14, the only people who would rent to me were people who wanted to have sex with me. Often, that is what happens.”

Several focus group participants identified living in precarious and unsafe housing, including sleeping on the street, couch surfing, accessing shelters and staying with older men, as a barrier to staying in school. Homeless or housing-insecure girls were at a loss when school registration forms or field trips required addresses and/or parental consent. Requirements of the education system, including “regular timely attendance, school fees, dress codes and personal hygiene [are] all barriers to girls who [live] in unstable environments.”⁸³

“At 14, the only people who would rent to me were people who wanted to have sex with me. Often, that is what happens.”

- young woman participant

Institutional barriers

Inadequate institutional responses to violence

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* requires states to take all appropriate measures to support children in their physical and psychological recovery from violence.⁸⁴

Research reveals that the intensity and duration of psychological trauma experienced by survivors of male violence varies depending on how their disclosures are received.⁸⁵ Despite young women overwhelmingly citing male violence, particularly sexual assault and rape, as the most significant cause of school disconnection, few educational personnel or youth service providers acknowledged teenage girls' experience of sexism, sexual harassment and sexualized violence as factors in their school disconnection. It's not clear whether they were lacking awareness of the prevalence of male violence against teenage girls or an understanding of its effects on girls.

In either case, young women we consulted expressed dissatisfaction with the school system's responses, reporting that educational staff ignore signs of violence. When young women in our focus groups made complaints against educators, the administration usually did not respond. Girls reported a serious lack of accountability for teachers, especially those in senior administrative roles.

Educational personnel often lacked the skills, knowledge or inclination to assist girls who experienced violence. One young woman said, "Teachers don't ask the tough questions because they are too afraid to get involved or don't have the proper training. So more often than not, they ignore stuff." Young women also viewed school counsellors as "unhelpful" and "not well-trained."

In some instances, young women reported that educators deepened existing wounds. Girls who had experienced violence said teachers were "not understanding at all." One explained, "I showed up at school with a bruise on my neck from an attack the night before and a male teacher joked about it and made fun of it in front of the class. I didn't go back to that class."

"Teachers don't ask the tough questions because they are too afraid to get involved or don't have the proper training. So more often than not, they ignore stuff."

- young woman participant

This sort of insensitivity and ignorance about the harm of violence against girls contributes to the normalization of abuse,⁸⁶ is discriminatory and perpetuates violence in generations to come.⁸⁷

“It shouldn’t be stressful; it should be me getting help”

*- young woman participant
(on giving a police statement)*

Girls reported similar re-victimizing experiences interacting with other institutions, including police. Many young women in our focus groups experienced victim blaming. One explained that when two police officers responded to her rape, one asked the other, “Should we ask her what she was wearing?” When another young woman gave a police statement, the officer asked, “Hasn’t anyone ever told you not to let your drink out of sight?” Many reported that police plainly asked why they “didn’t say ‘no’” to the attacker. Young women found giving a police statement traumatic. They were emotionally harmed and humiliated when police showed up unannounced in public spaces, such as schools, to take statements, hovered over them as they wrote out a statement, or expected a statement immediately following a violent incident.

Many faced similar contempt and insensitivity from health-care professionals. Some were asked accusatory questions and called “dramatic” or “hysterical.” Community stakeholders and young women agreed that, although there are good youth health clinics available for teenage girls, there is a gap in service in Vancouver for responding to sexual assault and violence.

“I needed time to process it and you have to relive it.”

*- young woman participant
(on giving a police statement)*

Youth service providers in Vancouver described being at a loss of where to refer girls after a sexual assault. The majority of community-based programs, projects and services that respond to male violence are designed for adult women. While adult feminist models are useful, they don’t meet the age-specific needs of teen girls. Programs for youth aren’t gender-specific and don’t offer an intersectional understanding of oppression and violence. Educational staff often referred young women to mental health service professionals who may not have specific training in responding to violence against girls, may pathologize young women’s responses and were described as a “revolving door.” One young woman described having three different mental health counsellors in one year. Due to these inadequate institutional responses, survivors “often strive to cope with the experience of sexual victimization without legal, medical, or mental health support.”⁸⁸

Features of the education system

Hostile or discriminatory school climate

“It didn’t feel safe at that school.”

- young woman participant

Schools have the potential to advance young women’s equality but more often than not, schools are a “[re]production of the dominant culture”⁸⁹ replicating societal inequalities and entrenching gender roles.⁹⁰ The school setting becomes a microcosm of broader society in which sexist ideas are reinforced in curricula, physical spaces, classroom management, teacher conduct and schoolyard dynamics.⁹¹

One young woman described school environments as promoting “rape culture,” where pervasive sexist attitudes and beliefs normalize sexual harassment, unwanted touching and violence against girls. Others reported sexist verbal abuse and sexual coercion as commonplace.

Some noted teachers’ “double standard” for boys and girls. One educational staff member commented that girls are punished for questioning authority: “Girls that fail are the girls who lock horns with staff; the girls who are resisting.” Some consultation participants described male teachers as insensitive and sexist, citing examples of offensive jokes and derogatory terms such as “bitch” or “slut” in classrooms, or demeaning comments such as, “You throw like a girl.” Educational stakeholders also said that students’ sexist and homophobic remarks often go unchallenged by school staff, normalizing a discriminatory, sexist school culture.

