

# GFS Platform

*Working with Women where they are since 1875*

*England and Wales*

## *National Evaluation of the work with Girls and Young Women March 2007*

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## Sanctuary

There's a land  
Where all the boys and girls  
Play with their loved ones  
In innocence and joy.

They, never knowing  
Grief and hatred,  
Are happy in their love.

A hand offered in love – is sanctuary.  
Strong arms that hold you to shed away tears –  
A thought or prayer to ease pain.

Each and everyone join hands, embrace.  
Let us give Sanctuary to the human race.

*Paula Clarke, GFS participant.*

*Out of the Shadows, Dream Catcher Books*

*(Dedicated to the Platform, friends, crèche and the team behind the scenes.)*

The Youth Affairs Unit would like to acknowledge the help and support of the Steering Group, the Director, the Head Office staff, Branch Leaders and Project staff in managing this evaluation and providing us with essential information. We would also like to thank all the young women who took part in the training and contributed to the peer research element of the study – Jade Alexander, Mariella Caiger, Louise Cameron, Liza Cooper, Mel David, Sarah Irving, Jane-Lee Johnson, Christine Shilton and Sonya Smith.

We hope we have managed to capture the “spirit” of the work of the Girls' Friendly Society. This study would have completely failed to do that without the kindly and patient responses to our numerous questions from so many people whether volunteers, staff, parents, external partners or the young people themselves. We are most grateful for this cooperation and openness and we hope in return that this study will prove a useful foundation for building and improving the work of GFS in the future.

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## **GFS Platform – National Evaluation of the work with girls and young women – March 2007**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Aim of the study**

This review of the work of GFS Platform (the Girls' Friendly Society in England and Wales) was undertaken by the Youth Affairs Unit at De Montfort University between April 2006 and March 2007. The main aim of the evaluation was to gather evidence of the effectiveness of the programme in reaching and addressing the needs of girls and young women in order to plan its future services in line with its mission.

GFS Platform is a charitable company limited by guarantee. It is a single sex organisation focusing on the needs of young women and girls and their personal, social and spiritual development. The organisation has its roots in the Anglican Church and expresses faith in action in serving the needs of young women. GFS Platform works with women and girls of all religious faiths and of none.

#### **Current provision**

The services of the organisation are concentrated in three main types of delivery – *“in youth and community projects, parish based voluntary youth work groups with girls and young women and two supported housing schemes.”* (Trustees' Report 2005.) Over 50 “Branches” work with girls and young women aged 7 to 25 in groups normally attached to a local Anglican parish or to a school. This provision chiefly attracts younger school-age girls. Most of the older young women will be attending as volunteer helpers. Branch activities tend to be non-competitive focusing strongly on crafts and games. GFS Platform also links up its older members under the name of the “Townsend Fellowship”. In some areas, these members meet occasionally and there are national meetings and competitions. The four “Community Projects” work with girls and young women who have faced social exclusion or risk in their lives, mainly young women who are pregnant or who have a baby or small child. All these Projects have child care facilities so that the young women can take up the education provision and activities. In addition to the Branches and Community Projects, GFS Platform currently provides support to young women accommodated at St Paul's Lodge, Great Yarmouth and Hawes Road, Penge and offers “floating support” to young women in their own homes in partnership with the Supporting People Initiative in the London Borough of Bromley.

It is estimated that Branch activities and events involve over 200 volunteers and regularly reach over 500 members on a weekly basis and an estimated 1500 girls overall. As at January 2007, a snapshot census showed 263 young women participating in the Community Projects. The paid staff numbers approximately 80.

In recent years, GFS Platform has reduced and consolidated its services. Following an appraisal of services in 2002 and recognition of serious financial pressures, the Board took the decision to withdraw from housing management and to transfer its housing property to other registered social landlords. This has been a difficult experience for those involved but has been a path similar to that taken by a number of other specialist housing providers. This change meant a major reduction in Head Office staff. It has also meant that assets from the sale of the property portfolio have placed the Society in a much stronger financial position. It is intended that deregistration from the Housing Corporation will follow in due course.

## Methodology

The methods used in the study included visits to see the work with girls and young women at first hand, postal questionnaires, use of documentary evidence and monitoring records, extensive face to face or telephone interviewing. Three postal questionnaires were designed and sent out to all Branches and Community Projects from Head Office. These were for girls under the age of 10; for girls and young women aged 10 and over; and for staff and volunteers. 283 responses were received from girls and young women together with some 70 responses from volunteers in the Branches. 34 workers from the Projects, including one volunteer, and 4 staff from the Head Office also responded. This equates to approximately 47% of the total paid staff across the organisation. Over 200 semi-structured qualitative interviews of varying lengths were carried out with a range of local and national stakeholders, users, parents and staff and volunteers. Peer researchers were trained and carried out a number of these interviews and three of these young women have been submitted for assessment for OCN Level 2 accreditation. Visits were made in all to 15 Branch groups, area events and Community Projects.

## General characteristics

The research observations of this study and the comments of external partners bear witness to the remarkable warmth that is evident across the work of GFS. In different ways, the Branches and the Community Projects demonstrate this **caring and accepting atmosphere**. Whether paid or volunteer, the workers are committed to supporting the girls and young women and to enabling them to achieve and develop. In both settings, women appear to be supporting young women in a *“simple, motherly fashion”*, perhaps much as the founder envisaged.

Across the provision there are some further positive features in common. Both strands of the work have succeeded in maintaining an emphasis on **holistic help and support**. The needs of the clients are taken on board as a whole without artificial compartmentalising. This is clearly helpful in working with young women who are isolated or lacking in confidence, damaged by their experience or who face multiple risks in their lives.

Both the Branches and the Community Projects **contribute to the fabric of community life** in different ways. Some groups have a long tradition that is a respected part of local history. Particularly in more isolated rural communities, the group can be a centre of activity bringing people together and taking part in community projects. At the Projects, there is a philosophy of encouraging peer support and engagement in volunteering and local decision making.

## Main findings

The findings include the following headline observations:

- The **main reasons for joining** GFS groups are to find a place to go, to meet friends, to belong to a group for girls only and to join in the activities. In the Branch groups, members also tend to join to learn about the Christian faith and to get help for general personal problems. At the Projects, there is a greater emphasis in the reasons for participation on work, training and education and on more specific problems such as housing need, health issues, benefits questions, depression, parenting, or domestic violence.
- The **elements of the provision most appreciated** by the younger girls at Branch groups were the crafts, games and “learning new things”, alongside the qualities of the atmosphere such as feeling safe and the kindness of the leaders. There was a considerable similarity of response on factors that were seen as important to the older girls and young women attending the Branch groups and the Community Projects. They strongly valued having a place to go, meeting other young women and having a space without boys or men present. There were similar scores for feeling that not having to compete, being accepted for who you are and having friendly workers were very or fairly important. The needs of the girls and young women are very similar at a basic level – such as the needs for acceptance and for a supportive, friendly place to mix with others. The differences tend to be pragmatic in that young women with children need the childcare and the training opportunities and are more likely to need more intensive support from the workers.
- Within some of the Branches, however, there was **insufficient opportunity for young people to influence the content of the curriculum**, which could be limited both by the lack of practical support for innovation from Head Office and the preferences for familiar routines of some older volunteers.
- **Age differences** can be seen **on the question of whether the girls and young women liked having a group without boys or men**. For the younger girls in the Branches (under the age of 10) it was very significant and became less important further up the age range, apart from those young women in Community Projects who had had damaging experiences of relationships with men and felt more secure in a single-sex environment.
- There is **good evidence of learning outcomes** for the girls and young women participating.
- The girls under 10 felt they had been helped on topics like bullying, staying safe, health and diet. The children said they had learned to get

on with others, to help other people and to say “no” when they did not wish to do something “risky or silly”.

- The evidence from the questionnaires and interviews with the over 10s in Branches shows that there is learning around several of the Every Child Matters priorities as well as general growth in confidence and a sense of responsibility.

*“The important thing is I have more friends. I have learnt how to make friends.”*

*“It doesn’t matter what you look like it’s who you are inside.”*

- For the young women in the Projects learning was frequently in similar areas such as health or bullying but given the main client group more of the outcomes were directly related to pregnancy and parenting.

*“... it gave me lots of information in regards to health during pregnancy and looking after my baby.”*

*“To accept people who are different to me.”*

*“Believing in myself because I used to put myself down all of the time.”*

*“I have learned to stop drugs.”*

*“I learned to fend on my own and look after my little girl and be more independent.”*

- **GFS had often made a significant difference in their lives**, hopes and aspirations had been raised and they had more control of their relationships.

*“If I hadn’t had a GFS worker then I would have no money, nothing to do and no route to college.”*

*“I know I am safe. My children feel safe and I know they are safe when we are at GFS. It has developed my confidence...I would not have left my abusive partner if GFS hadn’t helped me.”*

- The question of **what GFS meant to its users** was revealing. It showed that participation had meant more than just enjoyment and learning – it had included a sense of safety, significance, belonging and a chance to make a new start.

*“Belonging to GFS means to me that I am happy with who I am...”*

*“A big family atmosphere. Knowing it is world-wide and trying to understand.”*

*“Friendship, I am an individual, I can be me, confidentiality in problem sharing, Team GFS! Family.”*

*“It’s nice to belong to somethin’.”*

*“Friendship, belief, kindness, hope, prospects, acceptance, support.”*

*“I feel better within myself because I am learning and doing something with myself.”*

*“It’s a place I can go where I feel safe among other young women, which helps me a lot with my depression and anxiety problems.”*

*“It means more than everything to me, I can’t explain.”*



- The **age profile of those involved in the organisation** is striking. GFS workers tend to be older than might be expected in a youth work organisation. The volunteers especially are an older group without a significant influx of younger leaders. Some 48% of those responding were aged between 50 and 70 plus, and 71% were aged over 40. This represents a crucial issue for the future, especially for the Branch work.
- **Both staff and volunteers are highly committed.** There is an enormous loyalty to the organisation. The concerns of both volunteers and paid staff showed **some serious gaps in support and communication.** While Branch volunteers in general have a much poorer perception of the support they receive, there are also significant gaps for the paid staff. Problem areas include perceptions of support from Head Office, a lack of information, not feeling included in the decisions of the organisation and poor networking with other workers who could offer help.
- The volunteers (and sometimes the paid staff too) wish to tackle issues around prevention and risks to young women but often lack the training, confidence and resources to do this adequately. **Opportunities** for learning for the participants are therefore **missed.**
- National and local **stakeholders are warmly appreciative of the contribution of GFS Platform.** There is support for the role of single-sex provision to meet the needs of girls and young women especially the most vulnerable and a perceived niche in policy priorities.

*“...the individuals I’ve seen couldn’t have benefited more. You realise what the girls have been able to do against the odds and how early intervention has helped.”*

*“They are not just nice to them. It’s not just a welcoming environment; it has clear purpose and challenge and in the best sense is outcomes driven. It’s a lovely example of how youth work can really work.”*

- Where there was critical comment it chiefly concerned the need to update the style and curriculum of the Branch work and general issues of publicity and communication. Local stakeholders also voiced some concerns about the quality of partnership working, the availability of management support, too frequent changes in staffing and a lack of sufficient accredited learning opportunities.
- Management and process issues identified include the vacuum in forward strategy following the exit from housing stock; insufficient time and briefing for Trustees; the lack of a business plan; communication issues; problems of staff retention and a need for basic procedural manuals, modern publicity and marketing, and more transparent budgeting and delegation. More consistent systems of supervision, training and development of staff and volunteers are also needed.
- The recent policies of downsizing and consolidating charitable funds at the centre have coincided with a reduction in support to the Branches. The overall effect of this is a marked loss of goodwill and a potential erosion of the loyalty of members, which is the bedrock strength of the organisation. There are divisions between the Branch work and the

Community Projects, unresolved by a clear sense of common purpose. While GFS has a very strong ethos and tradition, it is being damaged by this tension and this makes it hard to communicate the mission of the charity clearly.

- GFS has been losing members since around 1913. The national picture is that volunteers are becoming harder to recruit and that charitable project work is highly competitive. The organisation lacks critical mass and both the Branches and the Projects are fragile in different ways. Potential resources are wasted by the failure to foster consistently the development and succession of leadership amongst its staff and volunteers.

### **Policy relevance**

The report explores a number of key Government policies that have relevance to GFS Platform, including Every Child Matters, the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, Supporting People and the current emphasis on prevention. It concludes that there are numerous opportunities to address the needs of young women and reduce the risks and harm they may face. It also concludes that funding streams are available for such work but that access to them will demand clarity of purpose and more sophisticated partnership working at national and local level.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

The evaluation summarises the **current strengths** of GFS Platform as:

- *The nurturing ethos and the warm, caring and accepting atmosphere.*
- *The commitment and loyalty of the staff and volunteers.*
- *The focus on girls and young women – the niche of single sex work.*
- *The long-term and holistic approach to the needs of young women.*
- *The track record of involving young women in decision-making and peer education.*
- *The good quality crèche and nursery provision.*
- *The positive testimony from users and stakeholders.*

The most significant **weaknesses** highlighted by the evaluation include:

- *The lack of a clearly articulated vision or forward plan.*
- *The tensions on many dimensions between the Branches, the Projects and Head Office.*
- *Weaknesses in internal and external communication.*
- *Shortfalls in staff and volunteer development.*
- *A lack of budget delegation and transparency.*

### **The need for a clearly articulated vision**

The research team was struck by the impossibility of choosing between development options, planning funding applications or deciding on priorities for improvement if the core mission of the organisation is not clearly articulated. It is not easy to unite the membership without a clear sense of

vision. The main conclusion of this study is that it is now **essential for GFS Platform to achieve a clear sense of purpose and build unity and direction around it.**

This study argues that the **themes of prevention and harm minimisation** could serve to focus the work of GFS more clearly and unite the different strands of its programme. These are clearly traceable in the early history of the organisation and the intentions of its founder, Mrs Mary Townsend. Both Branches and Projects undertake prevention work but at different levels and stages in young women's lives as part of the continuum of youth work interventions. One is not intrinsically more valuable than another.

The **core identity of GFS Platform** appears to lie in four elements, which are shared across both Projects and Branches, and could inform choices about future development.

- ✓ Expressing the Christian faith in action.
- ✓ Women working to support girls and young women.
- ✓ A nurturing and caring ethos, dealing holistically with need.
- ✓ Working to prevent harm.

Key options for the future have been considered in the light of responses to the study including radical possibilities of winding up the organisation, broadening its scope to reach boys and young men, and relinquishing the faith basis of the organisation or its links to the Anglican Church.

The central recommendation is to maintain the current constitutional position and **develop the work with an emphasis on prevention as well as personal development.** This presents major opportunities for work with young women with a clear rationale and resonance with current policy drivers and there is already a good track record of holistic multi-issue work. If this approach is to be adopted it implies branding, marketing, curriculum development and internal training to carry it through. GFS is not yet sufficiently responsive to modern needs for "prevention". Topics are not always adequately covered at the Projects and significant support is needed to raise the quality of input at the Branches. A start has been made with the recruitment of Strategy and Development Managers and a Youth Work Officer (Branch Work) but this will need to be followed through and enhanced as a priority. Much more by way of training, resources and curriculum materials will be needed to exploit the prevention agenda more fully and greater use could be made of expert partner organisations in presenting prevention topics. A genuine pedagogy of prevention is required that enables young women to make positive informed choices. Careful selection would be required by the Trustees of areas of new development that play to the strengths of GFS, can be adequately funded and do not duplicate the work of partner agencies. Clear leadership on the part of the Trustees and the Director will be needed to unify efforts on this theme and to make all parts of the organisation feel that their contribution to the continuum of prevention is recognised.

## **Recommendations**

This study recommends to the Trustees that:

1. The core purpose of the organisation needs to be revisited and re-stated and measures taken to achieve understanding and buy-in from the membership and the paid staff.
2. A clear statement of purpose is needed that can explain and bind together the current functions of Branches and Projects, allow scope for new development and inform marketing.
3. Consideration should be given to the theme of “prevention” as part of the core purpose of GFS Platform, addressing the risks facing girls and young women today.
4. A limited list of priorities for strategic investment of reserves should be agreed to include consideration of enhanced capacity and infrastructure, improved publicity, minor funding support for Branches and Projects to meet particular needs and enhance access for users, and potential new development.
5. Appropriate curriculum resources for the different age groups should be developed or identified from existing internal or external sources and shared more systematically across the organisation.
6. A business plan for the next one to three years should be drawn up to show key targets for action in any given year and the indicators of success. Area committees and Community Projects should contribute to formulating the plan. Volunteers and staff should be made aware of its contents.
7. Priority actions in the plan should address:
  - Improving Branch support and training, especially at local level.
  - Publishing a Branch Handbook.
  - Developing support to Projects especially on supervision systems, evaluation, and financial planning and monitoring.
  - Curriculum development.
  - Volunteer recruitment and development.
  - Staff retention.
  - Communication.
  - Links to key partnership structures.
  - Fund raising.
8. A marketing plan and communication strategy should be drawn up linking into the main business plan, detailing steps to improve internal communication to staff and volunteers and external communication to users, funders, partners and stakeholders (including the Church of England). This should include a functioning website and basic publicity for Branch activities.
9. In due course, the restricted charitable funds of GFS should be reviewed, if necessary seeking Charity Commission approval to broaden their objects so as to make them sufficiently flexible for support of existing work or development of new initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The study shows that both in the Branches with younger girls and in the Community Projects with young women facing multiple problems, GFS Platform does achieve learning and change. There is evidence in these

findings of positive outcomes that relate to national policy objectives, especially in Every Child Matters and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. Stakeholders feel that there is a niche for GFS provision and that the focus on girls and young women is of value. The outstanding feature of the work is the atmosphere of nurturing, kindness and empathy for the girls and young women who use the provision. There is an enormous well of commitment and loyalty and an ethos of service amongst the staff and volunteers.

The potential of GFS Platform is not, however, fully realised. There is a loss of forward direction and morale following the exit from housing property. There are tensions and misunderstandings between the Branches, Projects and Head Office. The Trustees should recognise that they will need to invest in capacity in order to make strategic developments.

The challenge for GFS Platform will be to retain the “flavour” of its approach, especially the nurturing and supportive ethos while making changes and improvements. The recommendations of this study are shaped by a belief that its evident commitment to girls and young women and the approachable holistic style of working with them is worth every effort to preserve. The research concludes that the organisation could unite with confidence around its traditional strengths in giving young women and girls a voice; developing their ambition, hope and confidence; and reducing and preventing the risks and harm they face. Our hope is that this study will contribute to enabling this to happen.

## **Section 1: The aims and approach of this evaluation**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In April 2006, the Youth Affairs Unit at De Montfort University was commissioned to undertake a review of the work of GFS Platform (the Girls' Friendly Society in England and Wales). The study ran throughout the year to March 2007 and included visits to see the work with girls and young women, postal questionnaires, documentary evidence and extensive interviewing of volunteers, paid staff, stakeholders and the users themselves.

GFS Platform currently provides local activity groups for girls usually linked to parish churches, and projects offering support and education for young women, many of whom face risks of non-achievement in their lives and/or are pregnant or have young children. Its mission statement states that:

*"GFS Platform demonstrates Christianity in action by providing a safe and secure environment where girls and young women can build on their self-esteem to gain personal confidence and move forward in today's society."* (Memorandum and Articles.)

The main aim of the evaluation was to gather evidence of the effectiveness of the programme in reaching and addressing the needs of girls and young women in order to plan its future services in line with its mission. The study sought to examine what was working well, where improvements are needed and options for the future.

The research team from the Youth Affairs Unit wishes to record the warmest thanks to the many people who have helped us with the practical arrangements for the study or who have made time available to tell us about their insights and experience. We very much hope that our analysis and interpretation will prove useful to the GFS Platform and enable it to move forward with confidence.

### **1.2 Methodology**

The design and methods used in the study are summarised briefly here. The detailed methodology is set out for information at Appendix D below.

GFS particularly requested that the report be written for a wide audience and that it should assess the quality of the current work as well as the potential for development, "added value" and sustainability. The organisation also requested that in view of the vulnerability of many of its users, the fieldwork should be conducted by female researchers and this request was fully complied with. It was also their aim to achieve an inclusive approach involving workers and girls and young women in the process.

The original proposal to GFS Platform (sometimes also referred to in the report simply as 'GFS') therefore outlined a number of choices in relation to evaluation design, within an overall approach which sought to allow GFS to shape its future direction and priorities, was consistent with equality of

opportunity and was objective, independent and efficient in the use of resources. Having discussed the options for methods and the scale of the evaluation with the Director and her key staff in April 2006, a design for the study was agreed which included the elements set out below.

### **1.2.1 Compiling the extensive picture of GFS Platform activity and its value to its users**

Three postal questionnaires were used in the Branches and Projects. These were for girls under the age of 10; for girls and young women aged 10 and over; and for staff and volunteers.

In the case of girls and young women the questionnaires were designed so that they could provide simple answers to a range of questions about their experience of GFS services and what they had gained from GFS. Given the current policy emphasis on “outcomes”, the research team was keen to find out what the benefits are to the girls and young women of participating in GFS activities, such as new knowledge and skills, or changes in attitudes or behaviour. 283 responses were received from girls and young women.

The questionnaire to staff and volunteers also provided an extensive and reliable source of information and qualitative comment. 70 volunteers and about half the paid staff responded.

### **1.2.2 Audit of provision**

This aspect of the study was intended to examine the quality of provision and to reach an understanding of the extent of GFS services and where they were located. Comparisons were made where possible to other quality frameworks such as OFSTED inspections or Joint Area Reviews.

Constitutional documents and accounts were also examined and literature from elsewhere was reviewed to identify current policy issues and relevant good practice in other organisations.

### **1.2.3 Peer research**

The research team also involved some of the users as peer researchers. GFS Platform has a good tradition of involving young women in feedback and programme planning and this was a key commitment in the study.

Nine young women took up training for the role at a weekend residential in early September 2006 and some have gained a Level 2 OCN qualification as a result. The young women then contributed to the study by interviewing other participants at their local projects using a semi-structured interview schedule.

### **1.2.4 Gathering a picture of the role of GFS platform and future options**

Visits were made to all the Community Projects and to nine Branches or local joint events. The purpose of these visits was to see some of the work with

girls and young women at first hand and to gather information and views from a variety of relevant people. The researchers interviewed a wide range of Branch members, paid staff and volunteers, parents, local stakeholders, and young women and girls and saw several groups in action. The list of respondents appears at Appendix A.

### **1.2.5 Finding out the views of stakeholders**

In order to gain a range of views from outside the organisation, the research team interviewed commissioners of services or partners at national level who could give an informed opinion of the work. This helped to provide an insight into the effectiveness of the organisation and its possible future options. The visits also afforded opportunities to gather the views of local stakeholders, such as funding bodies, local authorities, parents and other voluntary organisations. Internal “stakeholders” such as Trustees and central staff were also interviewed. The list of respondents is included at Appendix A.

### **1.2.6 Reporting**

The final evaluation report aims to detail the spread of current provision, provide an analysis of the pattern of the work, offer comment on the quality and usefulness of that provision, provide a picture of current strengths and weaknesses, offer case study material, and provide an option appraisal for future development. It has included as many of the qualitative comments as possible to demonstrate the consistency and depth of the responses.



## **Section 2: An introduction to GFS Platform, its background and current work**

### **2.1 Background**

The Girls Friendly Society of England and Wales is a company limited by guarantee and was first incorporated in 1996. It is also a charitable body registered under the Charities Act 1993. It operates under the name “GFS Platform”. The Trustees currently constitute the directors of the charity. Twelve Trustees are elected by the members and a further four may be co-opted by the existing Trustees.

GFS Platform is a single sex organisation *“established mainly to develop the potential of young women and girls through education and other supporting activities. It works with girls and young women of all religious faiths and none.”* (Trustees Report, Year to September 2005.) The Memorandum and Articles (2005) show that its charitable objects *“are to advance education and any other charitable purpose for the benefit of women and girls.”*

Adult membership (and associated voting rights) is open to women aged 18 and over. Applicants pay an annual subscription and must sign that they are in sympathy with the declaration of Purpose, which says *“The purpose of GFS Platform, which is established within the Anglican Church, is to serve Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to help girls and women to develop spiritually, personally and socially.”* Ex-officio members (the Area Chaplains and co-opted Trustees) are also able to vote at the AGM.

GFS Platform is also part of the GFS international movement which has work in 23 countries worldwide (as at 2004). Every three years, GFS Worldwide holds a World Council to which member countries send adult and youth representatives. The World Council offers an opportunity for exchange and for learning about other cultures and the issues facing other nations.

The Girls’ Friendly Society was founded in 1875 by Mrs Mary Elizabeth Townsend, who was a clergyman’s daughter, married to a wealthy gentleman. At this time social concern was mounting about prostitution and the related problems of disease, especially in the growing urban populations. Mrs Townsend was asked by one of the Church of England bishops to assist with forming a “rescue society” for such women but decided instead that her vision was to prevent girls from “falling” in the first place. Her idea was that a network of women could support the girls flooding into the cities for employment, and offer them social skills, education and recreation as an alternative to more risk laden ways of spending their time.

Mrs Townsend also formed the Branches in local parishes around 1882 quite soon after founding the Society. These local groups were intended to deal with much younger girls to teach them skills and protect their innocence.

For Mrs Townsend and her early helpers, the vision of prevention was closely connected to preserving sexual purity and the Society faced many years of

turbulent debate about the requirement of “*virtuous character*” for members. It is impossible not to see elements of control of women’s behaviour and judgemental attitudes in this early history. It is also clear that this ran alongside a more radical thread of encouraging the development, confidence, employability and independence of young women through a strong network of mutual support from other women.

GFS in England and Wales reached its peak membership at around 200,000 just before the First World War. Over the years its activities have included provision of cheap supported accommodation, social clubs, educational classes, mother and baby homes, holiday and convalescent homes, advice on “thrift” and “health”, work with prisoners of war and industrial chaplaincy. GFS became a significant owner of hostel and housing properties.

Some of today’s Branch members still remember this unique blend of support, education and caring, as one volunteer explained at interview.

*“Our Diocese still has Townsend Fellowship competitions, though most of them are getting older, mostly over ninety...It was very hierarchical. I still find it hard to call them by their Christian names. They were Miss X and Miss Y and they were my leaders when I was six and a half. They’ve seen out two world wars. It was a bit like a domestic agency – you got recommended. The landed gentry had real pull for the local girls. They would go round to check they were treating them right. Some employers wouldn’t have them [GFS girls]. They knew they had to pay them properly. [I was] shown a different life. I wouldn’t have had the social confidence, a wider view, a competence in things... My mum died... They were an alternative family.”*

In recent years, the story has been not of expansion but of reduction and consolidation. Following an appraisal of services in 2002 and recognition of serious financial pressures, the Board took the decision to withdraw from housing management and to transfer its housing property to other registered social landlords. This has been a difficult experience for those involved but has been a path similar to that taken by a number of other specialist housing providers. Targeted housing support, with a volatile and transitory tenant population has proved unsustainable for many smaller providers in the current funding regime. Larger housing associations may be able to cross-subsidise or find other ways of managing the constraints of specialist provision.

By the end of the financial year in 2005, all housing property except for Littleton Homes and St Paul’s Lodge had been disposed of. At the time this change meant a reduction in Head Office staff from fourteen to nine. It has also meant that assets from the sale of the property portfolio have placed the Society in a much stronger financial position. It is intended that deregistration from the Housing Corporation will follow in due course.

