



Title II Evaluation:
Gender Specific Programs in
Sonoma and Santa Cruz Counties 2007-2010

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Introduction

The second title of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 2002 obligates the federal government to pay for preventative programs for youth in the juvenile justice system. In 2007, the state of California used their Title II allotment to fund prevention programs that focused on gang involvement, alcohol and drug use, mental health, or that provided gender-specific programs. That year, two counties were awarded three-year grants to start gender-specific programming for girls: Sonoma and Santa Cruz Counties. Ceres Policy Research has worked as the evaluator for both of these counties. This paper reports the findings from the full three years of Title II grant funding to these two counties.

The findings presented in this report are shaped by the unique lens of the researchers completing this project. In addition to researching projects linked to girls in the juvenile justice system, Ceres has studied disproportionate minority contact and completed the earliest research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in the juvenile justice system. Thus, rather than remaining within an intellectual silo focused solely on gender-responsive programs for girls, Ceres brings intersecting interests in gender, race/ethnicity, immigration status, home language, culture, and sexual orientation to this project. These interests allow the development of a theoretical framework and set of research questions that extend beyond previous studies of gender responsive services.

Expanding the Theoretical Framework of Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

The theoretical framework and empirical literature explaining girls' involvement in the juvenile justice system has grown over the past ten years.

The general juvenile justice reform movement began to accelerate in the early 1990's when researchers began to notice a significant growth in the number of youth held in secure detention. From 1985 to 1995, the number of youth held in secure detention rose by 72% (Hoytt et al, 2001).

Concerns about girls, however, began to rise more recently as the use of secure detention for girls increased. The percentage of girls in detention increased from 12% to 18% from 1991 to 2003 (Sherman, 2005). Also, between 1995 and 2005, the numbers of girls grew by 49% compared with a 7% increase for boys (Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice, 2010). In order to explain this rise in girls' detention, some researchers focused on the increase in violent offenses perpetrated by girls (Gabarino, 2006; Beirne & Messerschmidt, 2000; Sarri, 1999). Yet this rise in violent offenses cannot be explained by an increase in violent behavior among girls (Steffensmeier et. al., 2005). Instead, several policy changes expanded the number of girls getting disciplined or arrested for behavior that was not previously formally punished. (Steffensmeier et. al., 2005). For example, increased punishments for school-based fights and family conflicts pulled girls into the juvenile justice system in greater numbers (Steffensmeier et. al., 2005).

Another related literature also developed, linking the detention of girls to childhood abuse and trauma. Researchers have found that girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced higher rates of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse when compared with boys (McCabe et al, 2002). One study found that 75% of girls in the California Youth Authority (now called the Division of Juvenile Justice) reported histories of physical abuse and another 46% reported histories of sexual abuse (Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice, 2010). Another study found that 92% of girls in the California juvenile justice system reported histories of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse (Acoca, 1998).

Girls in the juvenile justice system also experience high levels of conflict within their home. For example, while girls' arrests for simple assault increased 36% between 1994 and 2003, case analysis shows that many of these assaults occur when there is conflict with family members or guardians about curfew or truancy (Sherman and Irvine, in press). As a result of this conflict, nearly 1/3 of girls in the California juvenile justice system reported being kicked out of their homes at least once and 25% reported being shot or stabbed at least once as a result of family conflict (Acoca, 1998).

This abuse and conflict within the home can escalate. Girls who have been abused often run away from home or out of home placement (Luke, 2008; Chesney-Lind, 2002; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992). Once girls have been kicked out of home or have run away, they often have to resort to

survival crimes such as theft or prostitution to survive (Sherman, 2005; Majd et al 2009). Girls on the streets are also more likely to be involved in fights in their efforts to survive (Luke, 2008). Incarcerated girls attribute their behavior to prior victimization (Belknap and Holsinger, 2006).

These particular survival strategies often lead to arrest and involvement in the juvenile justice system as well as placement outside the home (Luke, 2008; Chesney-Lind, 2002). Once girls are arrested, girls are more likely to be detained while they are awaiting adjudication because juvenile justice professionals want to protect them from returning to the street (Sherman, 2005; Gilfus, 1992). Moreover, girls are more likely to be placed outside their home after running away (American Bar Association and the National Bar Association, 2001; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992). One reason for this pattern is that parents are more likely to refuse to take custody of their daughters after arrest and booking because of underlying parent-child conflicts. This leads to longer detention times for girls when compared with boys who have similar offenses (Sherman, 2005).

By placing trauma and conflict in the center of the dialogue, the literature on the link between abuse, conflict, and girls in the juvenile justice system has done an excellent job at deconstructing behavior that was previously viewed as pathological. Instead of viewing running away, and conflict as “delinquency” or the result of a “personality disorder,” these behaviors become framed as coping mechanisms for extreme levels of disruption and violence within some homes.

Research on girls, however, would be further improved by addressing lessons learned from studies of disproportionate minority contact (DMC) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth.

Juvenile Justice Reform and Disproportionate Minority Contact

Research on the detention of youth of color has found that the total number of youth held in secure detention has decreased since 1995 while the proportion of youth of color held in detention has increased (Mariscal and Bell, 2010). In 1985, youth of color represented 43% of detained youth. By 1995, youth of color represented 56% of detained youth. This slight majority has since increased. As of 2006, youth of color represented 69% of detained youth (Mendel, 2009).

