

Young Women's Reactions to Using the "My Game Plan" Tool  
at the Logis Rose Virginie Women's Residential Centre in Montreal

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*The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author  
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by

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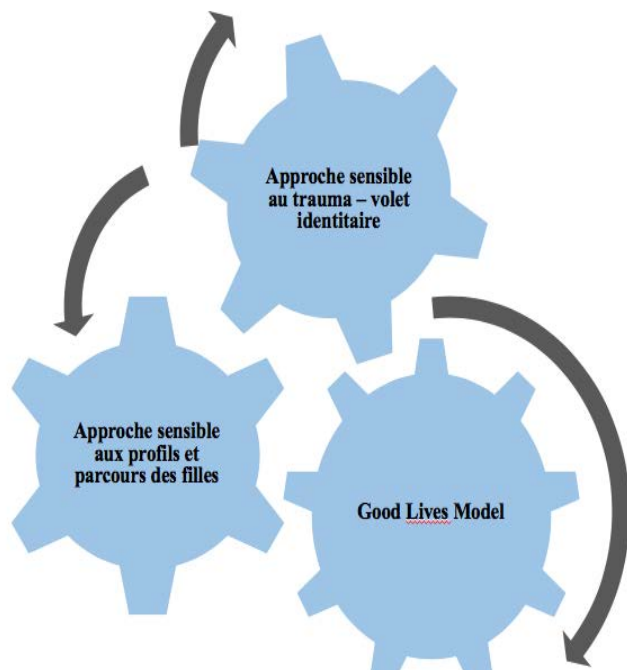
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## Theoretical Foundation

Until fairly recently, most of the rehabilitation programs offered to vulnerable adolescent girls and young women had actually been designed for and tested on adolescent boys and young men (Kerig and Schindler, 2013; Lanctôt and Lemieux, 2012). But over the past several years, a clear consensus has emerged in the literature: rehabilitation programs for female clients need to be designed and developed to meet their specific needs (Day et al., 2015 ; Saxena et al., 2014). For example, a meta-analysis of programs for women offenders has shown that gender-sensitive programs are more effective in reducing recidivism than gender-neutral ones (Gobeil, Blanchette, & Stewart, 2016).

The program examined in this report took a gender-sensitive approach based specifically on current knowledge about vulnerable adolescent girls and young women ages 1 to 25 (but for the project the young woman were between age 18 to 25), hereinafter referred to simply as “vulnerable young women” (Lanctôt, 2018). This approach attempts to understand the personal characteristics and life experiences of such women so as to provide them with treatments that suit their needs (Covington and Bloom, 2007; Kerig and Schindler, 2013). This approach focuses on issues that especially affect women, such as post-traumatic stress, low self-esteem, lack of social support and abusive interpersonal relationships. It also seeks to better understand the effects of the various adverse experiences that women may have in the course of their lives—especially repeated or prolonged exposure to interpersonal trauma (for example, sexual, physical or psychological abuse, neglect, and violence in family or intimate relationships).



*Figure 1: Theoretical models on which the My Game Plan tool is based (Top wheel: Trauma-informed approach – Identity Component; Left wheel: Approach sensitive to girls’ characteristics and experiences)*

This gender-sensitive approach provided the theoretical foundation for the program examined here. But, as shown in Figure 1, this program was also informed by two other theoretical models for rehabilitation programs: the Good Lives Model and a part of the Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC) model, which is trauma-informed (Collin-Vézina, 2018; Kinniburgh, Blaustein, Spinazzola, & Van der Kolk, 2017) (Figure 1).

**Good Lives Model:** Some of the most promising rehabilitation programs for vulnerable young women position them as the experts on their own lives (Cimino, 2012). In this regard, it is recommended that such programs emphasize these women's strengths and personal resources by exploring their interests, aspirations and ability to change, rather than focusing more narrowly on their risks and deficits (Matthews et al. 2014; Van Damme et al., 2017). These authors recommend applying the Good Lives Model (Ward and Stewart, 2003), an individualized rehabilitation model that focuses on change, personal development, achievement and goal identification. According to Matthews et al. (2014), the way for programs to effectively foster healthy development in vulnerable women is to foster their personal well-being and meet the needs that they themselves identify as significant and of high priority. It is also essential for a secure, warm, trusting relationship to be established between the counsellors delivering such programs and the vulnerable young women who participate in them (Lanctôt, Lemieux and Mathys, 2016). Such a relationship enables the counsellors to learn the young women's needs and make them more receptive to the program's interventions, while enabling the young women to explore new ways of developing their self-esteem, identity and resilience. The goal is to create an environment in which they can relax, feel safe and secure, and retake control over their own lives (Matthews et al., 2014).

**Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency (ARC) Model:** The ARC model provides a framework for better recognizing and understanding the effects that complex trauma can have on children's development (Collin-Vézina, 2018; Kinniburgh et al., 2017). This model emphasizes creating a rehabilitation environment that makes children feel safe and cared for and is sensitive to their individual needs, while helping them to develop and strengthen their capacities and resources. Because the vulnerable young women in the present study were in the developmental stage of transition to adulthood, the program that we designed for them emphasized the competency-development component of the ARC model. This component addresses important developmental tasks that young adults must complete in various aspects of their lives, in particular as regards developing their own identities (self-knowledge, a positive self-concept, and the ability to make their own choices, define their own objectives, imagine themselves in the future, and mobilize themselves into action).

The Good Lives Model and the ARC model provide some important guidelines for developing rehabilitation programs. These models call for individualized approaches focused on the needs, strengths and aspirations of vulnerable young women (rather than just their risks and deficits), in an environment conducive to their taking action to achieve a better quality of life. However, to date these guidelines have led to very few actual rehabilitation programs for vulnerable young women who are transitioning to adulthood. Although the Good Lives Model has been identified as promising, very little has yet been done to operationalize it (Willis, Ward and Jill, 2014), especially in programs for vulnerable young women (Van Damme, et al., 2017). The ARC Model has been applied chiefly to adolescent boys. To fill this gap, we have developed a rehabilitation tool called My Game Plan; its theoretical foundations consist of the Good Lives and ARC models, and it can be used to evaluate the needs of young women as individuals and to help them to develop their individualized action plans.

**Note:** In Montreal, Quebec, where this study was conducted, French is the majority language. The My Game Plan workbook and the materials that the participants used to evaluate it were written in French, and all of the activities described in this report took place in French. Wherever this report cites content from this workbook or these materials or statements by the participants or counselors, the content or statements in question have been translated from French to English specifically for the purposes of this report.

## **Design of the My Game Plan tool**

The My Game Plan tool consists of a workbook that young women in rehabilitation bring to weekly, one-on-one sessions with their counsellors. At these sessions, they fill out the various sections of the workbook to accomplish the following tasks:

- to better understand who they are and to think about who they want to become;
- to assess their own needs;
- to think about the impacts that their attitudes and behaviours may be having on their ability to get their needs met;
- to recognize not only their risks and limitations, but also their strengths and resources;
- to identify a top-priority need on which they want to work;
- to identify the methods that they will use to meet this need;
- to define a game plan for taking concrete steps to meet their needs in more appropriate ways.

In designing the My Game Plan tool and choosing a setting in which to test it, we were guided by principles based on the Good Lives Model, as set out by Coco and Corneille (2009) and by van Damme et al. (2017). For example:

- the counselling sessions addressed each young woman as a whole person, focusing on her strengths and aspirations;
- the counselling was aimed at enabling her to define goals that would let her meet her basic needs in a healthy, prosocial way;
- the counselling approach was collaborative, participatory and individualized;
- the counsellors (all women) strived to establish a warm, supportive environment in which they positioned themselves as positive, empathic role models.

We also based the My Game Plan tool on scientific literature about how to design gender-sensitive programs and services for vulnerable young women (Day, Zahn, & Tichavsky, 2015; Lanctôt, 2018; Walker, Bishop, Nurius & Logan-Greene, 2016). Such programs and services are designed with an awareness of the difficult life paths that these young women have often travelled and the more specific needs that they have. Thus above and beyond the needs targeted by the Good Lives Model (Ward and Stewart, 2003), the My Game Plan tool targets needs that characterize vulnerable young women in particular, such as the need for security and the need to be treated with respect. Lastly, the My Game Plan model incorporates some elements from the Competencies component of the ARC model, so as to provide young women with tools for strengthening their identity development, their feelings of self-efficacy, and their sense of control over their own lives.