Compounding the marginalizing experience of sexist school environments is the daily discrimination endured by young women who identify as lesbian, bisexual or transgendered. A 2011 Canada-wide report noted that 70 per cent of the 3,700 high school students surveyed heard expressions such as “that’s so gay” every day in school with almost half [48 per cent] hearing remarks such as “faggot,” “lezbo,” and “dyke” daily.⁹² Participants who identified as lesbian, bisexual or transgendered explained that they experienced elevated levels of verbal, physical and sexual harassment from peers.⁹³ Unsurprisingly, 64 per cent of these students revealed that they felt unsafe at school.⁹⁴

For Indigenous girls and girls from racialized or ethnic minorities, school cultures can be extremely hostile. Young women told us that racialized harassment, stereotyping and tokenism was commonplace in schools and rarely addressed by staff. One stakeholder in alternative education explained that many youth she supported had “no confidence due to the classism and racism they had experienced.” Young women in our focus groups cited racist bullying and harassment as major contributors to their school disconnection.

The 2013 Vancouver School Board *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement: Fourth Annual Report* echoes these sentiments, revealing that bullying continues to pervade the educational experiences of Indigenous youth in Vancouver.⁹⁵ Specifically, Indigenous students in Grades 3 and 4 are twice as likely (14 per cent, compared to seven per cent) as non-Indigenous students to experience bullying at school with the bullying incidence of Indigenous students rising to six times that of non-Indigenous students (29 per cent, compared to five per cent) by the time they reach Grade 12.⁹⁶ As a result, only 55 per cent of Grade 10 and 60 per cent of Grade 12 Indigenous students in Vancouver report feeling safe at school.⁹⁷

The Vancouver School Board has adopted policies of non-discrimination, stating “its commitment to eliminating racism and promoting educational and employment equity.”⁹⁸ However, much more must be done to ensure all students experience an educational environment free of discrimination and harassment, that promotes substantive equality in the educational lives of all young women and girls.

Inadequate and alienating school curriculum

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* requires that education ensures “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society” and be directed to “the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”.⁹⁹

There are “no courses that actually prepare you for anything.”

- young woman participant

Young women identified gaps in curricula pertaining to basic life skills, repeatedly indicating a desire for “real-life” education where they learn “things that matter, that will actually effect you in your life.” In every focus group, participants

asserted the need for core education about personal health and wellness, budgeting, independent living, communication skills, child development, parenting and careers.

Young women told us they lacked education about human rights. They either did not fully understand or were entirely unaware of their rights, particularly within the criminal justice system. They also lacked education about sexual assault law. They described the need for practical education about laws surrounding consent and sexual activity. They also said sex education was generally lacking in schools, particularly information about healthy relationships, consent to sexual activity and pregnancy.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirms the importance of adequate sex education: “it is essential that girls and women have the information on sexuality and reproduction to make meaningful decision about their lives.”¹⁰⁰ Girls’ autonomy, health and safety are at risk when information about pregnancy and consent to sexual activity is unavailable.

Only “20 minutes out of the whole year, consent was taught.”

- young woman participant

Inhibiting school structures and policies; lack of resources

“The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.”

- Mission Statement, B.C. Ministry of Education School Act, October 1, 2007

We need to “get rid of the cost we’ve put on young women’s lives...”

- educator

Stakeholders and young women in our focus groups cited the need for a more flexible, responsive and well-resourced school system, in order to adequately support young women and girls who experience poverty and marginalization. Educators and youth service providers noted that girls as young as 10 and 11 are disconnecting from school, and emphasized that more innovative, community-based outreach is needed to support girls who are not attending school. Others cited that a lack of resources, support and large class sizes have negatively affected the learning of vulnerable girls. An educator explained that girls are “being set up to work without being properly trained.” Another said “the system has totally failed them so why would they try.”

“Why do we measure success in terms of marks?”

- educator

Educational personnel said the current grading system disadvantages vulnerable learners. One noted, “Why do we measure success in terms of marks?” Another alternative program staff person remarked that “youth [in alternative education] are disempowered at a young age — they all think they are stupid”.

“School provides everything until high school and then even the best programs can’t match the level of service they get in elementary school.”

- educator

Educators and community service providers also described transitions as extremely challenging for vulnerable girls. The transition from elementary to high school is especially overwhelming for anxious, emotionally fragile girls. A Grade 7 educator commented on the huge

transition these girls must endure when they enter Grade 8. “School provides everything until high school and then even the best programs can’t match the level of service they get in elementary school.” Girls entering alternative programs in Vancouver may have to transition to multiple sites during their high school years, as they move from their home school to a junior and then a senior alternative program. One alternative program educator revealed that numerous young women she worked with had significant challenges staying connected to school once they left her Grade 9/10 program and many of them dropped out before graduation.

Consultation participants found hiring policy and practice that prioritizes seniority over suitability when filling educator and support staff positions troubling.¹⁰¹ This practice leads to challenges, particularly in alternative and Indigenous education programs, where training, experience, awareness, actions and staff team cohesiveness are critical to ensuring the success of vulnerable youth. Many educational stakeholders and young women related devastating consequences when inappropriate or ill-equipped staff are placed in positions working directly with vulnerable girls.

While young women pointed to many challenges within the mainstream schools, they widely applauded alternate education programs¹⁰² in Vancouver and elsewhere. They described having “caring, persistent” teachers who were “passionate,” went the “extra mile,” were “more available” and taught “about issues that were important.” In addition, they described a “flexible,” “self-paced” learning model where they received “individual attention” and “opportunities to succeed.” They also appreciated the holistic learning environments of some alternate and independent schools, where they could receive emotional support from on-site youth counsellors and concrete support such as food and transportation. One young woman commented, “[It] feels like a better education at alternative; more real life.”

[It] feels like a better education at alternative; more real life.”

- young woman participant

Lack of access to supports and resources

“I just got a doctor. I was looking for 1½ years since my baby was born”.

- young woman participant

Young women described a pressing need for more skilled, accessible, consistent and flexible girl-friendly supports and resources, particularly in health and wellness. Many participants said they wanted counselling

but were unable to get it, were uncomfortable with the choice of counsellor given, or found counsellors unhelpful, inaccessible or too short-term. On the other hand, one young woman said she had “too many different counsellors; alcohol and drug counsellors and therapists.” Another complained, “Detox takes forever. You can only stay one week. What’s the point in going when it’s just going to be the same [problems] when you get out?” Young women participants cited the importance of prevention and intervention for health and wellness concerns and a strict monitoring of medications by doctors to avoid drug dependency.

