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Youth outreach work at Portsmouth Area Rape Crisis Service  
– an explorative study

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## Foreword

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Portsmouth Area Rape Crisis Service (PARCS) emerged in 1981. A group of women, angry at the lack of support for victims of rape and inspired by feminist politics, set up the centre on a shoestring budget. The centre's original service model was largely shaped by the needs of local people and the meagre financial resources available. Then, as now, PARCS relied upon the tireless support and commitment of a small and dedicated group of volunteers to deliver its services.

Financial help from Portsmouth City Council, Hampshire County Council and the Local Police Authority has enabled PARCS to employ a small team and extend its services to adult survivors of sexual abuse and to young people. More recently, a grant from BBC Children in Need allowed PARCS to offer its counselling service to young people living in South East Hampshire, and we hope to also extend our outreach services into this area in 2011.

The evaluation of the services PARCS provides is increasingly important in the drive to improve and develop them. Stakeholders require evidence that the work PARCS does is the best that it can be. We use a number of methods to measure our counselling service. However, PARCS has been less successful in evaluating outreach services. This is partly because there is less available research to draw upon in this area.

PARCS has always provided feedback, including qualitative reports from the young people and data regarding the number of outreach sessions delivered. However, we wanted to open ourselves up to more critical analysis. We began by posing a number of questions including What is the outreach hoping to achieve? Is it effective? and How might effectiveness be improved? What follows is a report of how we went about answering these questions and what we learnt.

PARCS has changed and developed its outreach service based on the findings of this explorative study and we will present some of these developments as part of a conference to mark our 30th birthday in 2011.

We hope this study will play a part in developing and improving the outreach services in the area of sexual violation that are available to young people. We believe it is also relevant to those delivering services under the banner of personal health and social education. Ultimately, we hope this project will further partnership working between agencies providing services to young people.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr Nina Burrowes for undertaking this project. Its conception and development would not have been possible without Nina's tireless and generous commitment. Thank you also to Corrine Steppens (volunteer and research assistant) for the many hours given to supporting this project, and to all the young people who took part.

**Kim Hosier**

Acting Chief Executive Officer  
Portsmouth Area Rape Crisis Service



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**Dr Nina Burrowes**

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*There was the one with the questions about the husband and him forcing her to have sex and stuff. I didn't know about that. I didn't know that the woman had the freedom to say 'No I don't want to'.*

”

(Focus group participant)



## Executive Summary

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### What was the aim of this study?

The aim of this study was to gather information about the youth outreach sessions delivered by PARCS to young people in the Portsmouth area. Along with information gathered by an accompanying literature review (Burrowes, 2010) the data gathered in this study was used to produce a series of recommendations for PARCS. These recommendations were aimed at helping PARCS develop and further improve the service that it offers to young people.

### What data was gathered?

This study gathered data using feedback forms from young people who had participated in outreach sessions (n=393), focus groups with young people who had participated in sessions (n=21), and interviews with agencies and professionals who work with young people.

### What were the findings?

**Feedback forms:** Descriptive data from the feedback forms indicates that the average profile of someone attending a PARCS session is a white, female, 14-year-old who attends a secondary school. The feedback sheets suggest that whilst the young people may have thought about some of the issues covered in the session before, they felt that they did learn new material and that their ideas about rape and sexual assault had changed over the course of the session.

**Focus groups:** The data from the focus groups indicates that the sessions managed to get young people to think about rape and sexual assault in a new and engaging way. For many young people this was the only occasion they had discussed these issues with an adult, or with their peers. Some of the young people were reassured to know where to go for help should they need it, and felt that the information from the session would help guide them in the future. When asked about what additional information or support they would like, the young people suggested that they would benefit from follow-up work to help them remember the material, and more information about how to reduce their risk of assault.

**Other agencies and professionals:** The information gathered during this aspect of the study shows that PARCS works with young people just before they are at the greatest risk of being victims of rape or sexual assault. The sessions delivered by PARCS are seen as providing a useful opportunity to examine the issues associated with rape and sexual assault. There was a sense that PARCS' independence was valued by service users who may be suspicious of government agencies. Additional input on working with particular groups of young people and with particular issues associated with rape and sexual assault would be valuable.

### What are the recommendations?

Three recommendations were made based on the data from this study and the accompanying literature review.

1. Redevelop the sessions using a rape-related theory of change. This will enable a subsequent evaluation of the impact of the sessions according to how well they achieve the aims of the theory. A series of recommendations are made based on whether the desired outcome of the sessions is self-referral to counselling services, the prevention of rape or sexual assault, or the reduction of the impact of rape or sexual assault.
2. Seek resources to develop the service. This will enable the delivery of refresher sessions, and specialist work with more at-risk young people.
3. Evaluate and publish. In order to demonstrate the impact of these improvements it is important that PARCS seeks to continually evaluate its services and disseminate these findings through publication.