The My Game Plan tool is presented in the appendix to this report. **This tool is subject to copyright and must not be distributed.**

## **Testing the My Game Plan tool**

The setting that we chose for testing the My Game Plan tool is the Logis Rose Virginie, a not-for-profit women's residential centre in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. This centre provides vulnerable women with housing in the form of individual apartments, along with counselling and other forms of support. All of the young women who participated in this study were living in apartments at the centre and attending weekly, individual counselling sessions there.

Before testing of the tool began, the research coordinator for this study provided a three-hour group training session in the use of this tool to four of the agency's counsellors, its director, and a liaison officer. The counsellors then gradually began using this tool in their sessions with the young women. The research coordinator visited the shelter several times to provide follow-up training and review the theoretical principles on which the tool is based. She met individually for 30 to 60 minutes with each of the four counsellors who had taken the initial training, to answer their questions and make sure that they had a good understanding of the tool.

While the tool was being tested at the agency, the research coordinator and the counsellors communicated with each other by e-mail and telephone about twice per month. These exchanges let the research coordinator answer the counsellors' questions and ensure that they were using the tool in accordance with the principal investigator's instructions. They also gave the counsellors the chance to make comments and recommendations about the use of the tool.

As the testing process proceeded, the research team made some adjustments to the tool on the basis of these comments and recommendations. These adjustments made the tool easier to understand and to use, both for the counsellors and for the young women with whom they were working. All of these changes were documented by the research coordinator as the study continued.

Since this study began, the research coordinator has recruited 12 young women to participate. Out of these 12, six have completed the entire My Game Plan workbook, three are about to complete it in their final sessions with their counsellors, two moved out of the facility before completing the workbook, and one simply decided to drop out of the study. Of the six women who have completed their workbooks, four have also participated in a group discussion with the research team to share their perceptions about their experience in using this tool.

## **Results (what the participants wrote in their My Game Plan workbooks)**

The following pages summarize the entries that each of the six young women who completed their My Game Plan workbooks made in each section of these workbooks in their sessions with their counsellors.

**Who was I, who am I, and who do I want to become?** The participants were asked to describe who they had been in the past, who they were now, and who they wanted (and did not want) to become.

When describing who they had been in the past, two of the six participants used positive terms (such as happy, cheerful and responsible), while the four others described themselves in terms of the difficult experiences that they had had in their families (for example, that they had been abandoned, left to themselves, or shuffled around). But when the participants were asked to talk about who they were now, all of them highlighted their strengths and their resilience. For example, one of these young women reported:

*I'm a woman who has experienced a lot of problems in her life but still keeps smiling, does her own thing, makes her own decisions, and keeps moving ahead in her life one step at a time.*

When these six young women were asked to imagine themselves in the future and think about the kind of people they wanted to become over the next five years, four of them mentioned only what they wanted to *do* (travel, learn a language) or to *have* (friends, children, a partner, a job, a place to live) but did not go into what they wanted to *be* or to *become*. But the two other participants did write about who they wanted to become as a person. They referred to things such as self-confidence, serenity, accepting their own limitations and being honest.

When the six participants were asked what kind of person they did *not* want to become, three of them alluded to various financial or behavioural problems, such as homelessness, economic dependence, substance dependence and violence. The three other participants referred more to their personal development—for example, not wanting to become the kind of person who would let other people control her, or who would go against her own values, or who would suppress her emotions.

**What's going well and what's going not so well in my life:** The participants reported various aspects of their lives that they regarded as positive. For example, four of these six young women reported being proud of being in school or having a job. Four of the six also reported things related to their personal development, such as having more self-confidence, having more faith in themselves, thinking more about their own needs, and becoming better at expressing themselves. Two reported being more and more capable of regulating their emotions and managing their moods. Only one of these women mentioned her relations with family and friends as one of the things that was going well in her life.

Regarding things that were going not so well in their lives, four of the participants mentioned trouble in regulating emotions such as anger and anxiety or in feeling emotions at all, while three mentioned practical problems with things such as school, finances and housing. Two of the participants mentioned difficult or harmful relations with family members or their partners.

