

GIRLS EDUCATIONAL AND MENTORING SERVICES [GEMS]

[Please note: the names of the four young women who participated on the panel have been changed in this transcription.]

RACHEL LLOYD: I want to thank my staff for coming out today. First of all, I'd just like to share really briefly with you about how GEMS got started and some of the principles that I utilized in founding GEMS. As you may have caught from my bio, I'm not originally from New York. My accent may be giving me away by this stage. I'm originally from England, grew up in Europe, where I experienced sexual exploitation as a young person, and eventually came to the U.S., originally as a missionary to work with adult women coming out of prostitution.

During my work at Rykers Island and the other correctional facilities, out on the streets at Hunts Point, I began to see a whole another population. I began to see girls in Rykers who would say they were 18, but were visibly not. I began to see girls on the streets. Older women would point out girls on the streets and they'd say: "I'm not ready to get out. I've been in the game a long time. But you've got to get this little girl out. She's like 13, 14." And I began to see girls that even though I was from a different culture and I'd grown up in a different country, but that we have many of the same things in common. We have many of the same factors that had led us into sexual exploitation. And we needed the same things in order for us to be able to get out.

So in January of '99, I founded GEMS, originally on my kitchen table, and as the story goes, with a borrowed computer and \$30. Originally I was just going out into the facilities and working with young women, one on one. I used to put girls on my couch when I had nowhere else for them to go. I was working with other programs, trying to find them referrals. But I knew very clearly in my heart that we needed a very specific place for a very specific issue. That the issue of sexual exploitation, although in the last or so has begun to get some type of media attention and some type of social recognition. Before five years ago, it was really something that wasn't discussed. And if it was discussed, it was associated with so many stereotypes and misconceptions that it was hard even for social service providers and clinical workers to really be able to identify the issues that the young women were facing.

So I founded GEMS based on several principles. And these were things that kind of came from a gut reaction of knowing what didn't work for me. Throughout the years I saw psychiatrists and workers and social workers and I had people coming to my house when I was turned in from school. And I was sent to different programs. And nothing seemed to really kind of work. In fact, I spiralled further and further out of control.

And then the things that did work for me. And for me it was actually a church home, where

people not only provided me with spiritual guidance and love but were able to give me the practical things that I needed; provided strong female role models for me, to be able to have a mother type figure that I'd never had. They were able to give me housing and a job and clothes and the very basic necessities. And through that I began to see that I had other skills and other abilities and other talents that I never thought I had. I began to see a whole new me. And through that I decided I wanted to give back to those girls that I remembered being like.

So throughout the evolution of GEMS and stuff that just kind of came from my gut and knowing what I knew internally, I began to look to other program models. And I found six things that I'm just going to share very briefly before the young women introduce themselves. And these are the six principles that we talk about in GEMS, in terms of best practice models. These are six principles that are taken from a study that was done by the Three Guineas Fund in the last couple of years of about 15 to 20 young women's programs throughout the nation.

So I'm going to go through these really quickly. And then obviously if you have questions afterwards, we can talk about that. Number one: gender specific space. And I know many of you work in programs or provide services where there's a mixed gender space. But we've found it's so important to have a specific space. Even if it's a space within a space, for the young women to be able to be young women and to have the ability to feel free from pressure from young men, to feel free from having to perform or impress or whatever. That they have that very girl-friendly space. And we tried our best to make our space very girl-friendly. I always complain that there's way too much estrogen in the program. [LAUGHTER] I mean, that really is something that we've stressed very hard.

Number two, and I can't stress this enough. I do have to say with my staff here how much I appreciate the fact that we have strong staff-girl relationships and how that is such a key element of the program. When I first started doing outreach and going out there and working with the young women, I didn't have a job developer. I didn't have a transitional house. I had my own couch. I didn't have a great referral bank or resources or programs. But what I did have was me. And I gave me. And I gave me a hundred and ten percent at all times. That was really what made the difference. And obviously we've veered away in some sense from a clinical approach. We have some staff who have been sexually exploited. We have some who haven't. But we've been very careful to identify staff who not only with the professional and clinical skills that they bring, have a heart reaction to this issue, have something in them that really connects to the issue, and that they're able to share that with young women.

And we've found that adolescents respond so well to keeping it real, to being able to share of yourself, to being able to give of you; and so that they feel safe to give back of themselves. So I can't stress how strongly, how much emphasis we put on the relationships between the girls and the staff.

And that's what keeps them calling at three o'clock in the morning. It's not jewelry class, it's not photography. And those are great additions. But it's the relationship, the family involvement that they feel that they have with the staff member.

Holistic programming. We've been very fortunate to work with Mount Sinai, to be able to provide medical and mental health services. We also provide recreational, educational activities. We try to provide a whole array for whatever you're interested in. And we've had girls come and say: "Well, I want to do cosmetology." Fine. I'm going to track down a cosmetology teacher. I've got girls who want to do dance. Great. We're going to find a dance theater. We've tried to really incorporate as many things into the program as possible, so that we're not just treating the girls, A, from a victim perspective, but we're looking from a strength-based perspective as well, and trying to draw out talents and skills that may have gone unnoticed.