## I. Introduction

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Portsmouth Area Rape Crisis Service (PARCS) is a charity based in Portsmouth that offers free specialist support and therapy to survivors of sexual violation aged 13 and above. As part of its youth service the agency also delivers sessions to local young people on issues surrounding relationships, sex, consent, and rape. The aim of these sessions is to educate young people about the law and to challenge some of the myths surrounding rape and sexual assault. In 2008/2009 PARCS delivered outreach sessions to 1,609 young people. Sessions generally last 45 minutes, are delivered once to each cohort, and are primarily delivered in local secondary schools (to children aged 13 to 16 years).

PARCS commissioned this research to examine the current impact of the outreach sessions that it provides, and to explore ways of improving and developing its services for young people. As indicated in an accompanying literature review of the area (Burrowes, 2010) there is a need for more agencies such as PARCS to have their work examined in this way.

The aim of the youth outreach sessions that PARCS delivers is to raise awareness and challenge attitudes around rape and sexual assault. However, in line with most other agencies that provide similar outreach programmes, the sessions are not based on a clear theory of change that would enable an accurate evaluation of the impact of the sessions. Consequently, this study was explorative in nature and does not provide an accurate evaluation of the impact of the sessions. The study explored the experiences and opinions of people involved in the youth outreach work with the aim of writing a series of recommendations for PARCS to consider.



## 2. Method

The aim of this study was to gather a wide range of information on the youth outreach sessions that PARCS delivers. There were three aspects to the data collection. The following section provides information on each of these three aspects.

### Data collection 1 – Using feedback sheets from the session

Feedback sheets were distributed to young people who attended a PARCS youth outreach session during the period of this study. The aim of the feedback sheets was to gather information from a large sample of young people who attended PARCS youth outreach sessions. The following table provides details on what information was collected in the feedback sheet and why this information was considered important for this study.

Information gathered	Why was this considered important
Demographic information on age, gender, and ethnicity	To provide information on the types of young people participating in PARCS youth outreach sessions
Information on who the participant was most likely to talk to if they had a problem with a relationship	To provide information that could be used in the development of PARCS youth outreach sessions, on how likely it was that young people would talk to friends, parents, or a teacher
A definition of consent	To explore how well participants were able to define what 'consent' meant after the session
Information on how much of the material in the session was new	To explore whether PARCS was providing information that the young people felt they already knew
Information on how much the participant had thought about the material covered in the session beforehand	To explore whether PARCS was managing to get young people to think about new aspects of rape and sexual assault
Information on how much the participant had thought about their own opinions before the session	
Information on whether the participant felt their ideas had changed during the session	To explore whether PARCS was managing to change the way young people thought about rape and sexual assault

The feedback sheets were completed by all participants immediately following the PARCS session. In keeping with the explorative nature of this study no comparison was made using feedback sheets before and after the session. No information is available on the reliability or validity of the feedback sheets. The results from this aspect of the study can therefore only be used to illustrate rough trends in the data rather than provide a valid test of the PARCS sessions.





## Data collection 2 – Focus groups with young people who had attended a session

This aspect of the study provided an opportunity to gather more indepth information from a small number of young people who had participated in a PARCS session. The aim of the focus groups was to explore the experiences and opinions of young people who attended the session. Some of the questions used in the focus groups were designed to be open enough to allow young people to comment on any aspect of the session; others were designed to explore themes which were in keeping with the aims of the study, such as requests for additional input following the session. Questions from the focus groups are listed below:

- Tell me about the session that you have just taken part in.
- What did you think about the session?
- How much of the information was new?
- How much had you thought about rape and sexual assault before the session?
- In what ways did the session make you think differently about anything?
- What are the main things that you learned during the session?
- How useful was the information that you learned today?
- In what ways, if any, was the session uncomfortable for you?
- Why do you think they have sessions like this in schools?
- Having done the session, is there anything else that you want to know, or any other help or support that you would like, in terms of rape and sexual assault?
- Under what circumstances would you say you have to be more careful about your own personal safety with regard to rape and sexual assault?

In total six focus groups were conducted. Four of these were conducted immediately following the PARCS session, one was conducted after a delay of two months, and another after a delay of seven months. The aim of the latter focus groups was to assess how much information participants had retained since the PARCS session.

