

MIAMI-DADE JUVENILE ASSESSMENT CENTER

**GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A PROGRAM
FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED GIRLS**

April 11, 2002

Prepared by:

**Bonita M. Veysey, Ph.D.
Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice**

for

**The National Center for Mental Health
and Juvenile Justice**

**Policy Research Associates
345 Delaware Avenue
Delmar, NY 12054**

OVERVIEW

The original goal of the Gender-specific component was the design and implementation of a justice-involved girls program. Over the past twelve months, considerable effort has been placed on understanding the feasibility and utility of such a program in the Miami-Dade area. Further, given the size of need and the geographic dispersion of the region, the impact would be minimal unless the program was both: (1) targeted, and (2) imbedded within a “girl-friendly” service environment. Despite these issues, the JAC staff, experts and consultants maintain an investment in the development of a girls program. The following presents a model for the development of the program.

MODEL COMPONENTS

Environment

- Inbed program within an educational setting

As an initiative for justice-involved girls, the tendency is to imbed the program in a justice setting. However, this option creates stigma and may not focus on the most pressing needs of girls.

Girls’ primary weakness and the single most important and immediate factor associated with delinquent and/or criminal behavior is poor academic performance. This appears to be a proxy for girls’ abandonment of traditional, mainstream goals of work and higher education. For these, girls substitute alternative goals of motherhood and long-term, committed relationships. They are not prepared to raise children and they are likewise frustrated in their ability to maintain long-term relationships with boyfriends. Further, boyfriends and peers are two primary avenues through which girls become involved in criminal behavior.

Supporting girls’ educational attainment gives them more options, less reliance on others, and a greater sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Education (i.e., gaining competence in reading, mathematics, sciences, history and computer technologies) is the single most important intervention point.

The best model for this program is the PACE program. It is a full-day, year-round educational center with a case management capacity. If the program does not fully substitute for school, the following issues must be addressed:

- Incentive to attend (i.e., youth and family support)
- Amount of time expected to be in program
- Distance to travel
- Safety in commuting
- Additional educational burden

In the best of all worlds, funds for this program would either expand the PACE program or the program be imbedded within an existing educational environment, such as a Charter School, Street Academy, or a TQE program.

Target Population

- Link directly to PAD initiative

This program should not be operated by the JAC. However, the process of identification and referral used by the PAD program could serve as the entry point into the gender-specific program.

- Target 1st time offenders

Targeting early problems and focusing on supporting girls' pro-social lives can have a more enduring effect, than intervening when girls have failed in so many aspects of their lives. This is not to say that "deep-end" girls should be ignored. This program, however, is designed to focus on the girls' strengths while addressing their weaknesses within a prevention model.

- Middle School age

Younger, rather than older, girls should be targeted. This provides the educational and service communities greater opportunities to address girls' multiple problems. Girls who are younger at first arrest tend to have greater or more severe problems than older girls. Younger girls at first arrest also are more likely to continue to be arrested. These facts make this group ideal for a prevention intervention.

Size

To ensure that all girls receive attention, the program should not exceed 30 to 50 girls.

Duration of the Program

The program should be time-limited and focused on bringing girls up to grade level. In addition, programs such as these cannot be successful without continuing support and follow-up.

The program should be limited to 12 to 18 months and operated year-round. This provides adequate time to address both the educational and other needs that girls present.

Physical Space

- Girls only

The program area and its immediate surroundings should be a “girls only” area. Girls’ attention cannot fully be focused on learning when there are competing interests, particularly vying for boys’ attention and concern for their own image. Boys, themselves, exacerbate this problem.

- Physically and emotionally safe

Justice-involved girls, like their male counterparts, often come from violent homes and neighborhoods. A girl cannot learn, hope or plan for the future when she is worried about whether she will be hurt. While this program cannot prevent violence from occurring outside the program’s walls, it can ensure safety inside. Safety is both physical and emotional. Boyfriends and peers not in the program should not be allowed to visit. Physical safety is primary. No acts of violence should be tolerated within or around the program site.