Number four, family involvement. This has been a challenge. And I won't say that this has been one of the easiest things that we've done. But really trying to recognize that the young women are part of a family unit and keep them, the families as involved as possible, training the families on what the issue of sexual exploitation really is, why their daughter went through what she did, why she's going through some of the reactions or PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] or whatever that she's going through now. And I think we've found that when the families become educated, it builds better communication between the child and the caregiver.

Five, culturally relevant activities and models. We know our population. We know our population well. We know who we're serving. We've tried to provide not just staff but activities and programs in the curriculum that match them, developmentally, culturally, that respond to the things that they're interested in.

And number six, authentic young ownership and leadership. Sometimes this is a concept that gets bandied around a lot. And we're into like peer leadership and peer involvement. But what does that really mean? Do we really take notice of what the young people want to see? Do we really listen to their views? Do we really allow them to direct the programming and the policies to actually serve and affect them?

So at GEMS we do our best to do that. We have a youth collective that meets once a month. And they take their minutes and they meet with me afterwards and they present their requests, their recommendations, the things they don't like. And we do our best to alter the program, to adjust the program. And we've found that they are honestly much better sometimes at being able to kind of weed out what's working and what's not. They're part of all the interviews that we do. Every person that we call back for a second interview, they have to meet with like four or five of the girls. The girls write their own questions, they ask their own questions. And we've found again that's an important part. If a

worker's going to be coming on board and working one on one with the young women, the young women should be able to choose and say: "Nah, she's fake." And they will say: "Nah, she's fake."
[LAUGHTER]

And we've found that they've been really on point as well, in terms of being able to identify those things. We've developed a whole youth leadership curriculum. So that we don't only provide activities and fun and recreation and education. But we have a whole component where the girls begin to learn about what sexual exploitation is internationally, nationally; what youth incarceration is about; what social issues affect their community. And in doing so, I believe that begins to empower them. And then they're given the skills in terms of youth organizing, public speaking, working with the media, and how they can implement those. So that you begin to see yourself, and for many of our girls, they come into the program feeling like: "This happened to me. I was a victim. And I don't know why this happened to me. And I must be a bad person."

And then when they can see it in a bigger picture, that sexual exploitation is actually an international problem, that there are many forces and social issues affecting you. That there were reasons why you were at risk. And now because of your experiences, your experiences have actually made you an expert and your pain can actually be turned around and be made into your passion. And you can utilize those things to assist and reach out to your peers.

So those again are a very quick run down of the six principles that we use in GEMS. I'm going to step back now. I've said my little piece. And I'd like to start off with Jennifer. Our young women, I just have to say, I'm just very proud of the young women, just for coming out today. You know, for those of you sitting in the audience, to come and sit on this panel, there's a whole lot of you out here. And I'm just really proud that they're taking the time to be able to share their experiences with you today. [APPLAUSE]

JENNIFER: Hello. My name is Jennifer. I'm 17. Okay. I was born in Jamaica and I moved here when I was 13 years old. Growing up for me was a lot of pain. I don't know how to explain it. It was just a lot of pain. I went through being abused by my father, cousins, close family and friends, uncles, everybody. I felt like I was being taken advantage of like every day, all day. It was nonstop. I've been going to counseling for this since I was 10. And all they ever did for me was make me angrier. And I felt like going to counseling, was this person trying to get in my business and just talking, talking all this stuff I do not want to hear and it's not helping me.

But then when I got here, I was 13. I got recommended to GEMS when I was 15. I had got incarcerated for fighting, anger problems. And I started out like I came here. But every time I met with my counselor, instead of prying into my business, she actually gave me that space to make me feel comfortable. And she made me at my own pace, like put my trust in her and talk to her at my own

level. I was able to feel like I was home. I felt like home. And she has made me realize how much I'm worth, how much life is worth. She showed me things I've never seen. She's done a lot.

Youth leadership is my favorite of all the groups that GEMS has provided us with. Because it teaches me about sexual exploitation and it also makes me feel empowered. Because through youth leadership, I feel like the future I can change. It teaches you different skills, like this is one of them I'm learning. And this is actually getting fun. [LAUGHTER] [APPLAUSE]

It has been a great experience. It is a huge difference from what I'm used to, a very big difference. I feel like GEMS helped me in ways where they've showed me what are my talents, which is my favorite—poetry. And through my poetry I've been able to reach out to the world, whether it be kids, females, males, whatever. I've been able to do that through GEMS. They've encouraged me. And whenever I did something wrong, yes, they did get down on me and tell me: "Oh, that's wrong," and all that. And yes, I might pout when I get mad. But when you really think about it, that's what we as young people need; we need role models. And that's what GEMS is for me, a role model.