A total of 21 young people recruited from two secondary schools in the Portsmouth area participated in the focus groups. Eleven of the participants were 16 years old, 10 of the participants were 15 years old. Sixteen of the participants were female, five were male. The focus groups lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. All of the focus groups were audio tape recorded and transcribed.

The transcripts were analysed using an approach based on grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The aim of this analysis was to accurately collate the comments made by the participants into a series of themes in order to produce a clear, condensed picture of the participants' experiences and opinions from which recommendations could be made.

Concept labels were generated around five key research questions for this aspect of the study:

- What was the experience of the session like for the participants?
- What was the impact of the session?
- What were the participants' opinions about rape?
- What did the participants see as the purpose of the sessions?
- What additional input did the participants request?

Each transcript was examined for any data that would relate to these five areas. In total 289 concept labels were generated for the study. Taking each research question one at a time, all of the concept labels relevant to that question were then listed for each focus group. This list was then filtered into subject groups by the researcher. Subject groups reflecting the aims of the study were chosen. For example, the research question 'What was the impact of the session?' was divided into the following subject groups: knowledge prior to the session; memory



of session content; what the session did do; what the session did not do. Having filtered the concept labels by research question and subject, concept labels were then grouped together into themes.

For example:

Research question:	What was the impact of the session?
Subject:	Knowledge prior to the session
Concept labels with similar themes:	I did not know it all I learned new stuff during the session I did not know about men raping men I did not know about the laws
Theme label:	I learned something new during the session

In order to check the reliability of the data analysis inter-rater and intra-rater reliability tests were conducted. These tests examined the level of agreement between two individuals when they coded the same material and the level of agreement when one individual coded identical material on two separate occasions. The results from these tests demonstrated 85% agreement between the two different individuals and 98% agreement when the same individual coded the same material on two separate occasions. Both of these results indicate that the coding was conducted reliably and add to the overall accuracy of the data in this study.

### Data collection 3 – Gathering information from professionals working in the area

This aspect of the data collection gathered information from professionals who work in the area of young people, rape, and sexual assault. The aims of this part of the study were to gather information on the incidence of rape and sexual assault in Portsmouth; to explore how PARCS sessions fitted in with the practices of other agencies; to identify any unmet need in the area which PARCS may consider meeting; and to explore how PARCS could improve its practice in keeping with the needs of local funders.

The information gathered was collected during visits to two local secondary schools, Portsmouth City Council, and The Treetops Centre, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in Portsmouth. All of the visits were made by the lead researcher for this project and lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. The visits were not audio recorded, instead notes were taken during the visit and a summary of the main themes from these notes are presented in this report. The individuals who facilitated the visits were a secondary school counsellor, a secondary school matron, and a member of the procurement team at Portsmouth City Council. The small sample size (n=3) and the nature of data collection and analyses means that this aspect of the study can only be considered as a useful additional source of information for PARCS rather than an accurate assessment of the incidence of rape and unmet need within Portsmouth.



### 3. Results

#### Data collection 1 – Using feedback sheets from the session

##### Who completed feedback sheets?

In total feedback sheets were completed by 393 participants during the length of this study: 257 (65%) of the participants were female and 136 (35%) were male. All of the participants were aged between 13 and 16, with an average age of 14. In terms of ethnicity, 74% of the participants described themselves as White British, 4% as Asian, 3% as Black, 0.3% as Bangladeshi, 0.3% as Mixed, and 0.3% as Turkish. All of the participants who completed feedback sheets were attending a secondary school in the Portsmouth area. Pupils from seven schools participated in this part of the study. This data indicates that the majority of young people who attend PARCS youth outreach sessions are white, female, 14 years old, and attending a secondary school.

##### What do the feedback sheets indicate?

The data from the feedback sheets is summarised in the table below. The data indicates that the participants: are most likely to talk to their friends if they have a relationship problem; felt they already knew some of the material in the session; felt that they had thought about some of the topics in the session before; and felt that their ideas had changed a bit during the session. The vast majority of participants provided a correct definition of 'consent' with only four out of 393 providing an incorrect definition. An examination of the feedback scores by age and gender did not find any differences in average scores for any of the questions.

Who are young people likely to talk to about problems in a relationship?	How much did young people think they already knew before the session?	How much had young people thought about rape and sexual assault before the session?	How much did young people think their ideas changed during the session?
Friends – 55% Parents – 20% Teacher – 2%	Felt they knew at least a bit before the session	Felt that they had thought a bit about rape and sexual assault before the session	Felt that their ideas had changed a bit during the session

The data indicates that the youth outreach session had a moderate impact on these participants and that the young people who completed feedback sheets were much more likely to talk to their peers than to their parents or a teacher about a relationship problem.