## 2.2 Service Delivery

Currently in England and Wales, the organisation has three main modes of delivery – *“in youth and community projects, parish based voluntary youth work groups with girls and young women and two supported housing schemes.”* (Trustees’ Report 2005.)

The “Branches” work with girls and young women aged 7 to 25 in groups normally attached to a local Anglican parish or to a school. This provision chiefly attracts younger school-age girls. Most of the older young women will be attending as volunteer helpers.

GFS Platform also links up its older members (over 30) under the name of the “Townsend Fellowship”. In some areas, these members meet occasionally and there are national meetings and competitions.

The “Community Projects” work with girls and young women who have faced social exclusion or risk in their lives, chiefly young women who are pregnant or who have a baby or small child(ren). All these Projects have child care facilities so that the young women can take up the education and activities. There are four of these Projects, some of which have satellite provision:

- Great Yarmouth Community Project, with a satellite base at Gorleston;
- Penge Community Project, with satellite provision at The Hub, St Mary’s Cray and at Connexions, Bromley;
- Sandown Bay Community Project, Isle of Wight;
- Skegness Community Project, with satellite bases at Mablethorpe and Alford.

In addition to the Branches and Community Projects, GFS Platform provides support in two housing schemes. At Hawes Road in Penge, GFS provides support while Casa Support is the landlord taking responsibilities such as rent collection or maintenance. At St Paul’s Lodge, GFS undertakes both the support and the housing management/landlord responsibilities while the house is owned by Cotman’s (a Housing Association). At both sites, the residents are issued with a Tenancy Agreement for shared supported housing which includes a client-led support contract. The types of support offered include financial advice, and information on obtaining work, education, social skills, household and parenting skills. The aim is to prepare young mothers for independent living and an assessment of their ability to achieve that is made before they are re-housed. In the London Borough of Bromley, GFS also provides “floating support” under the Supporting People Initiative. “Floating support” takes place in the young women’s own homes providing advice and support around issues such as maintaining tenancies, budgeting, parenting or education and training.

## 2.3 Current resources

The annual accounts for the financial year to 30 September 2005 show that GFS Platform had an annual expenditure in the region of £1.4 million. In the same year, its total income including investment income and interest slightly

exceeded this figure. Member subscriptions realised £6,545, while total grant income amounted to £699,190. The organisation has a considerable level of capital assets partly from the sale of properties over recent years but also including a number of restricted funds which can only be applied to particular purposes or for work in particular dioceses.

The local Branches are mainly self-funding from subscriptions and local fund raising. Branches are organised on a geographical basis coterminous with the Church of England dioceses. Since most dioceses no longer support sufficient Branches to merit an independent structure, the dioceses are combined into wider "areas". The "area" has a President and other officers, acts as a channel for information and organises some joint activities each year. Each "area" can apply to Head Office for a small budget each year for such items as training, area fun days or residentials. Few Branches receive any significant grant-aid though some small grants, donations and in-kind support are generated.

The Community Projects aim to be sustainable on external funding. In practice the Trustees sanction contributions from internal funds for approved purposes. Grants are drawn down from a range of statutory agencies, voluntary bodies and trusts including the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills, local authorities, the National Youth Agency, Connexions, the Big Lottery Fund, Sure Start, Supporting People, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Bridge House Trust, BBC Children in Need and various local funds.

As at 2006, the paid staff complement stood at 84 (approximately 50 full-time equivalent) including both full-time and part-time staff. The headquarters staff currently represent around one tenth of that number. The organisation rents premises in central London for its Head Office function.

## Section 3: Main findings

### 3.1 Sources and methods

This section aims to set out the main findings from the study. It draws on previous evaluations and inspections, internal documents, the postal questionnaires, the qualitative interviews by the research team, the peer research interviews and the observations made during the visits to Branches and Projects. Details of the methodology used are given in Appendix D.

### 3.2 Findings on the “outputs” of GFS Platform

In the initial discussion with Head Office, at April 2006, a list of Branches was provided. This indicated that there were approximately 60 Branches in operation. More recent information at January 2007 suggests that this number has dropped to around 50 Branches or less. Branches are most strongly represented in the dioceses of Birmingham, Blackburn, Durham and Liverpool.

GFS has conducted an annual “Census” of the Branch work for the last two years. At April 2006, 18 Branches out of 47 responded. Figure 1 shows that the majority of users responding (69%) were aged between 7 and 13.

**Figure 1: Age profile of users in Branches**  
(% of those responding to Census)

7-9 yr olds	39%
10-13 yr olds	30%
14-18 yr olds	14%
19-25 yr olds	17%

**(Source: GFS Platform Census 2006)**

The Census returns show an average of approximately 10 members per Branch. The observation visits to Branches also suggested that membership was usually between 5 and 20 girls, though a small number of Branches have a significantly higher attendance. The vast majority of Branches meet once a week in term-time in the early evening.

It is therefore possible to make an estimate of the total Branch provision as offering some 3600 hours of activity per annum (estimated as 50 Branches offering 2 hours per week for 36 weeks per year) plus special events like fun days or residentials. These activities in the Branches regularly involve at least 500 girls and young women based on average membership and are deemed by the organisation (Annual Report, 2005.) to be involving 1500 girls of school age overall. These activities are supported entirely by voluntary effort and probably involve at least 200 volunteers.

Evidence is gathered at GFS Head Office from the Community Projects on the number of young women participating and the activities they are involved in. This Monitoring Data received by January 2007 was supplied to the researchers and provides the numbers of young women involved at that point. Figure 2 below shows a breakdown for each project and by age, ethnicity and whether the young women were pregnant at the time.

Figure 2: Participation at Community Projects as at January 2007					
Project	Total participants	Age groups		No. currently pregnant	Ethnicity
Skegness	42	13 – 15	0	0	All White British
		16 - 19	3	0	
		20 – 25	39	1	
Gt Yarmouth and St Paul's House	158	13 – 15	21	1	144 White British 6 White Other 1 Black British 3 Dual Heritage 4 Not known
		16 - 19	63	26	
		20 – 25	70	8	
		Not known	4	Not known 5	
Isle of Wight	33	13 – 15	0	Not known	32 All White British 1 Not known
		16 - 19	14	7	
		20 – 25	19	4	
Hawes Road, Penge	16	13 – 15	0	0	8 White British 2 Black British 1 Black African 1 Black Caribbean 2 White Irish 1 Mixed – White & Black Caribbean 1 Black Other
		16 - 19	12	2	
		20 – 25	4	0	
Penge	14	13 – 15	0	0	7 White British 1 White Other 1 Black British 2 Black Caribbean 1 Dual Heritage 2 Not known
		16 -19	6	2	
		20 – 25	7	0	
		Not known	1		
(Source: GFS Monitoring Data, 2007)					

A total of 263 young women were participating at this time and the evidence of the study shows that most would be attending the projects on two or three days a week. The largest group of users at this time were aged 20-25 (52.3%), followed by those aged 16-19 (37.7%), with those aged 15 and under in the minority (8.8%). There are relatively few minority ethnic users, other than in the Penge Project and its satellite sites which show over 20% of users in this group. Almost all the participants listed if not pregnant for the first time already had one or two children or in a few cases, three children. The main exception to this is the Young People's Development Programme at

Great Yarmouth which deals with young women of school age who face exclusion, lack of attainment or other risks to their development.

### **3.3 The nature of the provision**

The research team made visits to all the Community Projects and to a variety of Branch settings. This afforded an external view of the nature and quality of the provision.

#### **3.3.1 Branch work**

Branch activities took place mainly in church halls or schools and attracted in the main a younger age group. Area events and a holiday week were also observed. Our impression was of a warm, welcoming and caring atmosphere that seemed to have a value in itself in creating confidence and learning. The leaders were relaxed and approachable and knew the girls well. The older girls noticeably took part in looking after the younger ones. The programmes moved at a gentle pace, including time for conversation, and activities tended to be non-competitive focusing strongly on crafts and games. There is a wide variety of activities on offer overall but in individual groups these do tend to be governed by the particular interests and skills of local volunteers. We saw parachute games, elementary gymnastics, traditional games, crafts and Christmas decorations, face painting, puppets, cooking and so on. Most groups included a short faith based input, often very like a primary school “circle time” in atmosphere, and the GFS prayer was normally used. The groups are generally seen as non-uniformed though a T-shirt with the GFS logo is sometimes worn and in one group a “woggle” was still expected. A small subscription is normally paid each week.

Most groups are clearly single sex provision. In a number, one or two young boys do attend usually because their mother or another relative is a volunteer. Some groups occasionally have joint activities with a boys’ organisation. One of the groups visited operated a girls-only group for the youngest, with joint mixed sex activities with the church youth group for the intermediate and senior groups and had achieved a high standard of open youth provision recognised and valued both by the church and by the local authority.

The Branch leaders did not appear to have a clear or set curriculum. Some said that they tried to follow the church’s year or that the area provided themes. Others said they had abandoned such suggested themes as “too religious” for their user group. It appeared to be a matter of local choice how far particular topics were pursued though we were throughout impressed by the informal discussions where concerns and current issues were raised.

*“We have a ‘Talk Big Box’. You put in a topic. Nobody knows it’s you but there’s always a discussion.” (Group at Welsh event.)*

Branch leaders were aware of issues such as health and safety requirements and the need for risk assessment. Criminal Records Bureau checks were carried out either by GFS or by the Diocese. However, we did not obtain

sufficient evidence of such procedures being carried out with total consistency and this relates to a later point about the lack of a procedural handbook.

In a few groups, the girls indicated that they did not have as much choice and say in the planning of the programme as they would wish. In one group however, there was an outstanding level of involvement of the young people in managing their own activities. The members were trusted to decide their own programme, manage their new portacabin facility and sell refreshments.

The Branches attracted relatively few children from minority ethnic groups, which may be in part a feature of the rural venues. The church based venues and Christian emphasis do not lend themselves to a strong multi-racial or inter-faith approach. There was however a clear strength in the way the work included girls with physical disabilities or learning difficulties. The level of acceptance from the other group members for these girls was remarkable and was no doubt inspired by the attitudes, inclusive practice and unostentatious caring of the leaders. We observed difficulties of behaviour being well-handled (e.g. in a child with autistic spectrum disorder and a child with Downs).

Some of our respondents suggested that the Branch work will be reaching a middle class clientele, mainly on the grounds of its church connections. This may be partially true but is not a complete reflection of the picture. Some of the Branches operate in deprived urban areas and almost all reach some girls who are in some sense socially excluded or isolated. For example, the researchers interviewed both girls and adult helpers on the Northern Area holiday in the Isle of Wight. One group had brought 11 girls to the holiday of whom only 4 were regular church goers, 2 girls had never seen the sea before and for some two thirds of this group it was their only holiday in the year. On Branch visits, we encountered situations where some children had been abused in the past, or suffered bereavement or the separation of parents.

### **3.3.2 Community Projects**

There are four Community Projects, three of which are located in seaside or small semi-rural towns. Community Projects work chiefly with young women between the ages of 14 and 25 who are either pregnant or who have young children. The main activities are designed to reduce social exclusion and build self-esteem by providing informal social education, formal educational courses health awareness and generic support in a *“non-judgemental and secure environment”* (GFS Platform, Outline of Community Projects.). The educational courses provide accredited qualifications such as English and Maths GCSE, computer training to NVQ Level 3, Administration at NVQ Level 1, or Basic and Key Skills. Outreach services often take place to contact the harder to reach young women and to encourage their attendance.

The Great Yarmouth Project also offers a Young People’s Development Programme (YPDP). Participants on this programme are aged 13 to 15 and have been identified as having significant educational and social needs, often manifesting themselves in problems with schooling. In some areas, sexual health education is offered in local schools. Several Projects have satellite



outreach centres and as mentioned above in two locations the support role is provided to young women in Housing Association accommodation.

GFS Platform prides itself on a tradition of involving young women in decision making and as positive role models. For instance, young women have made presentations to the Trustees and to external conferences; become peer supporters or volunteers in sexual health education, breast feeding support, or voluntary youth work. A number have progressed to employment in parenting or mentoring initiatives. Our impression was that there was a major opportunity to be exploited in accrediting these efforts and developing the volunteering and citizenship aspects of the work.

The Community Projects all have on-site childcare provision. Most of this is registered crèche provision but the Great Yarmouth Project offers full-day nursery care. All these facilities are OFSTED inspected. The most recent inspection reports for all four sites were examined as part of the evaluation and in each case the provision was assessed as “good” with some aspects of “outstanding” practice. Areas suggested for improvement included tightening of attendance registration procedures and better facilities for cooking meals for children. The childcare is undoubtedly integral to the success in engaging these young women in education and the childcare staff take an active role in supporting parents and promoting good parenting with all their users.

[In respect of] *“helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do – the provision is outstanding. Children clearly enjoy the good company of adults who are patient, interested and enthused in what they do and say. They are tolerant and understanding with a delightful and infectious sense of fun.”* (OFSTED, 2006, Cuddles Crèche, Isle of Wight.)

*“Children use simple programmes on the computer from an early age...Children’s creative development is outstanding. They paint with all kinds of objects including fruit, [or] parts of their body...The children attending the nursery are from a wide range of ethnic groups...Staff introduce them to different cultures, religions and abilities. Children have celebrated festivals from around the world such as Ramadan and Diwali...Children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. They are beginning to learn how to behave considerately to one another and are learning to share resources.”* (OFSTED, 2006, GFS Platform Nursery, Great Yarmouth.)

*“Children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and with special needs are warmly welcomed into the crèche to ensure they feel included.”* (OFSTED, 2005, GFS Platform, Penge, crèche provision.)

### **3.3.3 Positive features in common**

There is considerable room for improving and updating aspects of the current work and for new developments but the evidence from the visits underlined the essentially positive features of the provision. The research observations

and the comments of external partners bear witness to the remarkable warmth that is evident across the work of GFS. In different ways, the Branches and the Community Projects demonstrate this caring and accepting atmosphere. Whether paid or volunteer, the workers are committed to supporting the girls and young women and to enabling them to achieve and develop. In both settings, women appear to be supporting young women in a *“simple, motherly fashion”*, perhaps much as Mrs Townsend envisaged.

The Projects have more targets to meet for external funding than the Branches but both strands of the work have succeeded in maintaining an emphasis on holistic help and support. The needs of the users are taken on board as a whole without artificial compartmentalising. This is clearly helpful in working with young women who are isolated or lacking in confidence, damaged by their experience or who face multiple risks in their lives. As a voluntary organisation GFS may have a greater relative freedom to maintain this person-centred approach and it clearly pays off in progress and learning.

Both the Branches and the Community Projects contribute to the fabric of community life in different ways. Some groups have a long tradition that is a respected part of local history. Particularly in more isolated rural communities, a lively youth group can be the centre of activity bringing people together from other age groups. We heard of examples of visiting the elderly, fund-raising for various causes, and taking part in civic occasions. At one of the Projects, we heard of young women who had contributed to the debate about the local authority’s strategic plan. These contributions to local cohesion may be low key but they are nonetheless valuable.

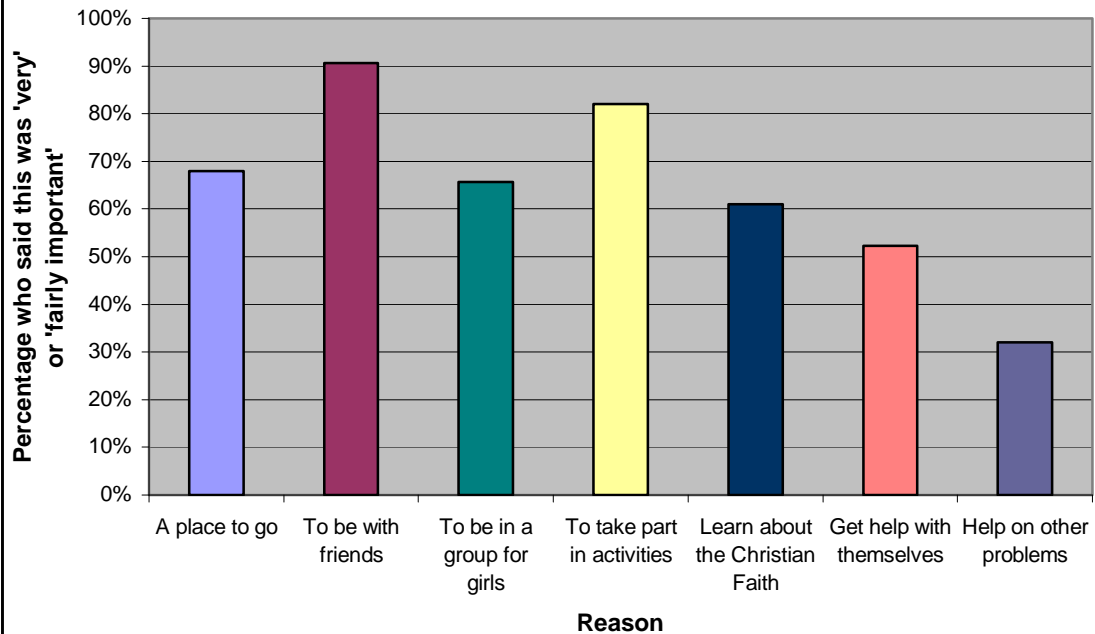
### **3.4 The reasons for participating on the part of girls and young women**

The evaluation sought to find out from the questionnaires and interviews why girls and young women engaged with GFS groups in the first place. Figure 3 shows the results from the questionnaire responses on the seven reasons for joining most frequently given by Branch members over the age of 10. Figure 4 shows a similar profile for the young women participating in the Community Projects. Roughly similar proportions want to find a place to go, to meet friends, to belong to a group for girls only and to join in the activities. In the Branch groups, members also tend to join to learn about the Christian faith and to get help for general “things to do with myself”. At the Projects, there is a greater emphasis in the reasons for participation on work, training and education and on more specific problems, which from other evidence in the questionnaires concerns issues such as housing need, health issues, benefits questions, depression, parenting, or domestic violence. Parental wishes or pressure, referrals from other workers or advice about crime or drugs do not feature as strongly for either group. And for some participants joining was more fortuitous than reasoned: a point which relates to the issues around publicity discussed below.

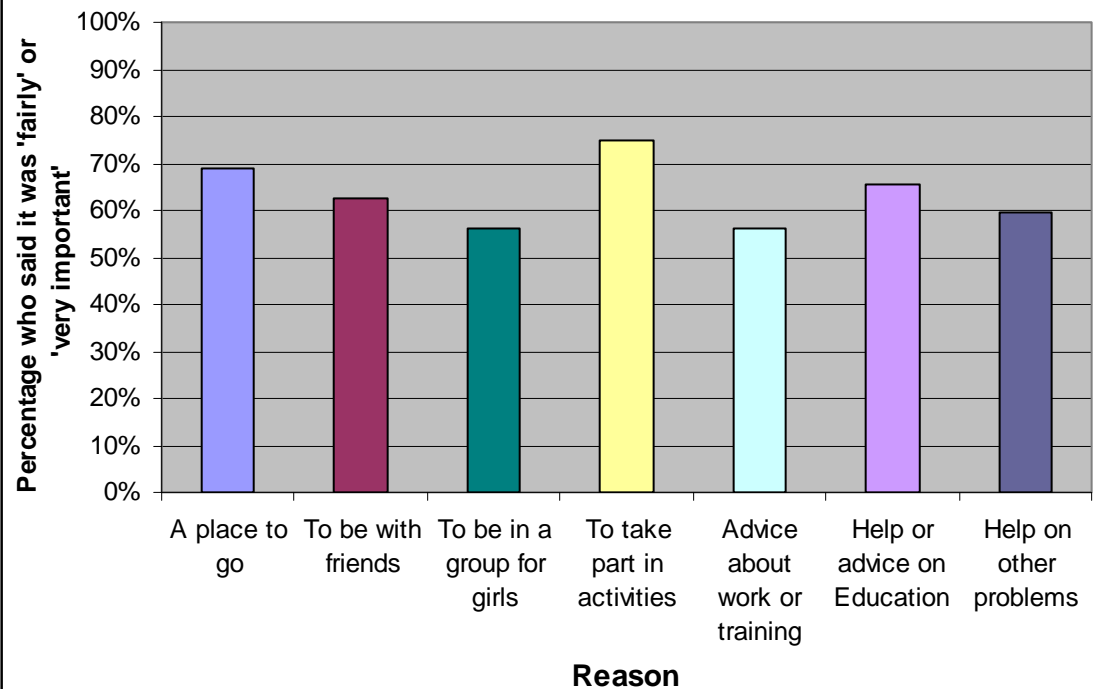
*“My mum turned the Yellow Pages. I’m not religious.”* (Young woman, aged 12, interviewed at a Branch.)

*“I saw it on the notice board outside the church and thought I’d check it out.”* (Young woman aged 11, interviewed at a Branch.)

**Figure 3:**  
The main reasons girls over 10 years said they come to GFS Branches

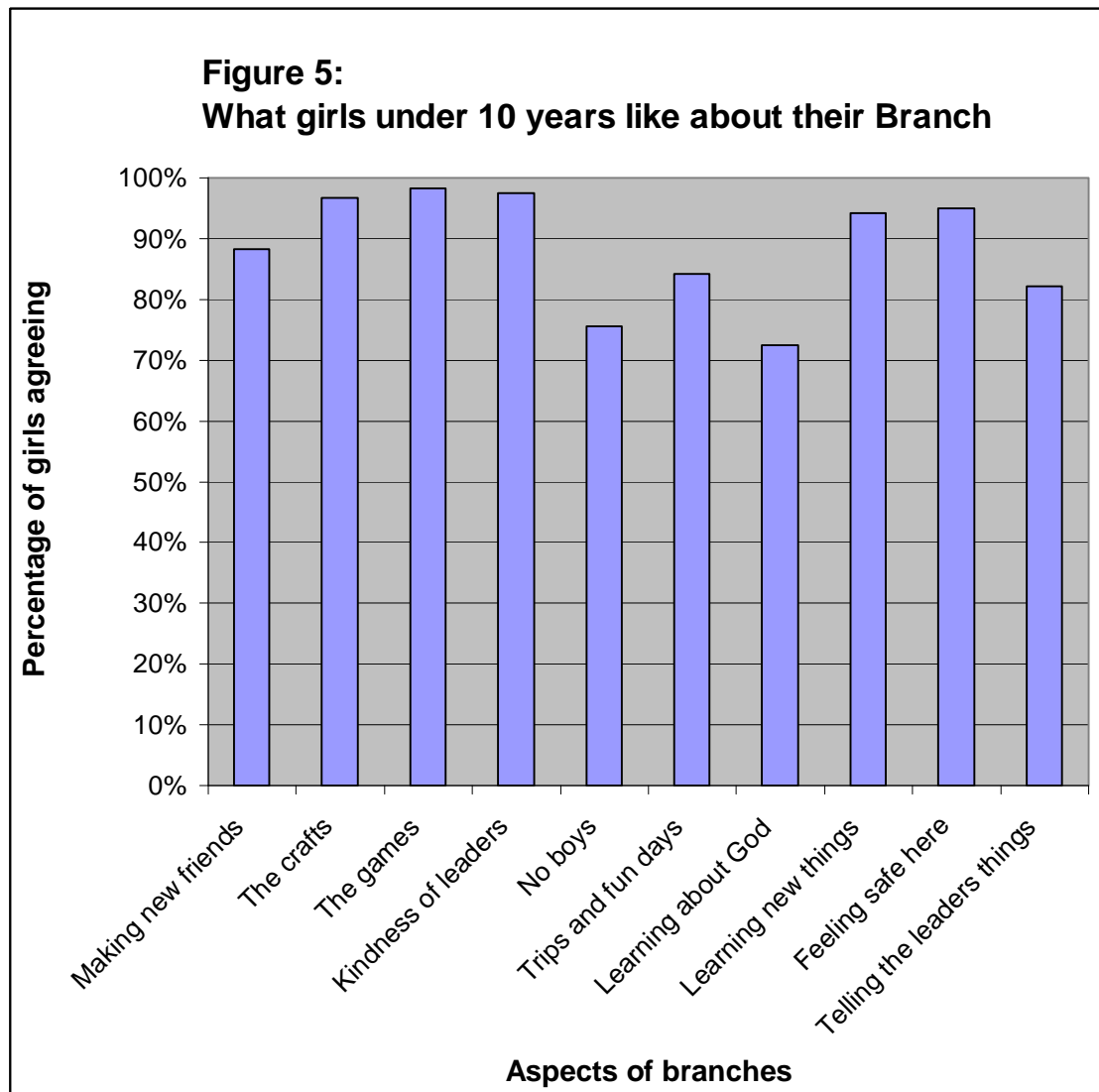


**Figure 4:**  
The main reasons girls over 10 years said they come to GFS Projects



### 3.5 Findings on what participants valued and enjoyed

Through the interviews and questionnaires, the research team sought to identify what attracted the users to GFS Platform activities, and what aspects they most valued and enjoyed. Figure 5 shows the aspects of the Branch groups most appreciated by the younger girls. Crafts, games and “learning new things” scored highly, alongside the qualities of the atmosphere such as feeling safe and the kindness of the leaders.



Not unexpectedly, most of the comments from this younger group on what they liked most concern the practical activities but a number also said that they liked “learning about God”, whether or not they normally attended church.

*“Everything, but mostly games.”*

*“I like making new friends and I like the leaders too.”*

*“Making a book about us.”*

*“Making and icing biscuits.”*

*“The adventure holiday, Spiritual Journey, Crafts.”*

*“I have enjoyed learning about God.”*

*“I enjoyed playing parachute.”*

*"Going on day trips and cooking."*  
*"I like making things that we do here."*  
*"I have really enjoyed playing all the games like 'Captain's Coming'."*  
*"Painting, crafts, jewellery making, acting and dancing."*

*"I like making candles like this."*  
[What else do you like?]  
*I like the stories.*  
[Stories about what?]  
*About Jesus and stuff.*  
[Do you go to church too to hear stories like that?]  
*No."*  
(6 year old Branch member at informal interview.)

Figure 6 below shows the factors that were seen as important to the girls and young women aged over 10 at both the Branch groups and the Community Projects. There is a remarkable similarity of response on many factors. The girls and young women strongly valued having a place to go, meeting other young women and having a space without boys or men present. There are strong similarities on the scores for feeling that not having to compete, being accepted for who you are and having friendly workers were very or fairly important. The main differences appear to lie in the nature of the programming (e.g. more games, crafts and worship at the Branches and more emphasis on the training, the crèche provision and the support from workers at the Projects.) We would argue from this that the needs of the girls and young women are very similar at a basic level – such as the needs for acceptance and for a supportive, friendly place to mix with others. The differences are practical ones in that young women with children need the childcare and education and are more likely to need intensive support from the workers.

Age differences can be seen on the question of whether the girls and young women liked having a group without boys or men. For the younger girls (under the age of 10) it was very significant. 76% said they like the group "because there are no boys here." Only 5% said they disagreed. The younger girls tended to see boys as "stupid" or "messaging about." For the over 10 group in the Branches, 67% saw it as very or fairly important in the range of reasons for joining that it was a group for girls and young women. 7% said it was not important at all. Having "space without boys or men" was seen as very or fairly important by 62%. When the young women in Projects (who tended to be somewhat older again) expressed their views, these proportions are slightly lower once more. 64% saw it as very or fairly important when they joined to be in a group of young women. 56% said they valued having a "space without boys or men" and 25% felt this was not important to them at all.

The sample is not sufficiently large or representative to draw firm conclusions from this but it would appear that the need for a girls only group is strongest for the younger girls and that this need reduces with age and adolescence unless there are specific reasons why a young woman feels safer or more at ease without men present. All groups however agreed that there were common reasons and occasions when single sex groups would be most

appropriate. A number indicated that while they appreciated single sex provision, some facilities were also needed to help young men.