Young women, especially those living independently on youth agreements,¹⁰³ described challenges receiving consistent care, including affordability of medical, dental and mental health care, medications and access to a regular doctor. One young mother commented, “I just got a doctor. I was looking for 1½ years since my baby was born.” Without consistent, long-term and attentive health and wellness care, young women in poverty and their children are left vulnerable.

While there’s a clear need for improved services, it’s imperative that these services are grounded in an understanding of how the impacts of multiple forms of oppressions can increase girls’ vulnerability to male violence, exploitation, criminalization, school failure and homelessness. These experiences can have long-term, devastating impacts on the health and wellness of teenage girls. Health and wellness supports must go beyond simply mitigating damage by treating the problem as an individual mental health concern and instead advocate to change the underlying social and economic conditions that lead girls to experience mental health issues. Only when we move from supporting teenage girls to cope better to actually changing the conditions of their lives, will we improve their health and wellness.

Young women largely described local youth centres and services as helpful. They appreciated safe, comfortable drop-in spaces where they could access multiple on-site supports and resources. They recommended several local youth centres as extremely supportive because of their on-site resources, concrete aid, housing, counsellors and medical staff. One said, “[The youth centre is] a big support for my life with housing, food, support all on-site, and it’s not clinical-based.” Another described how useful a new youth health centre was. “They have everything in the same building: doctors, nurses, counsellors and advocacy.”

When we asked young woman in the focus groups if there were services in Vancouver they needed but could not find, they emphasized the critical need for advocacy supports when dealing with the complexities and barriers of the multiple institutions and services they encounter. They also highlighted an urgent need for female-only drop-in spaces, emergency and low-barrier shelters and long-term housing for young women, as well as girl-specific, age-appropriate sexual assault services. They highlighted the importance of creating mentorship and leadership opportunities for girls and young women, more youth clinics and detox centres, and designing youth spaces that allow young children and/or have on-site childcare available.

"[The youth centre is] a big support for my life with housing, food, support all on-site, and it's not clinical-based."

- young woman participant

PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Justice for Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre

Young women described many programs, services and supports that are effective in Vancouver. It is important to build on the success of these efforts in our recommendations. For example, young women value local youth centres where they can access multiple services at one site. They said direct access to concrete aid such as food, clothing and diapers is essential, as is trusting connections to youth workers who “know your story.” Research affirms the critical importance of employing holistic, integrated and culturally appropriate service models when supporting youth marginalized by violence, life in government care, colonization and homelessness.¹⁰⁴

Young women also articulated a clear need for **young women-specific** advocacy, support and education services to address the complex challenges and multiple barriers they face. They identified a need for girl-only spaces to escape sexual harassment, verbal abuse and, at times, assault from males at school, on the street, in shelters and while accessing services. This is consistent with our observations and experiences as advocates over the past 18 years — young women need safe spaces with a continuum of integrated, gender-specific supports and services in order to escape the crushing poverty, discrimination and violence they endure.

JFG proposes the establishment of a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre. As an immediate measure to address the root causes and specific barriers that prevent young women in poverty from substantively realizing their right to education, this centre will synthesize the best practices of youth resource centres with a feminist, rights-based approach to responding to young women's experiences of poverty and violence. Young women's leadership must also be promoted to ensure the development and operation of a young women's centre and its work is grounded in the lives of young women and girls living in poverty. Young women must be leaders in the public education, public discourse programs and policies that affect their lives. These recommendations are consistent with current research in this area.¹⁰⁵

- ❖ Young women want a safe gathering space where they can receive mentorship, peer support and counselling from women. They say such support is crucial to overcoming the isolation and trauma inherent in school disconnection, unstable housing, male violence and the “revolving door” of group and foster homes.
- ❖ Young women and community stakeholders emphasized that girls living in poverty need independent advocates to ensure fair treatment/human rights compliance when they are navigating the multiple institutions that affect their lives.
- ❖ Young women repeatedly articulated their need for holistic, “real life” education that equips them for independent life beyond secondary school graduation.

Justice for Girls Advocacy and Learning Center
1. Advocacy
<p>Individual and systemic advocacy to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and secure young women’s right to equality and freedom from violence • Secure safe, stable housing and financial independence for young women in poverty • Increase young women’s access to justice • Address inequalities and barriers to young women’s education, health and well being • Increase young women’s access to adequate childcare • Promote the leadership of young women and girls • Advise governments and policy-makers • Provide communications and public engagement to promote girls’ rights and educate the public about inequalities and issues affecting girls living in poverty
2. Support and counselling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide sexual assault support and long-term feminist counselling • Provide on-site sexual assault services including medical and forensic • Provide outreach and accompaniment supports (police, hospital, court, child welfare) • Build family, peer, community and cultural (re)connections • Cultivate an environment of belonging, empowerment and equality • Provide immediate, concrete aid such as food, clothing, transportation, laundry • Provide on-site medical and health and wellness services
3. Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational facilitation: To complete graduation requirements and/or connect to an equivalent training, trades or post-secondary program in the community • Holistic learning: To promote health and wellness and improve life and job-readiness skills • Young women’s leadership: A full-time internship program in which young women in poverty earn Grade 12 course credits while receiving on-the-job leadership training and experience as peer mentors, advocates, public educators and community leaders in the program development and policy changes that affect their lives • School outreach: Girls’ rights education workshops • Professional development training: Workshops to enhance the capacity of educational personnel, front line workers and health-care providers to respond to violence against girls, and to the issues affecting girls living in poverty • Public education: Increase public awareness and engagement on issues affecting girls living in poverty

Broader social and systemic change

While critically important, services alone are not sufficient to end violence, poverty and homelessness in girls' lives. We must address the root causes of poverty, racism, colonialism, homophobia and sexism that leave girls vulnerable to violence, exploitation, government apprehension, school disconnection and homelessness. This section includes recommendations from the young women and stakeholders who participated in our 2016-17 community consultations, along with current research in this area and JFG's systemic advocacy work over the past 18 years.