**Messages that the young women wanted to convey to their counsellors:** The My Game Plan workbook included a space for each young woman to write a brief message that she wanted to convey to her counsellor. The messages that the young women wrote focused mainly on their need for their counsellors to recognize their strengths and to realize that their vulnerabilities reflected the difficult lives that they had led. The following excerpt from one of the participants' workbooks is typical:

*I'd like you to remember that I always try to do my best with what I've got. Sometimes I'm too emotional or embarrassed to confide in you, but I'm working hard on my self-assertion and self-esteem. And lastly, I'd like to say that I can't stand conflict, which is why I tend to withdraw when it arises. Apart from all that, thanks for being there.*

**My strengths, limitations and resources:** In another section of the workbook, the young women identified what they saw as their strengths and limitations, in terms both of their own attitudes and behaviours and of the people and activities in their environment that could help or hurt them. For this purpose, they were asked to make entries in four different "zones":

- **My Balance Zone:** This zone represented the participants' strengths and abilities that led them to make appropriate choices to meet their needs. All of the participants' entries in this zone emphasized their desire to achieve change through such qualities as perseverance, a positive attitude, commitment and determination.
- **My Turbulence Zone:** This zone represented the participants' personal problems and limitations that led them to make choices that prevented them from meeting their needs. The most frequent entries in this zone were lack of self-confidence (three participants) and impulsiveness (three participants).
- **My Comfort Zone:** This zone represented people and activities who could help the participants to meet their needs in an appropriate way. Five of the six young women identified specific people to whom they could turn for support. But in two of these cases, the only people identified were professionals whose job it was to help; these young women mentioned no one in their personal circles (such as friends or family members) who could provide them with support informally, rather than in a service-delivery setting. Three of the young women also mentioned drawing comfort from pursuing long-term career or educational goals or leisure activities such as sewing, reading and writing.
- **My Risk Zone:** This zone represented people and activities that could be harmful to the participants. Four of them identified people in their personal circles, such as their fathers or other family members or a spouse or ex-spouse, as their main source of risk. Other risks identified related to idleness (for example, wasting time on the Internet or not being in school or not having a job).

**My top-priority need and a conflicting need:** After having identified and prioritized their needs using a “Wheel of Needs” in the My Game Plan workbook, the young women were asked to identify the top-priority need that they wanted to meet and on which they wanted to focus in their subsequent counselling sessions. Of the six young women who completed their workbooks, two chose “to feel right in my heart and my mind” as their top-priority need. The top-priority needs identified by the four other participants were “to learn new things”, “to be at peace with my past”, “to have control over my life” and “to have a clear goal in life”.

Next each of the young women was asked to identify a need that might conflict with the top-priority need that she had identified. The purpose here was to help them better understand why sometimes their ability to meet their top-priority need might be impaired by another need that was just as important but that might keep them in a zone of risk or turbulence.

Of the two participants who said that their top need was to “to feel right in my heart and my mind”, one reported that her conflicting need, to make peace with her past, often got in the way. The other identified a conflicting need to have fun, and trouble in striking a balance between the two. The third participant, whose top-priority need was to learn new things, said that her conflicting need to have fun often kept her from devoting the time and effort needed to learn the things that she wanted to. The fourth participant said that her need for stability conflicted with her need to be at peace with her past. Because of her strong need to have people she could count on in her life, even if they might also exert negative influences on her, she continued to live under conditions that made her feel anxious and insecure. The fifth participant, whose top priority need was to have control over her life, recognized that she first needed to make peace with her past and was struggling to do so. The sixth participant, whose top need was to have a clear goal in her life, said that she was having trouble in meeting this need because she felt that she did not have control over her life.