#### Data collection 2 – Focus groups with young people who had attended a session

##### What was it like to participate in the sessions?

The participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences of participating in the sessions. The sessions were described as fun and interesting. The format of the sessions appears to be well liked by the participants with positive comments being made about working on the scenarios, talking about relationships, and the true and false exercise.

As part of the focus group the participants were asked what it was like having the sessions in their class groups and having a teacher in the room. None of the participants reported that these aspects of the session caused any problems. Some participants said that they preferred to do the session in their classes because they felt safe with familiar people and could learn more from others when they were in a larger group. Having a teacher in the room



was either not considered a problem by the participants, or was reported as a positive aspect of the session if the teacher joined in with the activities. Some participants felt that the sessions made the risk of sexual assault seem 'more real' and that this was a bit frightening, however they were still glad to have participated in the session.

### What is the purpose of the sessions?

During the focus group participants were asked why they thought the sessions were delivered in schools, and whether they thought the sessions were important. The participants felt that the sessions were mostly about raising awareness of the issues around rape and sexual assault, providing information on the laws around consent, and letting people know that support is available should they ever be a victim of sexual abuse or sexual assault.

The participants felt that it was important that people discussed rape because they felt they needed to be aware of the risks. They also felt that they needed awareness as either they or someone they knew could be raped. There was a strong sense amongst most participants that rape was not an issue that they discussed very often, and that they would be very unlikely to discuss the issue at home with their parents. This was mostly attributed to personal embarrassment about raising the issue of rape. Consequently, the participants saw the value in having sessions in a school setting.

The specific aspects of the session that the participants appear to value include clarification of the laws around consent, knowing your rights, knowing where to go for support, and learning about relationships. The participants from an all-girls school appear to have particularly valued the information that they learned about what boys want in a relationship. There were no comments from the participants to indicate that they felt the sessions were unimportant or a waste of time.

Having explored the participants' experiences of the sessions the following section will examine the impact of the sessions.

### How much did you already know?

One of the main aims of the sessions is to raise awareness and provide information. It is therefore important to explore how much of this information is new to the participants when assessing the impact of the sessions. During the focus groups participants were asked how much they felt they already knew before the session. The participants gave a mixture of responses. Some felt that they knew most of the material before the session whilst others reported that they only knew a little bit before the session. Overall the participants felt that they knew some of the general aspects about rape or sexual assault before the session but they did not know some of the details. Information that they felt was 'new' was the specific laws around consent, that rape could occur in a marriage, and that men could also be victims of rape.

**“ There was the one with the questions about the husband and him forcing her to have sex and stuff. I didn't know about that. I didn't know that the woman had the freedom to say 'No I don't want to'. ”**

### What did the session do?

The main impact of the session appears to have been to encourage participants to think about things they had not considered before, or think about things in a different way. Issues that participants reported never having thought about include male rape, rape within a marriage, and the impact of alcohol on the ability to give consent for sex.



***“ There was some stuff which I had not ever thought about, like the man question. It didn’t even occur to me, a man raping a man. ”***

In terms of changing the way they think about issues, participants reported thinking differently about sex in relationships, the myths around rape, and their personal risk of rape.

***“ It made me think about how I would treat sex in a relationship. It can be something quite casual because that is the way that it is portrayed now. But now I realise that actually it is more important, and you shouldn’t feel under pressure and stuff. ”***

***“ I don’t think that it is ever the girl’s, well, she’s the one getting raped so it is obviously not her fault, but it just kind of made me realise that it is wrong to say what you deserved it or something, because you were wearing that. ”***

The participants felt that the session helped them to be more aware of the risks and also let them know where to go if they needed support.

#### **How well did the participants remember the content of the sessions?**

Some of the participants in the focus groups had participated in an outreach session up to seven months before participating in the focus group. This provided an opportunity to explore how well the participants were able to recall what they had learned during the session. The recollection of the session varied between participants. A few participants were unable to recall anything about the session. The majority of the participants were able to remember the format of the session, and some of the exercises, but could not recall the content of the session.

Some participants were confused over the content of the session after the delay. The confusion appeared to be around some of the details of the session, for example, whether the age of consent was 13 or 16, and whether there was an established level of alcohol that someone could consume before being unable to give consent. In line with other research (Barron & Topping, 2008) it therefore appears that the participants in the youth outreach sessions do begin to forget the information learned during the session within a relatively short time.

#### **What did the session not do?**

As part of the process of looking for ways to improve the youth outreach service at PARCS this aspect of the study explored what the sessions did not appear to be achieving.