Male violence

"Provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services to girls subjected to all forms of gender-based violence."

- Conclusions of the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women

- ❖ British Columbia's provincial, regional and local governments must take steps to prevent and respond to violence against girls.
 - Fund girls' rights, advocacy and anti-violence centres
 - Provide supported girl-only emergency shelters and transitional housing to girls escaping violence and/or who are homeless

- ❖ Canada must ensure that the criminal justice response to violence against girls is immediate and thorough.
 - In consultation with young women and girls, women's anti-violence and Indigenous women's organizations improve the training, procedures, oversight and accountability for police officers and criminal justice staff responding to sexualized violence and exploitation of young women and girls
 - Allow time for girls to access supports before giving victim statements after a sexual assault

- ❖ British Columbia's Ministry of Education and Boards of Education, must improve their prevention efforts, response, procedural oversight and accountability for dealing with violence against girls in schools and reports of violence against girls generally.

- Mandate training for educators, educational personnel and teacher candidates on the prevalence and consequences of violence and exploitation in the lives of teenage girls, and the added vulnerability to violence faced by young women and girls marginalized by poverty, racism, colonialism, homophobia and homelessness
 - Have well-trained, on-site supports in schools that are responsive to young women's specific needs, and respond to their experiences of violence by acknowledging the broader context of systemic oppression and inequality
 - Educators and educational staff must be hired for positions working with vulnerable girls based on suitability rather than seniority.
- ❖ Given the prevalence of violence in the lives of teenage girls, British Columbia's health authorities must ensure teenage girls have access to long-term, consistent, integrated, quality care to promote their emotional, mental and physical health and well-being.
- Ensure all health and mental health professionals are trained to respond to sexualized violence and exploitation in the lives of teenage girls, including an understanding of the impacts of intersecting forms of oppression such as colonialism and poverty
 - Addiction treatment for girls in British Columbia must fund girl-only detox services, and residential and non-residential addiction treatment programs, to respond to the multiple issues girls face, especially male violence and exploitation

Poverty

- ❖ British Columbia's provincial, regional and local governments must take immediate action to alleviate poverty in the lives of teenage girls and their families by ensuring that all have access to the means by which to live in peace, security and dignity.
- Raise social assistance rates in B.C. to above poverty line levels
 - Set wage standards to a living wage in B.C.
 - Increase access and availability of affordable, high quality child-care options
 - Increase the funding allotment in Vancouver, B.C. for those on a Youth Agreement or an Agreement with a Young Adult
 - Provide free bus passes for children under 19
 - Provide free extended health and dental care to all B.C. youth on a Youth Agreement or an Agreement with a Young Adult

Colonization

- ❖ The British Columbia government must specifically uphold the inherent rights of Indigenous girls and make every effort to remedy the consequences of colonization. In so doing, the provincial government must engage the leadership of provincial, regional and local Indigenous women's groups.
 - The provincial government must immediately provide supports, resources and core funding to Indigenous women's organizations for the development of advocacy, support, housing and education services for Indigenous teenage girls in B.C.

Life in government care

- ❖ Given that children and youth who live in government care in British Columbia face greater barriers and are at an increased risk for school disconnection, violence and homelessness, the B.C. government must increase prevention and ensure children in care are treated equitably.
 - The provincial child welfare ministry must create policies to remove sexual abusers from the home when sexual abuse is being investigated or has been found, instead of removing the child
 - Given that many children are taken into care because their mothers are poor, that many girls who are or have been in care become homeless, and that Indigenous girls are pulled out of their families and cultural communities, child welfare ministries must work to alleviate the poverty of mothers and support mothers/families to parent their children
 - Ensure all child welfare agents are trained to understand and respond to systemic oppression and violence in the lives of girls
 - Conduct frequent, thorough reviews of all staff and provide strict oversight of cases involving Indigenous girls in care
 - Ensure teenage girls on Youth Agreements in B.C. are adequately resourced and supported with frequent, regular, accessible contact and in-home assistance
 - Provide independent advocates, counsellors and/or support groups for youth in care

Homelessness

- ❖ The provincial, regional and local British Columbia governments must develop an informed plan for the creation of a continuum of housing options for homeless young women and girls, including a specific plan for ending girl homelessness.
 - The government of British Columbia must fund long-term subsidized housing for homeless teenage girls
 - The provincial, regional and local governments must financially support Indigenous women’s organizations to create transition houses for homeless Indigenous teenage girls
 - The Metro Vancouver Regional District must increase the number of girl-only emergency shelters and female-only affordable housing options outside of Vancouver’s downtown core and Downtown Eastside
 - Government and community groups must shift the focus of programs for homeless youth from employment training and “employability” to access to education
 - Alternative educational programs specifically designed for homeless girls must be developed across B.C.

Access to education

- ❖ Anti-racist, anti-homophobia and anti-sexist education, training and policy development must be a part of the education system province-wide in B.C.
- ❖ The B.C. government must provide funding and resources to decolonize educational curriculum, training, materials and delivery models for school age children
- ❖ British Columbia must embed “rights” education and life skills in school curricula to ensure girls understand their entitlements and graduate equipped to live independently.
- ❖ The British Columbia Ministry of Education, Boards of Education and associated unions must invest in innovative solutions to address school disconnection.
 - Community outreach to girls and their families should be provided to facilitate school (re)connection and promote school-community mutual respect and reciprocity
 - Educators and educational staff must be hired for positions working with vulnerable girls based on suitability rather than seniority.