**Ways that I meet my needs:** After the young women had identified their top-priority needs and conflicting needs, they were asked to think about the various ways (behaviours, reactions, attitudes and so on) in which they go about meeting these needs, and to classify these ways as either appropriate or inappropriate. The ways identified fell into the four categories shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Ways that young women identified for meeting their needs**

|                | <b>Appropriate</b>  | <b>Inappropriate</b>   |
|----------------|---|--|
| <b>Factual</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going to my meetings</li> <li>• Taking steps related to school, work, or my dealings with the justice or social assistance system</li> <li>• Establishing a routine</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying shut up at home,</li> <li>• Being inactive</li> <li>• Spending money needlessly</li> <li>• Having an unbalanced lifestyle</li> <li>• Skipping my meetings</li> <li>• Skipping school</li> </ul> |



|                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| <b>Relational</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going out</li> <li>• Seeing friends, my romantic partner or my family</li> <li>• Pursuing recreational and other activities</li> <li>• Getting support from my counsellor</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting back together with my family without being prepared</li> <li>• Staying in a relationship with my romantic partner against my will</li> <li>• Being unfaithful</li> <li>• Partying too much</li> <li>• Manipulating other people</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Emotional</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having control</li> <li>• Asserting myself</li> <li>• Having self-esteem</li> <li>• Managing my impulsiveness</li> <li>• Being disciplined</li> <li>• Persevering</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harming myself physically on purpose</li> <li>• Having low self-esteem</li> <li>• Holding on to hate</li> <li>• Doing whatever I want</li> <li>• Being immature or irresponsible</li> <li>• Being impulsive</li> <li>• Controlling my emotions too much</li> <li>• Letting myself get discouraged</li> </ul> |
| <b>Personal</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in physical activity</li> <li>• Taking time for myself</li> <li>• Growing in my personal life</li> <li>• Having a balanced lifestyle</li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not having any perspective on my situation</li> <li>• Repeating the same patterns</li> <li>• Lacking self-confidence</li> <li>• Not asserting myself</li> <li>• Letting other people influence me</li> <li>• Forgetting my goals</li> <li>• Being lazy</li> </ul>  |

**Recognizing not only my risks and limitations, but also my strengths and the resources available to me:** During their counselling sessions, the young women next had to identify the strengths and limitations of the people around them and their life circumstances: in other words, what these people and circumstances could do to help or hurt them. Here is what they reported.

**Table 2: Ways that young women said that the people around them and their life circumstances could help or hurt them**

|                           | <b>Help</b>  | <b>Hurt</b>  |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Friends and family</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give me space</li> <li>• Encourage my independence</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep me from being free</li> <li>• Not respect my choices</li> <li>• Put pressure on me</li> <li>• Hang out with people who are unstable</li> </ul> |

|                           |  |  |
|---------------------------|--|--|
|                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide me with emotional or financial support</li> <li>• Respect my choices</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make me worry about my romantic relationship</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Counsellors</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the steps I take</li> <li>• Encourage me</li> <li>• Be attentive to my needs</li> <li>• Help me to find solutions</li> <li>• Meet with me more often</li> <li>• Value me</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not support me</li> <li>• Drop me</li> <li>• Lack transparency</li> <li>• Stop meeting with me</li> <li>• Infantilize me</li> <li>• Doubt me</li> <li>• Tell me what to do</li> </ul> |
| <b>Life circumstances</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go back to school</li> <li>• Have a trade</li> <li>• Live in a neighbourhood that I like</li> <li>• Have a more balanced lifestyle</li> <li>• Have an ideal financial situation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precarious financial situation</li> <li>• Unstable housing situation</li> <li>• Level of education</li> </ul>   |

**Defining my game plan (objectives and methods of meeting them):** To define their game plans for meeting their top-priority needs, the young women were asked to set their objectives for each week of the counselling process and identify the methods that they would use to meet these objectives. Here are examples of some of the objectives that they set and the methods that they identified.

**Table 3: Objectives set and methods identified in young women’s game plans**

| <b>Objective</b>                        | <b>Method</b>   |
|---|---|
| Get more rest                           | Sleep in one morning every week   |
| Take better care of myself              | Go get a massage  |
| Go back to school                       | Register for school   |
| Take care of my health                  | Go see a health professional  |
| Have some leisure activities            | Get out of the house<br>Take a course<br>Read a book                                |
| Get control over my financial situation | Find a job<br>Post a notice on Facebook to let my friends know I’m looking for work |
| Feel my emotions                        | Focus on myself and on what I’m experiencing  |

All of the young women found carrying out their game plans relatively difficult. But all of them were able to say which parts of the process went well and which ones did not. In general, they found it fairly easy to apply methods that they had defined in terms of **behaviours**, such as

playing sports, going to bed earlier, making a budget, looking for a job, trying new things, seeing their psychologist or counsellor, or getting out of the house.