The youth outreach sessions aim to dispel some of the myths around rape and sexual abuse. One of the myths is that most sexual assault is carried out by strangers. The idea that you can be raped by someone you know appears to have been picked up by some of the participants in the focus groups.



***“ I always saw rape as something like, really, like how they describe it on the news, like you were walking along the side of the road and get pulled into a corner, something like that. But actually I found out that it can be, a form of rape, it can be somebody that you think that you know. But then you get pressurised into doing something that you don’t want and this is, that is still rape really. ”***

Some of the participants also recognised that they would be more at risk of being raped when they were at a party and drinking alcohol. However, when the participants talked about the risk of being raped the image that they painted was overwhelmingly that of stranger rape.

***“ I would be more concerned if I was walking on my own, and it was dark, and I was in an alley or something like that. But in the middle of the day I would not really think about it. ”***

As a group, these participants associated rape with being alone, in the dark, in an alleyway, in a city. Conversely, situations where the participants reported a low risk of rape or sexual assault were during the daytime, in familiar locations, and when they were with their friends.

***“ I live in a rural village kind of thing, so I can’t ever expect anything to happen to me. ”***

Whilst the participants felt that the session helped raise their awareness of the risks surrounding rape and sexual assault many felt that they wanted more guidance on what to do if they felt at risk. Participants were unsure what they should do if they or someone they knew was raped, what would happen if they told someone they were raped, and how they should support someone else who told them that they had been raped.

***“ ...if she told me that she had been raped, I don’t know what I would do then. Like, I would, it’s obviously confidential, but I don’t know whether I would, if she was in trouble, I don’t know whether I would be allowed to say anything to anyone who could help her. ”***

Conversely some participants felt that just being given information helped them make decisions that could reduce their risk of sexual assault.

***“ It helps you make your own decisions about what you need to look out for...All of the facts and stuff helps me make decisions about the kinds of things that I do ”***

What else would the participants like?

The focus groups asked participants what else they would like to have in addition to the session that they had already attended. In keeping with the finding above, a popular request was for some practical tools or knowledge that would help them prevent rape or sexual assault. Requests included how to spot risks, what to do if you



recognise risks, how to physically defend yourself from rape, and how to help your friend if they tell you that they are being pressurised for sex. As well as feeling more equipped to prevent rape from occurring the participants also wanted to know how to respond if a friend tells you they have been raped, where you should go if you have been raped, and what happens after you report a rape.

Another popular request was for more time to go through the material that was covered in the session, and for a refresher session to help them remember the material. The participants felt that they would just go back to their normal lives after the session and forget most of the information.

**“ I think maybe more lessons on it. Like because, that was the first and we’ve only had one hour and it’s a lot to think about in the one time. ”**

Some participants felt that it would be useful to have more sessions on rape and sexual assault when they were a bit older and a bit more experienced. Whilst they felt they had a theoretical understanding of the risks, they felt that they would gain from additional sessions at college or university when they had more experience in relationships.

### Summary of findings

This section has illustrated the results of a series of focus groups with young people who had participated in a youth outreach session. The table below summarises the experiences and opinions from the participants in the focus groups.

What was it like to participate in the sessions?	What was the purpose of the sessions?	How much did you already know?	What did the session do?	How well did you remember the session?	What didn't the session do?	What else would you like?
It was fun and interesting  I liked the way it was done	I would not discuss this anywhere else  To raise awareness	I knew the general stuff but I did not know the details  I learned something new	It made me think about stuff I had not thought about before  It made me think differently about sex, relationships, and rape	I could remember the format of the sessions but I had forgotten some of the details	I think I am most at risk alone, at night, somewhere unfamiliar  I am aware of risks but I don't know what to do about them	I would like more time on this  I would like a refresher session  How do I respond to my friends if they have been raped or are worried about being raped?

Overall the focus groups indicate that the sessions do get young people to think about rape and sexual assault in an engaging way. Young people valued the opportunity to discuss rape because it was not an issue discussed elsewhere. The participants felt they would benefit from a refresher session and would value more information about how to respond when they, or their friends, felt at risk.



### Data collection 3 – Gathering information from professionals working in the area

The final aspect of data collection for this study involved gathering information from professionals who work in the area of young people, rape, and sexual assault. The aims of this part were to gather information on the incidence of rape and sexual assault in Portsmouth; to explore how PARCS sessions fitted in with the practices of other agencies; to identify any unmet need in the area which PARCS may consider meeting; and to explore how PARCS could improve its practice in keeping with the needs of local funders.

