



**in Sonoma County, CA**

**Circles Across Sonoma**

**A Title II Gender-Specific Services Program**

**2007-2010**

In 2007, the State of California applied Title II funds to programs that focused on gang involvement, alcohol and drug use, mental health, or that provided gender-specific programs.

Sonoma County Probation Department was awarded a three-year grant to implement the gender-specific Girls Circle model, under the county's program name: Circles Across Sonoma (CAS) for girls across the continuum of care in the probation department. "CAS is collaboration between the Sonoma Probation Department, Girls Circle Association, and a series of community-based counseling services in Sonoma County. Girls on formal probation, informal probation, as well as girls who are diverted from probation all qualify for CAS, which provides a string of Girls Circle support groups across the County."<sup>1</sup>

Ceres Policy Research, the evaluator, reported on the findings for the girls in the program.

This brief report summarizes those findings and the administrative information and findings available.

*“I thought it was really fun like. I mean at the beginning when I first, when I was like, ‘oh great like this is gonna be ridiculous. I wonder like how everyone’s gonna get along?..... But then you know the whole entire time, every single time like everyone would just be nice to each other and comfortable. And so I just, I felt like I gained a lot of friends and by the end like everyone got a long really well.”–Participant, Circles Across Sonoma, Girls Circle*

## **Quantitative Findings**<sup>ii</sup>:

Of the more than 900 girls who were invited to participate in Sonoma County Probation Department’s Circles Across Sonoma- Girls Circle program, 374 girls completed and provided matched pre and post surveys.

Demographics for quantitative results:

- 47% of the girls were white, 30% were Latina, 13% were biracial, 4% were African American,
- 3% were Native American, 2% were Asian, and 1% had other race or ethnic identities
- 5% of the girls were 12-13 years old, 39% of the girls were 14-15 years old, 49% of the girls were 16-17 years old, and 7% were 18 years old
- 88% of the girls identified as heterosexual, 10% identified as bisexual, 1% identified as lesbian, and 1% were unsure
- 70% spoke English only, 29% of the girls were bilingual Spanish/English speakers, and 2% were Spanish-speaking only

Summary of pre- and post-survey results:

- 1. Significant Increases in:**
  - Body Image
  - Communicating to Adults
  - Self-Efficacy
- 2. Girls of color were less likely to get drunk when they drank compared to white girls after participating in the program**
- 3. High Satisfaction Rates amongst participating girls**

## **Qualitative Findings**<sup>iii</sup>:

Girls were randomly invited to participate in one-on-one phone interviews with researchers. During each year of the three year grant program, twenty girls from the Circles Across Sonoma program were interviewed.

Demographics for qualitative interviews:

- 40% were White, 30% were Latina, 3% were African American and 20% were Mixed Race
- 10% of the girls were 13 years old, 35% were 14-15 years old, 40% of the girls were 16-17 years old, and 15% were 18 years or older
- 85% of the girls identified as heterosexual and 15% identified as bisexual
- 65% spoke English only and 35% of the girls were bilingual Spanish/English speakers
- The length of participation in the program varied from 8 weeks to 24 weeks. (Girls were able to choose to continue beyond the initial 8 weeks if they wished; other girls attended more sessions if they had not successfully completed the initial 8 weeks.)

The following is a summary of qualitative results:

- Nearly every girl interviewed said that they would recommend the program to their friends.
- Most of the girls also reported building positive relationships with their facilitators.
- Girls developed few conflicts with one another or their facilitators.

*“This general lack of conflict should be seen as an accomplishment for both programs, since girls in the juvenile justice system often use conflict as a coping mechanism.”(Irvine, Roa.)*

- One of the primary ways that girls did not feel understood was related to bilingualism and biculturalism. Sonoma County has a large Latina population within their juvenile justice system. In order to be responsive to Latinas, Sonoma County Probation Department would need to provide bilingual and bicultural staff.
- Girls also felt that they would benefit from facilitators who had experience in the juvenile justice system.
- Some girls reported their facilitators took a punitive approach to attendance issues, which decreased their feeling of safety and caring.