The young women had more trouble, however, in applying methods that involved working on their own **personalities, emotions and relationships**—addressing issues such as self-doubt, financial worries, stress, low self-esteem, toxic relationships or feelings of not having control over their own lives. But such issues reflect the adverse experiences that many of these young women had had in their lives, and working on such issues of course requires a long-term effort, whereas the My Game Plan program involved just four counselling sessions over four weeks. But the program did give these young women an important start on examining their lives and taking steps to strengthen their competencies and develop their identities.

### **Young women’s assessments of the My Game Plan experience**

The last section of the My Game Plan workbook asked the young women to evaluate this tool and the effects that working with it had had on them. For this purpose, they were asked to score three sets of statements. For each statement, the possible scores were: 1) Not at all, 2) A little bit, 3) A fair amount, 4) A lot, and 5) Totally. Tables 4 to 6 show the lowest, highest and average scores that the young women assigned to each statement.

The first set of statements dealt with the young women’s assessment of their sessions with their counsellors. The results in Table 1 show that they were very satisfied with the collaborative, supportive way that these sessions went.

**Table 4: Young women’s assessment of their counselling sessions (n = 6)**

| <b>Statement</b>   | <b>Lowest Score</b> | <b>Highest Score</b> | <b>Average Score</b> |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| My counselling session went in the direction that I wanted.  | A fair amount       | Totally              | A lot                |
| I understood the things that my counsellor was telling me during these sessions.                   | A lot               | Totally              | Totally              |
| My counsellor and I worked together as a team during my counselling sessions.                      | A fair amount       | Totally              | Totally              |
| During my counselling sessions, I felt that my counsellor was there for me, no matter how I acted. | A lot               | Totally              | Totally              |
| During my counselling sessions, I felt that my counsellor really understood me.                    | A fair amount       | Totally              | A lot                |

The second set of statements dealt with the effects that the young women felt that using the My Game Plan tool had had on them. Overall, they reported that using this tool had had very positive effects: it had been a great help in getting to know themselves better, understanding their own needs, setting their own objectives, identifying appropriate ways of meeting their needs, recognizing their own strengths, motivating themselves to take action and progressing toward a more positive life. But the young women gave the tool lower scores when it came to getting them to try specific steps or to improve their behaviour.

**Table 5: Young women’s perceptions of the effects that the My Game Plan sessions had had on them (n = 6)**

| <b>Statement</b>   | <b>Lowest Score</b> | <b>Highest Score</b> | <b>Average Score</b> |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| The My Game Plan sessions helped me to better understand who I am as a person.                           | A fair amount       | Totally              | A lot                |
| The My Game Plan sessions helped me to better understand my needs.                                       | A lot               | Totally              | Totally              |
| The My Game Plan sessions helped me to set myself some objectives.                                       | A fair amount       | Totally              | Totally              |
| The My Game Plan sessions helped me to identify appropriate ways of meeting my needs.                    | A little bit        | Totally              | A lot                |
| The My Game Plan sessions helped me to recognize my strengths.   | A fair amount       | Totally              | A lot                |
| The My Game Plan sessions motivated me to take steps to meet my needs in appropriate ways.               | A fair amount       | Totally              | A lot                |
| The My Game Plan sessions are going to help me to move ahead toward a more positive life.                | A fair amount       | Totally              | A lot                |
| Over the past month, I have tried some things that my counsellor suggested in our My Game Plan sessions. | Not at all          | Totally              | A fair amount        |
| Over the past month, I have used some things that I learned in the My Game Plan sessions.                | A little bit        | Totally              | A lot                |
| Over the past month, the My Game Plan sessions have enabled me to improve my behaviour.                  | Not at all          | Totally              | A fair amount        |

The third set of statements let the six young women provide their overall assessment of the My Game Plan tool. One of them gave it a negative assessment overall, while another gave it a more mixed review. (These were the same two young women who said that they had taken the least concrete action as a result of the sessions.) The four other young women gave their experience in working with the tool a very high rating overall.