*"Boys would annoy us. They wouldn't want to do our stuff... It's nice to get away from brothers but sometimes at school it's nice because boys are funny."* (Branch member aged 11.)

*"I reckon when you're littler you want it separate. You're not nasty to each other, you're just 'Oh it's boys.' You think they smell. It's more fun just to have girls. When you're older you can sort of understand. You're not so conscious that there are boys there. You're more sociable."* (Branch member aged 13 at interview.)

*"You know there are boy problems at school. 'I like that boy' and stuff. You just want to get away from that."* (Branch member in group interview, aged about 11.)

*"Men are on a different planet. It's hard to talk freely with men around. The existence of this project says 'we are important.'"* (Young woman at a Community Project, aged 21.)

*"I wouldn't mind a mixed group but my partner would dominate."* (Young woman interviewed at a Community Project, aged 23.)

*"We could do with a young fathers' project but separate from GFS. They need to be able to get access to help and advice too."* (Young woman of 23 at a Community Project.)

*"We're all in the same situation – we all have kids. Nine out of ten times you have a problem with your kid or something, someone else has already been there and can help you. With a man you couldn't do that."* (Young woman, aged 24, interviewed at a Community Project.)

*"Most people are lone parents, [GFS] don't take partners into account. There's nothing anywhere for just men, male parents."* (Young woman, aged 23, at a Community Project.)

*"Confidence building is easier to achieve in single sex places. There are no men to put you down or criticise you."* (Young woman, aged 25 interviewed at a Community Project.)

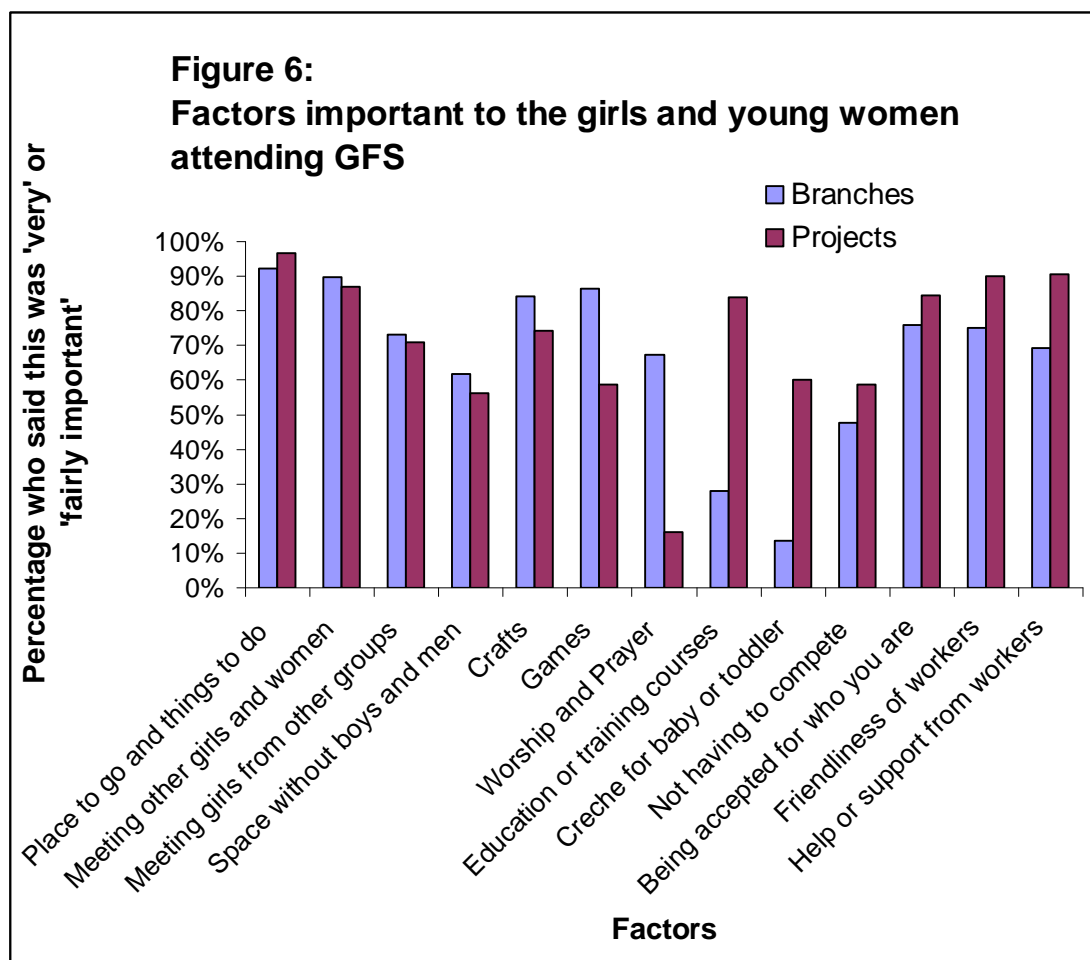
*"Yes, it is needed [single sex provision]. We are young mums. Some have had violent relationships, sexual abuse, panic attacks or depression."* (Young woman, aged 21, at a Community Project.)

*"Girls are the ones that are actually going through the pregnancy. They're the ones that have to face the issues like whether to keep the baby, abortion or adoption."* (Young woman, aged 20, interviewed at a Community Project.)

*"Girls are vulnerable. More are going to open up on things like sexual health."* (Young woman, aged 22, at a Community Project.)

*"If groups are mixed, girls can't be themselves and tend to show off."* (Young woman, aged 16, YPDP.)

*"You wouldn't feel comfortable with men. There's social services issues, custody and criminal issues, being pregnant and being alone, violent relationships and post-natal depression."* (Young woman, aged 23, interviewed at a Community Project.)



The comments from the older girls at the Branches on what they enjoyed most emphasised particular activities but also the ability to make new friends, take some responsibility and have the support of the leaders.

*"Tasting food from different countries."*

*"Going to sing at the old age home."*

*"I have enjoyed having responsibilities."*

*"Going to camp because I got to meet new people."*

*"The crafts are cool. They are fun."*

*"No one yells."*

*"I have enjoyed everything including, games, learning, quizzes, cooking, first aid etc."*

*"Playing football rugby on Halloween."*

*"I have enjoyed the drama activities and plays which we have written and acted out."*

*"Going to the Isle of Wight. I made lots of friends and had the best holiday ever."*

*"The leaders are like your parents. They really care. They make you feel comfortable."* (Young woman, aged 12, at interview.)

*"Church parade is all the groups, with Brownies and so on. The leaders don't mind whether you go or not. There's no pressure. You go for respect really but you don't have to. It's all chilled – you just do what you want to do, and it's fun."* (Young woman, aged 12, at interview.)

The young women in the Projects offered similar comments on what they had enjoyed, including activities such as swimming, camping or arts and crafts.

*"I enjoy everything as you get to see new things and meet new people."*

*"I loved dancing at Fitness 2000."*

*"I enjoyed drama and 'Getting Connected'."*

*"I really enjoy the sexual health course. I have just started - it gives me a chance to mix with other girls without feeling threatened."*

*"I've enjoyed meeting other young mums in similar situations as me and the support that's been given to me."*

*"Helping at carnival time and taking part. I had never done that before."*

*"Doing my maths and making new friends."*

*"You get to moan to people who understand... You know it's confidential and won't be spread around the town."*

*"The staff are good at picking up on things. They never make you feel you take too much time. You are never judged here."*

For the over 10s, the questionnaires also carried a speech bubble for free text responses to the question "what does GFS mean to you?" These responses are particularly revealing. They show the significance attached to the feeling of belonging, to the friendships made and to the sense of being accepted and supported. It is clear that for many confidence and independence and a stronger sense of identity have grown through their participation. This is true for the girls in the Branches and even more marked for some of the young women in the Projects, for whom GFS has been almost literally a lifeline.

Some of the comments from the girls in the Branches are set out below:

*"Belonging to GFS means to me that I am happy with who I am and making new friends."*

*"It makes me feel happy and safe."*

*"Very much a place where I can be myself."*

*"It means that I belong to a Branch and I feel proud of it."*

*"Learning about God and having fun."*

*"Being able to talk to people about problems."*

*"It makes me feel good about myself."*

*"It is nice to be there and to know there is someone there to help me."*

*"A big family atmosphere. Knowing it is world-wide and trying to understand."*

*"Friendship, I am an individual, I can be me, confidentiality in problem sharing, Team GFS! Family."*

*"A lot - because it helps get me out of the house for a bit."*

*"... this is a place where I can tell my feelings to people."*

*"This branch means a lot to me as I have developed a bond of trust with the younger girls, which has overall given me new confidence which is now helping me as a junior leader."*

*"It means a lot to me as I've been coming here since I was very little but can't answer the question because I can't put it into words."*

*"Means that ... I'm accepted at least somewhere."*

*"It means learning about religion and making friends."*

*"It's nice to belong to somethin'."*



Although a few struggled and wrote responses like “*nothing really*”, many of the comments from the young women in the Projects to the question of “what does GFS mean to you?” conveyed that GFS had an important place in their lives. These included the following remarks:

*“That I get the help I need when I need it. Friendly people.”*

*“Being with other young mums.”*

*“Friendship, belief, kindness, hope, prospects, acceptance, support.”*

*“I feel better within myself because I am learning and doing something with myself.”*

*“It’s a place I can go where I feel safe among other young women, which helps me a lot with my depression and anxiety problems.”*

*“It means more than everything to me, I can’t explain.”*

*“It is very important because it will hopefully help me do my A Levels and help me reach my independence.”*

*“I come to GFS because it is more better than school and we get treated like adults more at GFS than school.”*

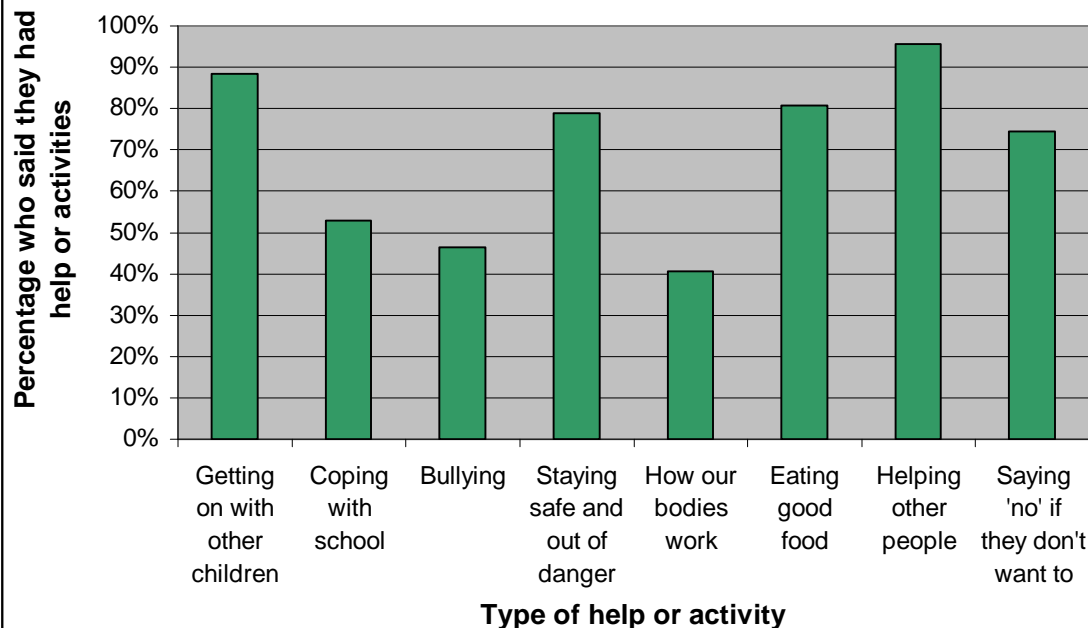
### **3.6 Findings on the “outcomes” of GFS Platform**

“Every Child Matters: Next Steps” sets out the government’s framework for children’s services focusing on five key outcomes for children: Be healthy; Stay safe; Enjoy and achieve; Make a positive contribution; Achieve economic well-being. Appendix B provides further detail on what these national outcomes mean. Increasingly commissioning processes are demanding evidence of such outcomes from work with children and young people.

Throughout this study therefore the researchers were looking to identify the “outcomes” of the work. Young women were therefore asked what they had learned and what difference GFS had made in their lives. There is evidence from the answers that GFS is making a difference. There is no doubt that improvements could be made to programmes and curriculum but there is still clear evidence that the participants are learning and developing in ways which meet the objectives of the Every Child Matters and Youth Matters policies.

In respect of the under 10s at the Branches, the questionnaire asked whether the girls had received help or taken part in activities dealing with a number of topics, which related in some way to the objectives of Every Child Matters. Figure 7 below sets out the areas where the girls who responded did feel they had been helped. It is clear that topics like bullying or staying safe are tackled, that there are some activities addressing health and/or diet, and that children are helped to get on with others, and to learn sufficient assertiveness to say “no” when they do not wish to do something “risky or silly”. In an echo of the motto and ethos of GFS, the highest responses are around having had activities about helping other people and getting on with other children.

**Figure 7:**  
**What girls under 10 years said they had help or activities about in Branches**



These results marry up with the qualitative comments on the questionnaires from this younger group on “what have you learned at GFS?” and with interview responses on what they had gained.

*“I never knew how to cook but now I do. Now I love to cook.”*

*“Different kinds of crafts.”*

*“That you need to think of others than yourselves.”*

*“Helping other people because we have to learn how to get on with other people.”*

*“I learned how to ring hand bells.”*

*“Stay safe from naughty people.”*

*“How to be friends and not to bully.”*

*“Doing quilting. Everyone’s feelings are important as each other.”*

*“Since I have been at GFS I have learnt different things about God.”*

*“About how they tell you to deal with bullying.”*

*“About that you should say ‘no’ if you want.”*

*“Helping people. Friendship.”*

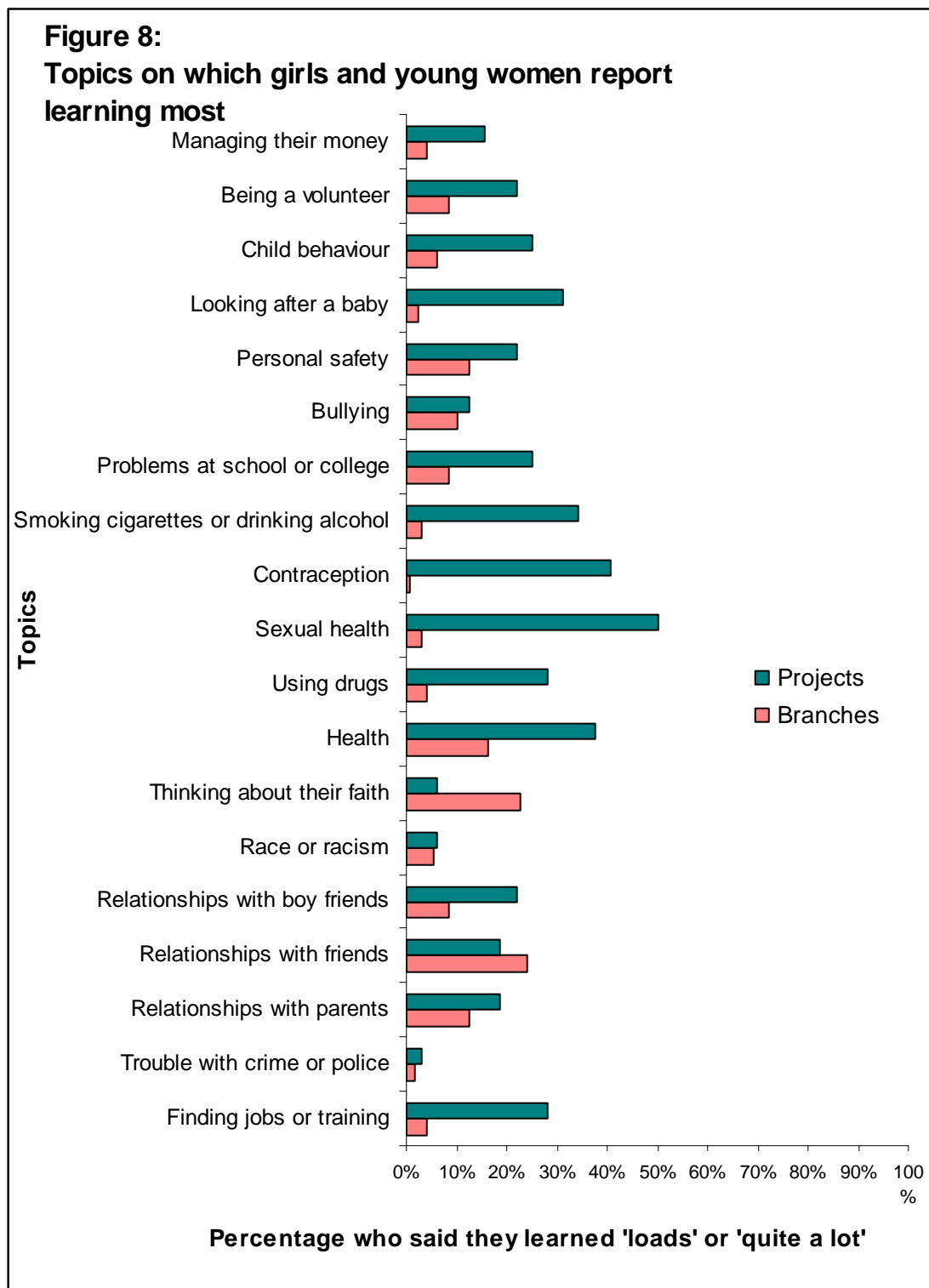
*“That we should be who we want to be and not what our friends want to be.”*

*“That you can make new friends from different Branches and they will last forever.”*

*“That friends are still important even though they annoy you, you may feel mad with them if they don’t do what you want them to, but deep inside they’re still special to you.”*

*“I have learnt first aid and how to stay safe.”*

Figure 8 shows where young women over 10 in both Projects and Branches identified most learning. In both arenas, particularly in the Project work, young women can identify outcomes from their participation which directly relate to the priorities of Every Child Matters. It is also evident that learning could be considerably improved in the Branch setting by greater attention to curriculum and appropriate ways of presenting information.



Once again the evidence from the over 10s questionnaires in Branches shows that there is a general growth in confidence, a sense of responsibility and the ability to get on with others as well as learning around several of the Every Child Matters themes such as health or personal safety.

*"You learn things. Cooking. Plain cakes, GFS first, [it's] new at home."*

*"Making different crafts like baking, origami, sewing and having time to do any 2 different crafts we choose."*

*"Whatever culture, race or belief we are all the same and we are one."*

*"I learnt about taking care of my nails."*

*"Learning to understand people that are different to me."*

*"Church - because I didn't really know that much."*

*"I have become more active."*

*"How to help and look after younger children than me."*

*"To not judge people and respect people."*

*"Not to be cheeky and to express myself better and talk about things that I couldn't before."*

*"Looking after ourselves re: cooking, health."*

*"The important thing is I have more friends. I have learnt how to make friends."*

*"It doesn't matter what you look like it's who you are inside."*

*"I have learned more about people with disabilities. I have learned some basic sign language that helps me to communicate with the deaf and partially deaf."*

*"I have learnt how to become more confident in myself. \*Thumbs up!\*"*

*"Learning more things to help your work easier at school like other people's religions."*

Parents were interviewed on a few occasions in the Branch groups. There is confirming evidence here that the learning did make a difference to the children. The provision was valued by those who spoke to the researchers, as the examples below from two of the mothers show (names and identifying details have been changed):

- "Kelly really looks forward to it. She likes the singing and the different activities, like pictures or origami, practising for a play, doing something for the church, cooking and she does dancing. It helps her confidence, interacting with other children. And she'll take things like the paper [origami] home. It's better than saying 'I'm bored'. I had a few problems with Kelly eighteen months ago at school. Fights and taking somebody's money. It was quite a horrible time because she's my first and I'm learning. I said to her that GFS meant she knew right from wrong. It helped...*

*I'm not a church goer but I always wanted my children to be christened. You could maybe make them more aware as they get older of street things. Maybe in a couple of years for her – like drugs. It's just the danger of certain things – children are very vulnerable, aren't they?...I know my hand on my heart that my children are safe here."*
- "Melanie is nine. She's getting a lot more confidence. She was an only child. Now she's more confident in herself – puts herself forward for plays and things...They do a lot of cooking. She comes home and*

*says 'We've made this at GFS – can I have a go at doing it at home?'  
She's creative ... not one for sitting in front of the telly. She has a lot of  
ideas. I see a piece of paper. She can see ten things to make out of it!"*

For the young women in the Projects learning was frequently in similar areas such as health or bullying but given the main client group more of the outcomes were directly related to pregnancy and parenting.

*"I originally came to do my maths but whilst I have been doing this I have met lots of new people from different backgrounds."*

*"... it gave me lots of information in regards to health during pregnancy and looking after my baby."*

*"To accept people who are different to me."*

*"Believing in myself because I used to put myself down all of the time."*

*"About bullying and how it affects the person that is being bullied."*

*"I have learned to stop drugs."*

*"How to keep my temper."*

*"That everybody are equal."*

*"The importance of wearing condoms. (STIs and pregnancy.)"*

*"I learned to fend on my own and look after my little girl and be more independent."*

Interview comments from young women at the Projects also showed that GFS had often made a significant difference in their lives. Often hopes and aspirations had been raised and they had more control of their relationships.

*"In the outside world lots of people look at you funny. Here it's fantastic because we're all in the same situation...I have more confidence in myself. I hardly spoke to no-one."* (Young woman, aged 20.)

*"If I hadn't had a GFS worker then I would have no money, nothing to do and no route to college."* (Young woman aged 17.)

*"I know I am safe. My children feel safe and I know they are safe when we are at GFS. It has developed my confidence...I would not have left my abusive partner if GFS hadn't helped me."* (Young woman of 23.)

*"It [GFS] has built lots of confidence. I used to be paranoid and on anti-depressants and saw a psychiatric nurse about a year ago. I'm a completely different person now."* (Young woman, aged 23.)

*"It's helped me get my life on track and to find a career that I want."* (Young woman, aged 16, at YPDP.)

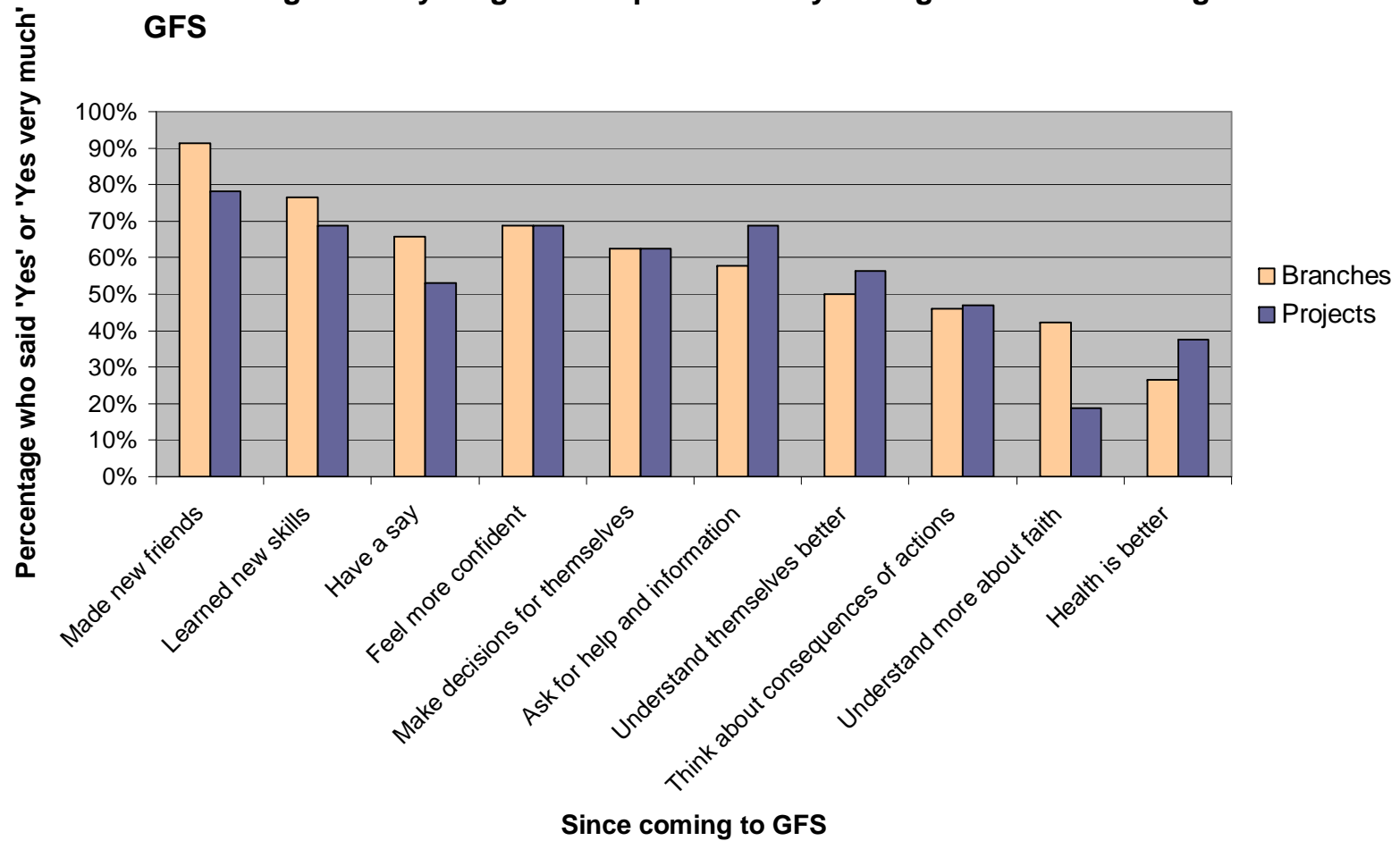
Some of the stories of the young women also illustrate such changes.