And GEMS is not a program for me. It is like home. I love going there. I'd rather be there than home actually. I'm serious. If I could sleep there, I would. It's like that. GEMS do the things where they follow your every moves. [LAUGHTER] Yeah, they do. If you go to school—if you cut school, they know. They know. You didn't go to church, they probably know too. Yes. It's like mommy, mommy's right there telling you what to do and what not to do. Not dictating to you, but like it's more for giving you guidance. It's like that backboard. So if you fall, they're like right there to hold you back up and push you forward. A lot of young people don't have that, and that's what we need. Yes, thank you, I never got to thank you. Thank you, Rachel. Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

GEMS has also helped us to organize ourselves. And they help us to see through ourselves and beyond the eyes of the world. So we don't see ourselves as what that person say about what we are. They help us to look deeper inside. They make you reflect. Whenever you have a counseling session, it's like when you're finished; you want to sit down and wonder: Who am I? Where am I going? And stuff like that. They make you think about things like that. Where maybe if I wasn't with them, I wouldn't be thinking about that. I'd be worrying about the party tomorrow night or something like that. But that's what they do. And it's a great feeling to know who you are and where you're going and stuff like that. It's really a great feeling.

I feel like I could go on forever and ever. And I'm not going to. In my opinion, I think GEMS aim is to stop, educate, and empower young ladies about the issues of sexual exploitation. They help you find yourself and help you accept and believe in yourself, that old hidden you. They help you become the future that you are supposed to become; the future that your children and my children and their children's children will always look up to in the future, that will make this world brighter and better. I

think that's it. Thank you. [APPLAUSE]

ANNIE: Hi. My name is Annie. I'm a member at GEMS. I'm 16. I've been there since June. I think GEMS has helped me in a lot of ways, more than one, more than I can actually say. I've been incarcerated and I was there for prostitution. I was recommended to GEMS by my lawyer. And to tell you the truth, when I first got to GEMS, I didn't want to be there. I looked around and it was like: "These are a bunch of cornballs. I don't want to be here with those." [LAUGHTER]

But then I actually sat down and realized that a lot of staff at GEMS has been through some of the issues that we've been through, has been sexually exploited or been through another issue that have been through. So it was like that's a nonjudgmental space and that's something I needed. Because in my house, that's not what we get. It's like a Christian thing and they judge you by everything you did in your past. And I needed somebody not to judge me; somebody to talk to me, like, everybody makes mistakes; to tell me you know it's going to be okay and I'm better than that. And that's what GEMS did for me.

When I got pregnant with my son, my family wasn't really there helping me. But GEMS helped me a lot. They helped me with support, as being a mother. They helped me take care of my son in a lot of different ways. Well, you could say they actually raised my son with me. He's the GEMS baby. [LAUGHTER] Like Jennifer say, you know, I'd rather be at GEMS than be at home. GEMS is a space where I could be myself. I don't have to impress anybody. I don't have to act different in front of nobody. Because it's like, they don't judge me on things that I do or things that I have done in the past. They always uplift me if I do something good at school or I do something good; it's like: "Oh, you did good," or "Oh, it's this and that." And I feel good that when I come in, I could get a hug; something that I can get from my counselor that I can't get from my own mother. Like they say, sometimes God gives you an extra set of people to replace as your family. And I guess that's what he did for me with GEMS. Because that's like my family right there. Because I can come in and I can tell my counselor anything because I feel that much trust in her and that much courage. I could sit down and tell her anything, no matter what it was. And I know that our business is our business. It's not going to go back—no offense—and tell Rachel or to tell other people. [LAUGHTER] And it won't get out outside and people won't know about my business and make me feel bad. And my counselor always uplifts my spirit.

GEMS always do things for us. Like Rachel said, she goes out of her way to help us find groups and activities. We have mental health with the counseling. And she helps us a lot. Like because when I came to GEMS, I felt that I had a low self-esteem. It's like I didn't care about the world. I didn't care about myself. I felt I had to love a man to love myself, for him to love me. And when I came to GEMS they taught me, I had to love myself first before I can have anybody else love

me. And that's what I needed. I needed somebody to bring up my self-esteem because I had real low self-esteem. "Like, all right, I'm going to do this because maybe if this guy sleep with me, then that's love." That's how I figured it.

And GEMS taught me: That's not love. Love is loving yourself, taking care of yourself, having respect for yourself as young women. And being sexually exploited is not your fault. It happens. And sometimes it happens to the wrong people for all the wrong reasons. And things happen. But everybody makes mistakes, everybody's human. And you could overcome that, you're better than that. So I want to thank GEMS for helping me. [APPLAUSE]

CHRISTINE: I'm Christine. I'm 17 years old. I started going to GEMS in September of last year. By me going there, I was incarcerated just like everybody else up here— [LAUGHTER] I was recommended by a police officer. The first time I came here, I did not want to come. I wasn't mandated and nothing like that. So I did not want to come. I didn't want to be here. I did not want to be around a bunch of girls. I didn't like them.