**Table 6: Young women’s overall assessment of the My Game Plan tool (n = 6)**

| Statement   | Lowest Score  | Highest Score | Average Score |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| In the My Game Plan sessions, I received the kind of services that I think I need.                                | A little bit  | Totally       | A lot         |
| The approach used in the My Game Plan sessions was appropriate for meeting my needs.                              | A fair amount | Totally       | A lot         |
| If one of my girlfriends needed help, I would recommend that she participate in the My Game Plan program.         | A fair amount | Totally       | A lot         |
| If I could choose the kind of counselling that I would like to receive, I would choose the My Game Plan approach. | Not at all    | Totally       | A lot         |

### **Group discussion about the My Game Plan experience**

Four of the six young women who had completed the My Game Plan workbook agreed to have a group discussion with a member of the research team to tell more about how they rated the experience. Several findings emerged from this discussion.

**A collaborative experience:** Several of the young woman appreciated the collaborative nature of their sessions with their counsellors. One said that she and her counsellor had not known each other for very long, and that this tool had let her counsellor learn about sides of her that she might not have learned about otherwise. Another said that the tool had created a climate of cooperation between her and her counsellor, because she had not had to fill out the workbook all on her own.

**Self-exploration:** Some of the young women said that they appreciated having learned more about themselves in their counselling sessions. As one of them put it, “It helped me to focus on myself, to really learn more about myself. I hadn’t expected at the start that I would learn so much about myself, but it really helped me a lot.”

**Having my needs validated and met:** The young women also discussed having learned to better understand their own needs. For example, one of them had already been used to prioritizing all her needs, but hadn’t been succeeding in meeting them all. She said that the tool had really helped her to distinguish her more important needs from her less important ones. The subject of how

well the program had validated their needs was not covered in the group discussion. We will have to see what other young women who complete the workbook in future think about this issue and determine whether the program should place more emphasis on it.

**Self-actualization:** Some of the young women said that they had seen changes in themselves since completing their game plan. As one of them put it, “I noticed that it made me more stable in my life (*laughs*). I don’t know whether it was really because of the workbook, but I do think it helped.”

**Putting my plan into action:** The young women felt that the tool had helped them to identify the steps that they needed to take to put their game plans into action. Two of them agreed that the tool had helped them to get organized and to work step by step to achieve their objectives. One of them added that even now, it was still helping her to take action to carry out her game plan: “We really worked on the objective, you know, and that let me... I’m still working on my objective, even now.”

**Encouraging hope:** One of the young women then talked about how she wanted to refer to her game plan in the future, to see how and how much she had changed over time. Another of the young women, who had tested an earlier version of the tool, said that the new version had enabled her to think about and continue to work on her objectives: “I can see the difference between the two tools, and I think that the new one is good, I think that it goes at the right pace for us. After, it gave you the chance to think and to keep going.”

**Things to improve about the tool.** The young women offered several comments and suggestions for improving the format of the tool and simplifying certain aspects that had been hard to understand. For example, several of them felt that the tool involved too many steps or too many questions and that it sometimes got hard both for them and for their counsellors to follow the thread. As one of the young women put it, “There were a lot of questions, and when I get asked a lot of questions, I start to get mixed up and I was, like, wow, there are so many questions.”

Another young woman added that the instructions were sometimes hard to understand: “Like my motivation to take action, my confidence in my ability to get myself to take action, how much control I have...I had a bit of trouble in sorting all that out.”

For some of the other young women in the discussion, the frequency of the My Game Plan sessions was an issue, because they had other sessions scheduled with their counsellors too, and it could be hard to fit the My Game Plan sessions in with the rest of their programs. As one of them said, “I found that meeting every week was kind of hard, because it was not paired with my regular session, so that I wound up having two counsellors here.” But the young women did feel that the My Game Plan workbook was an effective tool for assessing the needs of young women in residential settings and helping them to prioritize their objectives for the future: “I think that when you arrive in any kind of residential setting, whether you’re going to be there for the short term, the medium term, or the long term, it’s someplace new. You have to rethink things a bit, and adapt, and adjust your priorities. You don’t necessarily know what you want to work on, or

what you need to work on either. There are so many things happening to you at the same time. I think that this tool can help you clarify your thinking and focus on one or two objectives, instead of trying to look at everything all at once, as sometimes happens.”