CONCLUSION

Social and economic inequality prevent many teenage girls from accessing education in the public system. Institutional barriers exacerbate these inequalities and, as a result, girls are alienated, disengaged and vulnerable in mainstream schools, limiting their educational attainment and life prospects. If the right to education is to be substantively realized for girls who live in poverty, this must change.

Our consultations with more than 50 young women in Vancouver confirmed what JFG has been witnessing over the past 18 years: Girls' inequality is a root cause of school disconnection and failure. Girls who live in poverty need both individual support and systemic change to fully realize their right to education.

It is our sincerest hope that in the coming years, JFG will be able to respond to the countless young women calling for change. We will create a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre. One centre on its own won't bring about equality for teenage girls who live in poverty, but it will serve as a model for other communities to embrace.

For young women to experience the freedom, safety, dignity and equality they are entitled to, systemic change is needed.

References:

¹ The terms “girls,” “young women” and “teenage girls” are used interchangeably in this report to refer to girls aged 12 to 18.

² The phrase “young woman participant” refers to one of the 51 teenage girls and young women who took part in our community consultations through focus groups and individual interviews.

³ The terms “community stakeholders” or “stakeholders” refers to individuals who are affected by or affect the lives of young women and girls in poverty and, therefore, have a vested interest in the results of this consultation and specific expertise to offer the consultation process. During the consultations, we spoke to more than 50 stakeholders, including community members, activists, front line youth workers, educational personnel, counsellors, and health professionals in youth-serving institutions and agencies, and within women’s, Indigenous and other equality-seeking organizations.

⁴ The terms “ministry care,” “government care,” and “in care” are used to describe children who are under supervision and guardianship of the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development.

⁵ Anthony Robert Sangiuliano, “Substantive Equality as Equal Recognition: A New Theory of Section 15 of the Charter” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 52, no 2 (2015).

⁶ Jaskiran Dhillon, *Struggles for Access: Examining the Educational Experiences of Homeless Young Women and Girls in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: Justice for Girls, 2005). [Dhillon]

⁷ The use of the term “mainstream education system” in this report refers to the general Kindergarten to Grade 12 programs found within British Columbia’s public schools. This term is not referring to specialized programs such as alternate education, Indigenous-focused education, special education, independent education, etc., unless otherwise indicated.

⁸ Canadian Council of Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada, 2009: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success* (Ottawa, ON: 2009) at 6.

⁹ Assembly of First Nations, *The Reality for First Nations in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Assembly of First Nations), <http://reisnativestudies30.weebly.com/uploads/1/6/2/6/16268926/rfnc.pdf>. [Assembly of First Nations]

¹⁰ Cherry Smiley, *Indigenous Girls and the Canadian State* (Vancouver, BC: Justice for Girls: 2012). [Smiley]

¹¹ Wayne Mitic and Mary Lynne Rimer, “The Educational Attainment of Children in Care in British Columbia,” *Child & Youth* 31, no 6 [Mitic and Rimer]; K Smucker, J Kauffman and D Ball, “School-related problems of special education foster-care students with emotional or behavioural disorders: A comparison of other groups” *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders* 4, no 1 (1996) [Smucker, Kauffman and Ball]; H Dubowitz et al, “Children in kinship care: How do they fare?” *Children and Youth Services Review* 16, no 1-2 (1994) [Dubowitz et al]

¹² Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, *Too Many Victims: Sexualized Violence in the Lives of Children and Youth in Care* (Representative for Children and Youth, 2016). [Turpel-Lafond]

¹³ Catherine Taylor and Tracey Peter, *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in Canadian Schools* (Toronto, ON: Egale Human Rights Trust, 2011).

¹⁴ Margaret Eleanor Greene et al, *A Girl’s Right to Learn Without Fear: Working to End Gender-Based Violence at School: Canadian Edition* (Toronto, ON: Plan Canada, 2012). [Greene et al]

¹⁵ The British Columbia Ministry of Education website states: “Alternate education programs focus on educational, social and emotional issues for students whose needs are not being met in a traditional school program. An alternate education program provides its support through differentiated instruction, specialized program delivery and enhanced counselling services based on students’ needs”, accessed January 9, 2018, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/alternate-education-program>. [Alternative Education Programs]

¹⁶ The Collective Agreement of the BC public School Employer’s Association/Board of Education of School District No. 39 and BC Teacher’s Federation / Vancouver Teacher’s Federation. July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2019. Article E.2.1. [Collective Agreement]

¹⁷ Canadian Federation for Sexual Health, *Sexual Health in Canada, Baseline 2007* at 10 as quoted in Safe Schools Action Team, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships* (December 2008) at 11.

¹⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No 25 on Article 4, Paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of*

Discrimination against Women, on Temporary Special Measures, UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/25 (2004) at para 8. [CEDAW Committee]

¹⁹ Sangiuliano *supra* note 5

²⁰ Article 26 of the 1948 United Nations *Declaration of Human Rights* provides that “everyone has a right to education”; Article 13 of the 1966 United Nations *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* recognizes “the right of everyone to education”; Article 28 of the 1989 United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* recognizes “the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.”

²¹ Council of Ministers of Education, *Education in Canada: An Overview* (Toronto, ON: Council of Ministers of Education, 2008), <https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/64/Education-in-Canada2008.pdf>.

²² Greene et al *supra* note 14.

²³ Nura Taefi, “The Synthesis of Age and Gender: Intersectionality, International Human Rights Law and the Marginalisation of the Girl-Child,” *International Journal of Children’s* 17 (2009). [Taefi]

²⁴ *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, 19 December 1979, 1249 UNTS 13 (entered into force 3 September 1981). [CEDAW]

²⁵ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990). [CRC]

²⁶ Taefi *supra* note 23 at 346; CRC *supra* note 25.