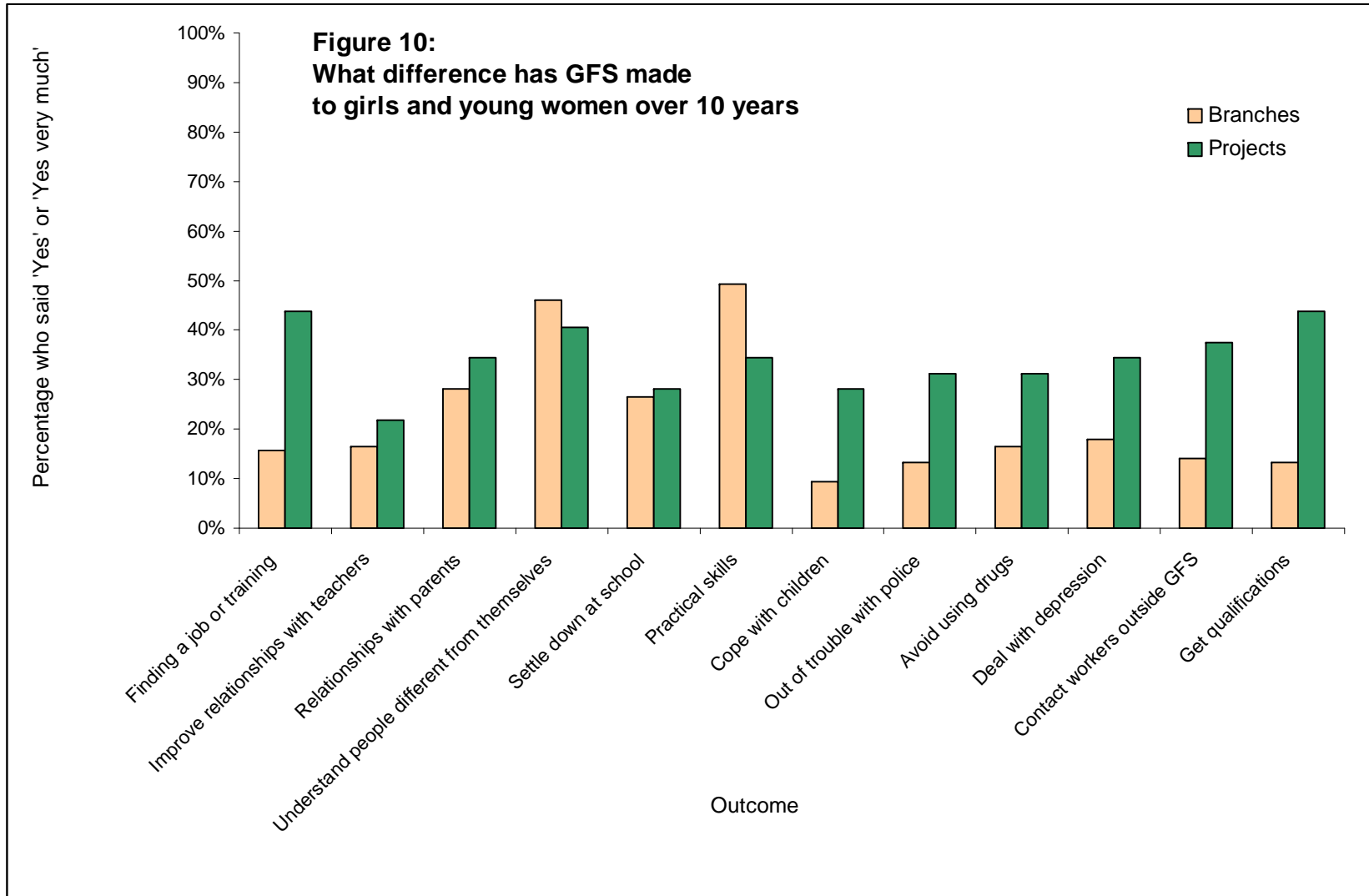
- One young woman was 7 months pregnant living in very poor accommodation and clearly uncomfortable, unhappy and unsafe in the surroundings. There was drug misuse and violence in the house. The social services department which had placed her there had apparently not visited and had left her to her own devices. The GFS worker advocated for her to be moved to a better situation when the baby was born and continued support. The young woman is now much happier and meeting other young mothers nearby. She is seen as *"now a fighter and ready to take on the next life stages"*. Her child is on the "at risk register" so she will receive continued support after the age of 18.

- Another young woman aged 16 told the researcher that she had never imagined that she would be able to live on own but now feels that she will be able to achieve it. She had learned skills for independence such as cooking, washing, planning her shopping, cleaning, and reading books about parenting. Her perception was that she had changed enormously and learned to present herself differently. She said she had been very disturbed, had run away from home and had used drugs heavily. She was now able to use practical and emotional support, had cut down her smoking and had a solid supportive friendship with two other girls at the Project which will carry on after she leaves.
- *“My health visitor referred me when I suffered Post Natal Depression following the birth of my child... I gained a City and Guilds qualification in English in September. I take part in whatever is on offer and enjoy every minute of it...I learned to cook, to eat healthier and to feed my child healthier. Platform taught me all of this. . I made curtains for my flat in the sewing machine lessons... Trust was a major factor to me when I had PND but as soon as I started attending Platform it lifted almost instantly because I trusted the staff and could talk to them about my problems. The crèche was fantastic for my child and gave me time to myself which helped lift my depression.”* (Young woman, aged 25.)
- *“I was told about it by a friend. I really needed support because I wasn’t dealing with my past. I have no parents and I was abused when I was in care. Here I attend the performing arts group, sign language, English and ‘Mothers and Toddlers.’ I enjoy having a break from my child, going places with friends, having a laugh and doing the courses. If I didn’t come, I would be a mess with depression. I used to sit in my flat day in and day out. I had no friends. I’ve built my confidence and got my self-esteem back. I’ve now got qualifications I would never have achieved...I just think it’s my life-line.”* (Young woman, aged 21.)
- *“I got referred by school as I was being mouthy and got bullied. I do drumming, swimming, dance, DJing and go on the residentials... I’ve got to keep my attendance up or go back to school but I enjoy coming... I am more confident and more motivated to learn and do activities. If I had any problems I would talk to a GFS worker.”* (Young woman aged 15 on YPDP.)
- *“The Money Matters course got me to sort out my financial situation better. It kept a roof over our head. We were having lots of problems. Housing Support helped a lot. They helped me ... sort out payments. There’s no more bailiffs any more! I’m guessing my confidence has got better but I won’t know that til I get a job.”* (Young woman aged 23 with 3 children.)

Figures 9 and 10 below show what the girls and young women felt they had gained from coming to GFS and what difference they felt it had made to them. In summary, the evidence of the study is that participation in GFS activities does result in positive outcomes for many girls and young women. The growth in self-confidence, self-acceptance and a range of practical skills is striking.

**Figure 9:**  
**What the girls and young women perceive they have gained from coming to GFS**







### 3.7 The characteristics of staff and volunteers

The study gathered a fairly comprehensive picture of the characteristics, views and experience of paid staff and volunteers involved with GFS. In general terms, GFS Platform has almost entirely female staff and volunteers; a relatively low proportion of minority ethnic workers, especially volunteers; and an older age profile markedly amongst the volunteers and noticeable but less marked amongst the paid staff.

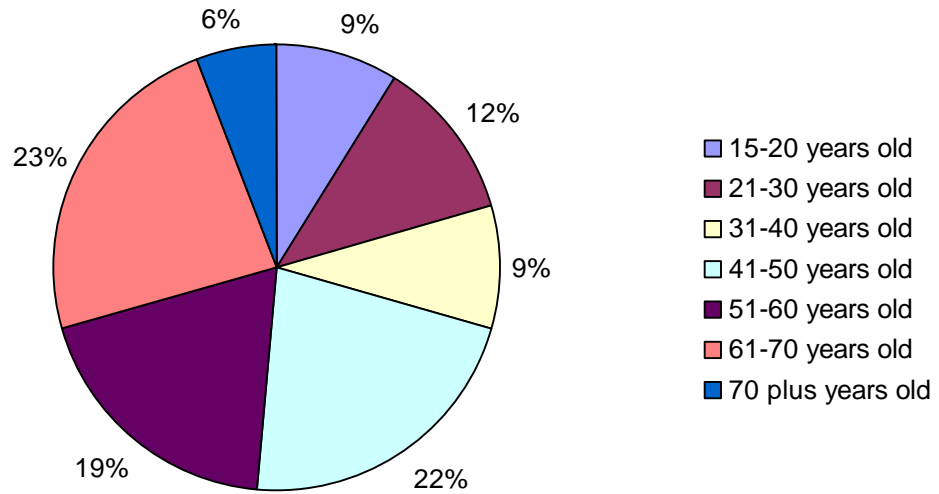
The **age profile** of those involved in the organisation is striking. GFS workers tend to be older than might be expected in a youth work organisation. The volunteers especially are an ageing group without a significant influx of younger leaders. This represents a crucial issue for the future, especially for the Branch work. Unless new blood can be attracted by recruitment drives, publicity or some financial reward, then it is inevitable that the work will die out. Figure 11 below shows the age profile of the 68 Branch volunteers responding to the question on age in the questionnaire. Although this is not drawn from a random sample, we believe this to be a sufficiently representative reflection of the body of volunteers. Some 48% of those responding were aged between 50 and 70 plus, and 71% were aged over 40. Some of these volunteers will have roles at area or diocesan level but nevertheless the findings confirm an older cohort of workers at Branch level.

All the respondents were female and only one was from a minority ethnic group (Black African or Black Caribbean). It is also of interest that **a high proportion of the volunteers are working** full-time (31% of those responding) or part-time (24%). This points to a need for realism in the arrangements for training and other meetings that may be demands on already crowded diaries. A further 29% were retired.

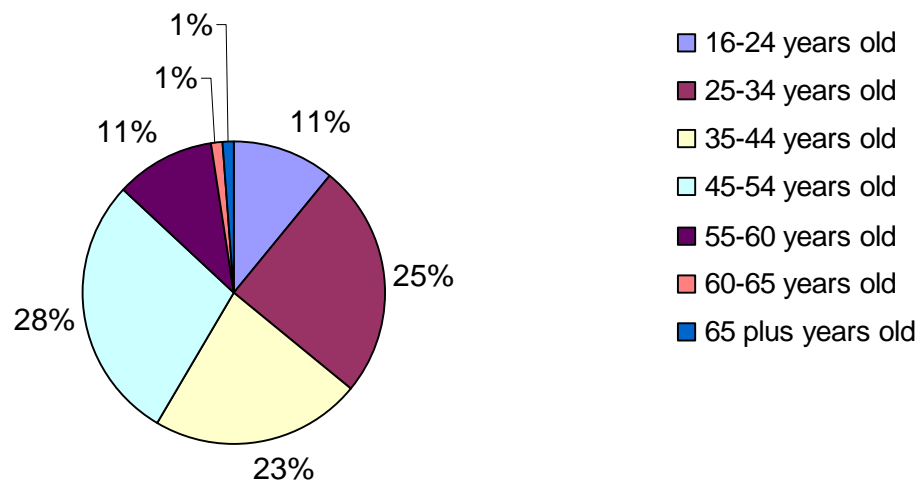
The profile for workers in the Projects is somewhat younger but the picture still shows some possible cause for concern. For those returning the questionnaire (N=32), 25% were aged over 50 and 44% were aged over 40. In terms of ethnicity, one respondent categorised herself as from a minority ethnic group (Other ethnic origin).

A more reliable source of data is probably the equal opportunities monitoring supplied by GFS Human Resources, though this dates from July 2006. This shows that of 84 paid staff in post at that time (full-time and part-time), two were male and 78.6% were White British, 3.6% were categorised as White Other, and 8.3% were from minority ethnic groups (with 3 members of staff recorded as Black/Black British Caribbean and the remainder from a variety of other minority ethnic categories.) Figure 12 below depicts the age profile of those staff and shows that some 42% were aged 45 or over.

**Figure 11:  
Age Bands for Branch Volunteers**



**Figure 12:  
Age Bands for Paid Staff (July 2006)**



### 3.8 The concerns of the volunteers

The main concerns of volunteers in the Branches are summarised below. (There are no paid workers in the Branches.) Some 70 volunteers completed the postal questionnaire, which provided quantitative data on the range of views together with free text comments. The interviews offered an opportunity to explore such views in more depth. The comments below are taken either from the questionnaires or from the interview notes taken at the time.

- Many of the Branch leaders were anxious about the lack of new volunteers and conscious of the age profile of helpers at local level. Several mentioned that more mothers were working as an inhibitor to volunteering.  
*"The main problem in Branch work is attracting people who will give commitment to running or helping on a regular basis. We need volunteers to keep Branches open and to grow. But this is a problem facing many volunteer-led organisations and there is no easy answer."*  
*"There's no shortage of girls wanting to belong to Branches. But it's difficult to get volunteers."*  
*"You can throw all the money in the world at Branch work but if you can't get leaders it won't do any good."*  
[Main threats in the future?] *"The lack of leaders... The clergy need to help and let congregations know what's going on, and really push."*
- Some leaders suggested that increased regulation had made it more difficult to run the groups and had discouraged potential volunteers.  
*"It's evolved over the years. You are a lot more aware of Government rules – health and safety and new issues like drugs. We used to do activities like a canal walk. Now we wouldn't risk it. We used to go to camp in a furniture van – you couldn't do that now!"*  
*"...hard to get leaders ...due to unwillingness to make the commitment and to red tape – Health and Safety regulation, forms to fill out, you can't take children in your car, you have to have two adults at any one time."*  
*"Not enough leaders. No one can get them – Scouts, Guides. Some are put off by Child Protection, CRB checks and that. But there's also a change in attitude – people don't help."*
- Volunteer workers at Branch level were crying out for help with practical programme ideas.  
*"We used to receive information to help Branch leaders on a regular basis for many years but not much at all now."*  
*"We had training and activity packs in the past."*  
*"It's hard to get ideas, keep up morale and enthusiasm. I'm floundering and a bit bored and the girls must be too."*  
*"I want fresh ideas. I think everybody would say that."*
- A particular point of contention was that a fully updated Branch Leaders' Handbook had been under discussion for some time but had not yet appeared. A "Branch Development Group" had produced a draft document but there was a widespread disappointment and lack of understanding about why the publication had not yet been forthcoming.

*“BRANCH WORKERS HANDBOOK [capitals as written] with clear procedures, instructions, forms covering all aspects, e.g. risk assessment, visits. Leaflets/flyers.”*

*“Branches want a good promotional leaflet, a handbook, a website, and the appropriate forms to fill in. They’d be happier then.”*

*“I would appreciate things being a bit ‘speeded up’. When volunteers need training, resources, information etc. these are not forthcoming. We have no Leaders Handbook to keep us up to date on policies or to help us attract further volunteers.”*

- The Branch groups do not have a set programme or badges for the girls to complete. The absence of competition or the need to achieve particular competencies was widely valued as attracting girls who might not wish to go to the more structured uniformed youth organisations. Generally, the Branch leaders could not or would not articulate a “curriculum” for their work. Despite their wish for ideas, many felt that past programmes had been too prescriptive or had over emphasised the religious aspect of the work. The Branches appeared to be devising activities locally often constrained by the skills or enthusiasms of local workers. Many felt it was important to convey the ethos of caring and responsibility but usually preferred to do so in an informal manner in discussion with individuals or small groups.

*[Do you have a curriculum?] “We follow the church’s year but not religiously – in that we do topics like sexual health, anything they want. And we instil by example – the difference between right and wrong – we hope it will kick in in later life.”*

- Most volunteers appreciated the need for training, though there were pleas that the pressures of working and running a family alongside volunteering should be better recognised. Most respondents felt that training for Branch workers would be better offered as short courses locally or on an area basis. Some felt that Head Office expectations were unrealistic.

*“One day training courses in our area. Not weekends at venues four hours away at short notice.”*

*“More emphasis on developing branches and leadership training. This is starting to come with area training weekends... More emphasis on healthy lifestyles, eating and self reliance.”*

*[Do you take up training?] “Not really, only what we organise ourselves in the area. They [GFS centrally] expect people who might be headmistresses to take NVQs. People who work full time don’t want it.”*  
*“Events for training should be held closer to us as we have trouble getting to them. Also more events that get ... girls from all of the different branches to have the chance to work together”*

- Alongside training, many people mentioned the need for better publicity, both for the organisation as a whole and for some simple leaflets or posters that could advertise the GFS groups. One group had had their own small publicity card printed at their own expense but would have preferred effective corporate publicity.

*“GFS needs more media coverage if it is to survive and develop. I thought it had died out years ago. The projects with young mothers*

*seem very worthwhile but local groups will need more promotion if they are to survive."*

*"We need good promotional stuff. We have a report to the Diocesan Synod conference every year. If we had leaflets we could send them out through that."*

*"I'd like a resources pack with GFS leaflets and so on. Something professional...People need to know about us. It's difficult to explain who we are. There's no website."*

*"It's frustrating. No one knows GFS. They know about Brownies and Guides."*

- Several Branch workers suggested that the GFS was not encouraged by the clergy or that they did not know enough about its role.  
*"GFS has a low profile with the church. Some clergy don't see single sex organisations as having a value."*  
*"The lack of clergy backing can kill a Branch."*
- The demand from the Branches for more financial help was in general not as high as the researchers expected. Only three questionnaire responses from the volunteers mentioned financial support in answer to the question of what one thing would most improve the support they receive for their work. Many Branches felt that they could survive on weekly subscriptions and small fund-raising events. The exceptions were in areas of particular urban deprivation or isolated and poorly resourced Branches that could not afford to travel to area events. Although many members understand the reasons for drawing charitable funds into the central office for purposes of charity administration, in some areas, there is still a feeling that funds should be locally controlled or are too difficult to access. A few voiced a perception that workers had been made redundant who could have continued to be paid and some felt that the process of regularising funds had been less than transparent.  
*"Financial support for Branches in low income areas. Funding from branch subs is not viable and reliance on generosity of branch leaders will die out and Branches will cease to exist."*  
*"More local funding available and able to manage our affairs though local training which is easier."*  
*"We can run our Branches week to week without extra money from GFS. But on a Diocesan level you might need a coach to go to an event. Logistically we can only get an area event if people can travel there. We need the money and a clear route to get it."*  
*"We need money to pay for transport, insurance, subs for girls, youth worker salaries, trips and to take the girls out generally."*  
*"Resources, especially money, ought to be in each diocese, equally accessible to each Branch. The GFS prayer includes the phrase 'bearing each other's burdens.'"*
- Several people expressed the need for better communication particularly with Head Office. There was an underlying feeling that the Branch work had received less attention in recent years and was valued less than the Project work. The volume of paper work and demands for information were problematic for some.

*"Improved communication between HQ and volunteers who give up their time week by week – to lose the 'them' and 'us' feeling."*

*"Branch work, head office work and project work, working towards the same goals and working together. Too much of 'them and us'."*

- Many volunteers spoke of the importance of the international work of GFS. A number had had experience of exchange visits or a World Council meeting and this had obviously been a high point for them.

*"Once you see GFS in its international garb, it's a very different feeling."*

*"The first black person I ever met was when I was 11. She was a GFS worker from Africa... And I shared a room once with A from Barbados. They came to a World Council. And B from the Transkei – they lived through apartheid. It's very important to keep the international links."*

- There was an evident loyalty to GFS as a whole and a wish that it might develop well in the future. Branch leaders could see the potential value of an improved Branch network and many also wanted to see an expansion in Project work and new Projects in their own area.

*"Having been a member since the age of 7, I see the value of ... this very special organisation and hope that it will remain vibrant and fit for purpose for the future generations of girls and women."*

*"I would like to see GFS as a flagship organisation for girls and women. Pushing its profile in order to attract good sponsorship and support which in turn would enable us to increase our project base and encourage and support better the Branch work which is so valuable in communities around England and Wales."*

*"There are no Projects in Wales. No links. There's a great need."*

*"We have nothing to do with the Projects. I would like to hear more."*

*"I have been involved with GFS since a child. I have made friends. It has helped my confidence. It has given me experiences I might not otherwise have had... GFS is part of my family and support. I am honoured to be part of it."*

*"It means a lot as I went as a young girl and then came back as helper and my daughter goes. I always like to help people when I can."*

*"Outreach work and working with young people where they are. Not just girls, but families. Not lose the "Church Foundation" but be more "worldly" and lead by example."*

*"I came to the Central Council for the first time. It hits you that you are immediately among friends... You are valued for yourself."*

*"I'd like to offer an umbrella [partnership] to the Local Authority statutory provision. We've dwindled to 12 members and we could be doing so much more. The ethos of GFS is to work with girls where they are. Right now they are in the church yard taking drugs. [Our town] has a population of 17,000 and no youth club. We're both trying to reach the over 11s who want something to do. We (GFS) don't have the expertise but we can offer a framework if the Local Authority provided the workers... there's so much that could be done."*

*"Perhaps we don't stretch ourselves to work with older girls... We need to stay with what's relevant ... and stay attractive to the age."*

[Future development?] *"Being an 'on the ball' organisation supporting volunteers and workers equally. A growing organisation, having*

*something to offer children and young people of today. Having a strong identity in society.”*

- There were several comments from Branch volunteers underlining the need for single gender work, though many also pointed out that over the aged of 11 the girls often started preferring mixed youth clubs.

### **3.9 The concerns of the paid staff**

The issues raised by the paid staff from the Community Projects or Head Office included some different questions about the style and management of the Projects.

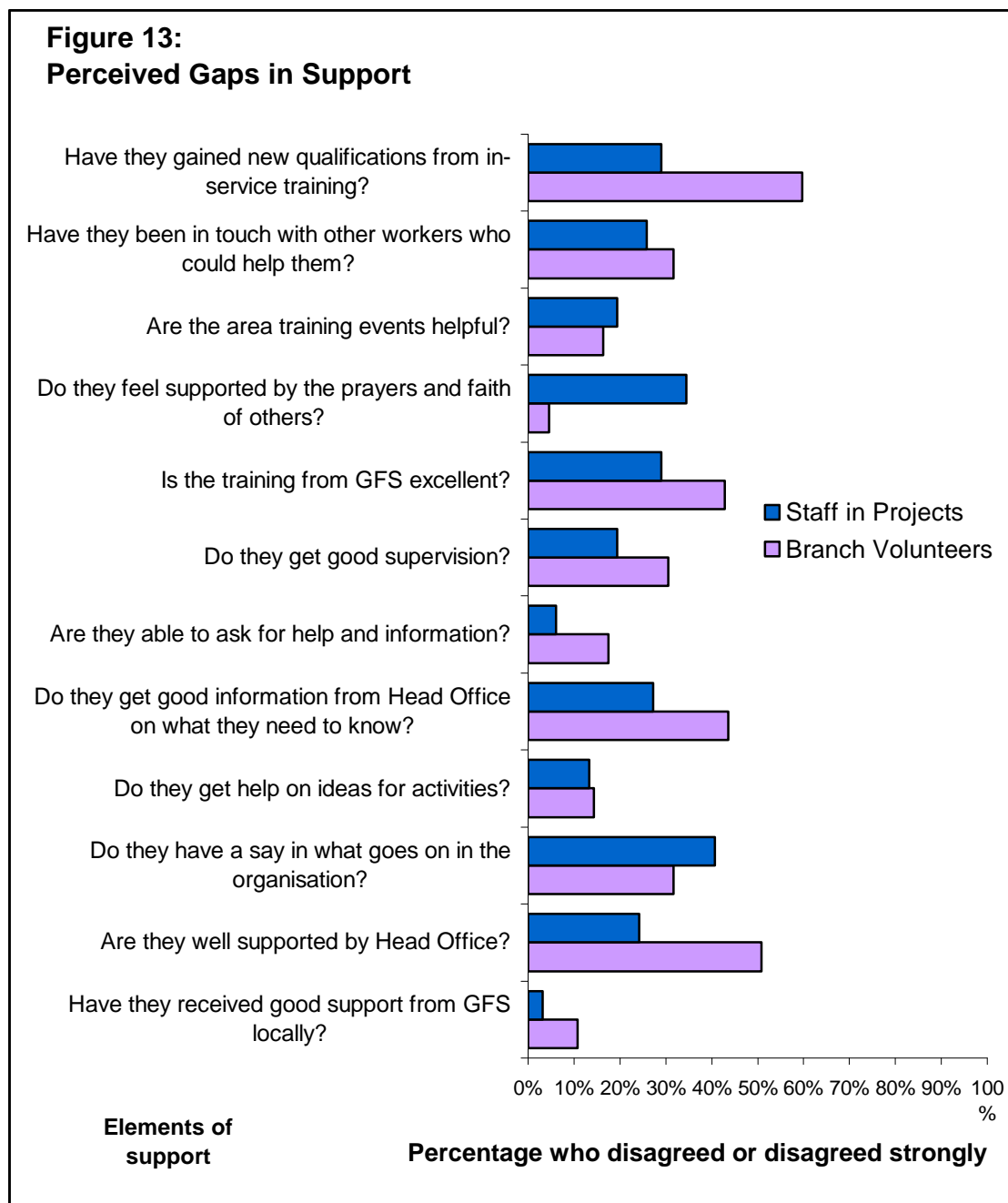
- The GFS characteristics of commitment to young women and active caring were again evident. This was shared across managers, administrative staff, child care staff and project workers. Many of the paid staff stayed in post because of that commitment.  
*“I love it here. It’s brilliant. It’s a really sound idea. When it all comes together it’s a brilliant feeling...I do believe in what the project is about.”*  
*“It’s a needy client group and I’m motivated that way. I’m passionate about the transfer of knowledge.”*  
*“I do believe in Christianity in action.”*  
*“It’s a brilliant organisation. I know it’s working. There’s real job achievement when I have young mothers trying so hard to be good mothers.”*  
*“The staff have the young women’s interests at heart – the staff do it as a vocation not just a paid job. Seeing girls transform from being a new parent feeling trapped and as if it’s the end of the world then blossom and take on new things.”*
- A significant group of comments centred on budget planning and monitoring. Projects submit an annual budget and aim to be self-sustaining. All orders and invoices are processed at Head Office. Central staff perceived some difficulties around coding and monitoring of expenditure. Although several Project staff expressed appreciation of support from the finance or HR sections, they voiced a general perception that the systems were inflexible in relation to local needs. Some relatively small measures could make a big difference to daily pressures at the different Projects such as replacing photocopying facilities, permissions for limited virement or the ability to manage small funds locally for children’s parties or trips.  
*“The programme has been non-existent for the last few months. We need GCSE Maths and English. We are told we haven’t got the money.”*  
*“There’s a lack of money message from HQ – a make-do attitude.”*  
*“We spend time chasing money – for gifts for the Christmas party for example. It stops opportunities like offering crèches for some training courses. The messages from HQ are of ‘make do.’”*  
*“A quality service costs money but you never feel comfortable to spend. The staffing is OK but we feel guilty if we buy materials. We never know what money is available. It’s not transparent.”*  
*“There’s a lack of information about money... for example, we can be phoning to finalise things on the day of a trip for the children.”*

*“Head Office controls budget and personnel and needs to leave some of those decisions here... The people doing the bulk of finance locally should be left to rearrange the budget as needed.”*

- There were concerns that the lack of autonomy meant that opportunities were lost to access local or regional funding. Some funders had asked for a local constitution or a local bank account.
- There is a range of policy documents available to staff (such as Equal Opportunities, or risk assessment). We received several comments however that there was no manual of basic procedures for the Projects. *“There is no procedure manual. A quick ‘how do you do this?’ would be so useful and isn’t available. Because Head Office hires people on such short contracts, as soon as someone can tell you what the procedure is, they’ve gone.”*
- Several people expressed a view that better links between the Projects could assist with such day to day problems. There was an impression that this was discouraged.
- A sizeable proportion of the staff at different levels expressed concerns about the nature or frequency of their supervision. This was both from Head Office managers and internally in the Projects and geographical distance compounded these difficulties. *“Higher managers need to be more approachable...Regular visits are needed with positive feedback rather than just when there are problems.”*  
*“The faith in Head Office has been really hard to build up. The difficulties about distance management have been magnified...We need more face to face contacts (for both staff and the young women) with Head Office. They need to come and find out about us.”*  
*“I just have to cope with it... My workload is very high. There’s no support and that gets me down.”*  
*“I don’t know the procedures to help the young women with their personal problems. I am careful about influence on them as many are quite vulnerable but I need more advice on best practice. I find this lack of information quite overwhelming as a new staff member.”*
- Views on in-service training were mixed. A number of staff had come into the work from earlier involvement as clients or young mothers. GFS did not appear to be building the capacity of staff sufficiently to enable them to progress in their careers and cope well with the development and partnership work. [Have you had training opportunities?] *“None here. You bring what you have and learn as you go.”*
- There were some frustrations at the limitations of the current Project premises. None of the Projects is working from purpose built facilities and space and adaptability are often limited.
- There was little evidence of consistent evaluation of the work. A number of staff were developing their own evaluation or feedback forms. Some complained that Head Office made sudden requests for information but that there were no routine systems for collecting what was needed.