Other research has found that there are racial and ethnic disparities in the treatment of youth of color within the juvenile justice system. Youth of color are punished more severely for the same behavior as their white peers (Nelson, 2008). For example, data reveal that white youth are more likely to be diverted from formal processing into detention than are youth of color (Mariscal and Bell 2011). As a result, more youth of color are admitted into detention than their white peers for the same behavior (Krisberg, 2005).

Moreover, the majority of these detentions are for non-violent offenses. In 2006, only 31% of all youth, including youth of color, were detained for violent crimes (Mendel, 2009). This means that 69% of youth were

detained for property crimes, drug offenses, probation violations, or status offenses such as curfew violations and truancy (Mendel, 2009).

Research specifically focusing on how both gender and race are linked to the juvenile justice system is scant, though the few studies that compare the experiences of white and African American girls show some important differences. For example, two studies show that physical abuse is linked to violent behavior for white girls while witnessing violence is related to violent and delinquent behaviors for African American girls (Chauhan & Repucci, 2009; Chauhan, Repucci, and Turkheier, 2009). Another study suggests that African American girls are less likely to become suicidal after witnessing domestic violence when compared with white girls and therefore may have different mental health needs (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005).

These findings reinforce other studies that insist that any programs designed for girls in the juvenile justice system need to be sensitive to cultural differences (Greene et. al. 1998). Yet, further research is needed to more clearly identify salient differences and to define what culturally competent or responsive programming might be (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005). Jones (2009), for example identifies the unique ways that gender, race, and class overlap for African American girls living in poor, violent communities. Specifically, Jones (2009) argues that African American girls in these neighborhoods often develop “unapologetic expression of female strength which contrasts with traditional white, middle class conceptions of femininity and the gendered expectations embedded in Black respectability.” More research is needed to understand what programs would best help these African American girls navigate conflicting social pressures that are unique to their culture and neighborhoods. Given high rates of detention among low-income Latinas, similar research would have to additionally address differences in home language and immigration status.

In addition to differences across race and ethnicity, home language, and immigration status, successful gender-responsive programs must address gender non-conforming girls as well as girls with lesbian and bisexual sexual orientations. Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender or gender non-conforming (LBT) girls constitute a significant proportion of girls in the juvenile justice system. A survey of 2100 youth in the juvenile justice system across the country found that 15% of all youth disclosed lesbian, gay, or bisexual sexual orientations or non-conforming gender identities (Irvine, 2010). This disclosure rate varied by gender. While 9% of boys disclosed having gay or bisexual sexual orientations or non-conforming gender identities, 28% of girls are LBT (Irvine, 2010). These numbers do not differ across most race and ethnic groups. The same numbers of African American, Latina, and white girls are LBT (Irvine, 2010). There were higher disclosure rates among Asian, Native American, and mixed race girls (Irvine, 2010).

Recent research shows that girls with lesbian and bisexual sexual orientations as well as non-conforming gender identities are even more likely to have experienced conflict in their home, to have run away, to engage in survival crimes such as prostitution, and to enter the juvenile justice system when compared with their heterosexual peers (Majd et al 2009; Irvine, 2010; Garnette et al, 2011). According to Irvine (2010), 37%

of lesbian and bisexual girls were detained for running away compared with 18% of their heterosexual peers. There were similar patterns for girls with non-conforming gender identities. Thirty-three percent of gender non-conforming girls were detained for running away compared with 21% of their gender conforming peers (Irvine, 2010). Similarly, LBT girls were twice as likely to be detained for prostitution and status offenses and probation violations (Irvine, 2010). In this sense, LBT girls are similar to their heterosexual peers because family conflict drives many LBT girls from school and their homes and into the juvenile justice system. Yet, LBT girls are also more likely to be detained for violent offenses when compared with their heterosexual peers (Garnette et. al. 2011). This difference highlights the need for programs to not only address gender-specific needs and cultural differences, but the specific needs of girls with non-conforming gender identities and sexual orientations.

Addressing Multiple Forms of Oppression

Girls' experience with multiple forms of oppression such as neighborhood violence, poverty, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia is as important as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Marmot (2004) argues that these marginalized social positions create the same debilitating chronic stress as other forms of trauma. Girls may not experience all of these forms of oppression at once. Rather, each girl has her own individual experience of oppression based on her particular race/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, income level, and immigration status (Hurtado, 1996; Hill-Collins, 1990). It is the unique ways these social positions intersect that shape girls' experiences and oftentimes life outcomes (Hurtado & Gurin, 2004). Nonetheless, most girls in the juvenile justice system have experience with trauma and oppression inside and outside of their homes and are often re-traumatized once they are held in secure detention (Schaefer, 2007). For programs to truly address all of the needs of girls, they must address these multiple layers of trauma and oppression.