²⁷ Taefi *supra* note 23 at 346.

²⁸ Taefi *supra* note 23 at 345.

²⁹ Asia Czapska, Annabel Webb and Nura Taefi, *More Than Bricks & Mortar: A Rights-Based Strategy to Prevent Girl Homelessness in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: Justice for Girls, 2008).

³⁰ CEDAW *supra* note 24 art 10.

³¹ *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 16 December 1966, 993 UNTS 3 art 13 (entered into force 3 January 1976). [ICESCR]

³² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Concept Note on the Draft Recommendation on Girls’/Women’s Right to Education* (2014) at para 3.4.

³³ June Larkin, “Walking through walls: The sexual harassment of high school girls” *Gender & Education* 6, no 3 (1994). [Larkin]

³⁴ Chiefly, we prioritise young women’s voices through a multi-stage consultation process where young women and girls articulate their perspectives and affirm they are adequately conveyed in our writing.

³⁵ See Appendix 2.

³⁶ See Appendix 3.

³⁷ Smiley *supra* note 10.

³⁸ A Smith et al, *Making the grade: A review of alternative education programs in British Columbia*, (Vancouver BC: The McCreary Society, 2007).

³⁹ Larkin *supra* note 33.

⁴⁰ CRC *supra* note 25 art 34.

⁴¹ Greene et al *supra* note 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Yasmin Jiwani et al, *Violence Prevention and the Girl Child: Final Report* (Vancouver, BC: FREDA Centre, 1999). [Jiwani et al]

⁴⁴ McCreary Centre Society, *From Hastings Street to Haida Gwaii: Provincial Results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey*, (Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society, 2014).

⁴⁵ Child and Youth Victims of Police-reported Crime, 2008, Statistics Canada accessed February 4, 2018, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14241-eng.htm>; Child and Youth Victims of Police-Reported Violent Crime, 2008 accessed February 4, 2018,

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85f0033m/2010023/ct006-eng.htm>; Criminal Victimization in Canada, 2014 accessed on February 4, 2018, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14241-eng.htm>.

⁴⁶ Erica Bowen and Kate Walker, *The psychology of violence in adolescent romantic relationships*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁴⁷ Greene et al *supra* note 14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* at 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ Dorothy Byrne and Brian Taylor, “Children at Risk from Domestic Violence and their Educational Attainment: Perspectives of Education Welfare Officers, Social Workers and Teachers” *Child Care in Practice* 12 (2007).; Helen Stalford, Helen Baker and Fiona Beveridge, *Children and domestic violence in rural areas: A child focused assessment of service provision* (London, UK: Save the Children, 2008).

⁵¹ *Ibid* at 1.

⁵² R B Rossman, “Longer term effects of children's exposure to domestic violence” in S A Graham-Berman & J L Edleson, *Domestic violence in the lives of children: The future of research, intervention and social policy* (London, UK: American Psychological Association, 2002).

⁵³ ICESCR *supra* note 31 at para 1.

⁵⁴ First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, *2013 Child Poverty Report Card* (Vancouver, BC: First Call, 2013).

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ Greene et al *supra* note 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ Value Village is a second-hand clothing store found in the USA and Canada.

⁵⁹ “Anti-bullying Awareness,” Royal Canadian Mounted Police, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://bc.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=2087&languageId=1&contentId=27359>.

The Province of British Columbia has yet to enact policy to address bullying in schools. Six Canadian provinces — Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta — have introduced legislative provisions that outline the role of educators in preventing and responding to bullying. See:

Bill 18, *The Public Schools Amendment Act (Safe and Inclusive Schools)*, 2nd Sess, 40th Leg, Manitoba, April 15, 2012.

Bill 30, *Promotion of Respectful and Responsible Relationships Act*, 2nd Sess, 61st Leg, Nova Scotia, May 17, 2012.

Bill 45, *An Act to Amend the Education Act*, New Brunswick, June 12, 2012, c 21.

Bill 56, *An Act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools*, 2nd Sess, 39th Leg, Quebec, June 15, 2012, c 19.

Bill 13, *Accepting Schools Act*, 1st Sess, 20th Leg, Ontario, June 19, 2012.

Bill 3, *Education Act*, 1st Sess, 28th Leg, Alberta, December 10, 2012.

⁶⁰ Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, *Aboriginal Children in Care: Report to Canada’s Premiers*, (Ottawa, ON: Council of the Federation Secretariat, 2015).

⁶¹ The Native Women’s Association of Canada and Justice for Girls, *Gender Matters: Building Strength in Reconciliation*, (Ottawa, ON, Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2012).

⁶² Smiley *supra* note 10.

⁶³ Canadian Council of Learning, *The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada, 2009: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success* (Ottawa, ON: 2009) at 6.

⁶⁴ Assembly of First Nations *supra* note 9.

⁶⁵ Smiley *supra* note 10 at 16.

⁶⁶ British Columbia Ministry of Education, *Aboriginal Report - How Are We Doing?*, (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016).

⁶⁷ CRC *supra* note 25 art 19.1.

⁶⁸ The official title of “the Ministry” varies between provinces. For example, in Ontario, the equivalent ministry is the “Ministry of Children and Youth Services.”

⁶⁹ Mitic and Rimer *supra* note 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*; Smucker, Kauffman and Ball *supra* note 11; Dubowitz et al *supra* note 11.

⁷¹ Mark Greenberg, Judith Siegel and Cynthia Leitch, “The nature and importance of attachment relationships to parents and peers during adolescence” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 12, no 5 (1983).