Figure 13 shows where the main perceived shortfalls in support occurred. While Branch volunteers in general have a much poorer perception of the support they receive, there are also significant gaps for the paid staff. For example, 51% of volunteers and 24% of staff felt they were not well supported by Head Office; 43% of volunteers and 27% of staff felt they did not get good information from Head Office on what they needed to know; a surprising 41% of staff felt that did not have a say in what goes on in the organisation compared to 32% of volunteers; and quite high numbers had never been in touch with other workers who could help them – some 32% of volunteers and 26% of staff. These findings indicate serious concerns about support to both staff and volunteers and a general lack of information flow and networking.



There are differences also between staff and volunteers in relation to what **curriculum topics** they felt were important. This mainly reflects the difference in the age of the users at Branches and Projects and the stronger faith base of the Branch work. However analysis of the questionnaires across different areas showed that frequently even where staff or volunteers felt a topic was very important to cover, relatively few had had any specific training on that topic and in practice the participants did not register major learning on the topic. In other words, **opportunities are being missed** to develop the workers' skills in important curriculum areas and as a consequence the learning experience of the participants is less effective than it could be. Many of these curriculum areas are sensitive topics such as sexual health, personal safety, drug misuse or personal relationships. Whether paid or volunteer, workers are likely to need substantial training and support with resources and ideas to be able to tackle these areas confidently. Topics also need to be age related and appropriately introduced. There is no suggestion here for example that a Branch group for girls under 10 should be dealing explicitly with matters of sexual health but there may well be an appropriate place for recognising and cultivating the sorts of assertiveness, positive self-image and ability to make decisions that are the foundation for positive personal and sexual relationships.

The questionnaires to staff and volunteers asked about a number of curriculum areas which might be seen as important in reducing risks and harm to young women or as positive in aiding their development. The questions asked for a simple "yes" or "no" on whether it was important to cover the topic. Figure 14 shows which curriculum topics were perceived as most important (i.e. most "yes" responses) taking both Branch volunteers and Project workers together. It then shows how many of these workers had said their group activities had included "nothing really" to address that topic. These results will be biased towards the responses from the Branches as higher numbers of volunteers returned the questionnaires. However the results show that Projects can also be affected by the absence of curriculum work even where the topic is perceived as important.

The issue has a relationship to **training** both in cultivating an understanding of what factors are most relevant to young women and which are most likely to increase risk and in raising the confidence and competence of the workers in tackling the issues. 42% of those responding had had no training on working with young people. 51% had had no training on how to promote a healthy lifestyle. 65% had received no training on sexual health promotion; 64% were untrained on parenting or child care; and 52% reported no training on spiritual development.

This **lack of focus and confidence** is borne out in the returns from the young women and girls. Amongst the over 10s responding, for example, 52% said they had had no activities or help around their health; 64% had similarly received no input around personal safety; and 63% report no advice or activities around volunteering. Clearly there are positive outcomes from the work as reported above. The argument here is that while workers attach importance to dealing with prevention topics, the lack of training and/or a lack

of effective programming are preventing maximum learning and achievement. These findings are echoed in a previous GFS evaluation (Triffitt, J., 2001) which concluded that *“there is a hesitancy [on the part of leaders] to recognise issues due to inexperience, lack of support, lack of confidence, not knowing what to do, lack of resources.”*

**Figure 14:**

**Coverage of curriculum areas perceived as important**

<b>Topics seen as important to cover (in order)</b>	<b>Number of workers saying the topic had NOT been covered in their group</b>
Relationships with friends (95%)	2%
Health, inc. diet & exercise (93%)	9%
Personal safety (90%)	8%
Helping others (88%)	6%
Problems at school or college (85%)	12%
Relationships with parents (81%)	8%
Christian teaching (75%)	23%
Dealing with racism (73%)	27%
Drug misuse (71%)	36%
Volunteering (67%)	21%
Smoking cigarettes (64%)	37%
Alcohol (62%)	42%
Relationships with boy friends (61%)	38%
Child behaviour (61%)	29%
Looking after a baby (56%)	36%
Jobs or training (56%)	29%
Sexual health (58%)	44%
Crime & the police (54%)	39%
Contraception (53%)	47%
Managing money (50%)	44%

### 3.10 Findings on the views of stakeholders

16 interviews were carried out with external stakeholders with a national level remit from other agencies, which supported or worked in some way with GFS Platform. These were mainly conducted by telephone but a minority were face to face meetings. The respondents included Members of Parliament, senior civil servants from key departments, and representatives of other voluntary youth organisations.

Given that most of the national or local stakeholders were nominated by the Head Office or by Project Managers, supportive comments would be expected. The feedback did however go further than expectation in being extremely positive.

- The style and ethos of the work was appreciated, especially the warm and accepting atmosphere that visitors had observed in the Projects.

*"I don't know anything about the efficiency of the organisation, but the individuals I've seen couldn't have benefited more. You realise what the girls have been able to do against the odds and how early intervention has helped."*

*"Cracking youth work."*

*"They are not just nice to them. It's not just a welcoming environment; it has clear purpose and challenge and in the best sense is outcomes driven. It's a lovely example of how youth work can really work."*

*"I would like them to have a contribution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century... There's something vibrant and genuine in a lot of GFS workers. Really caring and working to make a difference in the lives of young women. I visited [one Project]. It impressed me. It was up to date because of fresh funding but had kept some of the realness."*

*"Projects are well set up to support drugs awareness and prevention. The sort of projects are very person centred and are therefore able to work on harm reduction... The girls have a streetwise veneer but are really quite unaware of risks and what the substances do."*

*"They come from quite a strong values base – Christian foundation. Not evangelistic, they don't push it. It's important that they have that values base."*

*"I liked the work they were undertaking with vulnerable women (and I am aware of their historical past) in what I saw as a creative and supportive way... I was impressed by the level of commitment and enthusiasm associated with their grass roots programmes."*

*"When I visited I was very impressed by the time and work and dedication of those working there and equally impressed by the people benefiting from the service. They were articulate hardworking girls who had fallen on hard times, as it were and needed the requisite support. What they had gained was important – confidence and ambition. I am keen that young women get skills that they can take back into the workplace (if they wish) and come off the benefits system."*

*"The nursery provision provided by GFS alongside education has been important – there's a whole plethora of initiatives including outreach work in schools and getting young women back into gaining qualifications."*

*"The positive ethos of the house was evident and an important premium was placed on identifying and drawing out the creative potential of clients whose life opportunities have been severely undermined by their context and circumstances."*

*"I have the highest admiration for their programme. They operate their values without an undue emphasis on the Christian bit which might put off some young women. They are entirely inclusive and grounded and we are delighted when they bid for things."*

- There was still a perceived need for single sex work with girls and young women.

*"Girls and young women's work in the church – it is needed? Yes, certainly. If there are good relationships with volunteers that are positive and nurturing, they all need to be part of the mix. Some clergy may have a desire for mixed provision but if there's something there it should be kept going. It must speak volumes for the quality of the relationships if the girls continue to come."*

*"Single gender work- definitely there's still a role for it where it is well done and done for a specific purpose."*

*"From the point of view of a mother, there are so many activities now that children can do, but they are so structured. The idea of having a place that girls can go to just do a bit, meet new people, not be pressured, is great."*

*"Girls can be girls, without feeling they have to do one upmanship. Less fashion priority, just to talk, do girls' stuff... You can raise issues without fear you will be laughed at by the opposite sex... But girls' groups can become safe groups. How do you do a combination of sporty and arts and crafts and still get people to get outside of their comfort zone?"*

*"There's always a place for single gender work. From our point of view, we usually work with mixed groups. I sometimes think (especially with sexual health) there are some benefits to some single gender work – allows young people to be more open, have less pressures. Room for both – some young people fit into one better than the other."*

*"I really do think one strength is being a female organisation. [However] it has done it damage. After the Second World War there was a move to mixed groups. But they could make a whole [positive] point about it."*

*"I think there are unique circumstances which affect girls and young women, covering a broad area of social need, that fully justifies single gender work."*

*"The evidence is the demand for the service being provided. I certainly support single gender work (although there's a need for a similar set up for young men). The adverse personal circumstances – such as abusive partners, or rape – mean it is inappropriate to allow men into the programme... For young women an attraction is having no men there. They need to retain the existing integrity."*

*"My position is that it's horses for courses... Many of these young women have histories of abuse, of rape and lack of consensual sex and have no idea how to build relationships with men. They need a safe place to be with women if they are to do this. It's crucial in my view."*

- A few interviewees accepted the need for single gender work but wanted more balanced provision for young men.

*"They need to look at their client group and if they develop that expertise they should try to support both genders. Someone is fathering these children... Maternity type services always address women too much – not fathers."*

- Several respondents felt that there was a real niche for GFS work in the future.

*"Now there is the [government] agenda of developing community work, volunteering, citizenship that Branches do fit into."*

*"If they had the funding, it would be ideal to expand, replicate working Projects. There is a need... The work is the key thing, though it has to be adequately structured. It needs full cost recovery."*

*"In terms of youth policy, being able to deliver the views of young women is going to be valued."*

*"The opportunities will be there to grow locally. For example, neighbouring boroughs and local authorities who can see what's on the doorstep and want some more work. The harder thing is to break into the new local*

*authorities and into the agenda on commissioning... You need to generate replicable toolkits."*

*"They could partner another organisation. There are so few organisations that are doing single gender work. There has to be an opportunity ... to counter the emphasis on boys."*

*"I'd like to see more support for those involved with substance abuse, crime and prison – the three issues are often related... our criminal justice system is over-burdened, our prisons full and we have seen a significant increase in young women going to prison... The area of 'transition' from custody to community is a vital area of social need that strongly relates to many of GFS's current aims."*

*"There are unmet needs amongst the migrant population, the EU succession population. For instance the Portuguese in Lincolnshire. They need outreach."*

*"GFS understand their client group, do their research and adjust services to meet need. They realised they weren't really landlords and refocused on what they were good at when they let go of housing stock."*

*"Seaside resorts have a particular problem. There is plenty of B & B accommodation and it is seen as more glamorous to live there than in the city. Lots of young women live on their own with their children in easy to get sub-standard holiday accommodation... They have very low aspirations and need the encouragement that GFS offers."*

*"With the contestability of commissioning with targeted youth support from 2008, they have a fantastic niche as they've demonstrated they can contribute... GFS has strong evidence that they make a difference and that their style of work is highly successful... Their work is powerful and timely and there are opportunities for funding that would make it sustainable on a wider scale.."*

Where weaknesses were highlighted by the national level stakeholders, they chiefly concerned the style and curriculum of the Branch work and general issues of publicity and communication.

- Some respondents saw the Branch work in particular as in need of a more modern agenda.

*"Its work in the local churches and parishes was weak. The age band was lower secondary and upper primary. Volunteers at that time, although extremely dedicated, were not up to speed with youth work development."*

*"If the Branch work could be radically re-structured, it would be really good, but at the moment it's a bit out of step with the time. It needs to be overhauled and professionalised... It needs some structure... so it isn't just down to individuals and what they want to do each week."*

*"My personal view is that the Branches are moribund. They are old fashioned. But I wouldn't be recommending that you shut it down... That's what you find in the Branches – really caring. What you get across the century is the tremendous loyalty of members and volunteers."*

- Many of those interviewed mentioned the need for a better profile for the organisation

*"It needs decent publicity."*

*"More information and communication is needed from GFS about their achievements as I'm not really sure what they are."*

*"The thing that really struck me when I started looking into it was that I had never heard of it despite being brought up in the church."*

*"Unfortunately I see little evidence of their footprint and impact elsewhere. I have also come across some confusion and misconception about the work they do from other charitable partners and trustees."*

*[Future developments?] "Market themselves more widely. It's about publicity and more joint working and partnership. That's the way the London boroughs and central government want to move forward. They need to integrate and work with other agencies."*

*"They can showcase their work but they are perhaps not very visible as an organisation. Perhaps they are a bit self-effacing and unassuming."*

In addition, local stakeholders were also interviewed either during the visits or by telephone. This included representatives of local authorities, health visiting, general practice, social work, voluntary organisations, advice and benefits agencies, employment agencies, Connexions, Children's Centres, Sure Start, Home Start, school and pre-school professionals. Most of these stakeholders were more familiar with the Projects than with the local Branches but in some cases respondents were able to comment on both aspects of the work.

The evidence from local stakeholders was usually just as positive but there was more awareness of practice for example in curriculum design or partnership working, whether with the church or with secular agencies.

- Where local clergy were interviewed, there was a clear response that GFS Platform was little known. Most of the Anglican clergy (5 out of 7 interviewed) had heard of GFS for the first time when they came to a parish with an established group.  
*"It's a new concept. It was unknown to me previously... Awareness is quite important – making people know there's something called GFS because it's part of the church."*  
*"It's a female thing – I run away... The Deanery would be a good place to share ideas about youth work... Do they have literature and things? That would help – certainly."*  
*"I had never heard of GFS before I came here. I was really surprised. It's a calm haven. I rather expected 'hyper' teenage girls."*
- It was also evident that GFS could play a significant part in church outreach to families, especially where youth provision was poor.  
*"They are a very happy bunch. They learn useful stuff – craft and cooking. It helps to build confidence and self-esteem very gently. The girls learn the lesson of commitment from the example of the leaders... The Methodist Church seeks to welcome all. However the church does no youth work in this area. It's all done by agencies like GFS. There are no Sunday Schools in this circuit. Young people aren't hearing of God."*
- In some church settings, clergy felt that there was a potential for sharing or merging with other groups for young people. There was some evidence of duplication or competition with other groups.  
*"We have all the uniformed groups here. Beavers, Scouts, Boys Brigade, Girls Brigade, GFS, Guides, Brownies and Rainbows. It's a bit*

*of a problem because the church can't sustain the leadership for all these groups. They 'compete' – but not obviously – there's no friction."*

- Some of these local observers also echoed the comments above about an old fashioned and inward looking style of work in the Branches. *"One of the weaknesses with the religious groups is that they don't know how to cope with the religious bit. How do you run a group in a multi-cultural area? The other problem is the sense of becoming quite old fashioned. Perhaps that may also be inherently in the religious thing."*

*"I was thrilled when they focused more of their work around the community. The Branch work was valuable. It serves its purpose as a preventive element... There's real value in offering young people a safe, nurturing environment. But I'm not sure how forward-thinking they were ... That work could have been re-evaluated and refocused."*

- Partners to the Community Projects were full of praise for the role of the Projects in the local community.

*"I've never had negative feedback from anyone who's been there."*

*"It's not institutionalised: it feels like a home. People are in and out – a sort of organised chaos. I do a monthly drop in for them on the specific and general [health issues] and it's easy to spark a debate. They [the young women] are confident; they stand their corner and are prepared to say what they think. You throw in a comment and watch them debate quite serious questions. So they get the social side as well as the academic. There's a broad spectrum to what they are doing."*

*"It's a bit sweeping to say we wouldn't survive without Platform but without it we would have a lot of families who would struggle. It is a major benefit for the town."*

*"It helps these young women fit into society in a work role, in an advisory way and by befriending. They build up their confidence as local residents and as employees... It keeps the talents here. We're not depleting the town of resources and they're not having to go away to get education...All too often real talent moves away. The people with potential move on. Here they stay."*

*"This is a really well respected project which counts for a lot. It gets awards in [the local paper]. The health visitors refer a lot. It's very rare for a project to have everyone backing it...It's really respected. The girls seem really happy and they are telling their friends."*

*"Platform do a really good job with regards to tackling teenage pregnancy...They have been very successful with their Peer Education Programme whereby the young women go into schools and explain just how difficult being a young parent is..."*

*"I think they should simply keep on going the way they are. The educational opportunities are second to none and there is no other agency that provides this."*

*"They work within all local strategies which are in place and achieve all targets within these from what I am aware."*

*"As an organisation, GFS have pioneered quite a lot of this. Parent partnership – working and empowering parents often with quite vulnerable families. They were doing it long before Sure Start or parenting initiatives. Very solid good practice."*



*"I think as an organisation, they are pretty well incredible. They can take young women who are socially excluded and have a child and who may have been turfed out of home. They can do housing, education ... all in a non-stigmatising way."*

*"A lot of the work here was voluntary organisation delivery on behalf of the Social Services Department. Enlightened local authority managers invested in the user friendly voluntary organisation in order to reach hard to reach clients... This institution has become part of [the district]. To lose it would be a catastrophe."*

- Where they sometimes had more critical comments it generally concerned the quality of partnership working, the lack of publicity, the availability of management support, too frequent changes in staffing or a lack of sufficient accredited learning opportunities. The growth of Children's Centres was a notable issue that could be a threat to GFS Platform. The future resolution on this pattern of provision will be heavily dependent on good partnership working.

*"Previously we used to be invited to meetings and there were lots of other professionals attending. It doesn't happen now. It was useful – a much more hands on approach... I'm not sure now. Perhaps I should make more of an effort [to be in touch]."*

*"It's about being more obvious. I know they are there because of my position. I don't know if you were 21 if you would know about it."*

*"Management changes are a problem. Managers don't come and see us till long after they arrive in post and then they leave. There are lots of management changes which I think may be because of lack of funding."*

*"The management structure at GFS should be much stronger. There seems to be no strong middle management which has caused difficulties. Workers don't have strong managers close to them."*

*"There is a capacity issue. GFS management is sometimes stretched across the country. They sometimes defer meetings due to lack of management staff. Local workers sometimes work without local supervision... As a funder it can be a little frustrating."*

*"Management there [at the Project] should have been communicating with me about this [new initiative]. GFS tend to see things in silos rather than make connections and complement the work across their partners. They are not entrepreneurial enough – they need to take more risks and be more creative... They could draw down multiple funding if they could see the bigger picture."*

*"We are measured on the NEET target [reducing numbers not in education, employment or training] so when we get young people coming into our cohort, we'll move heaven and earth to get them to do something... There are no accredited courses for the young women, for instance on parenting or pre-natal. That's a gap."*

*"They [local Project] need to start working and liaising with the Children's Centre. I need to be aware that there is no duplication. I don't think the partnership is solid... It could be a missed opportunity... Maybe it's the lack of strategic work."*

*"Yes. We see them as a credible partner. GFS were one of the agencies who developed services and advocated [for young mothers]."*

*There was nothing before GFS and they worked so hard for it... They are open and flexible and even now I'm hearing excellent reports. There is still some work to be done – the voluntary sector do feel some threat from Children's Centres."*

*"They need better support in business administration... They have tended to cut back the management support. [The Project Manager] is pulled in too many directions. We really must get better information from them."*

### 3.11 Findings on management and process issues

The interviews and survey work reported above show up a number of implications for management of the organisation. These are summarised here.

- The Trustees have concentrated in recent years on the exit strategy from the housing stock. This has left a vacuum in forward strategy and a loss of momentum.
- The Trustees have insufficient time or briefing to debate the development issues and to make clear decisions on forward direction.
- There is no annual business plan or targets in place. There is a failure to prioritise.  
*"The organisation doesn't really make people stand back and go 'Wow'. A reasonable job is not sufficient. It's not dynamic... There's a culture of top down. 'I am so busy. I am too busy.' It's embedded."*  
*"This is what happens in GFS. Things go on the back burner. Things get sidelined."*
- The Director is drawn into day to day management issues and is not playing a sufficiently strategic role.
- The recent policies of downsizing and consolidating charitable funds at the centre have coincided with a reduction in support to the Branches. The overall effect of this is a marked loss of goodwill and a potential erosion of the loyalty of members, which is the bedrock strength of the organisation. There is a danger of a *"headquarters versus the membership"* culture developing.
- GFS has been losing members since around 1913. It continues to do so. The national picture is that volunteers are harder to recruit and that charitable project work is highly competitive. The organisation lacks critical mass and both the Branches and the Projects are fragile in different ways.
- GFS is currently a fractured organisation with no sense of shared purpose and vision across its modes of operation. Branches and Projects view each other with mistrust and as potential competition. People feel under threat. Despite both types of work being evident in the historic foundations of the organisation, they are now almost totally separate. While GFS has a very strong ethos and tradition, it is being damaged by this tension and this makes it hard to communicate the mission of the charity clearly.
- Communication is a major issue both internally to members and staff and externally to stakeholders and potential users. There is an urgent need to address basic publicity in leaflets and a website and to work on

some targeted communication to key partner groups, such as the clergy or local authority commissioners. Mailing lists and IT systems need overhauling to produce more accurate communication.

- Both Branches and Projects have a considerable degree of autonomy in programme planning. This is an asset in some respects but opportunities are missed to explore the curriculum of prevention with young women. Branch leaders express a wish for greater support but will need to recognise that some trade off should be expected in conformity to standards and procedures.
- Basic procedure manuals are needed at Branch level and for Projects. *"GFS has a long way to go in regards to having consistency across the Projects in systems and processes."*
- Budgeting needs to be more transparent. A somewhat greater degree of delegation should be feasible. Training on financial procedures is a continuing need.
- Some of the restricted funds of the Society should be reviewed, if necessary gaining Charity Commission approval to broaden their remit. It is important that available funds should be sufficiently flexible for application to current needs in Branch or Project work or new development.
- The opportunities for linking up staff or volunteers to help each other on developing new work or understanding procedures are insufficiently exploited. There is too little positive transfer of good practice.
- The line management supervision and staff development of paid staff is inconsistent. Project Managers especially need close and positive support and in turn need to ensure that other staff receive regular supervision.  
*"We need to develop our staff. We need incentives so that they get as much out of us as we get from them."*
- Equally the training and support for Branch volunteers needs much greater attention. Feedback suggests that the most appropriate avenues will be local and that there is a potential for joint training with other agencies.
- The organisation is wasting potential resources by not fostering the development of its staff and volunteers. The younger leaders in Branches need particular attention if there is to be any succession of leadership in these groups. Opportunities such as accrediting of volunteering are not explored. Many of the paid staff have come into the work with experience of being young mothers or clients themselves but this real asset is being insufficiently used and developed. Staff do not convey a sense of career progression.
- Staff retention is an issue compounded by a substantial use of temporary staff. According to Human Resources at GFS some 25% of staff are casual relief. This pattern may well be used to fill gaps quickly but it causes a significant loss of corporate knowledge and frustration amongst those contacting the organisation for information.

### **3.12 Summary and conclusions from the findings**

GFS Platform has evident strengths in its ethos, values and tradition. It is obviously highly regarded by many external stakeholders. The study has produced evidence that the girls and young women are learning and achieving and that participation makes a difference to their development. Outcomes can be demonstrated against the objectives of Every Child Matters.

The organisation has lost momentum and focus in the recent retrenchment in its operations. The Branches especially have suffered from a lack of investment in development, support and training. There are many missed opportunities to make the current provision more effective for its users and there is a current lack of strategic approach towards new development. These are substantial problems but not insuperable, given the loyalty and commitment of both staff and volunteers.

These findings are further discussed below seeking to place the options for development in the context of the needs of young women today and current national policy.

## **Section 4: The policy context**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section describes some of the main policy drivers currently informing planning and practice. It provides a background against which the findings about the nature of GFS provision can be examined and a context for assessing the options for future development. It also offers a small number of examples of good practice in such policy areas, which are detailed more fully at Appendix E.

### **4.2 Every Child Matters, Children's Trusts and Children's Centres**

In 2003, the Government produced a Green Paper (DfES, 2003) called "Every Child Matters: Change for Children." It was published against the background of several horrific examples of child abuse, including the case of Victoria Climbié, who suffered appalling abuse and torture before her eventual death. This was a key report signed by sixteen Government Ministers. Specifically, it sought to address the problems of the lack of sufficient early intervention, adequate accountability and poor integration of services. It also articulated five key outcomes needed for every child, which have shaped subsequent planning (see Appendix B).

Following the consultation, the Children Act 2004 was passed and "Every Child Matters: the Next Steps" was issued (DfES, 2004). This provides the core legislative framework within which services to children and young people are to be improved.

The Children Act 2004 laid the foundations for the current development of children's services and includes far reaching reforms in the way services are coordinated and delivered. The Act imposed a new legal duty for partner agencies to cooperate to improve children's well-being, promote their welfare and education and protect them from harm and neglect. This will result in the establishment of Children's Trust arrangements in every local authority area by 2008. Each Children's Services Authority is required to appoint a Director of Children's Services, who will take the lead on ensuring that agencies work together to improve outcomes for children. A Lead Elected Member will also be identified. New arrangements for child protection and safeguarding, information sharing and inspection are also being introduced.

As the Children's Trusts come into being at local authority level, they are developing strategic plans and commissioning services to meet these targets. The Every Child Matters Commissioning Framework (HM Government, 2006) guides such planning. It emphasises the need to seek evidence of outcomes from services provided and local youth and children's organisations are increasingly being challenged to demonstrate their effectiveness in making a difference for their clients on these five objectives.

Child poverty, family breakdown and poor parenting were all seen by the Government as key contributors to social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit,

2004). The Sure Start programme and other parenting initiatives developed as policy responses to these issues. GFS Projects largely pre-date these measures but their future is now seen locally alongside such other schemes in the light of Every Child Matters and subsequent developments.

Children's Centres were advocated in the report of the Inter-Departmental Childcare Review in 2002 and in the 2006 Action Plan (DfES and DWP, 2006). They are to become a central mechanism for the delivery of Every Child Matters in relation to under-5s and will operate alongside Extended Schools. They aim to create a service delivery hub in every community, each with a set of core activities and further enhanced provision to meet local need. They will foster the integrated approach that is believed to be the key to improved outcomes for children. Partnership with the voluntary sector is a central part of the philosophy. Various Government initiatives on parenting, including early intervention and preventative services, are also running in parallel with the development of the Children's Centres (DfES, 2006a).

Under the Childcare Act 2006, all local authorities will also have a statutory duty to secure sufficient childcare for working parents and to deliver with NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners integrated early childhood services to young children, their parents and prospective parents.

#### **4.3 Youth Matters and the Youth Offer**

"Youth Matters" was issued as a Government consultation paper in 2005 (DfES, 2005). It sought to build on the principles of Every Child Matters and to address the need for "a coherent, modern system of support" for teenagers. It started from the position that existing services such as Youth Services, Connexions, mainstream services and targeted support were not yet working together effectively to meet the needs of individual young people, reduce poverty and crime and harness new technology for learning.

The paper suggested that the five outcomes should be addressed for adolescents by making services more responsive to what young people and their parents want; balancing opportunities with responsibilities; integrating services for young people more; and narrowing the gaps in outcomes and achievement. It was intended to build on the best of current provision and to involve the voluntary, community and private sectors in widening choice.

The report suggested an 'opportunity card' for young people and an 'opportunity fund' for projects directed by young people themselves. It proposed that local authorities "working through Children's Trusts" would have a duty to commission and provide positive, safe and enjoyable activities for all young people under an annual local youth offer. Volunteering was to be encouraged for young people under the recommendations of the Russell Commission. Advice and guidance to young people were to be improved with the funding for the Connexions Service reverting to local authorities.

For young people, with more complex needs targeted support was envisaged leading to "frontline youth support teams, focused on prevention and effective

early intervention” in an integrated youth support service with a nominated lead professional for each young person. The responsibility for tackling teenage pregnancy, drugs and youth crime was to be consolidated in the local authorities working through the Children’s Trusts.

These arrangements are now evolving. “Youth Matters, Next Steps” (DfES, 2006c) confirmed that responsibility would lie with the Children’s Trusts and be executed through the Children and Young People’s Plan in each area. Connexions Services are in transition and some are already migrating into the local authority. 14 pathfinder areas are developing targeted youth support and further guidance is expected as the change process continues (DfES, 2007c).