Girls' responses to these negative experiences is varied and complex. Researchers show that girls both assimilate into and resist institutions such as schools, foster homes, and juvenile detention centers depending on whether their experiences are positive or negative. In other words, there will be times that girls follow rules and express support for providers and satisfaction with programs. There will, however, be other times when girls resist providers and programs by failing to show up to programming, disagreeing with providers, or even having conflicts with their peers or facilitators (Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice, 2010). Unfortunately for girls in the juvenile justice system, these efforts to resist negative treatment can pull them further into the system. Carefully trained providers, however, will understand the multiple sources of oppression within girls' lives, develop positive relationships with girls, and take measures to ensure that girls are not pulled deeper into the juvenile justice system.

Title II Evaluation

The rest of this report evaluates the outcomes of girls in two different gender-specific programs in California. Both of these programs were funded using federal Title II funds. We look at how each program helped participants develop positive relationships with their peers and adults, whether programs addressed the multiple sources of oppression in participants' lives, and whether each program took measures to ensure that girls were not pulled deeper into the juvenile justice system.

Overview of Santa Cruz and Sonoma County Title II Programs

Santa Cruz and Sonoma Counties developed similar yet distinct programs with their Title II grants.

Santa Cruz County developed a program called GirlZpace. GirlZpace is a collaboration between the Santa Cruz County Probation Department, Walnut Avenue Women's Center, the Conflict Resolution Center, and the Survivor's Healing Center. GirlZpace provided a menu of support services for girls in the juvenile justice system as well as girls at risk of juvenile justice involvement. The primary focus of GirlZpace was providing three different drop-in nights for girls that were staffed by volunteer allies. These three sites provided a dinner, support groups, and leadership development opportunities for participants. The structure encouraged the development of positive relationships between girls and young adult women. In addition, the Probation Department used Title II funding to develop intensive caseloads for girls. The Probation Officers on these caseloads were trained to minimize the imposition of probation violations and encouraged to link girls to school as well as social services such as GirlZpace, conflict resolution services, and support groups for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Title II funding paid for both the conflict resolution services and survivors' support groups. Conflict resolution services are provided by Conflict Resolution Center (CRC). The CRC provides Victim Offender Dialogue for victims and their offenders. They also offer bilingual conflict resolution meetings for girls and their parents/guardians. Survivor's support groups are offered by Survivor's Healing Center (SHC), which is a community-based organization that specializes in groups, individual, and family counseling for survivors of sexual abuse. The groups last 8-weeks and include four girls on average. These services are offered to high-need girls throughout Santa Cruz County. Girls do not need to be on probation to be eligible for services. Notably, these services are provided through the probation department, but they are not mandated as a condition of probation.

Sonoma County developed a program called Circles Across Sonoma (CAS). CAS is a 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. These Girls Circle

support groups are based on the Girls Circle Association curricula, a program that emphasizes the strengths of girls.

Girls Circle Association (Girls Circle) was founded in 1996 to develop a support group curriculum to help young girls make healthy life decisions. Girls Circle is a research-based model that encourages girls to be themselves within a structured support group. Girls Circle developed nine separate activity guides to be implemented within these support groups that represent unique 8-12 week programs organized around the themes of friendship; being a girl; body image; diversity; connections between the mind, body and spirit; expressing individuality; relationships with peers; identity; and paths to the future.

Girls Circle groups are held weekly in most cases and last approximately two hours. The groups are led by women trained to implement the Girls Circle guidelines, which involve giving each girl a turn to speak without being interrupted, ensuring a safe and confidential space. The structure provides a way for girls to find common experiences, reduce isolation and find support. The groups also offer participants an opportunity to express themselves using journaling, poetry writing, acting, role-playing, drawing, working with clay, and/or other art media. The mission of Girls Circle is to instill self-confidence and improve girls' self-expression, critical thinking skills, and interpersonal relationships. In Sonoma County, girls are required to participate in CAS for eight weeks as a court-mandated term of their probation or as an alternative to detention assigned by the juvenile court.

Methods

Ceres designed an evaluation to include both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for both Title II Grants. The research design is described in more detail below.

Quantitative Data

In order to measure quantitative outcomes, Ceres administered a pre- and post-survey to girls participating in GirlZpace and CAS. These surveys measure variables such as change in body image, alcohol use, self-efficacy, and relationships with adults. Ceres also incorporated a number of demographic questions such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, and languages spoken.

The data was analyzed using t-tests when we needed to determine whether participants experienced significant changes as a result of participating in the programs. The data was analyzed using analysis of variance tests when we needed to determine if there were differences between groups. Findings are reported as significant if we were more than 90% sure that there was a change ($P < .10$). We indicate whether findings were not significant by using the symbols “ns.”

Qualitative Data

To evaluate the success of GirlZpace and CAS, Ceres Policy Research also conducted individual interviews with participants. Girls were asked about how they were assigned to Title II programming; about programming in general; about their relationships with girls and facilitators in their groups; about the cultural competence of their facilitators; if they had changed from participating in the circles; and about their feelings regarding mandated circles. During each year of the grant, twenty individual interviews were conducted in each county to measure girls' experiences within the Title II Grant. This year the GirlZpace interviews were conducted in person and the CAS interviews were conducted over the phone. Girls were provided \$25 gift cards for their participation in GirlZpace interviews. Girls were provided \$30 gift cards for their participation in CAS interviews.