Around that time that I started coming, I had a boyfriend or whatever, quote/unquote, supposed to be my boyfriend; turned into the pimp that wanted to kill me. And I got arrested again. So then finally I was like: It's not worth losing my life over being out on the streets or whatever, being in the different pimping. And then I just one day woke up and it was like: "I'm going to go, I'm going to go, I'm going to do this." So it was like: Forget it. I got up and did what I had to do to get my life back together.

It's not easy coming out of prostitution after five years. GEMS has helped me come over it. They put me back in school. They're helping me with job training. We have all that. And my counselor is like my second best friend. Without her I don't think that I'd be doing what I'm doing now: going to school, getting ready to get a job, and trying to work it out with my family, which is not easy right now.

GEMS, Rachel, I love them all. I wouldn't be here without him because this is not easy. It's not easy to this day. Thank you, GEMS. I love you all. [APPLAUSE]

NATALIE: Good afternoon. My name is Natalie. I'm 19. I have a three-year-old daughter. I'm originally from Jamaica. I'm going to tell you all my story. I came here when I was about one-and-a-half, two years old. My mother started dating her boyfriend, as you could call it. A couple of years down the line, he started doing drugs. One thing led to another. We started getting abused. I got sexually assaulted when I was five by my stepfather.

Eventually I got taken away by ACS [Administration for Children's Services] or BCW [Bureau of Child Welfare] back then, and started living with my grandmother. I returned home to live with my mother when I was 12. I was raped by gang activity when I was 12. When I was 15, I had my daughter—still in high school. A friend of mine was dancing at the time. So my baby's father left me. I had

no other ways of getting any money, besides my parents. And I started to go dancing. One thing led to another. I started dancing with this girl who had a pimp, and that was my pimp. After a while he sold me to another pimp. So one thing led to another once again. I got locked up for charges—I'd rather not say, but charges, very serious charges.

And I had met Rachel when I was in jail. But the judge of course did not let me go to her program. They wanted to send me to another program. After a while he started seeing that I was not complying with the other program and started messing up there, started doing drugs at that program; and it was supposed to be helping me but it wasn't helping me. After a while I started dancing again, for the same dough. Okay.

So one thing led to another and I ended up at GEMS. I started going, then I stopped. Started going again. Ended up getting a job there. And then my term was over, so I decided to go back to school. And right now I'm currently in school, taking care of my daughter and handling my business as a young woman.

GEMS, what can I say about GEMS that they haven't already said? Okay. My counselor. She's the greatest. I mean, the things you can't talk to your parents about, I could talk to my counselor about. And I don't have to worry about getting called bad names, you know, without nobody calling me names at all. I could tell them how I feel for the day, what my goals are, what I want to achieve; and they'll help me achieve it. But I have to put my foot forward in order for them to help me.

We have a group to help me with my problem. Well, it's not my problem—the problem in general. We talk about what we did back then and how we decided to change or whatever the case may be. We have group to help me to like recover on my issues. I'm nervous, so please excuse me. The name of the group is Rachel's group, if you're all curious. So that's it. [APPLAUSE]

RACHEL LLOYD: Again, I just really want to say a big thanks. I didn't prep them to sound like a commercial for GEMS. [LAUGHTER] I really didn't. No, I mean, what we wanted to talk about was A, for them to share their stories, and then B, to talk about the ability of certain programs to be able to work with young women who are considered like at risk or high risk or unredeemable; as our girls have often been called. So hopefully that gave you just kind of a brief overview of some of the things that we do with the young women.

I'd like to open it up for questions now from the audience.

QUESTION: My first comment is to Rachel. This is going to sound a little New Age. But I really believe that there are angels on earth and I think you're one of those angels. [APPLAUSE] May a higher power bless you and keep up the good work. And my request is to the young lady in the blue, if you have a little poem, one that you can share with the audience? [APPLAUSE] Jennifer.

RACHEL LLOYD: You know what? We'll give you a minute, Jennifer to think, and then we'll come back. All right? Any more questions?

QUESTION: I don't have a question. I just needed to make a statement to all of the young ladies. You have to got to know and walk out of here knowing that y'all are phenomenal. [APPLAUSE] [STANDING OVATION]

QUESTION: My question is, since they are doing so well, I'm wondering what kind of male's role play in their life? Since there are some negative component in their development, is there any program or funding research or institute or program to enrich their full life development for future to re-establish their full life as a person?

RACHEL LLOYD: To address the male side of it, like I said, we have a gender specific space. And I feel like at the stage the young women are at, that's essential for their recovery. What we've learned is that young women will prefer to work with males initially. They're not really wanting to have a female case worker or counselor. They'd much rather have a male, because that's what they're used to and that's what they know kind of how to work. So when we take that out and it kind of forces them to have to deal with adult women, we find that that's really beneficial.

I mean, obviously there comes a point for young women—and we're not a male bashing program by any stretch of the imagination, we teach the girls about getting some power back. And like the video they did for the Johns School, was an important part of that; where they addressed the men or men who go out and solicit prostitutes. They go to address them on tape and really speak their real feelings. But we were just having this conversation in the office yesterday, because we're developing a video project with an agency that has males involved; and we talking about, you know, and sometimes the girls are like: "I don't know if I want guys to hear the story." But we were talking about the benefits of being able to include males, healthy males who want to be part of the issue and help and share in their healing process. So I think it's something that's important but I think it has to be done in small doses and at the stage where young women are ready for that.