The duty to provide positive activities for young people has now been enshrined in Section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and a new Section 507B inserted in the Education Act 1996. Statutory guidance was issued in January 2007 (DfES, 2007b). The duty applies to the 13 – 19 age range, though there are extensions of the age band for particular groups such as those with learning difficulties. This measure also forms a part of the Government’s “Respect” agenda as a means of reducing anti-social behaviour and addressing risk. Local authorities are now required to secure such activities for young people to national standards including:

- Access to two hours per week of sporting activity;
- Access to two hours per week of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups and classes which contribute to personal, social and spiritual development;
- Opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community;
- Recreational, cultural and sporting experiences;
- A range of safe and enjoyable places in which to spend time.

They are also required to take account of young people’s views on these facilities, to publicise the local “offer” and keep the information up to date.

There are opportunities here for GFS Platform to be involved both in the generic “youth offer” of constructive activities and in the targeted support to young people with particular needs. The local directory of provision should be a helpful vehicle for publicity.

#### **4.4 The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy**

The Government has set a target of reducing the numbers of conceptions by young women under 18 by 50% by 2010, with a view to reducing the degree of social exclusion that can be experienced by young women in this situation. Their teenage pregnancy prevention strategy (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999) has a clear priority of reducing the rates of under-18 conceptions by giving young people the means and motivation to delay parenthood until they are in a better position – emotionally, educationally and economically to face its challenges. For those who become young parents the Government is also committed to reducing the risk of poor outcomes for both parents and their children with an additional target of increasing to 60% the participation of mothers aged 16-19 in education, training or employment by 2010. This latter target especially concerns the Connexions Service which is charged with

reducing the numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) and supporting them to take up appropriate opportunities. The policy places a particular premium therefore on entry into accredited training or work.

Each local authority has been required to identify the areas which have the highest number of conceptions and to target a range of new sexual health services at this age group within these areas. They are also expected to encourage schools to address the issue through their sex and relationship education (SRE) curriculum. Interagency teenage pregnancy prevention boards have been set up to oversee the strategy, including education agencies, social services, youth services, and Primary Care Trusts, and teenage pregnancy prevention coordinators have been appointed to co-ordinate and encourage new projects and partnerships. These boards are now being subsumed under the new local authority Children and Young People's Strategic Partnerships.

The latest Government paper released in October 2006 'Accelerating the Strategy' (DfES, 2006b) encourages local authorities to improve their performance by concentrating on factors which have been shown to be effective in reducing teenage pregnancy, particularly making use of statistical data to identify high risk schools and areas in order to target their resources. Progress in all local authorities will be monitored and published annually with specific intervention in poorly performing areas.

#### **4.5 Supporting People**

The Supporting People programme was launched in 2003 (ODPM, 2003). The programme offers housing related support to prevent homelessness, hospitalisation or institutional care and to assist the transition to independent living. Supporting People is a partnership of local government, probation, health, the voluntary sector, housing associations, support agencies and service users. Its client groups include the homeless and rough sleepers, offenders and ex-offenders, people with disabilities or learning difficulties, teenage parents, women suffering domestic violence, people with alcohol and drug problems, the elderly, young people at risk, people with HIV and AIDS, travellers and homeless families with support needs. Housing related support can be short or long-term and can include such interventions as benefits advice, skill development to sustain a tenancy or live independently, or community alarm systems.

Supporting People brings together several different funding strands and is now administered as a grant to counties and unitary authorities by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). The partnership or Commissioning Body for each authority then implements the programme and contracts with providers for the services required. Outcome monitoring data is required to track clients through the services and maintain information on the costs of provision. Tenders are regularly advertised across the country for elements of provision.



A recent national evaluation (University of Bristol, 2007) examined the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund and the Approved Development Programme Pilots for Teenage Mothers. The study concluded that the quality of staffing is central to the success of both accommodation-based and floating support, as staff need to be able to create trust and understanding, treat service users equitably and non-judgementally, and balance user needs with the needs of other residents in an area. Training is crucial given the frequent policy changes in such areas as benefits, housing, law or child protection and the organisation itself needs to have robust financial, administrative and monitoring systems.

GFS Platform currently draws on Supporting People funding to provide floating support to young mothers in Bromley and the support role to young women accommodated at St Paul's Lodge and Hawes Road. There clearly is a potential to expand such work but sufficient management capacity would be needed as this is a specialist area of work both in its inter-face with clients and in the technical and financial expertise required to manage the contracts.

#### **4.6 Reducing Re-offending**

The Government is keen to reduce the levels of offending and re-offending amongst both juveniles and adults. The economic and social costs of offending are estimated at over £60 billion per year (Brand, S. and Price, R., 2000). Probation and youth offending numbers are rising and the prison population is now one of the highest in Europe. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) came into being in 2004, following the Carter review. Carter argued that there were gaps in the system, with interventions in prison often not being followed up in the community (Carter, P., 2003). He proposed using the new Criminal Justice Act 2003 as a platform for rigorous and targeted sentencing and establishing NOMS to coordinate the Prison and Probation Services in a new approach to the management of offenders.

NOMS targets are to reduce re-offending by 5% by 2008, rising to 10% by the end of the decade. All regions now have a Reducing Re-offending Action Plan. The NOMS Communities and Civil Renewal Strategy is aimed at helping communities to play an important role in dealing with offenders, through measures such as unpaid work, volunteering, and the support of offenders in the community. The Government is also anxious further to involve faith communities in work with offenders.

The central principle of NOMS is coherent offender management during the entire sentence. An "offender manager" (usually a Probation Officer) is envisaged as taking responsibility from assessment at the pre-sentence stage through to planning the offender's supervision and the interventions and services they need throughout custody, on release or through a community based sentence. The needs of offenders are examined under seven broad themes: accommodation; education, training and employment; mental and physical health; drugs and health; finance, benefit and debt; children and families of offenders; attitudes, thinking and behaviour.

NOMS activities will be carried out by a range of agencies, primarily the Probation Service and the Prison Service, but also potentially including providers in the public, commercial and not-for-profit/voluntary sector, under the principle of contestability.

The female prison population stood at 4,293 at December 2006 – a 2% rise on the previous year. A number of these women will have babies with them in custody or children in the community while they serve their sentence. It costs approximately £37,000 a year to keep an offender in custody (NOMS, 2005). The largest proportion of women in prison is those sentenced for drugs offences and a further large proportion is sentenced for acquisitive crimes such as burglary, robbery or theft. Over 50% of women who have been sent to prison are reconvicted within two years of release and the rates of reconviction are even higher for male and young adult offenders. The needs of male offenders still dominate policy but more recently the issues facing women have been recognised to some extent. In 2005, the Home Office allocated £9.15 million over four years to pilot new approaches to women's offending, concentrating on community supervision and holistic support.

#### **4.7 Other relevant strategies**

There is a multitude of other policy initiatives relevant to the challenges and problems faced by young women today – far too many to examine in this brief summary. Three further issues have been listed here as they may have particular relevance to the objectives of GFS Platform – early prevention; community cohesion and the place of faith based groups; and skill building through volunteering.

- **Prevention**

An important strand in Government thinking is the need to focus on prevention: to intervene early in the cycles of deprivation to improve outcomes. This can be seen clearly in many of the measures adopted to combat poverty and social exclusion and the way in which these pass from one generation to the next. "Breaking the Cycle", the review of progress produced by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2004, identified worklessness, health inequalities, crime, poor quality environments and homelessness as key drivers of childhood disadvantage (SEU, 2004). Their recommendations included a strong client-centred approach, more one-to-one support, accessible services, and more one-stop-shops and co-located services. The report also suggested a greater recognition of the interim steps that vulnerable people need to take for instance to build confidence and motivation or establish a routine.

The concept of harm reduction is also enshrined in many prevention strategies. This means the acceptance that many people will actively choose to take some risks but may also learn ways of reducing the potential harm that may result from a particular activity. One of the best known examples of such an approach is the National Drug Strategy (Home Office, 2002) which specifically includes information, advice and health care designed to reduce

the health problems and drug related deaths amongst those who do choose to misuse drugs either experimentally or in the long term. Parallels exist in sexual health education. The essence of the approach is the recognition that the “simply say no” approach is usually ineffective and that individuals should be able to choose their own course of action based on good information about the risks involved and how to minimise them.

In crime prevention, early intervention has been embodied in the work of the Youth Justice Board through schemes such as the Youth Inclusion Projects established in 2000 for young people at high risk of offending. More recently Youth Inclusion and Support Panels have been piloted, seeking to identify 8-13 year olds likely to become involved in offending or anti-social behaviour and to work preventatively with them.

Every Child Matters emphasised the importance of planning strategies for early prevention and in January 2007, the Treasury announced a policy review to inform the Comprehensive Spending Review and the Government’s forthcoming Ten Year Youth Strategy. It argues that “preventing problems or intervening as soon as they are identified is essential to sustain children’s life chances.” (DfES, 2007a:1) It identifies particular areas for attention including “rewarding... support which is preventative”; building children’s resilience, educational attainment and social skills; and building the capacity of parents and communities to create a supportive environment. It draws particular attention to the needs of disabled children and to families with multiple problems caught in the cycle of low achievement. Throughout it recognises the need to provide necessary interventions before children reach crisis point.

- **Community cohesion**

For some years, national concerns have been building around the divisions and tensions in local communities. They have surfaced particularly at times of unrest, such as in Bradford in 2001, or Birmingham in 2006 and have more recently been increasing as issues of extremism affect national safety. In many areas of Britain, there are extremely diverse multi-racial and multi-faith communities. These can include more recent arrivals such as migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers.

Community cohesion involves fostering a common vision and sense of belonging; valuing differences in background and identity; resisting racism and discrimination; and working to combat inequalities. The Government’s strategy “Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society” was launched in January 2005 (Home Office, 2005) and has been followed by several specific grants directed towards increasing cohesion, inter-faith understanding and tackling extremism.

It is clear that the Government sees a role for voluntary organisations and faith-based work in this process. “Faith can be the building blocks and the glue of community. It plays a vital role in people’s lives – even for those of us who are not overtly religious. All of us, our basic values, our sense of right and wrong, are shaped by our community and its religious heritage. Understanding

the role faith plays in people's lives is vital to community cohesion and good race relations...The challenge for faith communities is to develop the skills and confidence of their members to play an active role in civil society – speaking and acting not just on behalf of their faith, but on behalf of the local community as a whole.” (David Blunkett, Heslington Lecture, October 2003.)

- **Volunteering**

National policy has placed a much greater emphasis on volunteering in recent years. This is seen partly as a measure to increase skills amongst young people who are not in training, education or employment. The Russell Commission reported in 2005 recommending a new national framework to encourage youth action and increase the quality and quantity of volunteering opportunities for young people (Russell, I., 2005). The Commission recommended promoting information on volunteering opportunities, celebrating the achievements of young volunteers, increasing the numbers and diversity of those volunteering, removing benefits barriers, use of the Youth Achievement Award or other accreditation, and a dedicated implementation body to deliver the vision.

‘V’ is an independent charity set up in response to the Commission to champion youth volunteering in England. It has a board of young people and works with organisations in the voluntary sector to increase the range and quality of opportunities. It offers grant rounds to provide additional volunteering opportunities, currently including a focus on black and minority ethnic groups, disabled young people, young people in or leaving care, offenders and intergenerational projects. Other schemes also work in this arena, such as the Millennium Volunteers which targets 16-24 year olds and offers awards for 100 or 200 hours of service, with practical skill development.

#### **4.8 Good practice**

The De Montfort team made a point of seeking out relevant good practice that shows how other organisations have tackled these policy themes and succeeded in addressing particular needs. These are further detailed in Appendix E and include:

- ***Girlguiding - Switch On Project***

Girlguiding UK has received Big Lottery Funding for a new programme within its senior section for young women aged 14-25. The aim of Switch On is to engage with disadvantaged young people who are excluded from participating in Guiding in its traditional forms and offer them challenging activities that promote their personal and social development. Development workers offer training and support to local volunteers and help to run taster activities.

- ***Turning Point Women's Centre***

This is a community-led organisation dedicated to supporting, enabling and empowering women and their families to realise their full potential. The Centre offers pregnancy testing, a peer education project on sex and relationships and parenting, adult learning mentors working with women in the local

community, a social group for women over 40 and an early years service comprising a crèche and after school club. They also work with young men.

- ***Streetreach, Doncaster***

The Streetreach Project provides support services for women and young people involved in prostitution or at risk of becoming involved. It works through outreach, centre-based provision and a multi-agency partnership to support women to move on to a more positive lifestyle away from prostitution.

- ***Crime Concern - Youth Inclusion Projects and prevention programmes***

Crime Concern is a national voluntary organisation focusing on crime prevention. It runs several Youth Inclusion Projects funded by the Youth Justice Board to identify young people at risk of offending and divert them into more constructive activities. It also runs the Dalston Youth Project in Hackney, which trains mentors and runs support and early intervention programmes for 15 to 18 year olds at risk.

- ***Leeds Youth Service - Single sex work with Asian young women***

Leeds Youth Service undertakes single sex work with Asian young women, in order to empower them and build their confidence to make informed decisions and choices. The youth workers cover a range of issues such as health, relationships, employment, education and training, or drug misuse taking into account the need for cultural sensitivity and gaining the support of the parents and the community.

- ***Somerset Rural Youth Project – COGS (Creating Opportunities for Girls in Somerset)***

This voluntary sector project offered a comprehensive package of support to assist rural young people into employment. It involved young women in West Somerset including those living on very isolated farms. It met weekly, with occasional weekend or day events and planned its own activities including social outings, activities, fundraising, and conservation work.

## **4.9 Implications**

GFS Platform is at a crossroads in its history. Its outlets and membership are currently diminishing. If it does not move forward and develop, it is highly likely that it will cease to be viable as an independent charity. This section has reviewed some key strands of current policy. If these are set against the known risks to the well being of girls and young women and the philosophy of caring and prevention that characterises GFS, then it appears that while choices must necessarily be made there is no shortage of opportunities for development. These are further discussed in the next section.

## Section 5: Analysis, options and recommendations

### 5.1 Evidence of effectiveness

The overall conclusion of this study is that GFS Platform can evidence learning outcomes and growth in confidence amongst many of the girls and young women who use its services. These outcomes contribute to the objectives of Every Child Matters and Youth Matters in increasing achievement, health awareness, personal safety and a positive contribution to citizenship in the community. At Branch level with younger girls, this learning is fostered by volunteers in a recreational, activity setting and in the Community Projects, it is developed through more structured education and social education opportunities. Hard outcomes such as educational qualifications and/or entry into employment can also be seen, especially in the Community Projects, though these are not consistently monitored or collated. The organisation has developed a style and expertise in dealing with teenage mothers that is respected amongst its stakeholders. It has a strong ethos and a proud historical tradition of support by women for girls and young women.

GFS Platform is a faith-based organisation. There is evidence that particularly in the Branches its work serves to broaden the styles and options in church linked youth groups and to reach some girls and their families who do not have contact with the church and to cultivate values, a sense of service and discussion about the Christian faith. In some of the Community Projects, there are links to local churches or to GFS Branches but these are little developed.

The study also concludes, however, that much more could be achieved. Greater learning and achievement could result if staff and volunteers were better trained and supported and if the programming and 'curriculum' were more consistently developed. Greater impact could be made if the work were expanded and better publicised.

The organisation has highly committed staff and volunteers. In fiscal terms, it has been prudently managed, divesting itself of housing stock and consolidating charitable funds, to reach a stable financial position. Numerous possibilities present themselves for development but the organisation is not currently best placed to grasp such opportunities as some critical weaknesses in vision, direction and management systems are undermining its potential.

### 5.2 Key strengths and weaknesses

Figure 15 on the following pages summarises the strengths and weaknesses of GFS as identified in this evaluation together with the opportunities and threats that face the organisation.

In the estimation of the researchers, the most important **strengths** of GFS Platform include:

- *The nurturing ethos and the warm, caring and accepting atmosphere.* This was the outstanding feature of the visits. There is a homely feel to GFS activities and a tangible sense that the women working in the Branches and

Projects are committed to the health, well-being and development of the girls and young women who attend. It creates a place where confidence can grow and aspirations and self-image can improve. There is a strong sense of friendship amongst the workers which reflects in relationships amongst the young women.

This factor was much debated in refining these conclusions. It is easy to characterise this kindly, almost motherly atmosphere as unprofessional or old-fashioned and there are certainly aspects of practice which need to be updated, have tighter boundaries or be made more rigorous. However, the overall evidence was that the girls and young women benefited and many positively flourished. The significance of good nurturing relationships should not be underestimated – they are not always seen elsewhere in work with young people, especially where projects are under pressure. The perception of the evaluators is that it is possible to improve systems and methods if the basic relationships of trust, caring and genuine support are in place. If work with young people cannot demonstrate those qualities, improvements in procedures and management systems are unlikely to make any significant difference. If this ethos is in evidence, the provision is probably worth preserving and improving.

- *The commitment and loyalty of the staff and volunteers.*

GFS has a long tradition and a reservoir of good will. Many of its current volunteers have grown up through its activities and recognise its contribution in their lives. The sense of loyalty to the organisation, especially amongst the membership is very marked. Both paid staff and volunteers display enormous commitment, often going well beyond the call of duty to support their clients.

- *The focus on girls and young women – the niche of single sex provision.*

There are very few organisations dedicated to serving young women and the numbers are declining in the face of funding problems and pressures towards mixed sex provision. Despite continuing evidence of a gender pay gap, high levels of assaults on women and domestic violence, and the rising numbers of custodial sentences for women – provision and support specifically for women are not a political priority and are not receiving emphasis in current youth work provision (Batsleer, J., 2006 and Women's Resource Centre, 2006). Providing support for young women is not an easy niche to occupy and in some circumstances it can become a liability. This study, however, classes it as a strength of the organisation because of the evidence that the users have benefited from the support of women for women and the absence of threat and pressure from men and boys. There is radical potential in the concept of the network of women supporting and empowering young women and enabling them to be active and contributing citizens and parents.

- *The long-term and holistic approach to the needs of young women and girls.*

GFS Platform concentrates on a particular target group but it does not focus on a single issue such as education, drug misuse or homelessness. For all the girls and young women attending, this is a positive benefit as their needs can

be assessed in the round. GFS is not overly constrained with short-term targets so that responses can be person-centred and take account of the need to make small steps of development. There is evidence from elsewhere that the pressure to attain hard targets in the short-term with groups facing particular needs may be counter-productive. The national impact study of the Connexions Service found that many teenage mothers reacted negatively to the organisation's drive to place them into education, training or work as soon as possible (Hoggarth, L. and Smith, D., 2004). GFS Platform can work more gradually in both its Branches and its Projects and this often enables the users to pick up learning at the point of readiness (see for example Cawthorne, J. and Desira, C., 2002).

- *The track record of efforts to involve young women in decision-making and peer education*

Genuine involvement and engagement of young people in decision-making is one of the most challenging areas of youth work. Like most youth organisations, GFS Platform has some way to go in embedding the approach throughout its work. However, the evaluation found encouraging examples of participation in debates about provision and in peer education. In particular, GFS appears to have taken on board the need for the intensive support from workers that enables such things as peer education, participation in local democracy or visits abroad to take place. Recent youth policy such as the Youth Matters report emphasises the role of educating young people to be actively and critically engaged in their own organisations and in local democracy in a way that goes well beyond protective welfare approaches towards significant empowerment. The appointment of the Young Women's Engagement Officer should help to take this work to new levels and should include work with the Branches to promote inclusion in decision-making.

- *The good quality crèche and nursery provision.*

For the Project work, the child care provision is central to success. The facilities are of a good standard, the staff are highly committed and the caring ethos is carried through. The provision is essential to enabling the progress of young women with children and the staff use it effectively to assist the mothers and help them develop their parenting skills.

- *There is positive testimony from users and stakeholders.*

This evaluation and other studies have provided ample evidence that GFS Platform is valued by key external stakeholders and by those who use its services. This is a considerable asset for demonstrating the impact of the work, for gaining future funding and for publicity purposes.

The most significant **weaknesses** in the opinion of the evaluators include the following issues:

- *There is no clearly articulated vision or forward plan.*

The Trustees and the Director have concentrated for legitimate reasons on retrenchment – the sale of housing stock and downsizing of staff. The members are conscious of the diminishing number of Branches and the fragile state of external funding for the Branches. The organisation is losing critical



mass. There is a loss of forward momentum, a lack of leadership and there is no business plan.

- *The organisation is fractured with tensions on many dimensions between the Branches, the Projects and Head Office.*

This is an extremely serious issue for GFS Platform. Morale has declined with the reductions in scale and both paid staff and volunteers feel insecure about the future. Loyalty is being eroded and there are anxieties and suspicions at play between different parts of the organisation. There has been little support in practice from the centre to the Branches over the last two years and there is evidence that the Project staff sometimes do not feel supported or included in decisions. There is no unifying sense of purpose across the organisation, with very different modes of operation. This makes it harder to articulate its mission to the outside world. At the same time, both paid staff and volunteers need to recognise that greater support and clearer procedures will have a “quid pro quo” in reducing the freedoms to “do their own thing” – membership and affiliation must carry recognisable objectives and patterns of delivery.

- *Internal and external communication is weak.*

The study has shown up numerous examples of communication gaps. External stakeholders often do not have a clear picture of what the organisation does. Partnership work at national and local level is not as strong as it could be. There is no website and little publicity. Mailing lists and data bases need updating and streamlining. The Anglican Church constituency in which GFS has its roots is ill-informed and unaware of its value. Internally paid staff and volunteers complain of not receiving sufficient information to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. There are no basic manuals of day-to-day procedure to assist them.

- *Staff and volunteer development is poor.*

There are staff development procedures, supervision systems and training opportunities in place but these are inadequately and inconsistently applied. Volunteer training is problematic with geographical distance and has received little attention in recent years. The lack of confidence is reflected in a narrowing programme and curriculum at Branch level. There is little sense of active development of capacity and competence or of developing new leadership. Temporary staff do not stay long enough to understand the nature of the organisation and the role they need to play.

- *Budget delegation and transparency could be improved.*

The organisation has suffered from financial difficulties in the past. It has become to some extent risk averse. Quite small expenditure which could help the day-to-day work in either Projects or Branches can be disallowed. GFS Platform needs to develop the accuracy of its budgeting and funding bids to reflect costs more adequately. A degree of greater delegation and freedom of virement is probably feasible and both Projects and Branches would welcome greater transparency over financial matters and how they access support.

### **5.3 The need for work with girls and young women**

For all young people, especially those who lack confidence or are isolated, the opportunity to enjoy single-sex activities on occasion is important. The law recognises the legitimacy of such activities and currently includes the specific exception to general sex discrimination regulations for charitable bodies that offer such provision (Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Section 43).

Girls in particular may benefit from such provision which may offer enhanced opportunities for personal and social development. As the Guide Association puts it "In general, girls mature more quickly than boys, but, on the other hand, their self-confidence – crucial for leading life to the full – grows more slowly. Similarly, girls tend to have less self-esteem than boys and are more likely to under-value themselves. A mixed group, where boys are dominant because they appear to be more self-assured, only serves to highlight the differences." (Girlguiding UK, 2006.)

The evidence from the survey for this study of girls and young women in GFS Platform provision indicates that the wish for separate provision is stronger amongst the younger girls in Branches and the young women in Projects who have had bad experiences of relationships with men. The feedback from workers and stakeholders indicates strong support for offering a space for women only especially where the girls and young women lack confidence or need a sense of safety. There is a need for further research on the benefits of single-sex work with young women and girls and the circumstances in which positive impact is increased.

### **5.4 Opportunities presenting and opportunities missed**

The conclusion of this study is that there is a plethora of opportunities for work with young women and girls that improves their self-image, increases aspirations and increases resistance to the risks they face. As the section on the policy context indicates above, many of these issues are attracting public sector and charitable funding and may be appropriate avenues of development for GFS.

In the design of survey and interview questions, the research team had regard to some of the main risks affecting the lives of young women and some of the known cyclical processes reinforcing disadvantage. For example, low achievement in school affects subsequent employment and family poverty and can be related to early pregnancy and the quality of parenting. Many young women involved in the sex industry, including some from middle class and achieving backgrounds, have entered it from a route of drug misuse and debt. The risks associated with anti-social behaviour and youth crime include bullying, low achievement from primary age, family problem behaviour or conflict, peer group problem behaviour, truancy and the availability of drugs - with low achievement being by far the most significant factor (Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, 2001).

If GFS Platform stands for increasing the confidence of girls and young women and increasing their resilience to withstand risk and adversity, then there are numerous opportunities for work to be developed with different sub-groups of girls and young women. These include for instance efforts to address:

- a lack of educational attainment, including the failure to thrive in school, exclusion, bullying and poor basic skills
- health issues (obesity, poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking, binge drinking and alcoholism, drug misuse, mental health, sexually transmitted diseases)
- teenage pregnancy and unwanted pregnancy
- parenting skills
- poor or exploitative relationships with men, including prostitution, trafficking and domestic violence
- youth offending, custody and resettlement
- unemployment
- inability to budget or manage money, debt
- leaving or running away from home, moving into cities
- asylum seekers, refugees and those who have no recourse to public funds
- child abuse including Internet exploitation.

This is not to imply that all these areas should be developed - new initiatives would need to be carefully selected and properly costed. Nor is there any suggestion here that all these topics should be tackled or that they are all appropriate material for younger girls at Branch level. However, even with the youngest participants there are opportunities for preventative education and for increasing assertiveness and awareness. The returns from volunteers and staff indicate a wish to cover many of these topics more adequately.

There is a strong impression from this evaluation that such opportunities are wasted at GFS in various ways.

- There is no well developed curriculum dealing with confidence building or risk. Successful ideas and expertise are not well shared across the organisation. "Replicable toolkits" (in the words of one stakeholder) have not been developed.
- Partnership opportunities are not explored to their full potential. GFS could make a strong contribution to many of these issues in partnership with others. The organisation is not well-placed in the networks currently concerned with planning and commissioning.
- Younger leaders in the Branches and new staff are not sufficiently trained or mentored to ensure that they develop wider skills. Leadership and innovation are not being encouraged.
- Opportunities to join forces with other women's organisations for events, joint activities or campaigns are not exploited.
- Accreditation of educational opportunities is not developed as frequently as it could be and opportunities to recognise volunteering both in Projects and in Branches are little used.

- Links have not generally been made to arenas where the Church of England is addressing its social responsibilities or to the developments in modern church-related youth work.

## 5.5 Threats

GFS has competitors – for the Projects these are mainly the growth of Children’s Centres and parenting initiatives, and other contractors for Supporting People or educational provision; for the Branches these are chiefly other church related or uniformed youth groups and mixed-sex provision.

There are several key issues to be addressed in dealing with this competition:

- GFS Platform is not well enough connected to the partnerships and planning mechanisms for the commissioning of children’s and youth services. A lack of capacity, knowledge and confidence are barriers to effective participation – there are simply not enough staff at an appropriate level and with appropriate skills to field the partnership work and negotiate the protocols and funding opportunities. Similar problems pertain in relation to church structures and the local voluntary sector which might support social responsibility initiatives for young women in need or publicise the work of the local groups. This is partly a problem of scale for the organisation and some investment may be needed to seize the opportunities for development.
- The commissioning framework for most Government led initiatives now looks for evidence of effectiveness and outcomes achieved. GFS is not well placed to provide this as systems of evaluation and monitoring are still ad hoc and uncoordinated. While there is good practice on the part of some individuals, the need for collecting evidence of effectiveness is not widely understood. Evaluation needs to include “soft outcome” measures and evidence of “distance travelled” as many of the clients will need to build the initial motivation and skills to progress (see Comfort, H. et al, 2006).
- Probably the greatest threat is the lack of new Branch workers and problems of staff retention at Head Office and in the Projects. Active efforts are required to recruit new volunteers and foster their development. Staffing issues seem to be more to do with support than with salaries – the scales reviewed appeared to be generally in line with national trends. The considerable use of temporary staff, especially at Head Office, should be reviewed.