Ceres Policy Research conducted content analysis of the interview summaries to identify common themes. The most common responses that emerged from our content analysis are reported below.

Survey Findings

Survey findings from both programs show that there were positive outcomes for girls. Girls in both counties were satisfied with the programs as well as their facilitators. With regard to specific outcomes for participants, girls from the GirlZpace program showed improvements in body image. Girls who identified as bisexual and unsure of their sexual orientation were more likely to have an increase in self-efficacy than straight girls after participating in GirlZpace programming. Girls in Sonoma County showed improvements in body image, telling adults what they need, and self-efficacy. Girls of color were less likely to get drunk when they drank than white girls after participating in CAS programming. The details of these results are provided below.

GirlZpace

Nineteen girls completed pre and post surveys in the GirlZpace program.¹ The girls varied by race, age, sexual identity, and languages spoken. Demographic details about participants are provided below:

- 45% were Latina, 35% of the girls were white, 15% were biracial, 3% were African American, and 2% had other race or ethnic identities.
- 5% of the girls were 12-13 years old, 46% of the girls were 14-15 years old, 44% of the girls were 16-17 years old, and 5% were 18 years old
- 75% of the girls identified as heterosexual, 22% identified as bisexual, and 3% were unsure.
- 62% spoke English only and 38% of the girls were bilingual Spanish/English speakers.

On the pre- and post-participation surveys, girls were asked to report on their experiences. They were provided a set of statements and asked to circle “1” if the statement is never true, “2” if the statement is sometimes true, “3” if the statement is usually true, and “4” if the statement is always true. Table 4 (see below) reports participants’ responses. The first column reports the survey question. The second column reports the average response.

¹ *This small number of matched surveys is due to the design of the GirlZpace program. GirlZpace was not required. As such, girls entered and exited the program in unpredictable ways.*

Table 1. Participant Satisfaction for GirlZpace in Santa Cruz County

Question	Average Response
I could share what I was thinking in GirlZpace.	3.20
I could ask GirlZpace leaders for help.	3.58
Everyone supported me when I made decisions about my life in GirlZpace.	3.44
Everyone respected me in GirlZpace.	3.64
GirlZpace leaders focus on what I'm good at.	3.41
GirlZpace is fun.	3.53
No one shares others' secrets in GirlZpace.	3.43

On average, girls gave their circles and facilitators very high scores. Girls felt that all of the statements were close to “always true.” This indicates that girls were highly satisfied with the circles and their facilitators.

To measure specific outcomes for girls, Ceres Policy Research analyzed four survey questions related to GirlZpace. For each question, respondents were provided with a statement and asked to circle “1” if they strongly agree with the statement, “2” if they agree with the statement, “3” if they disagree with the statement, and “4” if they strongly disagree with the statement. They were also given the option to circle “99” if the statement didn't apply to them.

T-tests were run to see if there was a change of body image, alcohol use, telling adults what they need, and self-efficacy/esteem. Table 2 (see below) reports the results of these tests. The first column reports the statement content. The second column reports whether the t-test was significant. We report “ns,” or “not significant,” if the test was not significant.

Table 2. Body Image, Alcohol Use, Telling Adults What They Need, and Self-Efficacy/Esteem Results of GirlZpace Participation in Santa Cruz County

Question	Significance
I feel good about my body. (n=22)	.02
If I drink, I don't get drunk. (n=15)	ns
I tell adults what I need. (n=18)	ns
Schwarzer (2000) Self-Efficacy Scale (n=20)	ns

There were no significant changes in alcohol use, telling adults what they need, or self-efficacy (see Table 2). There were significant changes in how girls felt about their bodies. Analysis of variance tests were run to determine if there were differences between groups. Ceres found that girls who identified as bisexual or unsure of their sexual orientation were more likely to have an increase in self-efficacy than girls who identified as straight after participating in GirlZpace programming.

Circles Across Sonoma

374 girls completed pre and post-participation surveys in the Circles Across Sonoma program. The girls varied by race, age, sexual identity, and languages spoken. Demographic details about participants are provided below:

- 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.

Girls were asked to report on their experiences. They were provided a set of statements and asked to circle “1” if the statement is never true, “2” if the statement is sometimes true, “3” if the statement is usually true, and “4” if the statement is always true. Table 3 (see below) reports participants’ responses. The first column reports the survey question. The second column reports the average response.

Table 3. Participant Satisfaction for CAS Girls Circle Programs in Sonoma County

Question	Average Response
I could share what I was thinking in Girls Circle.	3.20
I could ask Girls Circle leaders for help.	3.26
Everyone supported me when I made decisions about my life in Girls Circle.	3.36
Everyone respected me in Girls Circle.	3.65
Girls Circle leaders focus on what I'm good at.	3.35
Girls Circle is fun.	3.23
No one shares others' secrets in Girls Circle.	3.31

On average, girls gave their circles and facilitators very high scores. Girls felt that all of the statements were close to “always true.” This indicates that girls were highly satisfied with the circles and their facilitators.