#### **What is the incidence of rape or sexual assault amongst young people in Portsmouth?**

It is estimated that only 11% of rapes or sexual assault are reported to the police (Stern, 2010). Consequently, it is impossible to provide an accurate measure of the incidence of rape or sexual assault in Portsmouth.

In terms of rape reported by young people, data from The Treetops Centre's 2008/2009 annual report (SARC, 2009) show that its service was used by a total of 554 individuals during the year. Of these, 344 (62%) were under 24 years of age: 72 were under 16, 194 were aged 16 to 20, and 78 were aged 20 to 24. Ninety-four percent of the clients at the centre during the year were female. Based on this data it appears that in Portsmouth young women aged between 16 and 20 are at the greatest risk of being raped or sexually assaulted, and that the majority of victims of rape or sexual assault in the city are under 24 years of age.

#### **How are the outreach sessions viewed?**

The sessions were considered to be effective in: encouraging self-referral should a child be a victim of abuse; providing education around sex and relationships; counteracting the media and peer-pressure; clarifying the laws around consent; and raising awareness about risk. The sessions were valued because they allowed the participants to explore these issues with an adult who was not part of the school staff, which may be easier for the young people involved.

PARCS' specialist expertise were valued by those interviewed, and there was a sense that a similar service could not be provided by a government agency. The nature of PARCS as a small, independent, specialist charity was thought to be valued by service users who may be suspicious of government agencies and be intimidated by the large bureaucracies involved in the health and social services.

#### **What other input would be valued?**

The participants in this part of the study were invited to identify what they saw as gaps in the current provision to young people around the issues of rape and sexual assault. These suggestions for additional services were broken down into additional services to tackle specific topics and additional services to tackle specific groups of young people.

Topic areas identified as currently not being effectively tackled within the schools included the prevention of rape and sexual assault, internet grooming, and relationships. There was a feeling that more could be done to provide specific guidance on the prevention of sexual assault, specifically to highlight the realities of rape by someone known to the victim, and to provide guidance on steps young people could take to keep themselves and their friends safe from being both a victim and an offender.

The internet was identified as the context for an increasing amount of grooming, sexual bullying, and sexual exploitation. Guidance on staying safe online, bullying and intimidation online, exercising choice in who one accepts as a friend on a social network, online security features, and identifying grooming tactics would be useful.

The final topic area identified was relationships. Useful input would explore choice, autonomy, communication, the influence of peer pressure and the media, and sex within relationships. It was suggested that these sessions may be more effective in a single-gender rather than a mixed-gender setting.

Some groups of individuals were identified as in need of additional or specialist input. Young people with learning difficulties were thought to be particularly vulnerable to rape or sexual assault and therefore in greater need of help and support. Other individuals who are perhaps not adequately catered for by the current system include potential abusers and those excluded from the school system.





## How do schools currently deal with rape and sexual assault?

Due to the age of the school pupils involved in this project all incidents of sexual assault come under child protection (CP) legislation. Professionals working in the area felt that their schools followed CP procedure very well. However, they felt that these procedures are not always in the best interest of the child. Incidents that involve CP are generally managed by specialist staff within a school. Consequently, whilst a child may choose to talk about abuse to a particular member of staff with whom they feel comfortable, they are likely to be immediately passed on to the CP specialist. This may happen before the child has finished telling their whole story. There was concern about the impact of stopping a child mid-way through a disclosure, passing them on to an adult whom they have not chosen to speak to, and removing from the process the one adult within the school that the child may feel comfortable with.

When discussing attitudes to CP within the school there was a feeling that staff within the school may underestimate the prevalence of CP issues and feel that they are only a matter for the CP specialists. They are therefore likely to see their role as solely to refer children to the correct CP member of staff should a child disclose to them. There was also a sense that staff may be afraid of getting CP 'wrong', that the process can be quite intimidating to staff, and that the reality of dealing with social services and the criminal justice system is actually a lot less threatening than people imagine. These fears may reinforce an approach of passing a CP matter on 'like a hot potato' and consequently dropping the child, and their relationship with the child, in the process.

## How can PARCS ensure good practice?

General suggestions for improving good practice at PARCS included demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of its service provision, demonstrating the impact of its service provision, identifying any gaps in service provision, and working with other agencies to avoid duplication.

## Summary of findings

This section has illustrated the results of a series of interviews with professionals who work in schools or in providing services to victims of abuse. The table below summarises the experiences and opinions from these professionals.

