

## Public Safety

**Right:** Girls Circle meets weekly and focuses on many issues.

**Below:** A creative activity produced art – during a discussion on domestic violence in Girls Circle.



### *Skill Groups provide unique opportunities for youth in the juvenile justice system*

A group of girls are in attendance, but not all of them are required to attend. One girl has returned for her third voluntary group. This is the girl who rarely spoke and often would pass, always an option for activities. She keeps coming because she knows this is a safe place to be herself. This is an example of the power of a Girls Circle.

Most of the youth who have contact with the Clackamas County Juvenile Department already feel shame and embarrassment for what they have done. Giving them the cognitive skills to make beneficial decisions in the future is aligned with the department's restorative justice approach to reformation – and the results have been positive for the youth and the department.

There are eight different skill groups offered by the Juvenile Department. Participating youth can be required to participate in one or more groups depending on their needs assessed through the juvenile justice process. Groups build capacity in a variety of areas, including anger management, self-esteem, increasing empathy for others, life skills, and personal boundaries.

"Each of our clients is assigned a juvenile counselor from our department," said Skill Groups Coordinator and Facilitator Tanya Kramer. "The counselor assesses each situation and determines what each youth needs. Then they are matched with skills groups."

The Juvenile Department Skill Groups program is committed to:

- using evidence-based principles in all group settings
- assisting youth in understanding the human impacts of their actions

- providing youth with skills which will assist them in becoming contributing community members
- providing opportunities for youth to meaningfully connect to their community; and
- addressing risk and protective factors in youth to minimize recidivism rates.

By having eight different groups, skills groups are able to direct youth into group learning scenarios which specifically target identified risk and protective factors.

Two of the most successful skills groups are called Girls Circle and Boys Council – national models developed by the One Circle Foundation – which focus on gender-specific issues relevant to teens and adolescents.

*"For girls, participation in Girls Circle includes discussion about body image, self-esteem, problem-solving and coping skills, and empathy for others," explained Kramer. "For boys, discussions and activities in the Boys Council could be focused on anger, conflict resolution, relationships, personal values and goals, and integrity,"*

These groups are confidential places where participants feel safe discussing personal factors

that led to their negative choices and the change they want for their lives.

Boys Council and Girls Circle have been so effective that the program was expanded to 15 middle and high schools throughout the county including schools in rural areas.

"Sometimes it's a hardship for youth to come to Oregon City to attend their group," said Kramer. "The rural schools now can offer youth a chance to participate while they are in school – facilitated by trained staff and volunteers."

Allison Irving, who lives in West Linn, began volunteering in June and says it is one of the best decisions she made.

"We facilitate a weekly Girls Circle," she said. "We want to help create a safe space for these girls to open up about their lives. I have seen the benefit and have seen girls come back to the group – even after their 10-week obligation was completed. That's the reward for me."

Irving would like potential volunteers who are interested in working with youth to take that first step by attending an informational meeting, then decide if it sounds right for them.

"The county staff will walk you through everything, and train you. There are so many different opportunities to work with youth."

The Juvenile Department and volunteers also work with families and schools in order to address needs in all aspects of a youth's life. But the youth has to be an open-minded participant.

"The youth feel heard when they have a chance to speak in a safe setting," said Kramer. "They can learn from each other."

To find out more about skills groups, or to learn more about volunteering, visit: [www.clackamas.us/juvenile](http://www.clackamas.us/juvenile).

#### EIGHT SKILLS GROUPS PROGRAMS

**Anger Replacement Training (ART):** Designed to provide youth with skills on what to do in anger producing situations while making the arousal of anger a less frequent occurrence.

**Girls Circle:** Designed to foster self-esteem, help girls maintain authentic connection with peers, counter trends toward self-doubt and allow for genuine self-expression.

**Boys Council:** Youth participate in group activities which provide an opportunity to learn to make positive choices, express ideas, work as a team and strengthen resiliency.

**Individual and Community Empathy (ICE):** Encourages youth to take responsibility for their choices, look at preventing future harmful or illegal behavior, understand harm done to others, acknowledge their victim(s), and make a commitment to their community to repair harm they have caused.

**Safety (Fire-Setters Education):** Designed as a tool to increase awareness of fire safety. Youth with fire-setting offenses learn to eliminate and/or redirect impulses.

**TruThought: Charting a New Course:** Focuses on addressing barriers in thinking through group

discussion, role plays, and group and individual activities. Youth learn skills to stop the tactics, change their thinking, and stay on track.

**Life Skills:** Sometimes referred to as the Independent Living program, intended to provide youth with the skills and information they need to transition from living with their parents/guardians to living on their own.

**CERTS (Consent, Equality, Respect, Trust, Safety):** Youth learn about personal boundaries, healthy relationships and the impact their behavior has on others.