**Figure 15: GFS PLATFORM – SWOT Analysis**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>A warm, kindly and nurturing ethos, providing a safe place where girls and young women can learn and develop.  Focus on girls and young women – single sex provision.  Strong value base.  Commitment of staff and volunteers.  Loyalty and friendships amongst the girls and women involved in GFS.  Both Branches and Projects are well linked to local community life.  International dimension.  Girls and young women articulate benefits of belonging to GFS – especially growth in confidence and new skills.  Users value support for girls and young women and the single gender provision.  Inclusive provision -with disabilities or learning difficulties welcome and comfortable.  Capital reserves.  <i>Branches</i>  Time and commitment and local roots of volunteers.  Long history of many Branches.  Strong in some rural areas – sometimes the main or only youth provision.  Some church stakeholders value the Branch work at local level, especially where it is clearly linked to outreach and the life of the church.  Girls start in membership very young – provides opportunities for prevention work and strengthening protective factors.  <i>Projects</i>  Committed and caring staff.  Holistic approach to clients not dealing with a single issue  Ethos of acceptance and kindness and absence of pressure from men.  Reaching young women not usually involved with other agencies.  A specific niche in the range of provision.  Crèche and nursery provision of good standard – assists &amp; develops young mothers.  Help with parenting, childcare and life skills.  Addresses mental health – young women are less depressed and isolated.  Provision up to the age of 25/26.  Long term work. Little artificial pressure from targets.  Connects with certain national policy targets, such as Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.  Excellent testimony and feedback from many stakeholders.  Young women coming into volunteering.</p>	<p>Management processes at all levels are not strong enough to deliver consistently on the purpose and ethos of the organisation.  Communication is a central issue across all dimensions of the organisation and is generally perceived as poor.  Trustees have concentrated in recent years on withdrawal from housing and rationalising charitable funds, with a consequent loss of forward vision and leadership.  There is no annual business plan or target setting. Initiatives not followed through.  Little evaluation of outcomes in either Projects or Branches.  The work is thinly spread geographically: therefore more difficult to manage/support.  The organisation is fractured with mutual tensions between Branches, Projects &amp; HO.  Poor branding and marketing. No up-to-date web site.  GFS is not well known nationally – it is often thought that it has ceased operating.  Despite formal links to the C of E, most clergy have little awareness of GFS.  Lack of volunteer and staff development and/or training, including for Trustees.  Leadership and management skills are not being developed.  Not successfully reaching minority ethnic groups in most Branches or Projects.  <i>Branches</i>  Branches have received little support over the last 2/3 years: loyalty is being eroded.  Communication to and from Branches is poor. No feedback loop.  Training is patchy and not localised.  There is no handbook of standard procedures on running a Branch.  Some of the Branch work is old fashioned and has weak or unimaginative programming, instructional in tone and style.  Resistance to change in some quarters, conservative and inward looking in approach.  Severe lack of new younger leaders. No plan for recruiting and fostering new leaders.  Few adolescents (over 12s) in regular participation.  Lack of knowledge and skills to deal with issues facing adolescents.  No clear relationship to modern church based youth work.  <i>Projects</i>  Staff supervision is patchy.  No training strategy or clear career path for staff.  Budgets are sometimes not clear and are not fully delegated. Short term funding.  Some premises present constraints for the programme.  Lack of promotion either nationally or locally.  Clearer routes to qualification and accreditation needed for young women.</p>

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>To build on ethos of caring, long tradition of working with girls and young women to develop skills and prevent harm.</p> <p>To extend accreditation routes and recognition of volunteering.</p> <p>To extend age range e.g. up to 30.</p> <p>To work with young women with older children, not just babies and toddlers.</p> <p>To extend relationship &amp; sexual health education, social &amp; life skills in schools.</p> <p>New funds or extension of schemes e.g. YPDP, Children's Trusts, Supporting People</p> <p>Intergenerational work especially with the older women members.</p> <p>Working in new partnerships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• for campaigns or joint working with other organisations working with women</li> <li>• to meet needs of young fathers</li> <li>• to meet needs &amp; aspirations of girls with disabilities or learning difficulties</li> <li>• to develop interfaith understanding and community cohesion</li> <li>• to consolidate and develop church based youth activities, including by merger or cooperation</li> <li>• to share premises and/or infrastructure with other voluntary organisations</li> </ul> <p>Developing new work to prevent harm and equip girls and young women to deal with risks, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bullying</li> <li>• failure to thrive in school or exclusion</li> <li>• lack of educational achievement, including poor literacy and numeracy</li> <li>• health issues (obesity, poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking, binge drinking and alcoholism, drug misuse, mental health, sexually transmitted diseases)</li> <li>• unwanted pregnancy</li> <li>• prostitution (and the link to drug misuse)</li> <li>• youth offending, custody and resettlement</li> <li>• inability to make relationships, poor or exploitative relationships with men</li> <li>• domestic violence</li> <li>• worklessness</li> <li>• inability to budget or manage money, debt</li> <li>• leaving or running away from home, moving into cities</li> <li>• refugee status and having no recourse to public funds</li> <li>• child abuse</li> <li>• Internet exploitation</li> </ul>	<p>Tensions within the movement &amp; apparent dichotomy between Branches &amp; Projects.</p> <p>Problems in recruiting new leaders and problems of staff retention.</p> <p>High level of dependence on Project staff or Branch volunteers, who are often untrained and/or unqualified.</p> <p>Lack of critical mass and geographical dispersion.</p> <p>Commissioning approach and outcome-led planning.</p> <p>Lack of evaluation and ability to demonstrate outcomes.</p> <p>Lack of strong links to local/regional funding streams and planning processes.</p> <p>Short-term funding.</p> <p>Fear of dissipating reserves without visible result.</p> <p>Caution and/or paranoia resulting in inaction.</p> <p>Weakness in management and governance procedures.</p> <p>Current or potential competitors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed gender youth work.</li> <li>• Other voluntary organisations, especially Brownies, Guides, Scouts, Girls Brigade.</li> <li>• Further education outreach, Learn Direct.</li> <li>• Children's Centres, especially where they are unwilling to work with voluntary sector.</li> </ul>

## 5.6 Funding

Access to funding for voluntary organisations is becoming increasingly competitive and is changing with the new commissioning processes. Finance is however still available from numerous sources for organisations which can show clarity of purpose, effectiveness in meeting evident need and demonstrable outcomes.

Such sources include at central level the DfES Children, Young People and Families grants designed to address the outcomes of Every Child Matters and Home Office initiatives on voluntary sector capacity building or cohesion. Much of the funding available is now channelled through partnerships at local authority or regional level, including the Children's Trusts for children's and youth programmes; Supporting People for housing support measures; Crime and Disorder Partnerships for community safety and crime prevention; Drug Action Teams for drug treatment and education. Incentives from central Government are increasingly offered at local authority level for achievement of agreed targets on such issues. Regeneration schemes and minor "community chest" grants are often available at local authority level. Other funders such as the Learning and Skills Council and Connexions work closely with these partnership structures. Schemes for offenders and diversion from offending are coordinated by the Youth Justice Board and the National Offender Management Service, including Probation voluntary sector grants. Various bodies fund volunteering development. The European Community offers support for education and entry to employment schemes for vulnerable groups. Numerous charities and trusts also offer support for youth work or particular target groups and information is available on their criteria from "funder finder" directories available through voluntary sector networks or on the Internet. Internal fund-raising especially through legacies can also be an important source of support.

In order to access this complex menu of financial support, voluntary organisations need to be well-connected to the local partnerships and well informed on national networks. They also need to develop the necessary skills in project management and the necessary monitoring systems to manage funding accountability and demonstrate outcomes. Funding strategies usually need to diversify to ensure sustainability and budgeting needs to be accurately planned for full-cost recovery. It is important however that funding bids should be driven by a clear sense of purpose and need rather than by the funding regimes available.

The Government has recognised that many frontline organisations lack the expertise and capacity to access and manage the opportunities available and measures are in place to offer support on such issues as performance improvement, workforce development, ICT, governance and using funding opportunities (Home Office, 2004). GFS Platform could have access to such support through the umbrella bodies for the voluntary sector at national and/or local level.

## 5.7 Achieving unity of purpose

Increasingly the research team was struck by the impossibility of choosing between development options, planning funding applications or deciding on priorities for improvement if the core mission of the organisation is not clearly articulated. The membership needs to be united behind a clear modern vision. The main conclusion of this study is that it is now essential for GFS Platform to achieve a clear sense of purpose and build unity and direction around it.

*“As an organisation, they are very good at dreaming up solutions, without knowing why they take that solution... They need to recognise what is distinctive about GFS.” (Stakeholder.)*

*“The real question for me is GFS knowing what its foundations are... Does it have a Christian foundation still? What needs link into the constitution that we can support and develop? That could give the projects a firmer foundation. A clear vision could give the [older members] something to pray about and support.” (Stakeholder.)*

It was clear from discussions with staff and members that debates on constitutional matters such as the statement of purpose or rules of affiliation have often been divisive and painful in the past. There is clearly a wish to avoid “navel gazing.” For this reason, the evaluation has included a brief examination of the original philosophy of the organisation to see if that can inform its present day direction. We would argue that the founder had a clear sense of mission to intervene preventatively in the lives of girls and young women to protect them from harm and exploitation and to develop their potential. This vision is directly translatable into today’s “prevention agenda”.

As currently expressed the purpose and vision of GFS Platform is extremely wide and can incorporate all current activities of Branches and Projects. It may however be somewhat too broad for effective use in branding and marketing.

*“The purpose of GFS Platform, which is established within the Anglican Church, is to serve our Lord Jesus Christ and help girls and women to develop spiritually, personally and socially.*

*The objects for which GFS Platform is established are to advance education and any other charitable purpose for the benefit of women and girls.*

*GFS Platform works with women and girls of all religious faiths and of none.” (Memorandum of Association)*

The original statement of purpose in 1880 was:

*“To bind together in one Society ... ladies, working girls and young women... for mutual help (religious and secular), for sympathy and prayer.*

*To encourage purity of life, dutifulness to parents, faithfulness to employers and thrift.*

*To provide the privileges of the Society for Members ...by giving them an introduction from one branch to another.*

*Associates to be of the Church of England.*



*No girl who has not borne virtuous character to be admitted as a Member.”*  
(Constitution and Rules, 1880)

Mrs Townsend founded the Branch work for young girls in the parishes shortly afterwards, in a move designed to prevent later problems by teaching the messages of “purity and truth”. In a significant passage in the GFS Journal this step was explained and justified.

*“Even at a young age our unsheltered little ones are not too young to know what evil means...to sin or to be sinned against. Surely then they are not too young to be taught in simple, motherly fashion, the lessons of modesty, purity and truth? Not too young to have their innocence shielded, and to be trained to help and love each other for the sake of Him who was Himself once a child?”* (Mrs Townsend, Friendly Leaves, GFS Journal, 1883, just after the setting up of the Candidates section for girls aged 7 + in 1882.)

The core elements of the early approach appear to have been the support of women for other women and girls in a programme of both religious and secular activity. The “curriculum” of the time centred on the promotion of purity (especially sexual virtue), employability and thrift, and early intervention to teach values and mutual caring and prevent “falling” or coming to harm. The style was deliberately low key, gentle and “motherly” and the “Associates” (or volunteers) were to be members of the Anglican Church. The original driving motivation does not appear to have been proselytising, evangelising or building church membership as such – it appears to have been more to prevent a girl from “falling”, to “shield” her from evil, and to encourage mutual support. Mary Townsend’s approach was certainly holistic – she thought every aspect of life had to be examined as vulnerable girls were vulnerable on every front. Education and thrift were important to create real alternatives to prostitution and other forms of exploitation.

While this approach shows elements of judgemental control over women’s behaviour it also contains radical elements of preventing the abuse of women, and promoting independence and security. The strength of the network of women supporting women was in itself a radical force. In any case, social norms have changed and sexual “purity” is not universally seen as a modern value even in church circles. Unwanted sexual relationships, exploitation of women’s sexuality or unwanted pregnancy can, however, all still be as damaging to women as they were in the 1870s.

*“If the idea of the Society [originally] was to offer protection to vulnerable young women in the context of the society in which they live, then there is a parallel today.”* (Stakeholder.)

This study argues that the themes of prevention and harm minimisation could serve to focus the work of GFS more clearly and unite the different strands of its programme. Both Branches and Projects undertake prevention work but at different levels and stages in young women’s lives. One is not intrinsically more valuable than another.

The core identity of GFS Platform appears to lie in four elements, which are shared across both Projects and Branches, and could inform choices about future development.

- ✓ Expressing the Christian faith in action.
- ✓ Women working to support girls and young women.
- ✓ A nurturing and caring ethos, dealing holistically with need.
- ✓ Working to prevent harm.

Such elements could be included in a statement of purpose for publicity – for instance – “GFS exists to express the Christian faith in action by supporting girls and young women in a caring environment to prevent harm and reduce risk and to promote their personal, social and spiritual development.”

Merton et al argue that youth work methods are used with young people at different levels of engagement in society from social exclusion through to active critical engagement with social institutions and services (Merton et al, 2004). The core purpose of youth work, which is the personal and social development of young people, contributes to a widening social policy agenda in five major areas – helping young people to be active citizens; increasing aspiration and achievement; enabling and protecting young people with the knowledge and skills they need to find their way safely through the world; diverting young people at risk from harm or exclusion; and reintegrating those who are significantly excluded and have drifted away from any positive autonomy or active citizenship. GFS Platform works across that youth work spectrum. The Branches are working more at the end concerned with aspiration, achievement, active citizenship and preventing harm in the first place. Projects tend to reach young women who are facing multiple problems and are seriously at risk of social exclusion or already in need of intensive help. At all points of the age range, from the six year olds starting in Branches to the 25 year olds participating at the Projects, risks and dangers are present which can be appropriately addressed to increase resilience and the ability to cope. Equally in all types of delivery, girls and young women can enjoy activities, increase their sense of achievement and confidence and contribute as active citizens. While the Branches and Projects today have different styles and contexts, they are both arguably part of a continuum of approach that can be traced back to the foundations of the organisation.

## **5.8 Options and implications for the future**

As many key options for GFS as possible have been considered in this study against the responses from the users, volunteers, staff and stakeholders. The main permutations are considered below.

*Option 1: to wind up the organisation or merge with another charity.*

Winding up the charity could be a strategic choice. It is, however, unlikely to meet with support at this stage given the strong loyalty of the members. There is potential in the medium term for a merger with another voluntary organisation working with girls and young women and this would certainly be preferable to ineffectiveness and slow decline.

Although some responses do indicate that people see a dying organisation, winding up activity has not been suggested by any of the respondents to the evaluation. Short of disbanding, there is still an opportunity for working in partnership with another organisation or sharing infrastructure. Broadly - staff, volunteers and stakeholders wish to see development. The critical mass of the organisation is very small and units are thinly spread and declining. If the organisation chooses to continue, new initiatives and high quality support for current work are crucial or the core activities will diminish too quickly for the organisation to survive. Branch support must become a priority alongside Project development. Financial reserves are sufficient for continuity for the time being but are insufficient on a permanent basis unless augmented by external funding. Clear purpose, branding and marketing are therefore key to bringing in new funding and some element of reserves needs to be deployed strategically to create support and development.

*Option 2: to broaden scope to include work with boys and young men.*

The single-sex focus is strongly supported by staff and volunteers and there is a long history of working with young women. The evidence is that the provision is valued by many of the girls and young women and by external partners. A key strength is the approach of a network of women supporting women. There are virtually no male staff or volunteers at present and this option would change the nature of the organisation so fundamentally that it would cease to be recognisable.

While work with young women is not currently high on policy agenda apart from in small number of issues, there are very few groups working solely with young women and GFS has come to occupy something of a niche in the range of provision. If GFS retains its single-sex provision there are potential alliances with other organisations working with women. The approach implies not developing work with men and boys directly but it could be compatible with partnership working to reach boys and young men.

*Option 3: to relinquish the faith basis of the work*

There are some arguments for this approach which has been followed for example by the YWCA England and Wales in recent years ([www.ywca-gb.org.uk/aboutus](http://www.ywca-gb.org.uk/aboutus)). Most volunteers in the Branches see their work as an expression of their faith but the style of some of the church-based work may be reducing the chances of gaining external funding in some circumstances because it appears to promote church membership and a specific faith. Most Projects demonstrate few links in practice to the faith basis. The organisation already constitutionally welcomes members of all faiths and of none and its original purpose included both religious and secular work.

This option does not, however, seem viable because it would require changes to the constitution which would further erode the trust and loyalty of members. The faith basis is an important source of motivation and informs the caring ethos.

This brings real opportunities but needs careful articulation to potential funders. Branches are the main vehicle for directly faith-related work with girls.

They urgently need support in managing at Branch level and ideas to update their work. Much more work is needed to enhance the understanding between Branches and Projects of their mutual roles and the potential support of the churches. The paid staff need to be in sympathy with the faith basis of the organisation and promoting links with church partners more actively.

*Option 4: to discontinue the links with the Church of England.*

Responses from the Branches indicate on balance that volunteers feel strongly about their Christian faith but are not so strongly persuaded that links to the Church of England are essential. This stems largely from negative experiences of the lack of support from the clergy.

GFS appears currently to be “established within the Anglican Church” without this bringing clearly perceived benefits to either party. The Bye-Laws provide for Areas to be based on groups of Anglican dioceses and for incumbents and the Parochial Church Council to approve the establishment or closing of Parochial Branches. The same control does not apply to Non-Parochial Branches in schools or other venues. According to the Bye-Laws, “GFS Platform aims to have at least one Leader in each Branch who is a communicant member of the Anglican Church.” Church membership itself is generally declining and the nature of participation appears to be changing and this may prove a disadvantage to GFS.

The advantages of preserving the link to the Anglican Church include the strength of the historical tradition, the international links and the sound infrastructure that the church can provide. There is a role in outreach, values education and church building for Parochial Branches. Equally there could be a much greater role for Projects as part of the Church’s portfolio of social responsibility.

If the status quo is kept, the lack of knowledge of GFS on the part of the clergy needs to be addressed. There is a marketing task to make the organisation known in the networks of the Church. Much stronger alliances need to be built with Diocesan Youth Officers and Boards of Social Responsibility. Flexible development of the Branches should be encouraged, where cooperation or new ways of working are required and this may include ecumenical approaches and/or merging activity with other church-based youth organisations.

*Option 5: to maintain the current constitutional position and develop the work with an emphasis on prevention as well as personal development.*

As suggested above, this option is strongly reflected in original purposes of Mrs Townsend. It presents major opportunities for work with young women with a clear rationale and resonance with current policy drivers. There is already a good track record of holistic multi-issue work especially in the Project work. The Branches undertake preventative work especially by building the confidence and achievement of the girls.

If this approach is to be adopted it implies branding, marketing, curriculum development and internal training to carry it through. GFS is not sufficiently

responsive currently to modern needs for “prevention”. Topics are not always adequately covered at the Projects. The volunteers are generally uncomfortable with explicit prevention work and significant support is needed to raise the quality of input at the Branches. A start has been made with the recruitment of Strategy and Development Managers and a Youth Work Officer (Branch Work) but this will need to be followed through and enhanced as a priority. Much more by way of training, resources and curriculum materials will be needed to exploit the prevention agenda more fully. Greater use could be made of expert partner organisations in presenting prevention topics such as aspects of a healthy life style; money management, benefit and debt; or drug and alcohol misuse. A genuine pedagogy of prevention is required that enables young women to make positive informed choices and great caution should be exercised around the potential for control and manipulation. Careful selection would be required by the Trustees of areas of new development that play to the strengths of GFS, can be adequately funded and do not duplicate the work of partner agencies. Clear leadership on the part of the Trustees and the Director will be needed to unify efforts on this theme and to make all parts of the organisation feel that their contribution to the continuum of prevention is recognised.

## **5.9 Conclusion and recommendations**

This study shows that both in the Branches with younger girls and in the Community Projects with young women facing multiple problems, GFS Platform achieves learning and change. There is evidence in these findings of positive outcomes that relate to national policy objectives, especially in Every Child Matters and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. Stakeholders feel that there is a niche for GFS provision and that the focus on girls and young women is of value. The outstanding feature of the work is the atmosphere of nurturing, kindness and empathy for the girls and young women who use the provision. There is an enormous well of commitment and loyalty and an ethos of service amongst the staff and volunteers.

The potential of GFS Platform is not, however, fully realised. There is a loss of forward direction and morale following the exit from housing property. There are tensions and misunderstandings between the Branches, Projects and Head Office. The Trustees should recognise that they will need to invest in capacity in order to make strategic developments.

This study recommends to the Trustees that:

1. The core purpose of the organisation needs to be revisited and re-stated and measures taken to achieve understanding and buy-in from the membership and the paid staff.
2. A clear statement of purpose is needed that can explain and bind together the current functions of Branches and Projects, allow scope for new development and inform marketing.
3. Consideration should be given to the theme of “prevention” as part of the core purpose of GFS Platform, addressing the risks facing girls and young women today.

4. A limited list of priorities for strategic investment of reserves should be agreed to include consideration of enhanced capacity and infrastructure, improved publicity, minor funding support for Branches and Projects to meet particular needs and enhance access for users, and potential new development.
5. Appropriate curriculum resources for the different age groups should be developed or identified from existing internal or external sources and shared more systematically across the organisation.
6. A business plan for the next one to three years should be drawn up to show key targets for action in any given year and the indicators of success. Area committees and Community Projects should contribute to formulating the plan. Volunteers and staff should be made aware of its contents.
7. Priority actions in the plan should address:
  - Improving Branch support and training, especially at local level.
  - Publishing a Branch Handbook.
  - Developing support to Projects especially on supervision systems, evaluation, and financial planning and monitoring.
  - Curriculum development.
  - Volunteer recruitment and development.
  - Staff retention.
  - Communication.
  - Links to key partnership structures.
  - Fund raising.
8. A marketing plan and communication strategy should be drawn up linking into the main business plan, detailing steps to improve internal communication to staff and volunteers and external communication to users, funders, partners and stakeholders (including the Church of England.). This should include a functioning website and basic publicity for Branch activities.
9. In due course, the restricted charitable funds of GFS should be reviewed, if necessary seeking Charity Commission approval to broaden their objects so as to make them sufficiently flexible for support of existing work or development of new initiatives.

The challenge for GFS Platform will be to retain the 'flavour' of its approach, especially the nurturing and supportive ethos while managing internal and external change and creating a thoroughly modern organisation. The recommendations of this study are shaped by a belief that its evident commitment to girls and young women and the approachable holistic style of working with them is worth every effort to preserve. The organisation needs to unite with confidence around this tradition and recognise its strengths in giving young women and girls a voice; developing their ambition, hope and confidence; and reducing and preventing the risks and harm they face. Our hope is that this study will contribute to enabling this to happen.

## APPENDIX A

### List of Respondents interviewed

#### Trustees

Carol Gardner	President
John Barlow	Treasurer
Carol Lee	Trustee and Western Area Vice-President
Charlotte Musgrave	15-25's Chair
Margaret Hughes	Trustee and Diocesan Secretary
Alison Carter	Trustee and Branch Leader
Canon Chris Rich	Director of Social Responsibility, Diocese of Guildford

#### Headquarters Staff

Joy Lauezzari	Director
Di Ross	Head of Finance and Human Resources
Julia Cawthorne	Funding Coordinator
Tara Schofield	Human Resources Manager
Mags Ball	Youth Work Manager
Valerie Wijt	Young Women's Engagement Officer

#### National Stakeholders

Revd Peter Ball	National Youth Adviser, Church of England
Simon Beard	Development Officer – Health, National Youth Agency
Diane Church	Communications Consultant
Yvonne Criddle	National Youth Adviser, Church of England
Holly Evans	Common Assessment Framework Coordinator, Conwy & Denbighshire (formerly at GFS Isle of Wight)
Jacqi Lait MP	Member of Parliament for Beckenham and Penge
Martin Perry	Deputy Executive Director, Hope UK
Suzanne Rauprich	Chief Executive, NCVYS
Dr Vivienne Richmond	Vera Douie Fellow 2005-6
Mark Simmons MP	Member of Parliament for Skegness
Gill Tishler	Chief Executive, YWCA
Anthony Wright MP	Member of Parliament for Great Yarmouth
Rt Revd Dr John Saxbee	Bishop of Lincoln
Karen Turner	Children & Young People's Public Health Programme Manager, Department of Health
David Sanderson	Rank Foundation
Angela Williams-Brown	Chief Executive, Chislehurst & Sidcup Housing Association

#### Wales – Visit to Inauguration of Welsh President

Carole Jacob	Welsh President and Branch Leader
Revd Kay Warrington	Diocesan President, Swansea and Brecon
Revd David Payne	Welsh Chaplain to GFS
Pam Richards	Diocesan Youth Officer
Catriona Charlesworth	Branch Leader, Brecon
Rosemary MacDonald	Townsend Fellowship member
Group: 3 young women	Aged, 15, 14 and 13

#### Northern Area Holiday at Winchester House, Isle of Wight

Barbara Brook	Branch Leader
Diane Farrow	Northern Area President
Kathleen Pattison	Branch Leader, St Peter's, Swinton
Linda Pragnell	Assistant Branch Leader
Tina Cockshaw	Assistant Branch Leader
Diane Rutter	Branch Leader, Salford
Group: 3 young women	Aged 17, 16 and 17
1 young woman	Aged 19
2 young women	Both aged 12

**Sandown Community Project, Isle of Wight**

Karen Payne	Project Manager
Linda Grant	Education Coordinator
Kate Dale	Outreach Development and Support Worker
Amber Jones	Administrator
Kate Atrill	Specialist Teenage Pregnancy Midwife and Connexions Personal Adviser
Karen Cheesman	Deputy Manager, 16 Plus Team, Isle of Wight
Lisa Didier-Carter	Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator, Isle of Wight
Visit and observation at crèche	
1 young woman	Aged 25
1 young woman	Aged 21
1 young woman	Aged 20
1 young woman	Aged 21

**Appley Bridge – Northern Area Fun Day**

Ann Andrews	Branch Leader, Wrea Green and Diocesan President
Annette Bevans	Assistant Leader, Thornton Branch
Caroline Ballard	Area President, Chester
Gail Carolan	Thornton Branch
Nora Critchley	Former leader, Walkden Branch, Manchester
Isobel Mackay	Assistant Leader
Linda Hill	Assistant Leader
Elsie Davenport	Assistant Leader
Mary Roberts	Branch Leader, Standish, Blackburn
Doreen Shaw MBE	Area Secretary, Liverpool
Linda Owen	Assistant Leader
Sue Leatheren	Area President, Liverpool
Jean Stoner	Former volunteer
Amy Stansfield	Townsend Fellowship
Linda Sutcliffe	Branch Leader, Furness Vale
Vera Young	Branch Leader, Appley Bridge, & Area President, Blackburn
Group: 3 girls	Aged 11 and 12
Group: 6 girls	2 aged 8; 4 aged 11.