What is the incidence of rape and sexual assault?	What opinions are there on the PARCS sessions?	What other input would be valued?	How do local schools deal with rape and sexual assault?	How can PARCS ensure good practice?
Those most at risk of rape or sexual abuse are women under 24 years of age	Sessions are useful for clarifying the laws around consent, counteracting media culture and peer pressure, looking at sex in relationships, and encouraging self-referral	Session or support on the role of the internet, the prevention of rape and sexual assault, and relationships  Additional work with young people who have learning difficulties, are potential abusers, or are excluded from school	Schools follow CP procedure well, but may lose the child within the process  Staff may be fearful of CP issues within local schools	Demonstrate impact and cost-effectiveness.  Identify gaps within the system and duplication of provision with other services and agencies.
The biggest age group for referral to The Treetops Centre is 16 to 20 year-olds				

The information gathered during this aspect of the study shows that PARCS works with young people just before they are at the greatest risk of being victims of rape or sexual assault. The sessions delivered by PARCS are seen as providing a useful opportunity to examine the issues associated with rape and sexual assault. There was a sense PARCS' independence was valued by service users who may be suspicious of government agencies. Additional input would be valued in terms of working with particular groups of young people and with particular issues associated with rape and sexual assault. The information gathered suggests that a 'gap' within the current system relates to an overly procedure-orientated approach to CP issues within schools.



## 5. Conclusions

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### What is PARCS doing well?

PARCS delivers sessions via its youth outreach worker to young people in the Portsmouth area. The sessions are generally delivered once to each cohort and last approximately 45 minutes. During this time PARCS aims to raise awareness about rape and sexual assault, and provide information on where young people can go for support.

This study has found that PARCS is delivering sessions which are considered to be fun and interesting by the young people attending them. The sessions appear to successfully encourage the young people to think about rape and sexual assault in a different way. The young people appear to value the opportunity to discuss sex and relationships, consent and the law, their rights, and the risks associated with rape. For many young people this may be the only occasion they have discussed these issues with an adult, or with their peers. Some of the young people were reassured to know where to go for help should they need it, and felt that the information from the session would help guide them in the future.

Given the topic area of the sessions, the size of the session groups, and the short amount of time allocated for the sessions, these represent considerable achievements on the part of the youth outreach service at PARCS.

### Recommendations – How can PARCS improve?

This research study has included a literature review of the area (Burrowes, 2010) and an explorative study on the impact of PARCS' current sessions. The following section presents a series of recommendations for PARCS based on all of the aspects of this study. The aim of these recommendations is to provide evidence-based guidance to PARCS on the development and improvement of its youth outreach service.

#### 1. Redevelop the sessions using a theory of change

The main recommendation from this study is that PARCS redevelops its youth outreach sessions placing a rape-/sexual assault-related theory of change at the centre of this work. The following section details the rationale behind this recommendation and provides suggestions as to how PARCS may integrate theory into its work.

The explorative nature of this study reflects the lack of a theory of change underpinning the youth outreach work currently conducted by PARCS. Whilst the current sessions have a similar content to work delivered by other agencies and demonstrate good practice in terms of the style of delivery, there is no overarching theory of change underpinning the content of the sessions. A theory of change is required to clarify what outcomes can be expected as a result of delivering the sessions. This in turn will enable an assessment of whether these outcomes have been achieved.

The current sessions aim to educate young people about the laws around consent, challenge some of the myths associated with rape and sexual assault, and inform young people about the counselling services offered at PARCS. What is currently unclear is what rape-related outcomes these will translate into. For example, is the suggestion that increasing awareness of the laws of consent will lead to a reduction in the incidence of rape or sexual assault?

It is suggested that the youth outreach sessions may target one or more of the following rape-related outcomes:

- Increased disclosure of previous or ongoing rape or sexual assault
- The prevention of rape or sexual assault
- Reduced impact of rape or sexual assault



The following section provides recommendations based on these different rape-related outcomes.

One obvious outcome of the session is that if any of the young people have been, or become, victims of rape or sexual assault they will be aware that there is somewhere in Portsmouth that they can go for specialist counselling. This is a very valuable outcome given the devastating effect that rape can have on a person (Morrison, Hardison, Matthew, & O'Neil, 2004). It is essential that young people know that should they, or their friends, become a victim of rape or sexual assault there is somewhere that they can go for support. If increased disclosure and self-referral is a desired outcome from the session the following recommendations are made:

- As 16 to 20 is the age bracket with the highest incidence of rape or sexual assault PARCS should consider conducting more outreach work with these young people. A significant number of young people of this age in the city may either not have had a PARCS session when they were at a local school, or were educated outside of the city and may therefore be unaware of the PARCS service.
- Given that most of the young people who attend PARCS sessions are 13 to 16, a greater emphasis on the disclosure of child sexual abuse (CSA), rather than on rape or sexual assault may be appropriate. The literature reviewed for this study indicates that most victims of CSA are under 12 at the time of the abuse (Barron & Topping, 2008). The literature also indicates that being a victim of previous abuse increases your risk of being a future victim of rape or sexual assault (Stern, 2010). Consequently, it is important that any young people who have experienced abuse in the past feel able to access support following the PARCS session.
- The current session should place more emphasis on encouraging victims to access support. For example, the session could explore more of the 'myths' which may prevent an individual from seeking support and provide guidance on how to support someone who discloses to you that they have been raped.
- General information on how to access sources of support in different geographical areas should also be provided so that young people who are raped once they have moved away from the area are able to find local resources.