To understand whether there were outcomes for participants, Ceres Policy Research analyzed four variables measuring changes in body image, alcohol use, telling adults what they need, and self-efficacy/esteem. T-tests were run to see if there was a change in these variables over time for girls participating in CAS.

Table 4 (see below) reports the results of these tests. The first column reports the survey statement for body image, alcohol use, telling adults what they need and self-efficacy/esteem. The second column reports whether the t-test was significant. We report “ns,” or “not significant,” if the test was not significant.

Table 4. Body Image, Alcohol Use, Telling Adults What They Need, and Self-Efficacy/Esteem Results of CAS Girls Circle Participation in Sonoma County

Question	Significance
I feel good about my body. (n=410)	.02
If I drink, I don't get drunk. (n=334)	ns
I tell adults what I need. (n=387)	.00
Schwarzer (2000) Self-Efficacy Scale (n=366)	.00

These results indicate that participants in the CAS program experienced positive changes in body image, telling adults what they need, and self-efficacy. Analysis of variance tests were run to determine if there were differences between groups. Ceres found that girls of Color were less likely to get drunk when they drank than white girls after participating in CAS programming.

Title II Interviews

The quantitative data from the Title II evaluation shows that girls enjoyed both programs, felt positive about their facilitators and peers, and achieved positive outcomes. Interview data provides more detailed information that allows us to learn important lessons about positive peer relationships, positive relationships with adults, addressing girls' experience with multiple forms of oppression, and taking steps to keep girls from being pulled further into the juvenile justice system.

Interview Demographics

The girls in both counties varied by race, age, sexual identity, and languages spoken. Demographic details about Santa Cruz participants are provided below:

- 58% of were Latina, 21% of the girls were White, and 4% were Biracial.
- 15% of the girls were 14-15 years old, 35% of the girls were 16-17 years old, and 35% were 18 years or older.
- 95% of the girls identified as heterosexual and 5% identified as bisexual.
- 47% spoke English-only and 53% of the girls were bilingual Spanish/English speakers.
- The length of participation in the GirlZpace program varied from 4 months to 4 years.

Demographic details about the Sonoma County participants were similar:

- 40% of the girls 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.

Relationships and Conflict

Juvenile justice professionals sometimes report that supervising and providing services for girls is more difficult than working with boys because of the conflict that can develop between girls and their peers or facilitators (Berkeley Center for Criminal Justice, 2010)

Both Sonoma and Santa Cruz County Title II programs provided environments that fostered positive relationships between participating girls and their peers. In both programs, there were occasional disagreements, but most girls reported getting along well with one another.

“It’s going good. I don’t make myself have to get along with them. Because everyone feels safe there. Everybody just talks to everybody and we end up just making conversations” –Santa Cruz quote

“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 like I had it with my best friend that I had gotten caught with and I also had it with...one other girl. I had played soccer with her so I felt kind of comfortable that I knew some people in there. 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.”–Sonoma quote

“It was good we were all really cool. All of us became hella close at the end. Yeah, well I mean like I kind of knew all the girls that were in the group, but like I didn’t really know them, know them, so like I got to get to know them and like we just became really cool.”–Sonoma quote

Almost every girl interviewed in both counties said that they would recommend the program to their friends.

Most of the girls in both counties also reported building positive relationships with their facilitators.

“I like the fact that it’s all girls and you can go and be yourself there. There’s gonna be people there that understand you. You can just talk about something and even if they don’t have any advice to give you, they are just there to support you” –Santa Cruz quote

“Now I know where I can go if I have a problem. I go there and I can talk about my problems and I feel better. Because there’s a lot of things I don’t want to share with my mom...And I can go to GirlZpace and say that.” –Santa Cruz quote

“They really wanted us to get better. I felt supported” –Sonoma quote

“Yes they were really nice and if you have any other questions stay after group – and I did and they really helped me.” –Sonoma quote

The program in Santa Cruz allowed girls to participate over long lengths of time. This allowed for special relationships to develop between facilitator

and participants. In some cases, girls were provided leadership opportunities at the GirlZpace sites. Several of the GirlZpace girls were elevated to positions from which they helped plan activities and counsel the younger girls. One of these leaders said,

“Yeah, [I feel like I’ve been able to be a leader at GirlZpace]. And not only at GirlZpace. Sometimes at home with my sisters or my cousins – they try to talk to me about what’s going on. They’ll say, ‘you sound like a counselor.’ I say, ‘GirlZpace is really working!’ It does work-because I feel older. I feel more mature. They treat you like an adult. They give you the space you need and want” –Santa Cruz quote

The positive relationships that were developed in the Title II programs sometimes led to changes in the relationships between girls and their families.

“We we had dinner all together [at GirlZpace]. That made me come home and actually sit down with the family and eat together. Because we usually are like, ‘Oh we’ll go eat on the couch.’ And that time it was like, ‘No, let’s eat together!’ My family thought I was weird. But it was GirZpace that changed me.” –Santa Cruz quote

“I’m closer to my mom. I don’t fight with my mom as much anymore. Yeah. I guess I was taking out my anger when I was talking to them about what would happen at my house I guess, and it was just somebody I could talk to. That’s how I used to be with my mom and now I talk to her about some things.” –Sonoma quote

Ways to Improve Programs

Interview data with participants of both programs show that the structure of GirlZpace and CAS created positive relationships between girls as well as between girls and the facilitators. While there were few large conflicts between facilitators and the girls or between peers, interview respondents reported times when they felt misunderstood, ignored, or disliked by facilitators. The ways that the girls discuss these events is instructive and provide lessons for improving programs.