And we've also started to develop a training program for young men and male workers who work with at risk young women; so that they can A, be aware of their own issues about working with young women. And we have that too as women. Young women is always the population that no one wants to work with. And a lot of stuff gets said about working with high risk young women. But also addressing young boys, who may grow up one day to be perpetrators of violence against young women; and beginning to address those issues at an early age and look at sexual exploitation from another tack. So we're trying to do what we can on both sides of the fence. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: Hello, beautiful women. My name is Maria Santiago and I work for the Urban Justice Center, family violence project. But more importantly, even in that, I am also a member of VOW, which is Voices of Women. We are survivors of domestic violence. I want to say to you that I also had a baby at 16. You are me and I am you. But I want to say this to you that all of the bad experiences that I had, I mean, I came from a family, it was not uncommon for my father to chase my mom with a knife. I went on to have a child at 16. My child was sexually abused by a partner that came into my life. But I think that I want to leave on a positive note and say to you that: Yes, life goes on and can go on and can be a positive experience for you. Today, I'm a college graduate and I educate and I train workers, some of them who are in this room today.

And I want to say this also, because I'm working on a list. I want to formulate a list of teen moms who are very successful. And just to mention one. Keep in mind that Maya Angelou was a teen mom. And that Maya Angelou had many, many trials and many tribulations that she had to overcome to be the phenomenal woman that she is today. And I think my last question is—because it is important that they come into contact with positive role models, so I would love to collaborate with you and voices of women; so that we can have conversations and we can mentor each other. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: Good afternoon, panel. My name is Marie Oriles. I feel thrilled to say something to you young ladies and even the audience. Because some of us who probably grew up with our parents, we take them for granted. Some of us who have children, adults here who have children, we take our children, we take our connection, communication with our children for granted. And to me, since English is really not my language, praise you all, commend you is not the word that I'm looking for to express to you; to see how you try to turn your life around. It teaches us a lesson, where there is strength in any underlying conditions and this is what you're doing. I think that what you teach the audience is one of the most powerful psychology or educational tools for us to take back to where we're going. Because as a health educator and a case planner, I'm dealing with so many young children; and sometimes who said to me: "Marie, I never know what it look like to have a mother or to have somebody who ever tell me I love you." And for Rachel, I really feel like running to you and to give you a hug, support you to continue. And I wish all of you more success in what you're doing. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: Listen, I have one thing to say to you all. You are all built from a people whose cornerstone for their entire existence was resiliency. If you get a chance, go to the Schoenberg. Look yourselves up and see where you came from and it will not be such a big surprise to you why you are

where you are now and where you're going to go. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: Hi. I'll make this short. I just want to express again how incredible it is to see all these young women sitting here with the courage to open up to all these people and to thank you. My question goes out to any of the girls who want to answer this question. I have actually two quick questions. But they're big questions.

I work in a clinic where we help young women like yourselves, who have been through similar experiences that you have been through; specifically domestic violence, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, very little family support. It's an outpatient clinic, where they come in for therapy, for group therapy. If you had any suggestions for us about how we could motivate the girls to come in more? And also it seems to me that the factor of the relationship with your counselor has been the key to what all of you have said is your incredible feeling of resiliency. Is that true? Is that the main thing that has helped you?

RACHEL LLOYD: Yes, it is true and all. But you got to make the girls feel like their counselor could be their friend. Like they have somebody to talk to, they could trust; somebody that's not going to judge them on what they do or what they have done in their past. And somebody that can keep them confidential. Because a lot of girls, that's what they're worried about, confidentiality: "Like, if I tell her, everybody's going to know my business ..." You got to let them know this is a safe environment. What you come in here is what you leave with. None of your business will get out to everybody. We're here to help you. Let them know that you're their friend, that you're there for them. Like GEMS, even your counselors, you could give your girls your home number or your cell number or something, just so they could be able to reach you when they're in trouble. At 3 o'clock at night when they can't sleep or they're stuck somewhere, they could be able to call you and even talk; just to talk or just to say hello. Just hear somebody talk to them. Because maybe they don't get that at home or where they're at. Just to walk in and give them a hug, that will make that girl's whole day go better. Just for that hug. Because maybe they don't get that. Just that hug or just to say: "I'm proud of you, you're doing good in school. Keep up the good grades," and stuff like that. Just to upbring their spirit and uplift them, you'll be good. Then your program will be successful. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: I have a question. But I want to start by saying something. Obviously we all think you are wonderful. I'm going to challenge the statement about Rachel being an angel though. And not because I don't think she is, I guess I kind of do too. But I'm going to challenge it anyway because what I heard these girls say were things like: "When we're there, they let me do poetry. They help me see a future and think about who I am. People tell me when I did something good. They're nonjudg-

mental, I can tell my counselor anything. They help me get back in school. No one calls me bad names. I have to put my foot forward in order to get help. People keep it real.”