If the prevention of rape is a desired outcome from the session the following recommendations are made:

- Consider the role that PARCS may play in the prevention of rape and sexual assault. Work in this area traditionally focuses on safety messages, however PARCS' work with victims may suggest that safety messages alone are insufficient for some individuals. For example, how is previous victimisation likely to impact on an individual's interpretation of their risk of sexual assault? Are these individuals likely to respond to traditional safety messages in the ways assumed by prevention interventions? PARCS has considerable knowledge and expertise on victims of rape and sexual assault and access to information on sexual offenders via reports from their victims. If this expertise is able to add a different voice to the traditional 'safety' message then this could be a valuable contribution to the field.

Should PARCS decide that the sessions should promote a traditional safety message then the following recommendations are made:

- Provide clear guidance on the circumstances under which the risk of rape or sexual assault is elevated. Specifically a greater emphasis is required on the impact of alcohol and the incidence of rape from a known perpetrator.
- Provide clear guidance on what participants may be able to do to reduce their risk, or the risk of their peers, of rape or sexual assault. This is a complex message to deliver without implying that the victim is in some way responsible for being sexually assaulted or raped.
- Provide clear guidance on what participants should do if they, or a friend, are raped or sexually assaulted.



Should PARCS decide that a reduction in the incidence of rape, and a reduction in the impact of rape form part of its desired outcomes from the youth outreach sessions then the 'bystander' approach (Banyard, et al., 2005) is recommended as a theoretical basis for the sessions. A brief summary of the bystander approach is presented in the accompanying literature review (Burrowes, 2010). The advantages of this approach for PARCS are:

- It provides guidance on 'what to do' as well as raising awareness of rape and sexual assault.
- It has clear personal relevance for all of the participants which may lead to increased engagement and retention of the material.
- It avoids treating male participants as potential perpetrators and thereby avoids alienating them.
- It encourages a 'community responsibility' approach to rape and sexual assault rather than focusing on the victims' responsibility to avoid harm.
- It has the greatest potential for impact due to:
  - The additional impact of rape-supportive beliefs being challenged by a peer in comparison to a criminal justice or health service professional;
  - The likely proximity of a victim or perpetrator's peers to any incidence of assault;
  - The likelihood of a victim choosing to disclose to a peer in the first instance.

## 2. Seek additional resources to expand the youth outreach service.

This project has identified a number of gaps in the current service provision to young people in Portsmouth. Should PARCS be able to secure funding it is recommended that it considers developing and expanding its youth outreach service to include:

- Additional work with young people to include follow-up/refresher sessions and to allow for time to cover all of the material required for the delivery of a 'bystander' session.
- More work with 16 to 24 year-olds.
- Specialist work with young people who are identified as being at greater risk from rape or sexual assault, including young people with learning difficulties and young people who have been excluded from school. PARCS should review the extent to which it currently manages to reach these groups of young people and assess whether this aspect of the youth outreach service needs to be expanded.
- The provision of training around child protection (CP) for school staff. Specifically training that: aims to increase awareness of the incidence of child sexual abuse (CSA), rape, and sexual assault amongst young people in Portsmouth; highlights the impact of CSA, rape, and sexual assault on the victim; emphasises the impact of CSA, rape, and sexual assault on a pupil's ability to learn at school; and encourages staff to see CP issues as part of their responsibility, ensuring that the child is not 'lost' within CP procedures.

## 3. Evaluate and publish

Both the literature review and data collection aspects of this study have highlighted the need for PARCS to be able to demonstrate the impact of its service, and publish the results in order to add to the body of published research available. A high-quality evaluation is only possible when there is a clear theory of change for the evaluation to test. Should PARCS decide to change the ways in which it works with young people, an evaluation study to assess the impact of the changes should be built in as part of these changes.



## 5. References

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*It made me think about how I would treat sex in a relationship. It can be something quite casual because that is the way that it is portrayed now. But now I realise that actually it is more important, and you shouldn't feel under pressure and stuff.*

(Focus group participant)

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