One of the primary ways that girls did not feel understood was related to bilingualism and biculturalism. Both Santa Cruz and Sonoma Counties have large Latina populations within their juvenile justice systems. In order to be responsive to Latinas, each county would need to provide bilingual and bicultural staff.

Santa Cruz County had a turnover in GirlZpace staff members as well as a group of volunteers for each site that were called “allies.” Over time, there were youth advocate staff members who were both white and Latina. There were also white and Latina allies. Latinas participating in GirlZpace often felt that white youth advocates and allies could not understand the culture of their families or communicate with their parents due to differences in language.

“Yeah for them to speak Spanish. I know that [my white facilitator] speaks Spanish. She talked to me in Spanish one time. (But) a Hispanic person would just be better because they would understand how we lived and stuff. Like my mom sometimes she doesn’t think I go to the group and that I go somewhere. And I think she calls sometimes and I don’t think [my facilitator] understands her.” –*Santa Cruz quote*

“Not all the Allies...they didn’t understand because they are not Hispanic. White people are raised differently than Hispanic people. Not all of them, but you know what I mean.” –*Santa Cruz quote*

One Latina felt that the white youth advocate favored the white participants.

“[If I had a facilitator with the same personal experiences as me], she’ll understand me and I could tell her more. She wouldn’t just be agreeing with the [girls of the same race]. She would understand both races...She’s known the white girls longer and gives them more attention. She wants to be in their life more than ours. The other night she was like, ‘Oh, I heard you were getting in trouble’ to one of the other girls who was white. And I was like, ‘Dude, why aren’t you paying attention to other people (referring to the Latinas in the group).’” –*Santa Cruz quote*

In contrast, Latinas felt that their Latina youth advocate fully understood their families and, therefore, felt that they were getting all of their needs met.

“She does [understand me] because she has similar things to me – like we are the same race and we speak both languages and her stories are somehow related to mine. And like everybody’s different but she understands all of us. And we talk about, ‘Oh my dad needs this’ and she understands the culture and how and what to do and how to help us” –*Santa Cruz quote*

“Yeah she does definitely [understand me]. Sometimes she has to drive me home after group. And she asks in Spanish about my family. She knows what’s going on and wants to help.” –*Santa Cruz quote*

Notably, the white founder of the GirlZpace program was highly respected by the Latinas that attended the pilot program before Santa Cruz County secured Title II programming. Girls reported that they felt understood because this woman was fully bilingual and intentionally addressed oppression in the girls’ lives.

“GirlZpace (with the founder) was kicking back with your homies and being intellectual. When I went to GirlZpace I had been told I was white. I had been told by other people that I’m not white enough. So basically a Puerto Rican with no knowledge about my culture. When I went to GirlZpace, Jenn said it’s all right that you’re Puerto Rican. It’s all right that you’re white. I felt like, wow, someone actually told me that. You could say anything. You weren’t worried about what was going to happen outside.” –*Santa Cruz quote*

This advocate also linked the girls to political activities aimed at fighting oppression.

“Go back to what (the founder) did. We had more field trips that were very educational. Jenn took us to political events now we mostly go to, like, museums.” – Santa Cruz quote

In Sonoma County, almost all of the CAS facilitators were white women without Spanish language skills. As in Santa Cruz, Latinas in Sonoma felt that their needs were not always understood.

“(Having a bilingual and bicultural facilitator) would be a bonus. Because I could connect with that person more because they know me. They know me before I even know them. They know what my parents went through...They speak the language I speak. They eat what I eat. They are basically my brother or sister that I’ve never met.” –Sonoma quote

“Um not really. I’m Hispanic but I don’t really speak Spanish at home because I’m not good at it. I think other girls for them it could’ve been good. Yeah, because there was this one girl there that I don’t think she really knows English.” –Sonoma quote

White girls in Sonoma also felt that the Latinas would benefit from having bilingual and bicultural facilitators. While the Latinas focused on feeling understood, one white peer observed one Latina’s feelings of frustration for having to translate.

“Well all the girls speak English. And one of the girls had English but her mom only spoke Spanish and she had to keep translating. It would have been better. Like the girl probably didn’t even want to be there and she was irritated and didn’t want to translate. Anyway she probably would’ve been happier with the group if she didn’t have to do it.” –Sonoma quote

Another white girl observed her Latina peer’s withdrawal from the group.

“I got my needs met in this way but I think the other girls would have benefited from it. The one Mexican girl was the really quiet girl I told you about that never talked. I think she would’ve benefited from having someone like that” –Sonoma quote

Interview respondents in both counties identified other aspects of cultural competence that would have made them feel more understood. For example, one Sonoma girl reported that her facilitators would not have understood the racism she encountered as school.

