

The Girl Connection

Iowa Commission on the Status of Women

For those who serve adolescent females involved with or at risk for involvement with the justice system

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A Short History/Herstory of Gender-Specific Services in the Juvenile Justice System

In the United States, the dominant male perspective informed the development of juvenile justice systems, theories, and program models. Traditionally, the needs of the relatively small population of adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system go unmet as the system strives to provide adequate and appropriate services for adolescent boys. As a result, girls must often fit into existing service resources that are not equipped to meet the specific needs of adolescent girls.

Fortunately, this is changing. In the early 1990s, scholars, policymakers and juvenile justice and youth-serving professionals recognized that our juvenile justice and youth programs did not effectively serve adolescent girls. Concurrently, statistics revealed more increases in the numbers of juvenile female offenders involved with the juvenile justice system. Due to heightened advocacy by states and national organizations, this combination of new awareness and revealing statistics led to a focus on the gender-specific programming and service needs of girls. Within the most recent years, funds for gender-specific services began to appear at the federal and state levels, and traditional foundations began to fund programs specifically designed to serve this population.

How is Iowa involved?

First, Iowa is involved in these changes through the receipt of the Challenge Grant. The 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974 added Part E, State Challenge Activities, to the programs funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The purpose of Part E is to provide incentives for states participating in the Formula Grants Program to develop, adopt, and improve policies and programs in one or more of ten specified Challenge areas.

In Iowa, as well as other states, this means that moneys have been specifically allocated to support the development and adoption of policies to prohibit gender bias in the placement and treatment of adolescent females involved in the juvenile justice system. Further, the Challenge Grant supports the establishment of programs that ensure these female youth have: access to the full range of health and mental health services, treatment for physical or sexual assault and abuse, self-defense instructions, education in parenting in general, and other training and vocational services.

A second way Iowa is involved is through the Gender Specific Services Task Force. The Gender Specific Services Task Force is a group in Iowa seeking to assure that adolescent females in the juvenile justice system receive equitable services. The Iowa Juvenile Justice Advisory Council along with the Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning (CJJP) formed the Task Force in 1996 to look at gender issues in the development and provision of services by Iowa's juvenile justice system. The task force is comprised of a multi-disciplinary group representing key players in the juvenile justice system including judges, juvenile court officers, Iowa Department of Human Services officials, service providers, educators, and researchers. This year, CJJP entered into an agreement with the Iowa Division on the Status of Women to provide staff support to the Iowa Gender Specific Services Task Force. This position will organize the annual "Whispers & Screams" conference, write a desk protocol for those professionals serving adolescent girls in the juvenile justice system as well as provide trainings on gender-specific programming and services.

What are key components of gender-specific services for girls?

Gender specific programming and services are more than ones which merely target the juvenile female offender or young woman at risk. They are, instead, ones that meet the standard of being both specific to the female experience and free from gender bias. To intervene in a young woman's life in a comprehensive way, gender specific programming and service delivery systems must:

- meet the unique needs of females;
- acknowledge the female perspective;
- support the female experience through positive female role models;
- listen to the needs and experiences of adolescent females;
- recognize the contributions of girls and women;
- respect female development;
- empower girls and young women to reach their full potential; and,
- work to change established attitudes that prevent or discourage young women from recognizing their potential (Cheltenham Young Women's Facility Program Redesign Committee, 1993).

Furthermore, these systems must also provide:

- a physically safe space that is safe for young women, removed from those who depend on them and removed from the demands for attention of adolescent males;
- an emotionally safe space for young women that is comforting, challenging, and nurturing within ongoing relationships;
- nurturing supportive networks among girls and between girls and women. Young women need to develop relationships of trust and interdependence with other women already present in their lives;
- education about women's issues, women's bodies, women's history;
- education, therapy, and counseling surrounding the issues of sexual harassment and sexual abuse, and;
- culturally appropriate programming for the population the program serves.

Cheltenham Young Women's Facility Program Redesign Committee. (1993). Proposed Program Redesign for the Cheltenham Young Women's Facility. Baltimore, MD: Cheltenham Young Women's Facility.

Suggested readings on female development

Belenky, M.; Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. & Tarule, J. (1986). Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind. New York: Basic Books.

Brown, L.M. & Gilligan, C. (1992). Meeting at the crossroads. New York: Ballantine Books.

Gilligan, C.; Rogers, A.G.; & Tolman, D. L. (eds.). (1991). Women, girls, and psychotherapy: Reframing resistance. New York: Harrington Park.

Orenstein, P. (1994). School girls: Young women, self esteem, and the confidence gap. New York: Doubleday.

Pipher, M. (1994). Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls. New York: Ballantine Books.

Taylor, J.M.; Gilligan, C.; & Sullivan, A.M. (1995). Between voice and silence: Women and girls, race and relationship. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Announcements

Upcoming meetings of the Iowa Gender Specific Services Task Force

Friday, August 7, 1998 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Friday, September 11, 1998 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Children & Families of Iowa's Cornerstone Recovery, Ankeny, IA

For more information, call Rhonda Chittenden, Department of Human Rights, Division on the Status of Women, Lucas State Office Building, Des Moines, IA 50319,

(515) 261-6915 or (800) 558-4427.

August 10-14, 1998

"What About the Girls?" at the Nineteenth Annual Summer School for Helping Professionals

A workshop, offered in two- and three-day sessions, which explores the role society plays in the development of young women and how programming specifically for young women can improve outcomes in the long term for both the young women and society. Taught by Lori Rinehart, Director of Program Development and Planning, Orchard Place, Des Moines, IA. For more information, contact Center for Conferences and Institutes, The University of Iowa, (319) 335-3231.

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