In general, the young women said that they would recommend My Game Plan to one of their friends if she felt the need for it.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, we designed a tool that is sensitive to the personal characteristics and life experiences of vulnerable young women and that lets counsellors work with them in a way that focuses on their strengths, abilities, and needs. The initial results of this study have been highly encouraging. But before we can draw any firm conclusions about this tool’s effectiveness, we will have to evaluate it more objectively, with a larger sample. This was an exploratory study with a small sample, but it has provided a basis for refining this new tool and encouraging an innovative approach that seems highly promising for working with and supporting vulnerable young women.

The present study has shown that it would definitely be worthwhile to keep working on this tool. We are already adjusting it to take the comments made by the counsellors and the participants into account. For example, we will be making some changes to enhance the training in how to use the tool and the strategies for implementing it. We will also be taking steps to test this tool in other settings so that we can continue and improve the assessment of its social validity. The applicability of the results will be maximized by our highly pragmatic approach to designing and testing the tool, whereby we tried to get both the young women and their counsellors to take ownership of it. We made considerable efforts to design the tool to be attractive and user-friendly, and we consulted the counsellors as we worked on its form and content. The present study will let us make some adjustments to the tool and the way of using it on the basis of the comments made by the young women and counsellors who tested it. In addition, we designed our evaluation process so that we could make concrete judgments about the tool’s applicability—its value-added compared with other approaches/tools, its appropriateness for vulnerable young women, and its limitations. The comments made by the young women and their counsellors provide a priceless, tangible means of determining the optimal conditions for employing the tool and its “portability” to other groups of clients and other treatment settings.

In light of the results of this study, we will be enhancing the workbook in a variety of ways. We will be revising it to reduce the amount of content somewhat and make the various steps in the process of using it easier to understand. Also, in the training sessions for the counsellors, we will focus more on the components of identity development, so that the young women will think more about who they want to become rather than on what they want to do or have. We will better explain the concepts of priority needs and conflicting needs and recommend ways that the counsellors can maximize the use of this content in their sessions with the young women. In addition, in collaboration with the Boscoville Centre for Youth Program Development, we will arrange for a coordinator to monitor the implementation of the My Game Plan tool at the Logis

Rose Virginie so that it complements the existing programming in this treatment setting and so that the frequency of the sessions is suitable both for the young women and for their counsellors.

Our ongoing work on this tool will contribute to the development and promotion of innovative practices for helping vulnerable young women to make positive psychosocial adjustments and healthy transitions to adulthood. Current social policy places a heavy emphasis on highly objective, fact-based intervention goals for helping vulnerable youth transition to adulthood (Collins and Clay, 2009) and become autonomous and independent (Goodkind et al., 2011; McMurray et al., 2011). Hence the expected outcomes are defined in highly factual terms as well, such as successful entry into the labour market and acquisition of skills of daily life related to housing, budgeting, diet, and so on (Lee and Berrick, 2014). But more and more questions are being raised about this highly functional approach to rehabilitation. Some authors even go so far as to say that such an approach simply does not represent a viable option so long as the young people's well-being is not also ensured (Avery and Freundlich, 2009 ; Goodkind et al., 2011). It is becoming essential to conduct studies that approach rehabilitation from a different angle, informed by theoretical constructs such as the Good Lives Model and the Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency model . Such studies should focus on the needs and well-being of vulnerable young people and pay more attention to developing their strengths and their ability to take action (Hébert, Lanctôt and Turcotte, 2016 ; Samuels and Pryce, 2008). The present study is part of the recent trend in this direction and will shed essential light on more innovative rehabilitation approaches for vulnerable young women.

Lastly, this study will receive significant international exposure through the Canada Research Chair on Placement and Rehabilitation of Vulnerable Young Women and so offers the Logis Rose Virginie a genuine opportunity to position itself as a leading player in the development of innovative practices for vulnerable young women.



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