“They hadn’t been in this position [being African American] so they couldn’t understand. They can say, ‘wow that’s hard’ but they didn’t know how it is to be in that position. Like today someone called me the N word at school and I got really angry and yelled at the girl. And they wanted to suspend me but I said I would call the NAACP. They (the facilitators) would not be able to relate to that. They don’t know anything about this.” –*Sonoma quote*

Another girl reported that her facilitators didn’t understand the difficulty she faces in getting to the program because her family does not have a car.

“The facilitators (could) be more understanding of the girls’ circumstances – like don’t be rude when they show up late because they live so far away with no transportation” –*Sonoma quote*

Another girl discussed having her father in jail.

“Yeah. Cuz if I were to tell something about my parents – about the way they are – If I was to say something like my dad is locked up, some people wouldn’t be able to relate to me. If someone could relate to me on low rider culture or something like that, that would be good.” –*Sonoma quote*

Girls also felt that they would benefit from facilitators who had experience in the juvenile justice system. When asked if they would want a facilitator who had had a similar personal experience as them, the girls reported,

“It’d be cool. I could talk to her about it to see how she got through it. You would just have somebody to see how they got through it and what they did to improve their lives. [They would] give you an example of how things can get better – what you can do to make things better and not worse” –*Santa Cruz quote*

“Yeah then they would relate more and they would know how you feel in that situation and understand. It would be good because the person knows what you went through and a person that doesn’t know what you went through and how you felt...they can help you but they don’t know what you really need. Other than a person that went through it and knows what you need. Like maybe you need space, maybe you don’t want to talk to anybody. They (the facilitator) can look back when they were my age and went through that” –*Santa Cruz quote*

“In a way kind of because they would understand and probably be a little more supportive. Both of those facilitators that I had I don’t think they, they’re kind of just like totally like not the type of people that get in trouble ...Yeah like one of the ladies she was like from the south and so she’s extremely polite and it’s just like, I was like, she seemed so kind of like perfect or a goody two-shoes in a way...I don’t think she could ever do anything, not just get in trouble but just the way she acts and everything.” –*Sonoma quote*

One girl who felt that she had a facilitator with similar experience said,

“Yes. My facilitator had gotten in a lot of trouble when she was younger and had been on probation and it was better that she had been because she understood it and how it was and stuff.” –girl quote

Finally, interviews with two Sonoma girls suggest that the needs of at least one bisexual girl and one gender non-conforming girls were not met by their CAS facilitator. When asked if she felt understood by her facilitator regarding her sexual orientation, one girl replied,

“I don’t think they understood me or got me at all. I’m bi and everyone else was straight – including the facilitator – so once again I felt alone. I had tried to open up privately with the facilitator I got along with best and she cut me off and gave me like 11 different numbers to call to get help. I felt stupid for opening up...Oh and I felt like if they (the girls in the group) were to know like stuff that the girls would like judge me just cause of like the type of people they were.” –Sonoma quote

When asked if she felt understood as a girl, one girl who dresses in a masculine manner described an incident where she disagreed with her facilitator and stood up for herself. This girl felt that the combination of her “bad ass” attitude and clothes led to differential treatment.

“I guess just because I wasn’t the same type of girl, like the way she acted. My facilitator was a girly girl and I wasn’t the type to wear flats and dresses. And I dress like ganster. But in a way I present myself, I have an attitude like I’m kind of being bad ass or something. I don’t know – I guess she got the same feeling too. And after that incident happened [where I disagreed with her], she didn’t treat me the same after that. After that she gave me attitude and was nice to the other girls.” –Sonoma quote

Differences in language fluency, ethnicity, race, culture, access to transportation, experience with the criminal justice system, sexual orientation, and gender expression all formed a basis for girls to distrust facilitators. While this distrust rarely led to conflict, it more frequently led to forms of withdrawal. This withdrawal threatens to undermine the quality of services that girls receive. Girls in the juvenile justice system need space where they can comfortably disclose information about their lives so adults can meet their needs. If girls don’t talk, their needs won’t be met. Agencies are obligated, therefore, to ensure that participants feel as comfortable and understood as possible. Girls will only open up under these circumstances.

Program Components that Threatened to Pull Girls Deeper Into the System

Within both counties, there were program components that threatened to pull girls deeper into the juvenile justice system.

In Santa Cruz, there were times when officials outside the core of GirlZpace that became more punitive than the grant intended. GirlZpace

was intentionally developed to create intensive services for girls on probation and to prevent the accumulation of probation violations. This was achieved by asking all key stakeholders to keep GirlZpace as a voluntary program, rather than a term of probation. One juvenile judge, however, mandated GirlZpace programs for two participants. This put those girls into the position of having to attend GirlZpace or risk receiving negative sanctions, possibly even probation violations. When asked, the two girls would not have gone to GirlZpace if it was not a probation term. These girls were not happy about having to attend but “made the best of it.”

In addition, as funding came to an end in Santa Cruz County, staff changes led to less trust in the Probation Department among participating girls. As designed, the probation officers responsible for the intensive caseload provided transportation to GirlZpace activities each week. These officers also often participated in dinner and evening activities. These officers, however, were required to leave if there was any risk of girls disclosing information that would get themselves into trouble. As GirlZpace wound to an end, assignments shifted and two new officers were assigned to the intensive caseload. These officers were not trained in the importance of minimizing sanctions for girls. Once these new probation officers were attending programming, girls felt less comfortable sharing their true feelings.