This is not the realm of angels, folks. This is right here and now. This is reality. So my question is: What can people in this audience do? How can we get more information about GEMS? How can we help GEMS? What do you need from all of the real people who are all the angels here?

QUESTION: Do you have a web site?

RACHEL LLOYD: Yes: www.gems-girls.org.

QUESTION: Good afternoon. My name is Natania Bell. I'm a social worker at Paladia Project Return. I came here today because I do women's empowerment groups. And I think that in listening to all you phenomenal women, that you're showing me how to go back and empower the clients that I work with at my shelter. And I also am a member of VOW as well, and I also encourage you to come to VOW meetings. Because this is about sisterhood.

But the one positive message I will leave you with is: Get a journal and write your stories in it. And also each and every morning when you get up, my phenomenal women, look in the mirror and tell yourself three positive things each and every day. And this is where the healing process starts with. And good luck and God bless you. [APPLAUSE]

RACHEL LLOYD: Thank you. Before we have any more questions, Jennifer is going to do her poem.

JENNIFER: Actually, this is a part of a poem that I wrote, because I don't remember the whole thing. So I just jot down what I remembered. And it's titled Parents: "And all I ask is your support to love me and guide me, to keep and watch over me. To appreciate me and to tell me of my worth. To celebrate the victory of my birth. And when I'm weak, you'll be strong. And if I stop, you'll push me along. And when I cry, you cry with me. For the purpose of life, you'll try with me. And when you live, you live your life for me. And if I forget, you remind me that I'm the best thing there could ever be." [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: That was phenomenal. And I would like to have that up in our clinic.

RACHEL LLOYD: We'll do so with the whole poem. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: Again, I'd like to just applaud you for being here and all of the courage that you've displayed. And Rachel, how are you doing? You're doing great work. As a son and as a brother and as a father, it's very painful for me to hear the role that men have played in traumatizing all of you

on the stage. And I think I really want to just speak to the men in the audience because it's time for us to check ourselves. It really is. [APPLAUSE]

We are moving into a new millennium and it's time for us to get together to kind of do the same things in terms of what we're seeing in terms of sisterhood and the healing energy of women; and to begin to get together as men and talk about the brotherhood and the healing energy of men and how we can actualize that in our lives and the lives of our families and our communities. And I think that we all as men need to walk out of here today, look at ourselves and look at other men and see how we can get together with them to have some healthy discussion about how we can turn this around. [APPLAUSE]

QUESTION: I just also want to pay tribute to all of you. You're really incredible. My question is: How much do you reach out? Do you provide leadership? Do you provide a new way of going into the community and an expanded community? Because I suggest to you there lots and lots and lots of other young women and young men who are really in similar positions. But it's a big secret. No one really knows. And they have nowhere to go and they have no help.

RACHEL LLOYD: At the moment we do have people going into facilities and talking to the young ladies there. And we do have pen pals, where us the girls write to the ladies on Rykers and tell them our stories and we communicate from there. So when they come home from jail, they could come visit. And if they like it, they come and participate in the program. We also have youth leadership, where it's preparing the girls at GEMS to go out and communicate with the other girls on the street and have them come to our program and speak to us and see how they like it. And if they like it, they can join. That's how it goes.

QUESTION: Good afternoon. My name is Anita Straus and I administer a program of an after school initiative that encompasses five sites, from kindergarten through high school. And I have a difficult question to ask you. You were in school. Weren't there any opportunities that adults in your lives had to help you before your pain drew you into the kinds of situations that you admirably related to us? Do you have any guidelines for me that I can help my staff look for things in our participants? Or ways that might have steered you into a different direction had there been someone to see what was happening?

RESPONDENT FROM GEMS: I felt like if my school at the time, before I had done everything I done, had seen the signs, like me not coming to school for a while; maybe somebody would have called my house or a teacher had just took five minutes out of her day to come by to see why I wasn't in school or sit down and talk with my parents. Or find out why my parents wasn't coming to open

school night when we had it. Or find out why my parents didn't know about my report card or none of that? To see that I was coming in every day, I was depressed or see me hanging around nothing but boys and not girls, always fighting with girls and being in a boy's face. If they had seen that and maybe a counselor would have come and talked to me about that, then maybe I'd have grew up better. And maybe if she'd asked me: Why do I feel the things that I do? Where's my father? Ask me questions that I needed to hear or tell me things that I needed to hear. Maybe I wouldn't have ended up in a situation I was in. Maybe I'd have been better. Maybe I'd have been in college right now. Maybe I wouldn't have had my son, even though I thank God for him. But maybe I wouldn't have had him. Maybe I'd have had a normal life, like normal children. I didn't have that life. My childhood was taken away from me. And now I'm a mother at 16. And I don't feel that's right. I should be a 16-year-old in a school, doing all the things that I should be doing; instead of I have to watch my child. I have to think about things that was in my past. If only that one person, that one teacher—it didn't have to be two, three; if that one teacher had just came out and asked me that one question, then maybe that'd have made my day better and my life better.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I'll help them look for that.