⁷² A youth agreement is “a legal agreement between youth and the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) available for youth ages 16 to 18 who cannot return home to their family for reasons of safety, and youth who have no parent or guardian willing to take responsibility for them. Program provides financial assistance for a place to live, as well as access to services and support to help youth gain independence, return to school and/or gain work experience and life skills, and deal with concerns such as mental health and addiction issues.” Accessed January 10, 2018 from:

http://redbookonline.bc211.ca/service/9507717_9507717/youth_agreement_program [Youth Agreement]

⁷³ Turpel-Lafond *supra* note 12.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶ United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to Canada at the Committee’s review of Canada’s compliance with the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2006). [UN Committee on CESCR]

⁷⁷ Czapska, Webb and Taefi *supra* note 29.

⁷⁸ A Smith et al, *Our communities, our youth: The health of homeless and street-involved youth in BC*, (Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society, 2015).

⁷⁹ Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, *Results of the 2014 Homeless Count in the Metro Vancouver Region*, (Vancouver, BC: Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness 2014).

⁸⁰ *Ibid*; Smith et al *supra* note 78.

⁸¹ Smith et al *supra* note 78; Suzanne de Castell et al, *No Place Like Home: Final Research Report on the Pridehouse Project* (Vancouver, BC: Pridehouse, 2002).

⁸² Czapska, Webb and Taefi *supra* note 29.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁸⁴ CRC *supra* note 25 art 39.

⁸⁵ J Lee, E C Pomeroy and K T Rheinboldt, "Attitudes towards rape: A comparison between Asian and Caucasian college students," *Violence Against Women* 11 (2005).; Patricia Fanflik, *Victim Responses to Sexual Assault: Counterintuitive or Simply Adaptive?*, (American Prosecturos Research Institute, 2007). [Fanflik]

⁸⁶ Larkin *supra* note 33.

⁸⁷ Greene et al *supra* note 14 at 17.

⁸⁸ Fanflik *supra* note 85 at 3; G E Wyatt, C M Notgrass and M Newcomb, "Internal and external mediators of women's rape experiences" *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 14 (1990).

⁸⁹ Dhillon *supra* note 6.

⁹⁰ Meghan Campbell, "The challenges of girls' right to education: let's talk about human rights-based sex education." *International Journal of Human Rights* 20, no 8 (2016) at 1224. [Campbell]

⁹¹ Greene et al *supra* note 14 at 17.

⁹² Taylor et al *supra* note 13.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Vancouver Board of Education School District No. 39, *Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement: Fourth Annual Report – 2012/2013*, (Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Board of Education School District No. 39, 2014), accessed January 10, 2018, <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/AEEA%20Year%204%20Report%20and%20Year%205%20Summary.pdf>.

Note: Unfortunately, the study did not further define bullying, but it is safe to assume that the disproportionate number of Indigenous students bullied implies a problem of systemic racism.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *The Vancouver School Board of Trustees Policy Manual*. Accessed January 10, 2018, <https://www.vsb.bc.ca/policy-manual>.

⁹⁹ CRC *supra* note 25 art 29.1(1)(b)(d).

Note: The redesigned curriculum from the B.C. Ministry of Education allows for more flexible learning environments, more personalized learning and an integration of Indigenous perspectives throughout all areas of the curriculum. Yet without the resources, training, support and commitment from government officials and educational staff to implement these changes, schools will continue to be an alienating and inadequate experience for vulnerable girls.

¹⁰⁰ UN Committee on CESCR *supra* note 76.

¹⁰¹ Collective Agreement *supra* note 16.

¹⁰² Alternate Education Programs *supra* note 15.

¹⁰³ Youth Agreement *supra* note 72.

¹⁰⁴ Dhillon *supra* note 6; Czapska, Webb and Taefi *supra* note 29; Gaetz, S. (2014). Stephen Gaetz, *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*, (Toronto,

ON: The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2014).; N Higgitt et al, *Voices from the margins: Experiences of street-involved youth in Winnipeg*. (Inner-city Research Alliance, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada, 2003).

¹⁰⁵ Dhillon *supra* note 6; Czapska, Webb NS Taefi *supra* note 29; A Keddie, "Much More than a Basic Education: Supporting Self-determination and Cultural Integrity in a Non-traditional School for Indigenous Girls," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15, no 9 (2011): 1001-1016; S Novac, L Serge, M Eberle, and J Brown, *On her own: Young women and homelessness in Canada*, (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2002).

APPENDIX I

JUSTICE FOR GIRLS GIRLS' ADVOCACY AND LEARNING CENTRE PROJECT GROUP CONSULTATION: CONSENT FORM

Justice for Girls is developing a Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre in Vancouver and wants your help to develop the vision and determine its priorities.

The Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre will provide:

- A safe place to gather and relax
- Advocacy and outreach
- Emotional support
- Sexual assault services
- Education Programs
- Support for family, community and cultural reconnection
- Social justice and human rights education

In today's group consultation, we're collecting information to make sure the Centre responds to the needs, wants and wishes of young women and girls. The information you provide will also help us challenge barriers that young women face when accessing services and supports.

The topics to be discussed today include:

- Experiences of young women and girls within the health, education, child welfare and justice systems
- Recommendations for the Centre

JFG will provide a \$25 honorarium, in the form of a gift card, for your participation in this study.

1. Why we are meeting:

I understand I am being asked to participate in the **Justice for Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre Project**. I understand that the information gathered in this meeting will be used to help develop the Centre, and also to influence policies and programs that affect the lives of young women and girls.

_____ initial

2. Confidentiality:

- I understand that JFG will keep confidential my name, and any other identifying information about me or anyone else, unless I disclose information about a child that is in danger and in need of protection.
- I understand that JFG will be taking notes during the discussion and that will be used in the project. Any personal information that will identify me will not be included in the writing.
- I have been informed that the transcript of the group sessions will be held securely and confidentially at JFG at all times and that once the project is completed, no information identifying me personally will remain on any permanent record.
- I commit to keeping the conversation in this group confidential.