“GirlZpace was great before the (new) Probation Officer started to go. When I first went it was great because she wasn’t around. There’s just no way during check-in that I can say what’s really going on without getting in trouble. It was way better without the PO there” –Santa Cruz quote

One girl reported that she was given a urine test based on information that she shared at GirlZpace. Her boyfriend was also given a urine test, suggesting that the GirlZpace probation officer shared information with the boy’s probation officer. While these events were rare, they highlight the need to instruct staff and key juvenile justice stakeholders on the importance of finding creative methods for incentivizing attendance in programs and positive behavior change rather than sanctioning minor infractions.

In contrast to Santa Cruz County, all girls in Sonoma County were required to attend CAS programming. Some of the girls were court-ordered to attend. Other girls were placed in CAS in lieu of a court date and/or formal probation. Though none of the girls reported being violated for not attending, most girls on formal probation reported that they accepted attendance as part of their probation terms and “just wanted to get it over with.” Every girl except one reported that they would not have gone to the group if they felt they had a choice. When asked how they felt about this, girls reported,

“I was mad that I had to be there. It took three days of the group to calm down” – Sonoma quote

“I felt uncomfortable. I didn’t know anyone there. I was irritated.” –Sonoma quote

“I was really sassy and over it and not giving it a chance. I was like, ‘are you serious?’ This is what we have to do?” -Sonoma quote

In addition, CAS facilitators sometimes used threats to control the behavior of girls.

One girl reported that she did not feel trusted by the facilitators and asking to call her mom to pick her up early. The facilitators did not believe her and made her put the call to her mother on speaker phone during their conversation. She stated that she only “put up with it” because she her facilitator had threatened to put her in juvenile hall if she didn’t finish the group. Another girl reported that she forgot to sign-in one night that she attended. The facilitators argued with her about not being there the night she actually did attend. She reported,

**“They threatened me about not coming. They said if you leave, they will tell probation.”
–Sonoma quote**

Sonoma County did not instruct the community-based providers of CAS to prevent probation violations or to find alternative incentives for keeping girls in the program. While girls did not actually report any probation violations, the threat of punitive action goes against the gender responsive program literature that highlights the importance of taking measures to prevent sending girls deeper into the juvenile justice system for minor rule infractions.

Conclusion

Girls in the juvenile justice system runaway, have conflicts with family members, and commit survival crimes as they navigate histories of abuse, trauma, and chronic stress stemming from neighborhood violence, poverty, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia.

Title II-funded programs in Santa Cruz and Sonoma Counties developed successful models for the girls in their jurisdictions.² Survey findings were satisfied with their programs and facilitators. Girls from Santa Cruz County showed improvements in body image. Girls in Sonoma County showed improvements in body image, telling adults what they need, and self-efficacy.

Interview findings supported the survey findings. Interview respondents in both counties reported developing positive relationships with the girls in the Title II programs as well as the facilitators. Moreover, 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.

At the same time, girls reported withdrawing and feeling frustrated when they felt misunderstood because of their culture, ethnicity, race, poverty, sexual orientation, gender expression, and experience with the juvenile justice system. These patterns of withdrawal made the Title II programs in Santa Cruz and Sonoma counties less successful than they could have been. Girls in the juvenile justice system need to disclose information about their lives in order to have their needs met. They will only share intimate details about childhood sexual abuse, trauma, and discrimination if they trust that adults in their life understand their experiences. For this reason, girls' program facilitators must have the same personal experiences of the girls they serve.

Girls in Sonoma and a few girls in Santa Cruz also reported that they felt forced to participate in Title II programming. This mandated programming strengthened feelings of distrust, and threatened the success of the programs. For this reason, girls' program facilitators must be instructed to minimize sanctions for minor infractions while developing creative methods for incentivizing participation.

² Notably, after GirlZpace funding ended, the detention of girls in Santa Cruz County has quadrupled. While the average daily population of girls hovered between one or two girls detained at any one time, Santa Cruz County now has nine girls housed in its facility. We attribute this increase to the loss of the Title II program.

Recommendations

The following list of recommendations for probation departments and their partners stem from our findings:

- Probation departments and their partners must aim to hire line staff members with the same language skills, culture, and personal experience of their clients. Probation departments can build these requirements into their subcontracts with their partners.
- Probation departments and their partners should receive cultural competence training to understand the links between trauma and abuse, conflict, running away, and survival crimes. Additional training about the detention patterns of lesbian, bisexual, and questioning girls should also be provided.
- Probation departments and their partners should receive training on how to minimize unnecessary sanctions for minor infractions and ways to incentivize participation in programming.

In addition, we encourage future research on the links between trauma, abuse, conflict, and juvenile justice system for boys. Over the past ten years, the literature on girls in the juvenile justice system has taught us that running away, conflict, and survival crimes are coping mechanisms for extreme levels of disruption and violence within some homes. If researchers can make these same links for boys, we can begin to develop more effective programs for all youth in the juvenile justice system.

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