QUESTION: [INAUDIBLE]

RACHEL LLOYD: I'll say that we've tried very hard to work with the Board of Ed [New York City Board of Education]. I don't know if anybody's here from the Board of Ed today. We've tried very hard to work with the Board of Ed and really not had too much success at all. And particularly when we're going in and we're talking about sexual exploitation. We're not talking about stranger danger. Do you know what I mean? And even that took long enough to get into the schools. But I mean, we're talking about issues that people are very uncomfortable about. There are schools in our area, we're on 149th between Seventh and Eighth [Avenues]; there are schools in our area that we know girls are being exploited from. And they'll say: "Oh, well, we don't have that problem." "Well, you have 2,000 kids in your school and my staff say that you do." But trying to get people to kind of recognize it ... We've been able a couple of times to go in, like under the guise of something else. And this has to be talked about. We need to begin to recognize that this is an issue that many, many adolescents are involved in.

QUESTION: Hello. My name is Gladys. I work with the educational alliance on the Lower East Side. And I've been working with adolescents for more than 10 years now. I started out with ... Sweeps, with the local stationhouses within my community. And as a caseworker riding around with youth officers, the adolescents were more open to see a person that was not a police officer

approaching them and giving them information. That's one.

Two, I had learned doing that that a lot of the parents, because of their cultural backgrounds, we are taught not to tell anyone what happens behind our closed doors. So I am presently also working still with adolescents and this is constantly brought up to me. How do we break that? I don't know. I'm trying to figure out a way myself. If anybody has an answer? But that is a tradition that is cultural, that's going to keep on going unless we break it somehow.

And the young lady said something about the Board of Ed. I had been taken off from working with the youth officer. Apparently one of the other organization's workers presented themselves at a home visit as a police officer. So we're not allowed to do that no more. So now I'm in the school. The Board of Ed will help you out, as long as you don't say you're going in there to talk about sex. [LAUGHTER] Seriously. I report to five schools within the local area. And we do individual counseling within the schools, after school hours. And we are reaching out to kids within the school system. You have to meet with the principals within each school in the area that you want to work with.

QUESTION: Hello. My name is Cisco. I work for Mount Sinai's SPEEK [Sinai Peers Encouraging Empowerment through Knowledge] peer education program. [APPLAUSE] Thank you. I want to know, have you ever encountered any young males who have been through the same things you guys have been through who want to be a part of your program? Because me, I teach or actually relate to a lot of young people who I speak to. So I want to know, are there any males who have been through the same thing you've been through, who would like to speak to you guys in general on how they could overcome their situations?

RACHEL LLOYD: We get very, very few young men who come to the program. Maybe one a year, honestly. I mean, it's that low. And we generally refer to an organization called Green Chimneys, that works with young men who've been sexually exploited. So if anybody wants to use that as a resource. I would say that one of the major differences is that as much as female prostitution is taboo, it's still very socially acceptable. It's something that we say: "Well, you know, men have needs and they're going to be out there anyway." With male prostitution, male sexual exploitation is very, very underground. It's very hidden. You know, you got homophobia and a whole bunch of other stuff wrapped up in that as well. So A, when boys go into facilities, they won't, as much as the girls won't admit they're in for prostitution; the boys would rather die than admit that's what they're in for. So it's really, really hard to even get a pinpoint. And then the girls' issues tend to be very different. Girls tend to be pimped. I would say 99.9 percent of the girls that we work with have been involved with pimps pretty heavily. Boys tend to work in groups. So there are different kind of emotional and psychological dynamics going on. But Green Chimneys is one agency that I know that works pretty well with young

men who have been sexually exploited.

QUESTION: My name is Dr. Anabel Bejarano. And I'm a clinical psychologist here at Mount Sinai, the child and family support program. And my question is to the girls. The child and family support program treats boys and girls who have been sexually or physically abused or witnessed domestic violence or other forms of trauma. It's a pretty new program. And as the person who provides therapy for them, I've been thinking throughout your presentation, you've mentioned you were seen by different counselors, nothing seemed to work. And I was wondering if you think back now and when you were between the ages of let's say five and 10 and you were already having problems within your family: what do you think would have worked if you were taken to a counselor, if it was one on one treatment, what do you think would have been helpful, thinking back now? You know, in terms of their approach with you?