**St Mary's, Bearwood Branch, Birmingham**

(Alison Carter – Trustee and Branch Leader, see above.)	
Fiona Price	Assistant Leader
Group: 4 girls and 1 boy	

**Great Barr, Birmingham**

Nicky Clarence	Parent
Revd Hilary Cooke	Methodist minister, Joint Ministry
Revd Kennedy Njenga	Vicar, Church of England, Joint Ministry
Tracey Bailey	Branch Leader
Donna Kelly	Assistant Leader
3 girls	Aged 11, 9 and 7

**Stanwix Branch, Carlisle**

Glenys Packham	Area President, Cumbria
Sandra Bell	Branch Leader
Susan Kerridge	Volunteer helper
Rebekah Krytowycz	Volunteer helper
Revd Ben Philips	Vicar, Stanwix Church of England
Revd Katie Hyslop	GFS Chaplain, Diocese of Carlisle
Group: 3 girls	Aged 11, 12 and 9
2 girls	Both aged 12



**Penge Community Project and Hawes Road**

Laura McLeod	Youth Worker, Bromley Youth Service
Nicole Bassy	BME Support Worker, GFS
Kerry Baker	Floating Support Worker
Tania Henderson	Assistant Project Coordinator (acting)
Gill Lewis	Crèche Coordinator
Linda Lawn	Crèche Worker
Jill Avramoussis	Crèche Worker
Paul King	Connexions Manager, Bromley
Rhian Brown	Manager, Casa Support, specialist Registered Social Landlord
Revd Dr Nick Reid	Priest in Charge, Holy Trinity Church, Beckenham
Young woman	Aged 23
2 young women	Aged 21 and 25
2 young women	Aged 16 and 17

**Skegness Community Project**

Debbie Parker	Project Manager
Moirra Hodkin	Project Support Worker
Tracy Hogan	Project Administrator
Neil Pilkington	Health Visitor
Councillor Phil Kemp	Mayor of Skegness
Michelle Meacher	Housing Support Officer, East Lindsay District Council
Young woman	Aged 23
Young woman	Aged 24
2 young women	Aged 18 and 25
Young woman	Aged 23
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 21, by Sarah Irving
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 25, by Sarah Irving
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 22, by Sarah Irving
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 25, by Tracy Hogan
Peer research interview	Health Visitor, by Tracy Hogan
Peer research interview	Midwife, by Tracy Hogan

**Wainfleet Branch**

Revd Lindsay Kemp	Methodist Minister
Judy Rowson	Branch Leader
Hazel Bown	Assistant Leader
Gail Shaw	Assistant Leader
Emma Walsh	Assistant Leader
Billie Tuplin	Assistant Leader
Group: 5 girls	Aged 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12
Group: 4 girls	Aged 6, 7 (x2) and 8

**Great Yarmouth Community Project**

Sue Battersby	Project Manager
Sally Harris	Post-natal Support Worker
Marion Carpenter	Project Administrator
Kirsti Bartlett	Sexual Health Educator
Michelle Seaton	Outreach Support Worker
St Paul's Lodge staff	
Jill Skipper	Early Years Support Teacher, Norfolk County Council
Sue Humphrey	Sure Start Coordinator
Zoe Lewis	Health Visitor, Great Yarmouth
Roy Beilley	Social Strategy Officer, Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Jackie Hughes	Operations Manager, Priory and Greenacre Children's Centre
Julia Haig	Operations Manager Ormiston Children and Family Trust – Regional Charity
Tracy Jary	Nursery Deputy, Senior Nursery Practitioner/Setting SENCO

Adreana Howell	Nursery Practitioner/Team Leader
Hayley Barron	Mother of children in nursery/ member of parents and carers committee
Kirsti Bartlett	Sexual health worker
Sue Green	Manager, St Paul's House
15 young women	YPDP group, aged 13 -15
1 young woman	St Paul's house tenant aged 18
1 young woman	St Paul's house tenant aged 20
Group: 15 young women	YPDP
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 23, by Jade Alexander
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 18, by Jade Alexander
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 18, by Jade Alexander
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 23, by Mariella Caiger
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 19, by Mariella Caiger
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 20, by Mariella Caiger
Peer research interview	Young Person's Development Programme (YPDP) Team Leader, by Mariella Caiger
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 23, by Liza Cooper
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 17, by Liza Cooper
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 15, by Liza Cooper
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 16, by Liza Cooper
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 16, by Liza Cooper
Peer research interview	Young woman aged 15, by Liza Cooper
<b>North Walsham Branch</b>	
Helen Gosling	Branch Leader
Joyce Lincoln	Eastern Area Secretary, Norwich Diocesan Secretary
Revd Derek Earis	Vicar, North Walsham Church of England
Susan Ling	Diocesan Lay Reader
Tammy Colman	Assistant Leader
Hilary Smith	Former member
Group: 4 girls	Two aged 13, two aged 11
Group: 4 girls	Two aged 12, one 13, one 14
Group: 2 girls	Two aged 9
<b>Pakefield Branch</b>	
Jill Eaton	Branch Leader
Revd Bob Baker	Vicar of Pakefield Church of England
Bronwen Knights	Guide Leader, Pakefield
Caroline Warren	GFS Leader/CYM (Children and Youth Ministry) Coordinator
Marion Rose	Volunteer Leader
Anna Hart	Volunteer Leader
Group: 3 girls	SPLAT group members, all aged 16
Group 2 girls	Expath members aged 11
Group: 2 girls	SPLAT groups members, aged 12 and 13
Girl	Aged 6
<b>Gloucester</b>	
Ellen Armitage	Branch Leader, St Catherine's, Gloucester

6 parents were interviewed at various venues. They have not been named in order to preserve the anonymity of the girls concerned.

1 adult volunteer was interviewed but declined to be named in this report.

## APPENDIX B

### Every Child Matters outcomes - What the outcomes mean

<b>Be healthy</b>	Physically healthy Mentally and emotionally healthy Sexually healthy Healthy lifestyles Choose not to take illegal drugs <i>Parents, carers and families promote healthy choices</i>
<b>Stay safe</b>	Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation Safe from accidental injury and death Safe from bullying and discrimination Safe from crime and anti-social behaviour in and out of school Have security, stability and are cared for <i>Parents, carers and families provide safe homes and stability</i>
<b>Enjoy and achieve</b>	Ready for school Attend and enjoy school Achieve stretching national educational standards at primary school Achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation Achieve stretching national educational standards at secondary school <i>Parents, carers and families support learning</i>
<b>Make a positive contribution</b>	Engage in decision making and support the community and environment Engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully and discriminate Develop self-confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges Develop enterprising behaviour <i>Parents, carers and families promote positive behaviour</i>
<b>Achieve economic well-being</b>	Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school Ready for employment Live in decent homes and sustainable communities Access to transport and material goods Live in households free from low income <i>Parents, carers and families are supported to be economically active</i>

## APPENDIX C

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Policy statements            Adult protection policy  
                                       Child protection policy and procedures  
                                       Confidential reporting policy (whistle blowing)  
                                       Compliments, comments and complaints policy  
                                       Disability policy  
                                       Discipline and grievance procedures  
                                       Equal opportunities policy  
                                       Health and safety policy and procedures  
                                       Integrity at work and code of conduct policy  
                                       Lone worker policy  
 Annual Report and Accounts, 30 September 2005  
 Annual Reports, 2003, 2004, 2005  
 Census Report 2006  
 GFS Platform Directory, 2005 and 2006  
 Memorandum and Articles of Association  
 Bye-Laws of the Girls Friendly Society in England and Wales  
 Project Monitoring Data , January 2007  
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## **APPENDIX D**

### **Design and methodology**

#### **D1. Introduction**

This Appendix sets out the methodology of the study for information. It provides details of the design, including the samples and the methods and tools of evaluation. The elements of the design are described below.

#### **D2. Compiling the extensive picture of GFS Platform activity and its value to its users**

Three postal questionnaires were designed and sent out to Branches and Projects from Head Office. These were for girls under the age of 10; for girls and young women aged 10 and over; and for staff and volunteers. This survey work contributed a major part of the evaluation. In the case of girls and young women the questionnaires were designed to allow respondents to provide simple answers to a range of questions about their experience of GFS services and, importantly, what they gained from GFS and the impact those services have had on their lives. Given the current policy emphasis on “outcomes”, the research team was keen to find out what the benefits are to the users of participating in GFS activities, such as new knowledge and skills, or changes in attitudes or behaviour.

The questionnaires also collected basic demographic information on respondents such as age, educational background, child care responsibilities or location. In the case of staff and volunteers, the survey examined issues such as motivation, training and support received and views about what GFS stands for and what it should be covering with girls and young women who use it. The draft questionnaires were checked with staff and with a volunteer leader highly experienced at Branch and Area level. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyse the results of the questionnaires.

Projects and Branches were asked to distribute the questionnaires to a 100% sample of all girls and young women who used GFS services between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Completed questionnaires were posted back to De Montfort by Branch Leaders or Project Managers, and the University followed up in January 2007 to encourage completion. GFS staff and volunteers were asked to offer assistance to any girls who found difficulty with the written format because of disability or literacy difficulties. They were also asked to contact and encourage a response from any young people who had left or dropped out of groups or projects during the designated period but in the event very few past users responded. Some 283 responses were received from girls and young women.

Every effort was made to preserve confidentiality so that views could be expressed freely. The questionnaires were completed anonymously. Branch Leaders and Project Managers posted them back to the University Research Office. In addition, a telephone number and address were made available for anyone who wished to post their own questionnaire or to speak directly to one of the researchers.

The questionnaire to staff and volunteers also provided an extensive and reliable source of primarily quantitative data with qualitative comment. It was sent out to Branches and Projects, seeking a response from each volunteer or member of the paid staff on GFS records between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2006. Questionnaires were again returned by post and an e-mail version was made available on request.

At the final closing date, some 70 responses had been received from volunteers in the Branches. One former volunteer sent a letter but not a questionnaire and this has been included with the qualitative responses but not counted for statistical purposes. 34 workers from the Projects responded including one volunteer. In addition 4 staff from the Head Office responded. This equates to approximately 47% of the total paid staff across the organisation.

A further 16 responses were received after the extended deadline (3 from Branch volunteers, 10 from girls and young women at the Branches and 3 from young women at the Community Projects.) While these could not be included in the statistical analysis, the free text qualitative comments were taken into account.

### **D3. Audit of provision**

The study also set out to gain an overall picture of the work being carried out. This “audit” of GFS provision had a number of elements, many of which were explored in parallel with the questionnaires, visits and interviews. This aspect of the evaluation was intended to enable a range of judgements to be made about the quality and quantity of provision including its range and reach; standards of provision and impact achieved; staffing and staff development; management and quality assurance; policy frameworks, planning and governance.

No single inspection framework was used on its own to inform these judgements but for benchmarking purposes reference was made to a range of appropriate indicators drawn from Ofsted and the Joint Area Review Framework.

Throughout the evaluation the researchers examined documentary and monitoring information collected by GFS locally and at a national level. Some evaluation reports were also supplied. Formal documents such as the Memorandum and Articles of Association were considered. This material enabled the team to understand the background to the work of GFS and the scale of its current operation. A limited literature review was also conducted to identify material likely to be relevant to the future strategy of GFS such as significant Government policy documents and guidance, examples of good practice and potential funding sources.

### **D4. Peer research**

The research team also involved some of the users in the evaluation through peer research. GFS Platform has a good tradition of involving young women in feedback and programme planning. Despite the practical difficulties, there was a commitment on the part of the University and of GFS to maintain such an element in this evaluation design.

It was proposed to recruit 8 to 10 young women aged 16 and above to assist with the evaluation. It was originally suggested that approximately half should be drawn from Branch activities and half from Project users but in the event only Project participants took part. GFS undertook the work of finding suitable young women who wished to take part.

The role of the peer research and advisory group was envisaged as:

- to comment on emerging design issues such as questionnaire content;
- to comment on the issues facing young women in their local situations;
- to offer their perceptions about GFS and the need for single gender youth work;
- to accompany the De Montfort researchers on selected local visits;
- to conduct a small number of peer interviews with other girls and young women.

This methodology has the clear advantage in research terms of narrowing the distance between the researcher and the user, and also supported the aspiration to involve users in the evaluation. In practice the young women did not undertake local visits with the research team but they did provide a young people's perspective and contributed to the study with face to face interviews of their peers.

The young women's research and advisory group was convened in London for a weekend residential in early September 2006. Participants were introduced to the peer research role in the evaluation and received basic training in the key skills involved. GFS met the cost of the residential, travel and gift tokens provided at the end of the process by way of acknowledgement of this contribution. The support of the Project staff who joined the young women on the residential and encouraged their work back in the local situation has been an essential ingredient in the success of this element of the study.

External accreditation was offered to the young women in the form of a Level 2 OCN qualification in 'Researcher Interview Skills and Techniques'. All the young women and the staff who accompanied them were interested in the possibility of accreditation. Three young women and one member of staff completed portfolios and are awaiting confirmation of successful completion from OCN.

## **D5.Gathering qualitative insights into the role of GFS platform and future options**

It was proposed to conduct up to 12 visits to local activities in Projects and Branches to gather qualitative information. Some visits were made by two researchers for two days at a time covering several units and others were visits to day events or Branch sessions undertaken by one researcher. For reasons of efficiency, in many cases visits to Branches were undertaken within reach of Community Projects. The following visits were undertaken:

Branches and area events

- Inauguration of Welsh President and activity day for Welsh Branches, Newport
- Northern Area Fun Day, Appley Bridge
- Holiday at Winchester House, Isle of Wight, Northern Area Branches
- Bearwood (St Mary's) Branch, Birmingham
- Great Barr (St Chad's) Branch, Birmingham
- North Walsham Branch, Norfolk
- Pakefield Branch, Suffolk
- Stanwix Branch, Carlisle
- Wainfleet Branch, Skegness, Lincolnshire

Community Projects and supported housing

- Great Yarmouth Community Project
- St Paul's Lodge, Great Yarmouth
- Penge Community Project
- Hawes Road, Penge, support to housing project
- Sandown Bay Community Project, Isle of Wight
- Skegness Community Project

The objectives of these visits were to see some of the work with girls and young women first hand and to gather documentary information and qualitative material from a range of relevant people. The De Montfort team wishes to acknowledge the help of a great many GFS staff and volunteers in arranging the programmes for these local visits. The programmes for the visits ensured that a wide range of respondents were interviewed and different situations were observed building up a purposive sample across the range of work, including - geographical spread; rural and urban situations; Projects and Branches (including those in more isolated areas); different age bands amongst the girls and young women; ability/disability /ethnicity.

During these visits qualitative interviews were carried out with a number of users. In practice it was not possible to achieve a random sample but a range of different types of users was built up, with different ages and other demographic characteristics. The research design used a semi-structured, conversational interview format which allowed the researchers to discuss and record in detail the experiences of girls and young women. Some of these conversations were conducted with pairs or small groups where that made the girls feel more at ease or suited the practicalities of the setting. An informal approach was maintained throughout and the response and willingness to talk to the interviewers was good.

Notes were taken of all the qualitative interviews on standardised data capture forms. Given the group activity settings, it did not prove possible to tape record the qualitative interviews. All quotations used in this report are taken from the contemporaneous notes of the interviewer or from open ended question responses from the survey.

Face-to-face interviews with adult workers were also conducted on a semi-structured format, enabling the interviewer to follow up questions of interest as they arose as well as ascertaining certain basic information. Respondents were assured that comments would be confidential and anonymous unless specific permission was sought for an attributed



quotation. Small group interviews and telephone interviews were used on a small number of occasions. Although most of the interviews had to be conducted in the course of local visits, a sample was accumulated that included a wide range of involvement, whether paid or volunteer, in different types of provision, with different ages and length of service with GFS.

## **D6. Ascertaining the views of stakeholders**

In order to gain a range of external perspectives, the research team interviewed commissioners of services or partners who could give an informed view of the effectiveness of the organisation and its possible future options. Internal “stakeholders” such as Trustees and central staff were also interviewed. The list of respondents is included at Appendix A. A list of appropriate contacts was agreed with GFS and augmented as the study progressed by the Youth Affairs Unit. The aim was to include representation of such groups as: Trustees, Head Office staff; Area Presidents; the GFS historian (Women’s Library Project); Diocesan personnel, Church of England Youth Advisers and parish priests; other voluntary organisations; MPs or local Councillors, who had shown particular interest; funders and commissioners; Local Connexions and Youth Services.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the main by telephone with some face-to face meetings. The interview schedule covered issues such as:

- The impression of GFS Platform – its strengths and weaknesses
- The nature of its positive contribution;
- Gaps, problems, issues;
- Whether there is a perceived need for single gender work;
- Opportunities and suggested future developments;
- Funding issues and potential avenues;
- Future use of GFS resources;
- Options for use of capital and revenue;
- Relationship to Government priorities and policy direction;
- Relationship to other voluntary organisations;
- Relationship to the structures and priorities of the Anglican Church;
- Relationship to the international work of GFS.

The visits also afforded opportunities to gather the views of local stakeholders. In respect of local partners, commissioners or parents, interviews concentrated on their perceptions of the service offered, the relationship of GFS to other partners and ideas for future development.

### **1.2.6 Reporting**

Interim reports outlining progress and emerging issues were provided to the Evaluation Steering Group. The final evaluation report aims to detail the spread of current provision, provide an analysis of the pattern of the work, offer comment on the quality and usefulness of that provision, provide a picture of current strengths and weaknesses, offer case study material, and provide an option appraisal for future development. The report has included as many of the qualitative comments as possible both to demonstrate the consistency and depth of the responses and to provide a resource for GFS in relation to future funding submissions or publicity. A dissemination event may be considered by GFS Platform as appropriate.

### **1.2.7 Liaison and communication**

The Team Leader from the Youth Affairs Unit was responsible for ensuring good communication with GFS and kept closely in touch with the Director and the Funding Coordinator on this issue. It also proved important to build up confidence and communication with Branch and Project contacts. These liaison tasks included informing the local groups about requirements and progress; briefings to the Steering Group and the Director; production of protocols and ethical approval; and follow up to improve the questionnaire response rate. An e-mail address and telephone number was offered for any member wishing to submit an individual comment or query and this facility was used on several occasions.

## APPENDIX E

### Examples of good practice

This Appendix provides more detail of the projects mentioned in Section 4 as examples of good practice. These should not be taken as illustrations of one policy only as many examples relate to more than one policy priority.

#### ***a) Girlguiding - Switch On Project***

Girlguiding UK enables girls and young women to develop their full potential through a varied range of events and activities that challenge, inform and stimulate. It offers activities for four different age-groups and has recently obtained Big Lottery Funding for a new programme within its senior section for young women aged 14-25. The aim of Switch On is to engage with disadvantaged young people who are excluded from participating in Guiding in its traditional form of delivery.

Switch On will provide opportunities for young people from communities not normally engaged. They will participate in activities outside their immediate reach through residential, externally recognised awards and activities designed to empower them to cope better and achieve personal goals. With support staff and volunteers, young people will be empowered to design a programme to meet their interests and needs. Girlguiding UK will employ development workers to support local volunteers to run taster activities to recruit young people into in targeted programmes designed to meet their needs and interests. Each programme will include a residential element and exchanges with existing Guide groups from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, encouraging interfaith co-operation and understanding. Young people will decide upon the activities and carry out community cohesion projects. They will also have the opportunity to work towards elements of externally recognised awards. All projects will require the young person to carry out self assessments at the start of and throughout their time on the project to measure their individual distance travelled. National evaluation events will bring the young women together to meet new people, share their experiences and influence future projects.

Switch Up is a parallel initiative to provide additional support to local guiding to help overcome the disparity between well-off and disadvantaged guiding units and engage communities not represented in guiding in their locality. Grants of up to £2000 will be available to local guiding to make possible new and improved opportunities for socially disadvantaged units through activities, training and support for the volunteers. Grant criteria will include the requirement of involving young people and a youth steering group will advise the project. Development workers will support regional panels and local guiding to develop targeted project plans  
*Girlguiding UK, 17-19 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0PT*

#### ***b) Turning Point Women's Centre***

This voluntary sector project started in 1982 as the North Braunstone Self-Help Action Group. It is an inclusive community led organisation dedicated to supporting, enabling and empowering women and their families to realise their full potential. The Centre offers pregnancy testing, a peer education based parenting project, adult learning mentors working with women in the local community, a social group for women over 40 and an early years service with a crèche and after school club. They also work with young men. Funding sources include Leicester City Council, the Braunstone Community Association, Connexions, the Parenting Fund, and the Learning and Skills Council/European Social Fund Objective 3. The work with young women focuses on the Braunstone Teenage Pregnancy Project which provides sex and relationship education using peer education. The project aims to promote life choices for young people and inform them of the negative and positive aspects of parenthood. It trains and supports young women, all of whom have experience of teenage parenthood, to act as peer educators in schools and other community venues, usually at Key Stage 3 and 4. The sessions, which have been cited as good practice by the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, cover the realities of teenage pregnancy such as restricted budgets or lack of opportunities, and the implications of unplanned sex, e.g. sex and the law, contraception methods, safer sexual practice and services, money, relationships and pregnancy.

The Project's peer education training project has been accredited by the Open College Network. Following their involvement, two-thirds of the peer education team have entered into full or part-time employment, higher education or training. Many originally left school with few formal qualifications or none or had never had paid employment.

*Turning Point Women's Centre, 27 Cantrell Rd, Braunstone, Leicester LE3 1DS*

### **c) Streetreach, Doncaster**

Streetreach is a registered charity providing support services for female adults and young people involved in, at risk of, or wishing to exit prostitution. The project receives funding from various sources including local Primary Care Trusts, the local authority, Teenage pregnancy, Connexions, New Deal for Community and Comic Relief. It provides outreach provision, centre-based provision and partnership work via a multi agency forum.

The statement of purpose states that "Streetreach delivers a holistic approach to sexual health for young people and adults involved in or at risk from prostitution... working to promote self-determination and equality of opportunity. We aim to eliminate some of the oppression, injustice and educational disadvantages from which many of our clients suffer." The project supports women towards a more positive lifestyle away from prostitution and is recognised as a centre of excellence for this area of work. While there are now hardly any young women aged under-16, and far fewer aged 16-19, working on the streets in Doncaster, there is still concern about less overt types of sexual exploitation and the project works with partners to highlight the potential dangers to young people.

The outreach service makes initial contact, builds trusting relationships, provides on-the-spot advice and condoms and sets up appointments for the Centre-based provision. The centre-based provision is open for 5 days a week and offers a drop-in facility, a drug treatment programme, structured day care programme, workshops and residentials, training and education, counselling, leisure activities and representation on forums and committees. A sexual health clinic has also been established.

More focus has been put on accreditation such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Youth Achievement Awards, which has proved to be very important to the women in recognising their ability and achievements. Sessions are also offered on assertiveness training and building self-esteem. The employment agency Reed provides an employment drop-in service. Support is offered to young people through the Multi-Agency Forum, which has an open membership for concerned agencies. The Project believes this is vital in reaching young people who are being sexually exploited. The Streetreach school prevention programme is delivered to year 10 pupils in schools and other venues giving young people information about the realities, risks and consequences of prostitution while encouraging them to look at their own attitudes and stereotypes. It also raises awareness about the links between drugs and prostitution.

*Streetreach, 28 Copley Road, Doncaster DN1 2PF [www.streetreach.org.uk](http://www.streetreach.org.uk)*

### **d) Crime Concern – prevention programmes**

Crime Concern is a national charity with a focus on reducing and preventing crime. It runs several Youth Inclusion Projects which are funded through the Youth Justice Board. These projects work with local partners to identify young people who are at risk of offending. They then offer activities and support to divert them into more constructive activities and build their self-esteem. Crime Concern also runs the Dalston Youth Project based in Hackney, London, which was set up in 1994 and has become a centre of excellence for mentoring. It currently runs support for 15 to 18 year olds at risk of offending and an early intervention programme. The mentoring programme trains 80 mentors a year and has become a training centre for mentoring, working with other groups in Hackney and further afield.

#### Case study

Kennisha is 19 and started going to the Dalston Youth Project (DYP) in Hackney when she was 15. For her, it's become a home from home.

*"I was at... secondary school but I hated it. I ended up not going to school...so my life was going nowhere... I was totally bored. I had nothing to do. I was wasting my life. We all were...I started going to DYP on Wednesday evenings to do drama. I also did IT workshops and learnt about video... I became a peer mentor. I did some peer mentoring training and went*

*into my old school to talk to 14 year olds. I used to talk about sexual health and about my own experiences – how DYP had helped me. It all helped to build up the kids' confidence. I love my work. It was great when my old teachers came up to me and said, 'is that you Kennisha?' They couldn't believe I was back in school – working and doing good."*  
[www.crimeconcern.org.uk](http://www.crimeconcern.org.uk)

#### **e) Leeds Youth Service - work with Asian young women**

Leeds Youth Service has a team of youth workers undertaking single sex work with Asian young women. They aim "to empower and build the confidence of Asian young women to make informed decisions and choices." The issues covered in this work currently include physical activities, health and wellbeing, mental health, employment, education and training, drugs, bullying and conflict resolution, and creative skills. The rationale for the work with Asian girls' groups is the multiple oppressions they face. The youth workers recognise the need for cultural sensitivity and gaining community and/or parental support. All aspects of their work take into account racism and sexism and their impact on Asian girls. In 2005 a successful youth exchange was arranged with a young women's project in Ireland. The fifteen participants were aged 15+ and were in school, college or part time employment. A team day was organised to find out more about international work and discuss concerns. The aims and group profile were sent to various search sites and agencies to find a European country prepared to exchange. Single sex groups were rare in other countries but the group in Ireland was willing to take part. The Irish group initially came to a festival in England and took part in joint activities, looking at young women's lives from both the Irish and Asian perspective. Drama was used to learn how racism and sexism played a part in their lives. The Leeds group raised money and eventually organised their reciprocal visit. The group included young women from Muslim, Sikh and Hindu backgrounds and they met up with Catholic young women in Ireland. Some had never been away from home before. They visited historic places and worked with specialist arts workers on homophobia, abortion, religion and a range of other issues. Back home they arranged a presentation event.  
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#### **f) Somerset Rural Youth Project – COGS (Creating Opportunities for Girls in Somerset)**

The voluntary sector Somerset Rural Youth Project was established in 1997 to test out innovative approaches to work with young people in rural areas. The project included teams of youth workers in each district council area and an economic programme, which provided a comprehensive package of support to assist rural young people in becoming economically active. The COGS project ran for a number of years and has only comparatively recently reached a natural conclusion.

COGS members were young women living in West Somerset including those living on very isolated farms. It met weekly, with occasional weekend or day events and the members planned their own activities including social outings, fundraising, conservation work, outdoor activities, exchange visits, arts and crafts and healthy living. The work was founded on notions of empowerment, providing opportunities to discuss personal issues and considering a range of options rather than being confined by traditional views of roles and responsibilities. The young women raised funds themselves and the National Parks Authority also made a contribution. With concerns about transport and personal safety in a rural area they usually met after school time with transport home provided afterwards. Members organised two exchange visits to Poland and to a National Park Forestry Project in Spain exploring issues of employability. Some members were trained as peer researchers and held consultative exercises with other young women.

The project was innovative in drawing in isolated young women; challenging very traditional views of women's roles; a strong focus in preparing young women for work; and the way in which individual young women recruited their peers and then supported in their involvement.  
*Source: Who says nothing ever happens around here? Innovation in working with young people in rural areas, Ray Fabes, Bob Payne and Jason Wood, National Youth Agency, 2003.*