_____ initial

3. Risks of participating:

I understand that the risks of participating in this discussion may include having an emotional reaction to the content of the discussion questions.

I am aware that JFG is available to offer support and to help me connect with advocacy services should I need this after the discussion.

_____ initial

4. Withdrawing from the consultation:

I understand that I may withdraw, without prejudice, from the discussion at any time or refuse to answer individual questions if I prefer. Because of the group nature of the consultation, it will not be possible to return any information collected.

_____ initial

.....

I have read and understand the content of this form and agree to participate in the group consultation as outlined above. I authorize Justice for Girls Outreach Society to use information from today's consultation for the purposes of their systemic advocacy work.

Signature

Date

Justice for Girls

I understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the consultation with the Director of Justice for Girls, Annabel Webb, at 604-343-6567.
If you would like to attend a follow-up meeting to review and consult on the draft document created from the group meetings, please leave your contact information with us today or contact:

Tracey McIntosh, justiceforgirls@justiceforgirls.org, 604-343-6567

JUSTICE FOR GIRLS
GIRLS' ADVOCACY AND LEARNING CENTRE PROJECT
FOLLOW-UP GROUP CONSULTATION: CONSENT FORM

Based on the 2016 to 2017 consultations with young women and community stakeholders, Justice for Girls has drafted a report outlining the current realities for young women and girls in Vancouver, the barriers they face when accessing services and support, and their recommendations for how to improve the institutional responses to the issues affecting their lives. Their recommendations for the vision and priorities of the developing Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre are also highlighted.

In the group consultation today, we will review a summary of this draft report which outlines the results of the year of consultations. Your feedback today will ensure the draft report adequately represents your input and recommendations

Justice for Girls will provide a \$25 honorarium, in the form of a gift card, for your participation in this consultation.

1. Why we Are meeting:

I understand that I am being asked to participate in the **Justice for Girls' Advocacy and Learning Centre Project**. I understand that the information gathered in this meeting will be used in the final report of the project, in the development of the Centre, and also to influence policies and programs that affect the lives of young women and girls. I also understand that while JFG aims to incorporate today's feedback into the final report, they cannot guarantee that all suggested amendments will be included.

_____ initial

2. Confidentiality:

- I understand that Justice for Girls will keep confidential my name, and any other identifying information about me or anyone else, unless I disclose information about a child that is in danger and in need of protection.
- I understand that JFG will be taking notes during the discussion and that these notes will be used in the project. Any personal information that will identify me will not be included in the writing.
- I have been informed that the transcript of the group sessions will be held securely and confidentially at Justice for Girls at all times and that once the project is completed, no information identifying me personally will remain on any permanent record.
- I commit to keeping the conversation in this group confidential.

_____ initial

3. Risks of participating:

I understand that the risks of participating in this discussion may include having an emotional reaction to the content of the discussion questions.

I am aware that Justice for Girls is available to offer support and to help me connect with advocacy services should I need this after the discussion.

_____ initial

4. Withdrawing from the follow-up group consultation:

I understand that I may withdraw, without prejudice, from the discussion at any time or refuse to answer individual questions if I prefer. Because of the group nature of the consultation, it will not be possible to return any information collected.

_____ initial

.....

I have read and understand the content of this form and agree to participate in the group consultation as outlined above. I authorize Justice for Girls Outreach Society to use information from today's consultation for the purposes of their systemic advocacy work.

Signature

Date

Justice for Girls

I understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the consultation with the Director of Justice for Girls, Annabel Webb, at 604-343-6567.

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report, please leave your contact information with us today or contact:

Tracey McIntosh, justiceforgirls@justiceforgirls.org, 604-343-6567

APPENDIX II

Justice for Girls — focus group questions

YOUTH SERVICES

1. What youth support services have you or young women you know used in Vancouver? Which would you recommend? Why?
2. Are there youth support services you or someone you know has needed but hasn't been able to get in Vancouver? What types of supports need to be available in Vancouver that don't currently exist?
3. What do you think are the most important things youth workers need to know/understand when they are supporting young women and girls?

EDUCATION

Mainstream, alternative and adult education:

1. Describe things that made/makes school a positive experience and made/makes it easier for you to attend school or want to stay in school?
2. Describe things that made/makes it difficult for you to attend or want to stay in school?

General:

1. Are there particular things that you feel as a girl or young woman should be taken into consideration by schools if they are going to support you?

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

1. What do you think are the most important things that police, judges, lawyers, crown council and victim's services need to know or understand when they are supporting young women or girls who:
 - Have been victimized in any way?
 - Are being arrested or charged with a crime?
2. Are there things you would change about the criminal justice system in regards to young women and girls?

HEALTHCARE

1. What are your experiences with the health services in Vancouver?
2. What should the government spend money on to improve the supports for young women's mental, emotional and physical health?

CHILD WELFARE (MCFD/VACFSS)

1. What do you think are the most important things social workers need to know/understand when they are supporting young women or girls?
2. What do you think is working well in the child welfare system? If you could change things about the child welfare system, what would you change?

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION AREAS:

1. What are essential elements we must have at a centre designed to support all young women and girls, particularly in relation to:
 - Poverty?
 - Violence/exploitation?
 - Racism and colonialism?
 - Homophobia?
 - Homelessness?

APPENDIX III

Justice for Girls — community stakeholder interview questions:

1. Description of your services:

- Scope, limits...
- Who are the young women you service?
- What are young women saying they need? What is working well? What are barriers that still exist?
- Others with whom you work, refer to, etc.

2. Are the young women you support connected to school? If not, why? Have they disconnected from previous schools? If so, why?

- Life circumstances?
- Barriers?

3. What do you see as the current needs in Vancouver for young women and girls?

- Gaps in service? Barriers to service?
- Promising programs and practices?

4. If you could design a program to address these needs, what would the essential elements need to be?