RACHEL LLOYD: Them not being judgmental about ... all right, they'll just say things like: "All right, everybody has some problems. Life goes on. Let's go." Or some psychiatrist be that up tight, like: "Well, I just get paid. You're going to pay me anyway. So speak your problems." And they just sit there like, okay, it goes through one ear and out the other. They don't say anything back. And after the session it's like: "Okay, well, I got [\$600] in my pocket. That was an hour. All right. Move on." Maybe if they'd have sat down and took just that little extra time that you ain't paid for; you may pay for that hour, but what if they took that extra hour and a half to sit down and really find out what is the root of the problem. Like how all this started. Like who started it and what is the problem. Then maybe if you had that one session and it continued on, then maybe we wouldn't have had the problems we had today. Or if they'd have brung in like the cause of our problems, maybe our parents, our godparents, whoever it may be and we all had that group counseling after we had that one session; then maybe we all could have worked out our problems and we all would have been fine. We wouldn't have all went out there and it's like: "All right, so what?" To get that counselor, you know, she don't care anyway. If that counselor just took that extra time or maybe even called. You don't even got to see her, just call. You have numbers. I'm pretty sure you have a problem list. So just call. Just like: "Hi, I just want to check in on your day." Like I said before, they'd make a person's whole life better, a whole day better. And I would say, having seen multiple, multiple psychiatrists growing up, being hospitalized four times for suicide attempts and seeing just a variety of different people who I just had absolutely no patience for at all. And this goes very much against, and now having gone to school and kind of done the psychology degree and da da da; I know it goes very much against like our clinical perspective. But having somebody who said: "You know what? I didn't get along with my mom either when I was growing up." But these are some of the tactics that I utilize. And for a lot of our kids, we can't

change the circumstances that they may be in. If they're not in a physically, sexually abusive home, it may not be the best thing for them to be pulled out of the home. Maybe they do need to stay at home. Maybe that's the only option. So we can't teach them to leave. But we can teach them resiliency in that situation, how to hide part of yourself in yourself. How to know that no matter what names you're called or whether your mom's drunk one night or whatever; that there's a part inside of you that's going to go on. To know as an adolescent that life is very temporary. What you're going through, this too shall pass. As adolescents, it's very hard to feel like that. You feel like this is forever. Twenty-one seems such a long way away. Twenty-five is absolutely ancient. [LAUGHTER] That's true. Between 16 and 18, yes, you may have to stay living in your mother's house for the next two years. Yes, she may treat you terrible. But you know what? In the grand scheme of your whole life, this will be just a portion. This is not who you are. This is not forever. And I think when we use our own experiences, and you don't have to have been through sexual exploitation. I get people coming up to me after conferences all the time and it really annoys me: "Oh, I wish I'd had your experience." "No, you don't." [LAUGHTER] Because if you say that to me, obviously you're missing something. And obviously you don't understand what I really went through. Because I may have a suit on today, but that's not what's inside of me. The scars are still here. So you don't wish you went through what I went through, because I still have to deal with the emotional nightmares behind that.

But you have been through pain. And you have suffered something in your life. And you have grieved or you have lost someone or you have felt insecure. You have struggled with your self-esteem. Or you have experienced the break up of a painful relationship. Whatever, you have experiences in you. And they may not be as dramatic, but they're real. And that's what adolescents relate to. If you can take some of that, and that doesn't mean complete, full disclosure. I know that goes against what everybody likes. [LAUGHTER] But if you can take just the feelings. "Yes, I remember feeling hopeless and helpless and desperate and abandoned and without worth. I know what that feels like and I know that when I was able to work through it, and these are some of the tactics I used. And now I feel much better and I can look back and see that." So utilize what you have inside of you.

You know, listening to the girls today, it reminds me of the commercials that we see, the drug commercials. And it says: Ask questions, ask questions. And that's really what they're saying and those commercials may come across a little corny. And they're a lot better than "this is your brain on drugs" commercials, but it's true. [LAUGHTER] They want you to ask questions. And Annie always gets on me for lecturing. And she kind of hurt my feelings one day because she was: "Oh, you're always lecturing, you always lecture." And I was like: "Hey, man, I thought I was an inspirational speaker or whatever. I didn't realize it was coming across as a lecture." [LAUGHTER] And she said: "You know what? I like it when you lecture, because I wish my family did that. And I appreciate it when

you lecture me. And it gets on my nerves but it's because I know you love me that you do it." So don't be afraid to give of yourself and be a mommy, be an older sister, be a grandparent. And we've lost a lot of that. And we've become so clinical and so removed and so careful and cautious— [APPLAUSE] I'm going to wrap up here because I feel myself getting a little emotional. But again, we just really want to thank you. Our number: 212-926-8089. If you want to volunteer, if you want to write a check to support these young women's education. I'm serious, whatever you want to do. If you want to volunteer your time, if you have skills, talents, you want to be a mentor or whatever. If you want to tutor, do homework help, GED help, whatever you want to do. If you want to be involved—they're telling me, like: "Oh, the teachers is what we need right now. We need a dance teacher." You can look on our listing on the web. But if you really want to be a part of what's going on. Or if you want us to come out to your agency and do very specialized staff trainings, we do that. We're good at it. We know what we're talking about on the issue of sexual exploitation. If you want to come out and have some of our girls come out and speak to your youth about the issue, we'll do that too. So I hope that you've enjoyed the presentation. [APPLAUSE] Our counselors: Jasmine, Delaree ... [APPLAUSE]