### **Ceres Policy Researchers (CPR) recommendations:**

Overall implementation was a positive experience for most girls in the juvenile justice system in Sonoma County. Improvements in implementation should include:

- Bicultural, bilingual facilitators for Spanish –speaking girls; cultural competency;
- Acceptance and responsiveness to LGBTQ youth and to youth with incarcerated parents;
- Transportation sensitivity
- Girls’ program facilitators should be instructed to minimize sanctions for minor infractions while developing creative methods for incentivizing participation.

### **Sonoma County Probation Department, Administrative findings:**

- More than 900 girls have participated in the program since 2007 with a successful completion rate since 2007 of about 78%<sup>iv</sup>
- Long Term measures<sup>v</sup>:  
*“Measured within 6-12 months after a youth leaves or completes the project”*  
Number of Project youth who re-offended (i.e., rearrested or seen at juvenile court for a new delinquent offense): **7**  
Number of Project Youth who Exited the Program 6-12 months ago: **52**
- Recognized as an innovative and effective government program as one of the 2009 National Association of Counties Achievement Award Winners<sup>vi</sup>
- California’s first county-wide implementation of Girls Circle. Over 900 girls participated in the program.
- Has become the primary service option for female juvenile offenders in Sonoma County<sup>vii</sup>.
- Collaborative approach: juvenile justice, Juvenile Courts, probation officers, direct community based service providers<sup>viii</sup> Learning Community consisting of service providers and supervisors as well Girls Circle developers and probation department increased fidelity, offered exchange of strategies for challenges, and tailored local referrals within the county and community based services for trauma and mental health services.
- Program approved by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors for continuation using YOBG funding, July 2010<sup>ix</sup>.

Michael Barber, Field Representative for California Corrections Standards and Authority, summary comments:

***“Gender-specific programs, especially Girls Circle, have proven to be very successful in addressing the unique needs of female juvenile offenders. Recidivism rates for gender specific programs are generally low, which is consistent with the outcomes realized by the Sonoma County Title II – Girls Circle – Circles across Sonoma Project.”***<sup>x</sup>

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Girls Circle Association wishes to acknowledge all those who contributed to the successful implementation of Circles Across Sonoma, including Leo Tacata, Phyllis Reason, Monique Chapman and the entire Sonoma County Probation Department; all partnering community based organizations; Angela Irvine and Jessica Roa of Ceres Policy Research, and the Corrections Standards Authority of the State of CA for the support and funding of this project.

ENDNOTES:

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<sup>i</sup> Ceres Policy Research, Irvine, A., and Roa, J. Title II Evaluation: Gender Specific Programs in Sonoma and Santa Cruz Counties 2007-2010

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid. *Data based on pre-post measures with participants of program. (Although control group data was expected for Title II evaluation purposes, unanticipated administrative processes prevented adequate collection of control group data in Sonoma County.)*

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Corrections Standards Authority Title II Formula Grants Quarterly Progress Report- Year 3, Sonoma County Probation Department Contract #CSA 349-08, Circles Across Sonoma, Program Purpose area: Gender-Specific Services,; April-June 2010, Sec. 5, p. 6

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, Sec. 3, p. 5

<sup>vi</sup> CA Corrections Standards Authority Corrections Planning and Programs Division Federal Grants Final Monitoring Report, June 24, 2010, p.2

<sup>vii</sup> Corrections Standards Authority Title II Formula Grants Quarterly Progress Report- Year 3, Sonoma County Probation Department Contract #CSA 349-08, Circles Across Sonoma, Program Purpose area: Gender-Specific Services, April-June 2010, Sec. 3, p. 3

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid, Sec. 5, p. 7

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid, Sec. 2, p. 3

<sup>x</sup> CA Corrections Standards Authority Corrections Planning and Programs Division Federal Grants Final Monitoring Report, June 24, 2010, p.6