While family members in general are important partners in a girl’s success, not all parents will support a girl’s goals to improve her academics and options for the future. It is important to identify situations where this is the case and provide emotional support through the program.

- “Normal” room arrangements and furniture

Rooms should be as “normal” as possible. Classroom seating in classrooms, comfortable chairs in any common area, etc.

Accessibility

- Location

The location of the program should be close to the largest eligible population, and, to the degree possible, located on public transportation routes.

- Time

The gender-specific program could be piloted on an after-school hours basis (3:00-6:00pm).

Staffing

- Number of staff

The number of staff is flexible. However, the program should have, at a minimum, a teacher, an aide, a case manager, and an administrator. If this is implemented as an after school program, consideration should be given to hiring staff on a part-time basis.

- Female-only staff

Some debate remains regarding the gender of the staff. Some argue that girls need to learn to interact with men in a non-sexualized manner. Given the level of physical and sexual abuse in these girls' lives and their developmental stage, it is important to remove one more element that may be confusing to them.

Discipline

Clear boundaries with known consequences are critical. Grounds for dismissal should include fighting, carrying of weapons, and use of drugs or alcohol during program hours.

Program Elements

- Basic educational skills

For girls to have real opportunities for higher education and well-paying jobs, they must have strong basic educational skills, including math, language skills (i.e., reading, writing, and communication), science, and history/social studies.

- Other education and groups

Other educational programs that girls should have are: pre-employment (time management, money management, job seeking), computer and technology skills, and basic home management skills.

Because justice-involved girls have multiple problems, group-based programs in the following areas should be made available: trauma recovery, effective communication, conflict resolution and anger management, and sexuality.

- Case management/counseling

Some capacity must be in place to assess girls' needs (possibly JAC only), and to assist girls' in meeting those needs. Case managers must be familiar with a variety of services (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, health care, legal advocacy) across the Miami-Dade area. The effectiveness of the case management component is dependent to a large degree on the availability of services and the services' level of gender-responsiveness.

Case managers and, to some degree, teachers should be available to offer one-on-one counseling to girls.

- Mentoring

The period from early adolescence to adulthood is characterized by an open horizon of roles. Both girls and boys "try on" many behaviors, personality styles, attitudes and

beliefs. During this time, both boys and girls are influenced heavily by those around them. This, therefore, is the time when girls should be surrounded by pro-social peers, encouraged and supported in their academic goals, and guided by successful adults.

Adult women mentors who share the same language and culture and who demonstrate care and consistency toward the girls with whom they work can have an enormous and long-lasting impact on these girls' lives. This is particularly important during times of chaos, stress, or loss.

- Referral network

The best program in the world can have only limited success, if it is isolated from the greater service community. Case managers should continue to work with local services providers, the JAC and any standing task forces to expand connections and programs available to justice-involved girls.

- Support services

To be able to attend programs, girls need to have basic services, including transportation (or funds for) and childcare (or funds for). Depending on the length of the program, providing a snack or a meal is important.

Link to Justice Agencies

An administrative link should be developed through a formal agreement, such as an MOU, that explicitly allows for the communication of information between the PAD (or other justice supervision) and the program.

Continuity of Services and Supports

- Transition case management

Case management should continue to be provided as the girl transitions back into her usual school environment. If problems arise that cannot be resolved by the case manager, some flexibility should exist within the program to bring her back for a brief period of time.

- Volunteer programs and tutoring

One option that other programs have used to keep youth involved in their own education and give back to the community is a tutoring program. Program graduates come back to the site to help younger students learn. This has a number of benefits: 1) the younger student receives additional assistance and attention, 2) the older student provides a role model, 3) the program has more people to do the work, and 4) the older student feels valued.

- Mentoring and college funds

Mentoring may continue under another community auspice. Mentoring, if it is linked to concrete resources to achieve goals, such as a college fund, can be particularly effective. College funds associated with individual girls may, in fact, be a more cost effective intervention for older girls than any single program.